

Spaces of Commoning

Artistic Research and the
Utopia of the Everyday

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Eva Blimlinger, Andrea B. Braidt, Karin Riegler (Series Eds.)
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On the Publication Series

We are pleased to present this new volume in the publication series of the Academy of Fine Arts Vienna. The series, published in cooperation with our highly committed partner Sternberg Press, is devoted to central themes of contemporary thought about art practices and art theories. The volumes in the series comprise collected contributions on subjects that form the focus of discourse in terms of art theory, cultural studies, art history, and research at the Academy of Fine Arts Vienna, and represent the quintessence of international study and discussion taking place in the respective fields. Each volume is published in the form of an anthology, edited by staff members of the Academy of Fine Arts Vienna. Authors of high international repute are invited to write contributions dealing with the respective areas of emphasis. Research activities such as international conferences, lecture series, institute-specific research focuses, or research projects serve as points of departure for the individual volumes.

With *Spaces of Commoning: Artistic Research and the Utopia of the Everyday*, we are launching volume eighteen of the series. The book presents the results of a research project that has been conducted at the Academy of Fine Arts Vienna over the last two years. The project was funded by the WWTF the Vienna Science and Technology Fund through the funding program "Public Spaces in Transition (2013)." The project, headed by Anette Baldauf, professor at the Institute for Art Theory and Cultural Studies at the Academy, and Stefan Gruber, then professor at the Institute for Art and Architecture at the Academy, brought together an international group of artistic researchers who developed case studies as tools for research into the question of "commoning," case studies that looked closely at the history of commoning practices in Austria, in Ethiopia, and in other selected places around the world—for example, on the island of Lesbos, Greece.

It is not always the case that recent political developments make research questions and research topics, which are formulated in regard to the state of the art of research, timely in an almost extreme way. In the summer of 2015, when thousands of refugees who had fled from Syria to seek asylum in safe places reached Austria, questions of commoning and of sharing became much more than an academic interest. The research project "Spaces of Commoning" reacted to this development in many ways, and we are happy that this in-depth publication was produced to tackle the many different aspects of the phenomenon in question.

We thank the editors of this volume, the Spaces of Commoning research group, for bringing together this wide range of expertise, and for doing this as a group. And we thank, as usual, our partner, Sternberg Press, for publishing our series.

The Rectorate of the Academy of Fine Arts Vienna
Eva Blimlinger, Andrea B. Braidt, Karin Riegler

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What Collects in a Collective?

Stefano Harney

What collects in a collective? I believe the Spaces of Commoning collective poses this question in the collection that follows. It is a collection that at first sight might be misrecognized, so familiar is the form of collected studies. Indeed, rather than approaching what follows as a common collection of studies, one might instead approach these essays as studies that collect the common. One might unlearn some of our assumptions about the autonomy of studies in a collection. One might then begin to hear in common something that collects in these studies. One can begin to cross these studies, to cruise them for what collects. One begins to unsettle oneself as a way to move through this collection, in a movement of what collects. As we do we start to feel that we are collected by cruising this collection. We are brought together by what follows, by what we let follow us, collect us. We are brought together in study by these studies. And to be brought together in study is to let oneself be collected. It is the act of allowing oneself to be collected. This is the act of study.

To be brought together in the Merkato in Addis Ababa or in the archive of Llano del Rio in California, or the settlers' movement in Vienna is to let go of one's collected self. It is to be neither calm nor collected. It is to allow oneself to be uncollected, unclaimed by oneself, awaiting collection. To enter into study with Casco in the Netherlands, or Ultra-red in the United Kingdom, to be collected by Queer Base in Austria, or by Ethiopian university colleagues in a *meda* in the midst of a city is to feel the unsettling movement of coming together in study with others, of allowing oneself to de-collect in this collection.

To become the site for collection, to be collected by collection is to cease to be the collector; that is, to cease to be the collector of oneself as the pretense for collecting others. It is a pretense because the collection of the self is always the collection of others and therefore never the collected self, never the self-collected authority to collect others. But it is a powerful pretense. It is the kind of pretense that thrives off the idea of a collection of studies. Here the study stands for the self-collected authority of the researcher who is capable of entering into collection with others based on his own calm and collected will, a will authorized by his authoritative study. This is at the same time the kind of powerful pretense to the authority of a collector who seeks to bring together studies in such a collection.

But there is no such pretense here: one does not find a collection to call one's own; one does not come to own what one collects, nor does collection become the act of seizure, the right to ownership, or the ownership of such rights. Here, those who are collected cite the inextricable coloniality of modernity, or one might say, the inescapable history of the collector. The pretense of the self-collected, with its order of the self, is the pretext to the

ordering of things, and the ordering of things to the ownership of such things, to placement of such things in the private collection. The class of collectors creates order from its studies and ownership from its collections. To be collected against one's will, to be held in a collection is, of course, to be torn from the common. Collection of this kind is the destruction of the common in the name of order—the order of the collection. But to be collected without one's will, without the pretense to one's self-collected will is to escape, right here, into the undercommons. It is to survive not by the resistance to collection but paradoxically by the radical history of openness to being collected, the open secret of the undercommons. This is the feel of study.

A better-posed question, then, may be: What does it feel like to be collected, to allow oneself to be brought together? What does it feel like to study? This is a question the following collection can answer. The feel of collecting in others and of others collected in you leads not to the collector but to the collective. This is what one becomes when one allows oneself to be collected by the study of listening, by the history of organizing, or by the practice of cruising in these pages. A feeling comes over one of being newly heard, of being differently organized, of being crossed and cruised, unsettled and aroused. The de-collected self can lose itself in being collected from Vienna to Addis Ababa, from Red Vienna to Ultra-red, from common kitchens to kitchen-table study. And as Barbara and Beverly Smith taught us, to be collected around the table in study is to feel the power of living without being a collector or being subject to one.

Thus to allow oneself to be collected is not the same, in fact, it is the opposite of opening oneself to be enclosed, captured, colonized. But to be collected with others in study is to risk this harm in the world we know. To study Jacqui Alexander or Silvia Federici is not to minimize that risk but to make it even more real. And that is what this collective does, that is what collects here, the de-collected ones, the opened ones, opened in the medias and in the communal kitchen, the ones awaiting collection by each other, the under-common ones.

April 8, 2016

Artistic Practices and Uncommon Knowledge

Pelin Tan

Practices of commoning in labor, forms of solidarity, and the production of uncommon knowledge and its distribution have inhabited artistic practice for a long time. Socially engaged artistic research methods and practices provide a collective experience of the translocal production of knowledge and of instant alliances that lead to the creation of common spaces for uncommon knowledge.

The practice of artistic research has gained ground in discussions that, over time, have converged with the methodological crisis in social and scientific disciplines. The practice is often affiliated with a process-based multidisciplinary art that engages with everyday realities, politics, and social issues. Both visually and in practice, artists use research methods that are partially borrowed from the sciences or universities. Artistic research is thus defined as a specific practice that reveals the intersection of academia and art, as well as methodological conflicts in general. As Sarat Maharaj proposes, perhaps we should not try to define artistic practices in an institutional context or academic realm, but on the contrary: "This apparent mishmash is a scene of unwieldy, unorganized possibilities—something we should hang onto to avoid defining artistic research simply along institutional academic lines. This means focus on the singularity of how art practice-theory-history and other 'disciplines' intersect and coalesce in individual projects."¹

Thus, we can approach certain artistic practices as relying on layered levels of the processes of research, collaboration, and engagement that are part of an overall ongoing knowledge production and yet are not necessarily defined by methodologies of academic knowledge production. While we can't describe such artistic practices along academic lines, there are still ways of processing knowledge production within visual and ethical narratives that bring the issue of methodology into play. Undoubtedly, forms of knowledge exist that incorporate processes that might not be defined through an academic perspective in art. Simon Sheikh points out that a transformation occurred in the self-referential form in the twentieth century, where the focus on art as a thing "that is in the world" has now shifted to a place "where things can happen."² The event, or what we might call the affect, crosses aspects of the molding of the social—in other words, the transformation of things happening. This in turn drives collectivism, otherness, and transversal methodologies into the realm of the politics of aesthetics.

¹ Sarat Maharaj, "Unfinishable Sketch of 'An Unknown Object in 4D': Scenes of Artistic Research," in *Artistic Research*, ed. Annette Balkema and Henk Slager (Amsterdam: Lier en Boog, 2004), 39.

² Simon Sheikh, "Objects of Study or Commodification of Knowledge? Remarks on Artistic Research," *Art & Research* 2, no. 2 (Spring 2009), <http://www.artandresearch.org.uk/v2n2/sheikh.html>.

In the last decade, the methodological crisis resulting from the conservative, closed-circle orthodoxy of social sciences has led us to question empirical research methods. Aside from the issue of separately employing quantitative and qualitative research methodologies, or the problems of grounding theory in empirical practice, discussions of embedded situational research methods have largely been neglected in academia. Additionally, the multiplicity of new forms of contemporary knowledge production requires that we change our methods to suit the conditions at hand. Deleuzian research is often based on the understanding of the social subject as an affect and as an experience. This means that visibility as both a concept and a product is not only a representation of knowledge but also the machine that drives it. A transversal methodology ensures a trans-local, borderless form of knowledge production that rhizomatically reaches beyond topics of architecture and design, such as citizenship, militant pedagogy, institutionalism, borders, war, displacement, documents/documenting, urban segregation, commons, and others. This transversal practice is often ascribed to Félix Guattari, who describes it as follows: “Neither that of institutional therapy, nor institutional pedagogy, nor of the struggle for social emancipation, but which invoked an analytic method that could transverse these multiple fields (from which came the theme ‘transversality’).”³ Such an understanding of methodology is often affiliated with terms of alternative knowledge and pedagogical practice such as “assemblage methods” or “affective pedagogical.” A methodology is not only a tool that is used to describe realities but also a political tool that takes part in the process of knowledge production. The assemblage methods described by John Law are useful in this way: “Method assemblage is the process of enacting or *crafting* bundles of ramifying relations that *condense* presence and (therefore also) generate absence by shaping, mediating and separating these. Often it is about manifesting realities out-there and depictions of those realities in-here. It is also about enacting Othernesses.”⁴

Law’s statement in his book *After Method* (2004), which is mainly about the critical approaches of methods in the social sciences, directly reveals the methodological problems in research and its pedagogy. In this context, artistic practices in contemporary art and their conceptual frameworks offer possibilities in producing transversals that enact Othernesses. On the other hand is affective pedagogy, a nod to the Deleuzian reference to Spinoza’s concept of “affect/affections” that is beyond the body and assemblages of form described in the context of other methods in aesthetics: “Affect is a starting place from which we can develop methods that have an awareness of the politics of aesthetics: methods that respond with sensitivity to aesthetic influences on human emotions and understand how they change bodily capacities.”⁵ “Affect pedagogy” is not necessarily linked to the sensation of images and their power to challenge society. It is a practice of artistic

research in which objects, forms, and subjectivities are connected in a constellation of the entirety of representations in art.

Spaces of commoning and artistic research methodologies are closely connected in terms of their engagement with transversal methodologies, forms of affect pedagogy, and thus the production of uncommon knowledge. This leads to the further making of instant communities, alliances that choose to think and discuss together rather than inherit the imposition of a normative structure. To reiterate Stavros Stavrides’s sharp analysis on commons, it is not about affirmation but negotiation. It is about debating critical issues in an urban space where space itself is a pressing concern.⁶ Creating collective, nonclerical political action in the urban space means coexisting and functioning together to achieve commoning. This is rooted in a reconsideration and realization of our practices of collaboration, alternative economies, autonomous networks, self-organization, and surplus strategies, all of which radically differ from the reality of the neoliberal policies and logics of production currently being forced upon us.

3 Pierre-Félix Guattari, *The Guattari Reader*, ed. Gary Genosko (Oxford: Blackwell, 1996), 121.

4 John Law, *After Method: Mess in the Social Science Research* (London: Routledge, 2004), 122 (emphasis in original).

5 Anna Hickey-Moody, “Affect as Method: Feeling, Aesthetics and Affective Pedagogy,” in *Deleuze and Research Methodologies*, ed. Rebecca Coleman and Jessica Ringrose (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2013), 92–93.

6 “On the Commons: A Public Interview with Massimo De Angelis and Stavros Stavrides,” by An Architektur, *e-flux journal*, no. 17 (June 2010), www.e-flux.com/journal/on-the-commons-a-public-interview-with-massimo-de-angelis-and-stavros-stavrides/. See also Stavros Stavrides, “Housing and the City: Re-inventing the Urban Commons,” in *Adhocracy Athens: From Making Things to Making the Commons*, ed. Ethel Baraona Pohl, Pelin Tan, and César Reyes Najera (Barcelona: dpr-barcelona/Onasis Cultural Center, 2015), 220–40.

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Introduction

Having to Make It, without Being Able to ...

Anette Baldauf, Stefan Gruber, Moira Hille,
Annette Krauss, Vladimir Miller,
Mara Verlič, Hong-Kai Wang, and Julia Wieger

In the midst of accelerating financial and ecological crises, and massive migration flows paired with aggressive waves of selective enclosure, the concept of the commons has resurfaced as a key feature in the discussion on alternative societies, social movements, and urban transformation. The debate on the commons claims new entry points for a radical repudiation of neoliberalism; it inspires the envisioning of alternatives beyond capitalism and other forms of domination. The creative insights, the energies developed in and around the debate promise to provide perspectives for a new economic, political, and social discourse that helps articulate and build on the many existing struggles challenging the politics of accumulation and exclusion. The past twenty years have been marked by a growing retreat from radical visions for alternative futures; the commons debate insists that another world is possible.¹

Yet the promise of the commons does not imply that coming together will be free of friction. On the contrary, the commons is simultaneously made against, as well as within, existing fields of power to negotiate their manifestations, not reproduce them. As different dimensions of power organize the overdetermined terrain of the social, social movements are often caught between competing agendas, as well as in the gap between their declared aims and the actual complexity of everyday life. In this book, we call this struggle *commoning*. Beyond shared resources, commoning involves a self-defined community, commoners who are actively engaged in negotiating rules of access and use or the making of a social contract. As Peter Linebaugh argues, commoning is a verb, a social practice: commons are not yet made but always in the making; they are a product of continuous negotiations, reclaiming, reproducing in common.² Spaces of commoning, then, are a set of spatial relations produced by practices that arise from coming together. They are the spaces of encounter and mediation of differences and conflict. They are also a means of establishing and expanding commoning practices.³

In this ambiguous space of commoning, of trying to come together without knowing how, we as a group of artists, architects, and social theorists engaged in a search for uncommon knowledge: our two-year research project, “Spaces of Commoning: Artistic Practices, the Making of Urban Commons and Visions of Change” (2014–16), was funded by the City of Vienna (WWTF) and hosted by the Academy of Fine Arts Vienna. We first approached the

¹ David Harvey, *Rebel City: From the Right to the City to the Urban Revolution* (London: Verso, 2012).

² Peter Linebaugh, *The Magna Carta Manifesto: Liberties and Commons for All* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2008).

³ Stavros Stavrides, *Common Space: The City as Commons* (London: Zed Books, 2016), 2.

commons as a pool of shared resources, with Marx's account of primitive accumulation and the massive waves of enclosure in the woods of London echoing in our minds, as well as Silvia Federici's insistence that this accumulation process appropriates land as well as women's bodies.⁴ We soon recognized the necessity of linking discussions on commoning to the long history of colonized lands and bodies, and how accumulation in global capitalism has always relied on the social production of race.⁵ Just as important, we agreed that the commons cannot be reduced to a physical space and that establishing the commons as a viable discourse and form of living means embracing the negotiation of social relations.⁶ Building on this, we wanted to explore what it would mean to come together as an equivocal, nonessentialist, and, in effect, highly unstable "we."

For two years, members of the research group spent many days sitting around a table discussing the commons and its manifold possibilities and limitations. We organized a wide range of events including the international summer school "Commoning the City," and we tried to counter a too-cerebral approach to commoning by bringing back our thoughts in contact with affect and our bodies. To this end, we embarked on collective journeys that included walking forward and backward, listening in common, joining guided tours, building fragile stick constructions, experimenting with reading, making zines, cooking, learning, and unlearning. Meanwhile, over the course of our project, thousands of people seeking refuge from war, persecution, and poverty arrived in Vienna and a "culture of welcoming" turned into a decisive anti-immigrant stance and populism. Global economic discrepancies accelerated in the aftermath of the 2008 financial crisis, and Vienna remained deeply implicated in growing the divide between the global North and South, East and West. As we watched the aggressive politics of enclosure taking shape, our study on commoning seemed both timely and presumptuous.

Around this time, many of the tensions shaking the constituency of the world around us also began intruding upon the everyday of our research. Who were we as a group? We were supported by public funding and situated in a public art university: How could we possibly engage in a debate on commoning from this position of privilege, and one which fed invisibly on the distress of others? How could we deal with the uneven distribution of resources and privileges within our group, the anger and frustration with the precarity of some and the affluence of others, the different immigration statuses and abled versus disabled bodies?

For readers who expect a systematic introduction to the debate on the commons, we apologize if this brusque beginning set off on the wrong foot. You should know that the texts assembled in this book are a sincere attempt to document the trials and errors in a study of commoning, and as you will soon

see, a series of disruptions, failures, of falling apart, and the search for means to come together again. With this in mind, many of the contributions here do confront questions of methodology: they reflect on methods that support the study as well as the practice of commoning, methods that cherish critical reexamination and allow for unresolved dilemmas. As such, this search is part of the much wider methodological crises that continues to shake Western sciences, arts, and architecture, raising disturbing questions on research ethos, accountability, and the entanglement of power/knowledge regimes.

Following Linda Tuhiwai Smith's powerful account that "research" is one of the dirtiest words in the indigenous world's vocabulary,⁷ we asked ourselves what it could possibly mean to "do research" in light of the troubled history of Western epistemologies, their history of speaking and acting in the name of the privileged? What does research offer in light of epistemic crises as research itself has a long history of complicity in precipitating the very crisis we attempt to challenge? Audre Lorde wrote that "the master's tools will never dismantle the master's house," but in the same statement, Lorde adds that, in fact, this condition only threatens those "who still define the master's house as their only source of support."⁸ Her powerful statement brought forward against institutionalized racism resonates with another position that has accompanied us over the course of our study: in their feminist critique of the political economy, J. K. Gibson-Graham use the image of the iceberg to describe the overwhelming totality of capitalism that is talked into being by the very scholars and activists who set out to critique it. Instead, they propose reframing wage labor based on capitalist relations as being only a hint of the much greater set of economic relations and activities located outside of monetary exchange—the in-kind payments, reciprocal labor, unpaid housework, family care, self-provisioning, and volunteer labor that make up a large portion of our daily routines and are essential not only for mere survival, but living well.⁹ What links these positions are their attempt to decenter power and the dominant discourses on racism, identity politics, and political economy. These

4 Silvia Federici, *Caliban and the Witch: Women, the Body and Primitive Accumulation* (New York: Autonomedia, 2004).

5 See Paula Chakravartty and Denise Ferreira da Silva, "Accumulation, Dispossession, and Debt: The Racial Logic of Global Capitalism—An Introduction," *American Quarterly* 64, no. 3 (September 2012): 361–85; and Achille Mbembe, *Kritik der schwarzen Vernunft* (Berlin: Suhrkamp, 2014), 11–81.

6 Massimo De Angelis and Stavros Stravrides, "Beyond Markets or States:

Commoning as Collective Practice; A Public Interview, Athens, July 2009," *An Architektur*, no. 23 (July 2010): 4–26.

7 Linda Tuhiwai Smith, *Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples* (London: Zed Books 1999).

8 Audre Lorde, *Sister Outsider: Essays and Speeches* (Berkeley, CA: Crossing Press, 2007), 112.

9 J. K. Gibson-Graham, *The End of Capitalism (As We Knew It): A Feminist Critique of Political Economy* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2006), 79–101.

interventions disrupt habits of thinking, doing and feeling that otherwise provide little space for alternatives.

The Utopia of the Everyday

Here we turned to artistic practice and the concept of utopia. Building on Ernst Bloch's concept of concrete utopia and José Esteban Muñoz's vision of "cruising utopia," we approached the utopia of the commons neither as an always delayed future nor as a coming together in an idealist space, but closer to what Federici calls a "commoning with a small c"—the often invisible everyday gestures, sonic registers, and visual clues involved in trying to come together. This framing relies on the valuable lesson learned from modernist conceptions of utopia. As the projection of absolute difference, it claimed an innocent beginning from scratch while always already covering the stains of the settlers' colonialism, and what Karl Hardy describes as the refusal to become unsettled by the accountability to anticolonial critique.¹⁰ What we term the "utopia of the everyday" allowed us to dwell on the potential of everyday life and to locate, in the here and now, a future that might be otherwise. As the tension between the urge to problematize and deconstruct the flaws and fault lines of prevalent spaces of commoning, and the longing to overcome pessimism and make a difference was tearing our group apart, we repeatedly found reassurance in Fred Moten's much-quoted statement: "I believe in the world and want to be in it. I want to be in it all the way to the end of it because I believe in another world in the world and I want to be in that."¹¹

Focusing on the social processes of commoning supports a concept of the commons as a condition as much as an ideality. The concept of commoning reminds us that the commons can never be fully realized: because of the very condition of the social field, there is no state of perfect togetherness, a togetherness in sync and harmony. Instead, the commons serves as a guiding horizon—a cluster of imaginations on how we want to work together, live together, be together. But as the worldly, situated, and embodied practice of commoning helps us to find our way, the commons in the making depend on a continuous subjection to scrutiny calling upon the reproduction of the norms and conventions of hierarchization and exclusion.

One of the aims of our transdisciplinary research project has been to not just stack but to actually converge perspectives from art, architecture, and social science. Artistic practices provided us with strategies on how to look for the utopia of the everyday and, even more importantly, with devices to engage with them. Learning from what Claire Bishop has termed "collaboration and its discontent,"¹² we were eager to further scrutinize the very premises of

collaboration in a process of what Gibson-Graham describes as "doing thinking" that implicated us as much as the people we invited to study with us.¹³

Art- and architecture-based research inspired us to challenge the patterns and habits through which we perceive and how we give meaning, and also how to reimagine the world that is closer to our desires. In her essay "Uncommon Knowledge: A Transversal Dictionary" (2014), Pelin Tan looks at different artist-run platforms that aim to create unique forms of solidarity, translocal networks, and transversal knowledge. Focusing on the intersection of urban, pedagogical, and artistic practices, she advocates a situational arts-based research and practice that is "vital in enabling everyday life knowledge to intervene in institutional bodies, and vital to the flow of alternative pedagogies into different platforms, resulting in the emergence of creative forms of solidarity in extra-territorial spaces."¹⁴ As she tries to learn from different art- and architecture-based collectives, she addresses that which seems impossible in the present by provoking unlikely encounters and unforeseen alliances. Along these lines, we engaged in a study of the dynamics, patterns, and habits of how we perceive our being together, aiming at transgressing what Stephen Shukaitis has called "the limits of the conception of collectivity."¹⁵

Study as/of Commoning

Commoning was the subject as well as the intended means of our study. We approached commoning as a possible methodology, a modality of social relations, and the collective state of mind that framed our working together. The research confronted the complex double tension of *the study of commoning* and *study as commoning*. In this book, the study of commoning can be found in a series of entries that investigate practices of commoning. The entries assemble, in dialogue and also in conflict, a spectrum of distinctive accounts on commoning. Study as commoning manifests itself in the homonymous series of fragmented conversations that provide an inward-oriented, self-reflective perspective that is intended to disrupt the flow of the book. In these texts, eight researchers with different backgrounds and training

10 Karl Hardy, "Contemporary Indigenous Politics, Settler-Colonialism, and Utopianism," *Spaces of Utopia: An Electronic Journal*, 2nd series, no. 1 (2012): 123–36.

11 Fred Moten, "The General Antagonism: Interview with Stephen Shukaitis," in Stefano Harney and Fred Moten, *The Undercommons: Fugitive Planning and Black Study* (Wivenhoe: Minor Composition, 2013), 118.

12 Claire Bishop, *Artificial Hells* (London: Verso, 2012), 11.

13 J. K. Gibson-Graham, *A Postcapitalist Politics* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2006), xxix.

14 Pelin Tan, "Uncommon Knowledge: A Transversal Dictionary," *Eurozine*, May 30, 2014, <http://www.eurozine.com/articles/2014-05-30-tan-en.html>.

15 Stephen Shukaitis, "General Antagonism," in Harney and Moten, *Undercommons*, 147.

in different disciplines reflect on and literally work through the conditions, modalities, and implications of a group's attempt to come together. While the study of commoning explores more or less conventional paths of research, the latter calls for their undoing. Study as commoning challenges the dominant division of subject/object that continues to structure the foundation of Western thought as it reflects on the challenge of letting ourselves be dispossessed and repossessed by others as we study in common.¹⁶

The concept of study is inspired by Fred Moten and Stefano Harney's book, *The Undercommons: Fugitive Planning and Black Studies* (2013), in which they propose and develop study as a mode of thinking and doing with others, and outside of the thinking and doing that the institution requires of us: a being-in-common that seeks refuge in the institution's basement, its hidden corners, the so-called undercommons.¹⁷ Affected by the book's claim of an expanded notion of sociality, we approached Harney in an early phase of the research to walk with us into what Jack Halberstam, in the introduction of their book, calls "a wild place."¹⁸ As his writing renews the claim to pay attention to the conditions under which we live and work, including the condition of academic labor in institutions and their distinct politics of indebtedness as well as calls to order, Harney became an important witness to our many attempts to work with and against the conditions of coming together.

The question of commoning as methodology is most pressing when the two trajectories, study of commoning and study as commoning, converge. Two articles explore this intersection most explicitly: "Study across Time" and "Study across Borders" have been written collaboratively; in other words, they involved all members of the research group, and can be read as both a documentation of our study process as well as our endeavor to come to terms with the challenges of commoning in specific situations. "Study across Time" documents an excursion into the past to learn more about the present. In this collective study we tried to learn from the so-called settlers' movement that spread in the city of Vienna after the First World War. Faced with poverty, hunger, and a devastating housing shortage, residents turned to the woods for survival and as a place to make new homes. Out of this constellation grew a powerful social movement that emphasized self-organization, collaboration, and what today is called DIY. As we struggled with the lack of documentation, we consulted historians, activists, and anarchist librarians and tried to counter the gaps in memory with our own imagination to speculate on the movement's condition of coming together as well as the various utopia of the everyday. As visual documentation did not correspond to our projections, our conversations brought the past into the present, and turned commoning into a practice of the here and now.

"Study across Borders" traces our collaboration with students and teachers from the Alle School of Fine Arts and Design and the Ethiopian Institute of Architecture, Building Construction and City Development at the University of Addis Ababa, Ethiopia. Formally, the collaboration relied on institutional contacts; it was framed as a conference and a series of workshops generously hosted at the Alle School of Addis Ababa and the Academy of Fine Arts in Vienna. With regard to the workshop in Addis Ababa, our study group sketched out a research plan from abroad, suggesting to engage in a study of the grand-scale housing projects introduced by the Ethiopian government, but the actual encounter redirected our focus and we navigated between the recognition of the situatedness of our systems of knowledge and the making of a "we" in this precarious endeavor. Our struggle to meet was bound by the stark, uneven distribution of resources as much as the violence of Western immigration regimes, but it was also invigorated by the enjoyment of communicating, as much as miscommunicating, across borders. "The differences between us necessitate the dialogue, rather than disallow it," Sarah Ahmed writes in her book *Strange Encounters: Embodied Others in Post-coloniality* (2000), and continues, "a dialogue must take place, precisely because we don't speak the same language."¹⁹

Both "Study across Time" and "Study across Borders" make obvious that commoning as a methodology cannot be smoothly transferred across time and space but in fact requires the ability to respond to the specificities and situatedness of the people involved. While in conventional sociological research the two studies might be called "case studies," we don't perceive them as self-contained cases but instead as documentation of very concrete ways of trying to meet the methodological challenges deriving from the macro- as well as micro-crises we are confronted with. They document study as being imbued with blind spots, projections, miscommunications, Eurocentrism, the making and remaking of borders—and evoke what we, following Gayatri Spivak, have termed "having to make it without being able to."

Next to the three texts dedicated to study ("Study as Commoning," "Study across Borders," "Study across Time"), all other entries reflect the individual, or in some cases smaller-scale collaborative interests of the members of the research group. As these entries differ widely in terms of geography, methods, and aims pursued, and are organized around the three strands of investigation that frame the entire study—spaces, practices, and the utopia of the everyday:

16 Harney and Moten, *Undercommons*, 115–22.

17 Ibid.

18 Jack Halberstam, introduction to *ibid.*, 6–8.

19 Sarah Ahmed, *Strange Encounters: Embodied Others in Post-coloniality* (London: Routledge, 2000), 180.

Spaces of commoning is a collection of texts situating practices of commoning in their specific, mostly urban contexts, since it is in the city where social conflicts as well as alternative visions for the future become most explicit. Understood as distinct from public as well as private spaces, spaces of commoning emerge in the contemporary metropolis as sites in which self-managed rules and forms of use contribute in resisting and producing creative alternatives beyond contemporary forms of domination. Spaces here are understood not only as resources or assets but as the production of new social relations and new forms of life-in-common. "Housing Commons" investigates how the settlers' movement as housing commons turned into enclosure over time. "Site for Unlearning (Art Organization)" traces the collaborative effort of unlearning specific institutional habits within an art organization that seeks to actively practice a commons-based approach in their daily work, and "Allmeinde" unfolds the dynamics of in- and exclusion in the rural commons. The entries in this section explore the tensions between economization and commoning, between normative infrastructures and the attempts to rework them, the appropriation of space as self-empowerment and as a process of re-enclosure.

Practices of commoning aim to grasp commoning beyond the mere idea of sharing to focus on the process of negotiation. Thus, the contributions scrutinize the social processes that create and reproduce commons and that critically engage with how we organize ourselves collaboratively. The practices discussed in the publication are housing, working, cruising, caring, listening, unlearning, or building. "Designing Commoning Institutions" treads along the thin line between self-organization and institutionalization. "How to Hear in Common" frames listening as a precondition for coming together, and "Where Do You Come From" challenges everyday practices of othering. The entries here struggle with the tensions between abstract aims and the messiness of the everyday.

Utopia of the everyday departs from the premise that the imaginations of alternative forms of relating can nest precisely within the messiness of the everyday. By their very nature, these barely visible, minor gestures can easily be overlooked when reading this book, as the strand "Utopia of the Everyday" brings together contributions that point at a horizon imbued with potentiality. The entries situate this affective structure not in a delayed future but foremost in the neglected presence and the unfinished past of today. "Cruising as" searches for non-identitarian means of coming together in aconflictual spaces. "Kitchen Politics" traces utopia in the communal organization of reproductive labor. "The Intimacies of Other Humanities" discloses the inherent paradoxes of utopic yearning in reconstituting a radical history of the Taiwan's sugarcane workers' revolt, and "City of Commons" imagines the possibility of making a city through acts of negotiation. The entries tackle memory and

forgetting, the discourse of development and colonialism, and the settlers' violent appropriation of land.

The collection of contributions in this book is the result of a process of negotiation: an effort to appreciate the particular orientations that individuals bring to the table, and at the same time, to carve out and inhabit a common space, a space where we can meet and work together. Because of this condition, the book addresses a wide range of challenges, pursues multiple flights of thought, and steers toward very different findings. But for this very same reason, namely, the profound situatedness of our study, there is no more and no less systematic order behind the project than the shared interest that has emerged in the course of our own coming together. It is the feature of our group that has set out the terrain we explore, and the questions we leave aside. Meanwhile, we hope that the cracks and gaps will inspire others to join in the conversation, because it is in the gaps, even if we aren't quite able to articulate them, that commoning begins.

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Study as Commoning No Beginnings

A conversation composed of fragments from collective writings, e-mails, and discussions.

A: Calling a point in time a beginning is always in danger of becoming a gesture of erasure, a gesture with an inherent colonial stance. It proposes we could move out and go to a place to establish there something from scratch. But wherever we are moving to, be it physically or metaphorically, this beginning remains a construct agreed upon by the ones who are on the move.

CV: From a soldier's perspective, the occupation takes place in no-man's-land, ready to be colonized anew. In wartime, territory is treated like an unmarked piece of land, a terra nullius that has not yet been occupied.

B: It is seemingly necessary that commoning "begins" somewhere, because we seldom find ourselves stepping in an already ongoing process of commoning or continuing an established commoning practice.

C: Where to draw the line that would mark a beginning?

D: Our collaboration departed from two points: a work contract and a project proposal. The first one was readily accepted; the signing of contracts occurred without negotiations, as if it was a mere formality. The proposal, however, has been continuously challenged, debated, rewritten.

E: There was no beginning anymore, and no part of our subjectivity was exempt from being a condition for our process of commoning.

SH: The only way to deal with this is to make the conditions that you came with the object of study, and by that I mean the object of the transformation of being together. They are not just a thing that you are trying to understand before you do something else, they are the only way you are ever getting to the time and the space that you need. They are the very thing that you work on—they are the very topic of study.

D: Since the beginning of our work, one question has consistently reemerged: Is commoning simply the subject of our research or is our collaborative research also a form of commoning?

F: We have left the end but are not yet at the beginning.

Members of the Spaces of Commoning research group (A, B, C, D, E, F) with Cornelia Vismann (CV), author of "Starting from Scratch: Concepts of Order in No-Man's-Land," in *War, Violence and the Modern Condition*, ed. Bernd Hüppauf (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1997), and with Stefan Harney (SH) in a public conversation with the Spaces of Commoning research group on the occasion of the Vienna Art Week, 2015.



Dear Border,

Berhanu Ashagrie Deribew and Participants
of the Commoning Seminar, European Forum
Alpbach 2015

Fig. 1
Participants of the Commoning Seminar,
European Forum Alpbach 2015, Dear Border, poster

Allmeinde

Anette Baldauf

I have long thought of Nenzinger Himmel as my personal heaven—a lush green valley cradled by imposing mountain peaks. The boldness of the mountains makes the valley, nesting preciously under guardianship of the mountain peaks, seem timid by comparison. Eighty cabins are clustered tightly around a chapel, tavern, guesthouse, and dairy. Immediately upon arrival, I sense relief. The cabins are simple. There is no phone, no Internet, no TV. While fetching water from the public fountain or building a fire in the stove, the chatter in and outside my head recedes and a unique stillness takes hold of life. Over centuries this land has been maintained as an Allmeinde: How has such preciousness been protected from destruction? What has saved the land from seizure and enclosure?

Geographically, Nenzinger Himmel is part of the Gamperdona valley. It encompasses seventy-three-square-kilometers of land and is located in western Austria, on the border to Switzerland and Liechtenstein. The valley does not, as one might expect, belong to the neighboring township Nenzing, but is owned, administrated, and maintained by the Agrargemeinschaft Nenzing, a cooperative founded in 1965 in the historic tradition of the Allmeinde. For centuries in many European countries, the Allmeinde provided an autonomous fourth column of the governing structure, supplementing national, regional, and local authorities. In Nenzing, too, the Allmeinde was formalized as a non-regulated cooperative until 1965. It was integrated into the administration of the township Nenzing and maintained by people living in town. In times of financial need, the township periodically sold off fractions of the Allmeinde to the Federal Association of Agriculture and Forestry. Finally in 1965, members of the cooperative bought back the land and founded the new, regulated Agrargemeinschaft Nenzing.

Today, the so-called *Agrar* has about 728 members, all of them acknowledged *Bürger*innen*, that is, burghers who not only have Austrian citizenship but can trace back their origins to generations of ancestors in Nenzing. United by bloodlines, the cooperative owns 80 percent of the Gamperdona valley. In line with the tradition of the Allmeinde, no single member owns land, but every member has the right to use the land. Members are obligated to work one to two days per year in the forest. In return, they have the right to collect a certain amount of wood, use the land, and inherit a cabin.

Until the nineteenth century, most towns in western Austria were constituted on the basis of the Allmeinde, with farmers maintaining meadows, woods, and lakes in common. This constellation changed drastically when vast modernization processes started to spread like fire in calling for the privatization and compartmentalization of shared land. A major battle arose between farmers who asserted tradition and wanted to hold on to the conventional way of economizing, versus new entrepreneurs who were eager to utilize the land for

industrialization. In the first volume of *Capital* (1867), Karl Marx describes the brutal expropriation of land and resources during England's transition from feudalism to capitalism. Tracing the conversion of the commons into property, he defines primitive accumulation as the historical process upon which the development of capitalist relations is premised.¹ In western Austria too, industrialization reconfigured the understanding of land, social relationships, and economic transactions. When land was compartmentalized and turned into a commodity, farmers were paid off while the poor received a symbolic compensation for their loss. It was the poorest who eventually suffered the most as they were deprived of their means of self-subsistence. Within a short time, industrialization consumed almost all the Allmeinden; only the lots and parcels considered unproductive in terms of accumulation remained designated for common usage. This was how a few Alps, lakes, and forests stayed in the hands of farmers' cooperatives—only together could the farmers afford the expense of maintaining roads or hauling wood; only with the support of others could they pay for the shepherds and dairies.

The Gamperdona valley likely survived the call to privatization because of its remoteness. Over centuries, the Allmeinde had been maintained by farmers from Nenzing who, as many stories recount, were conspicuously fond of their valley—so much so that the neighboring farmers, ridiculing their pride, started to call the Gamperdona valley “Nenzingers' heaven,” hence the name Nenzinger Himmel. For many years, the Allmeinde in the mountain enabled the farmers to maintain far more dairy cattle than the land in the small town alone would have sustained. It became the primary source of the Nenzingers' wealth.

In English the term “commons” designates a set of spaces and spatial practices, whereas the German language distinguishes between *Gemeingut* (common good) and the rural commons, Allmeinde. In both languages, the concept of the commons refers to those shared spaces and social practices that preceded the enclosures enforced by the violent accumulation of land over the course of industrialization. Owing to this history, many debates frame the Allmeinde as an ideal type of space, where needs, not profit, determine the usage of space; where maintenance is continuously negotiated and social relationships are malleable. As such, the Allmeinde is a kind of sacred cow in the commons debate.

“The cow is the queen in the Gamperdonatal” is a popular saying in Nenzing. But the cows in the valley are bizarre creatures: imposing but gaunt, with boney hips but supersized udders. These mutants embody a series of paradoxes that tend to remain invisible in the debate on the Allmeinde. Like cows all over the world, the herd moves out of the dairy in the morning and grazes in the meadow until evening; when they walk back their udders are swollen and ready for milking. But the cows also wear chips behind their ears, they

are fed with soy supplements from Brazil, and scanned during the milking procedure. In the summer months, when the herd is in the valley, the cows produce twenty-eight tons of cheese and butter. In other words, these 140 cows today produce as much as 300 cows did only a few years ago, before the industrialization of the dairy.

Despite the idyllic preservation of nature and the suggested innocence of the valley, the cows, too, are caught up in the turmoil of the global economy. This disjuncture between the appearance and reality behind the different modes of production can be extended further upon by the fact that the Agrar owns not only most of the mountain valley but also stretches of land in the town of Nenzing. While these lands were previously designated as unproductive and zoned for agricultural use only, over the course of the shift from industrial to postindustrial modes of production, Nenzing rezoned some land and the collaborative now leases parts of the Allmeinde to contractors. In 2013, the Agrar's turnover was roughly 2.1 million euros, with 1.1 million generated from leasing contracts. Profits—some years as high as 300,000 euros—is not paid in cash to the members but reinvested in the commons, for example, the high-tech renovation of the dairy.

Is the story of the Agrar another tragedy of the commons? In 1968, looking at the commons Garrett Hardin, a US microbiologist and ecologist, equated freedom with destruction. In his much-quoted article “The Tragedy of the Commons,” he claims that when scarce resources are left to collaborative maintenance, they degrade by either over- or underuse. In a society that worships freedom and growth at the same time, he argued, commons are doomed to fail. “Therein is the tragedy,” he writes, “each man is locked into a system that compels him to increase his herd without limit—in a world that is limited.”² Fifteen years later, Susan Jane Buck Cox wrote a response titled “No Tragedy on the Commons.” She claims that the story of the commons is a triumph: despite the innumerable forces against them, the commons have in fact continued to thrive for centuries. She argues: “Since it seems quite likely if ‘economic man’ had been managing the commons that tragedy really would have occurred, perhaps someone else was running the common.”³

My intention is neither to correct the perception of human nature—such claims have historically always been vested with power and stained with blood—nor to slaughter the sacred cow. I aim for a more humble approach,

1 Karl Marx, *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy*, vol. 1, trans. Ben Fowkes (London: Penguin Press, 1992).

2 Garrett Hardin, “The Tragedy of the Commons,” *Science* 162, no. 3859 (December 1968): 1244.

3 Susan Jane Buck Cox, “No Tragedy on the Commons,” *Environmental Ethics* 7 (Spring 1985): 60.

hoping to allow the profuse cacophony of situated voices and diversity of embodied practices to rise to the forefront. I went to the Gamperdona valley and asked four residents to share their accounts of the valley's claim to the commons: historian Meinrad Pichler reconstructed the valley's position during the Second World War; Otto Beck recalled stories of hunting, escape, and brave rescues; Doris Ruesch reconstructed her claim to women's rights; and Mehmet Kilic reflected on the tension between the Allmeinde and the concept of citizenship.

Heimat, Nature, and Innocence

In Nenzing, local families started to establish workshops for spinning and metal production in the mid-nineteenth century. When the pioneering industries introduced disastrous working and slum-like living conditions, the Gamperdona valley came to resemble the epitome of life predating the violent restructuring. Capitalizing on this promise, mountain tourism spread and the cabins in the valley started to also serve as summer retreats. In the summer of 1900, the local newspaper reported on a morning mass held in the valley on the occasion of the inauguration of the tourist guesthouse. To the writer's surprise, the priest praised not only the mountains and hiking trails but also mountain tourism as a remedy for the crimes of civilized men.⁴ Soon after, the glorification of nature, the simple way of life, and farming provided a meeting point for several political ideologies: conservatism, Austrofascism, and National Socialism, all of which claimed ownership to the ambiguous construct called *Heimat*. Pichler recalls how in the 1930s the valley served as a meeting place for politicians of different party lines: Governor Otto Ender supposedly came every summer to hike and do informal business. Here he met Alois Tschabrun who, inspired by the concept of the Allmeinde, realized the most extensive cooperative housing project in the history of western Austria:

Early June 1933 Otto Ender met with Alois Tschabrun at Nenzinger Himmel. [...] Tschabrun wanted to ask Ender for his blessing to join the still illegal NSDAP uncover in order to subvert the party as a Catholic fascist. Governor Ender said an individual was too weak to fight the entire party and that he should remain on the Austrian side. Soon after this conversation, Tschabrun joined the Nazi Party and eventually worked full time for the party in Nenzing. [...] In 1938, he founded a nonprofit settlement company, *Vorarlberger gemeinnützige Wohnungsbau- und Siedlungsgesellschaft m.b.H.*, in short: Vogewosi. With the support of the county, some townships and several local entrepreneurs, all of them well-known Nazis, Tschabrun wanted to introduce affordable housing for workers on the basis of self-help building. In June 1939, Berlin commissioned Vorarlberg and Tirol to create housing for the 40,000 "returnees" from South Tyrol. [...] Four weeks after

the announcement of the program, Tschabrun's Vogewosi started the first construction site in Bregenz without any building permit. He became active far beyond Berlin's specifications. By 1942, Tschabrun had completed more than 2,000 apartments and 430 buildings—the largest public housing project ever realized in Vorarlberg.⁵

In spring 1934, Nenzinger Himmel hosted the Pentecostal camp of the still illegal *Hitlerjugend* (Hitler Youth), during which young men and women perhaps camped on one of the Allmeinde's lush green meadows. Four hiking hours away from the town, the valley must have offered an ideal retreat for exhilarating bonding over campfire romanticism, ideological schooling, and outdoor military training. The two local founders of the Hitlerjugend, Otto Weber and Hans Österle, were both present at the camp, despite ongoing police raids that put most of the central Hitlerjugend protagonists in prison a few months later.

Already during the First World War but even more so during the Second World War, most of the cabins served as homes for the many border patrols stationed on the mountains to Switzerland and Liechtenstein. For the first time, a direct phone line was installed to provide immediate communication between the valley and the town of Nenzing. Local National Socialists plotted the future in the tavern Löwen, where officers from Germany decorated the walls with portraits of a glowering Hitler. Today, the diary of Hedwig Scherrer provides a rare document on how heavy the volume of human traffic was in the dark forest of the Gamperdona valley in the 1930s. The Swiss artist was known in Nenzing for wearing pants and throwing parties in her father's cabin, which the Swiss entrepreneur had bought after purchasing hunting rights in the 1880s. On August 21, 1938, she writes, "Every day refugees flee from the Scesaplana and most often the Cavelljoch into Switzerland."⁶ A few months earlier, only days after the *anschluss*, the Austrian poet, writer, and activist Jura Soyfer tried to escape to Switzerland just a few mountains further south. A local policeman stopped him and his friend and sent both back. Ten months later, Soyfer died in the Buchenwald concentration camp.⁷ When roughly one year later, in 1939, the local newspaper reported record numbers of local hikers visiting the Gamperdona valley, there was no mention of the refugees' attempt to escape.⁸ As Nenzing has not yet started an investigation on the

4 *Vorarlberger Landes-Zeitung*, August 3, 1900.

5 Meinrad Pichler, in conversation with the author, July 17, 2015. Unless otherwise noted, all translations are my own.

6 Artenne Nenzing, "Sommerfrische im Himmel," exhibition documentation, 2009, <http://www.artenne.at/content/Rueck>

<http://www.gargellen.at/925.html>

7 For a few years now, the summer theater group Sarotla has performed the interactive theater piece *Auf der Flucht* in and around the town of Gargellen, where local actors reenact the flight of Jura Soyfer. See <http://www.gargellen.at/925.html>.

town's role in National Socialism, and since town administrators tell researchers that all documents regarding the war were destroyed in 1945, oral accounts are key. Otto Beck, a former hunter, recalls the story of Viktor Brandner:

I want to tell you the story of Viktor Brandner. [...] Everybody knew that Brandner was against the Nazis but we all had no idea what he really accomplished. [...] Whenever he got a tip, he would go to the train station and fetch a group of people trying to flee. Often they were ten people, sometimes less. Covered by the darkness of the night he took the group down to the meadow and along the Ill river; walking in the woods was good for hiding. He then took them around the town along the outskirts of the forest and along the Riegel up into the woods toward the Gamp. Brandner knew his way well from nighttime poaching; because of this experience the group was able to walk without a lamp. A chain of people followed him tightly. Very tightly, I was told. They walked up to the Alpe Gamp and from there, still in the dark, to the Liechtenstein border, the Matterjoch. This is where the transfer took place.⁹



Fig. 2
Alpine cabin, Nenzinger Himmel, 2015

Toward the end of the war, the local Nazi Party tried to hand over the Allmeinde's hunting rights to Obermarschall Göring in Berlin. And when the war was over, the French army arrived in the valley. One French officer walked into the Löwen and aimed his machine gun at the Hitler portraits. Beck remembers, "Their machine guns riddled all the pictures. Anna Gandter (the owner of the tavern) later showed me the holes. She hung new pictures of Mary and Jesus to cover the holes. All those bullet holes in the beams!"

Commoning and Exclusion

After the war, a few and short-lived changes ensured overall political continuity. The constellation of the Allmeinde remained precious as the cabins ceased to house cows altogether and were converted into expensive vacation residencies for those privileged enough to inherit the membership. More and more cabins were added until the introduction of the regulated Agrar established a new membership policy in 1968 that clearly distinguished between those who had lived in Nenzing for generations, and those who recently arrived (i.e., between locals and strangers). The reformulation protected the heritage of the precious environment as much as it asserted the exclusive rights of "real Nenzingers." It was, in other words, a device of commoning as much as uncommoning.

The town's archivist, Thomas Gamon, traced the historic conventions of the Allmeinde back to Rhaeto-Romanic alpine laws that value the collaborative use of land over private property. Beck, whose family lost access to the status of a burgher when his mother married a non-burgher, traced this tradition back to an equally old but more profane condition: the political will to ensure that the wood stays in town and no foreign element, neither cow nor man, enters the community.

"In the sixties, there was an inflation of the status of 'burgher' granted to the people of Nenzing. Too many now had access to the valley; they could collect wood and build a cabin. The founding of the cooperative was a reaction to this inflation. We wanted to protect our heritage and regulate access," explains Gamon bluntly.¹⁰ The preconception of the commons as a utopia often assumes that the return to a precapitalist organization of land and social relationship produces anticapitalist effects, based on the commoners' potential to redistribute, negotiate, and care. But in the case of the Gampadona valley, does commoning rather thrive on exclusion and exploitation? When Marx

⁸ *Vorarlberger Tagblatt*, July 13, 1939.

⁹ Otto Beck, in conversation with the author, July 13, 2015.

¹⁰ Thomas Gamon at a meeting on May 15, 2014.

wrote *Capital* in 1867 at the height of Western colonial violence, he insisted on the strict differentiation between the principle of primitive accumulation and the conditions in the colonies. But as Walter Mignolo points out, it was precisely the “primitive (colonial) accumulation” of, for example, gold and silver mines, land, and African slaves that provided the foundation for modern accumulation processes.¹¹ Marx refuses to see what Mignolo calls the “darker side of modernity” because of his own epistemic privileges, and also because the organizational principle for the colonies’ functioning and exploitation of labor was race, not class.

“Standing still is progress” is a popular saying in Nenzing. Is it a coincidence that the collaborative was founded one year after Austria signed the bilateral recruitment agreement with Turkey, when more and more migrant workers moved to Nenzing to provide factories with cheap labor? With the rise of post-Fordist economies, Nenzing became increasingly integrated in the extensive flows of goods, finance, technologies, and ideas that circulated now globally in many—for Nenzing—profitable ways. But how did the new globalism relate to the localism of the valley? Mehmet Kilic, head of ATIB (Turkish-Islamic Union for Cultural and Social Collaboration in Austria) in Nenzing, describes his personal connection to Nenzinger Himmel: it reminds him of the countryside in Turkey based on the way agriculture is pursued there. Despite this attachment, his Austrian citizenship and his civil engagement, he is not eligible to become a member of the Agrar. Kilic states:

I find it unfair that migrants are excluded. [...] As a tourist I am always welcome. As long as I leave in the evening, I can come and the color my skin is irrelevant. I can spend a day there, that is okay, but I have to leave in the evening. They do not want foreigners there. [...] I have been an Austrian citizen since 1984. I do not feel like a foreigner but for the people in Nenzinger, the burghers, I am still the foreigner. See, here is where I live: the neighbor over there is a teacher, on the other side lives an entrepreneur, and this one also is a teacher. We get along well, but for all of them I’m still the Turk.¹²

Commons and Gender

In her research on the commons, Silvia Federici also contests the univocal narrative of what happened between the mid-eighteenth and mid-nineteenth century in the woods of England: Marxists’ understanding of primitive accumulation, she criticizes, ignores a key condition of capitalism—the appropriation of women’s bodies and their reproductive labor. Her study on the systemic violence against women illustrates how deeply intertwined the processes of dispossession are with the politics of sex and gender.¹³ Nenzinger Himmel,

too, carries the distinct marks of a long and violent history of gender hierarchies. Until 1997, the Agrar excluded women from membership. In 1993, Doris Ruesch read an article that praised the progressiveness of the Allmeinde. She wrote to the head of the Agrar Bürs and asked to be admitted as a woman. When she was rejected, she went to court, and after having faced a town’s manifold strategies of ostracism, she won the case. Ruesch recalls:

The most difficult part for me was the reactions of the people in the village. Some crossed the street when they saw me, others changed sides after the church, so they did not have to talk to me. [...] People put pressure on me. Everybody said, this is just how it has always been—accept it. [...] They blamed me for destroying the Agrar; the Agrar will not be able to deal with too many members, they said. Indeed, the number of members increased, at that time the Agrar had two hundred, today it has four hundred members. [...] In 1996 the supreme court in Austria awarded me with the positive decision and all *Agrargemeinschaften* across the country had to change their constitution. [...] In Bürs the Agrar accepted my request to become a full member starting with the day I had officially applied for membership. [...] The first meeting was a challenge. I was in purely male company. During the meeting I had to go to the bathroom and when I asked the man sitting next to me to move his chair, he barked, you take up so much space! My presence was not wanted. I knew I had to endure this tension because it was what I had fought for. Ultimately, the Agrar accepted my presence and also introduced a women’s bathroom.¹⁴

As I collected stories over the kitchen table, in the corner of the local café, and on hiking trails tucked away in the woods I tried to resist the pull of dualistic thinking, placing the Allmeinde as either tragedy or triumph. Instead, I aimed at what John Law calls the capacity of both/and (rather than either/or).¹⁵ In the stories I was told, the commoning practices traverse the different planes of reinterpretation, narration, and representation in a multiplicity of unexpected and often fractious ways, moving in and out of tales of tragedy as much as tales of triumph. The authoritative voice of the *Agrargemeinschaft* Nenzing, for example, is called into question by a multiplicity of voices that

11 Walter D. Mignolo, “The Enduring Enchantment (or the Epistemic Privilege of Modernity and Where to Go from Here),” in “Enduring Enchantments,” ed. Saurabh Dube, special issue, *South Atlantic Quarterly* 101, no. 4 (2002): 930.

12 Mehmet Kilic, in conversation with the author, on July 14, 2015.

13 See Silvia Federici, *Caliban and the Witch: Women, the Body and Primitive Accumulation* (New York: Autonomedia, 2004).

14 Doris Ruesch, in conversation with the author, on July 14, 2015.

15 See John Law, *Aircraft Stories: Decentering the Object in Technoscience* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2002).

suggest alternative interpretations. It is because of this polyvocality and its inherent ambivalence that analysis of places like the Nenzinger Himmel are essential for the debate on the commons: they challenge the nostalgia of narratives on origins, and place the commons in the midst of a web of complex social struggles. The stories shared by my interlocutors convey moments of inclusion and exclusion, sharing and repossessing, reclaiming and redefinition, even moments of rewriting the constitution. I am thankful for the generosity of those who shared their time and stories, even though and also because they placed my heaven solidly on earth.

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Crisis and Commoning Periods of Despair, Periods of Hope

Stavros Stavrides in Conversation with Mara Verlič

The following interview with Stavros Stavrides was conducted in Athens in early September 2015, a time when Athens faced yet another surge in austerity policies following the financial crisis in the early 2000s. Amid the privatization of public services, the dismantling of the welfare state, and the sharp increases in joblessness, poverty, and homelessness, Athens has also seen the emergence of powerful social movements and self-help initiatives, not least within the context of the dramatic increase in refugees in Greece. But the euphoria behind the growing social movements and leftist politics characterizing the city in recent years has now cooled. In spite of the Syntagma Square movement, the promises of a new and broadly supported Syriza party, and the clear *Oxi* on the bailout referendum, a new memorandum for austerity policies with the European Union has been signed.¹ In the midst of these happenings, Stavrides discussed his views on urban commons, the corollary hope for other kinds of social relations, and how urban commons connect to moments of crisis.

Mara Verlič: The commons is a highly popular concept today and picked up in many different contexts within academic and activist circles. A resource, a practice, a community: What is your particular idea of commons and especially urban commons?

Stavros Stavrides: The way I approach urban commons is not simply as yet another product or thing that we should share. I think that urban commoning has to do with a more general issue—it has to do with the very meaning of space, especially public space. Compared to other kinds of common goods, space is not only something to be shared, but a system, a network of relations. Space is a process. Therefore, urban commoning will have to deal with this peculiarity of space, the fact that space is a set of relations, a means through which social relations are being expressed. And at the same time, space indeed also happens in the form of concrete places in which rules of use are always contested. I think the particularity of urban commoning is that it has both to do with a specific area of commons, and at the same time with the problematization of the very means by which we share. Space is something to share and a means through which we develop rules of sharing.

¹ *Oxi* is the Greek word for “no.” The referendum was to decide if Greece should accept the bailout conditions proposed by the troika of the European Commission, the International Monetary Fund, and European Central Bank. The referendum was held in July 2015 and the bailout was rejected by 61 percent of the voters (with a voter turnout of 62 percent).

MV: You describe space as a relational concept where space is constantly formed by social interaction but also always informs social relations. Commoning as a kind of social relation thus creates its own spaces but is also created through space. What kind of commoning emerges in particular urban space?

StS: Let's not talk about the urban in general, let's talk about the urban in the form of a metropolis. One specific particularity of current cities is that the metropolis city forms a set of spaces that can be described through the image of an archipelago: a sea in which various enclaves of use and rules of use float, a city of enclaves comprised of secluded urban worlds. Between those enclaves stretches an urban sea that creates discontinuities along the predictability of actions dominant forces need to exercise their control. Nevertheless, methods of control are being developed and tested in the context of prevailing urban policies in the form of metastatic checkpoints that appear all over the city. Contemporary cities consist of separate enclosed or self-enclosed common worlds. In those enclaves, commoning is not based on acts of egalitarian sharing. It's important to observe how these common worlds are being created and what kind of rules are imposed or developed in them. This might help us to be able to think about commoning as a force that may transcend the current condition and go beyond the city of enclaves toward a city in which commoning is a form of sharing based on solidarity and equality.

MV: When you speak of how commoning might overcome the city of enclaves—or the islands of the archipelago—it evokes the image of commoning as a kind of totalitarian practice. In this vision, instead of many different islands there is just one common island for the whole of the city—one commoning island. Can commoning also occur within a totalitarian ideology, within fascism?

StS: Commoning is not necessarily connected to emancipatory processes and ideas. Can commoning merge with a fascist ideology? Yes, fascism has developed forms of sharing but this kind of sharing was first of all based on a strict hierarchy and a complete discontinuity between the mass of followers and the leader. Under fascism there are kinds of sharing, even solidarity among the chosen few, but this is not enough to make commoning a process through which potentially emancipating practices might be developed or encouraged.

MV: The relationship between commoning and exclusion is a challenging point. If we see commoning as based on a certain community, it also depends on the creation of a “we.” Does commoning, thus, need a “them” or an outside of some sort?

StS: This is exactly a point on which I disagree with the Elinor Ostrom tradition in the discussions on commoning. I also partially disagree with Massimo De Angelis who insists that for commoning to exist we need an outside and an inside—we need a separation, a barrier, a borderline. I think that a defining characteristic of emancipatory commoning communities is that they are necessarily porous and necessarily open to newcomers. Otherwise, if commoning is confined within the limits of a specific community or a specific spatially defined area, then commoning will suffocate and end up as its reverse. I think that commoning is necessarily opposed to any kind of enclosure. And this is true even if that enclosure serves to protect a community's collectivities, its ideas of sharing, and its sharing rules and regulations. Indeed, we have to defend communities that are fighting against prevalent inequality and state aggression. But, at the same time, we need those communities to be always open to newcomers. And we need them not simply to include newcomers in their already established form and set of rules, but to consider them as necessary coproducers of this process.

One example is our experience in the Syntagma Square occupation. During the 2011 occupation, there was an always extended publicness: people were actively invited to participate and they could think of the square as theirs. Syntagma has always been a ceremonial public space in the center of Athens, a no-man's-land where nobody felt it could be his or her own place or that they could contribute to its transformation. During the occupation, this space emerged as common space. I say common and not public because it had the characteristics of urban commoning: the always-renewed participation of people allowed to co-form the rules of use of space and to take part in activities they considered important. When the police attacked Syntagma Square, it was exactly to limit the common space, to contain it, and to create a barrier and an outside. They wanted to contain and stigmatize us as being a very secluded enclave of otherness that would soon die out. They aimed at imposing the rules of the enclave city at something that was against enclavism. Commoning should always find ways to spread and to expand. It should be realized that if commoning is forced to defend itself by enclosing itself, this makes commoning uses and means alien to its values. Commoning practices enter a hostile territory in which they will soon die out.

MV: To achieve a continuous openness of commoning, it seems insufficient to simply claim that the commoning initiative is open to all and that everybody can join. Often universalistic claims implicitly lead to the exclusion of heretofore unseen minorities. In this context, on the contrary, it seems important to actively look for the outside and the borders of commoning to

transgress them. How can a commoning initiative realize openness and expansion while looking for borders and differences?

StS: Openness is obviously a problem to be solved and an aspiration to be realized in different ways in different historical contingencies. What I am trying to describe here is only the direction toward which commoning practices should gesture to remain what they claim to be. I agree that in terms of concrete historical contexts, borders are being created that circumscribe commoning communities. But the force of commoning should always actively seek to move and transgress those borders to invite newcomers who are willing to be included without abandoning their own differentiating habits and characteristics. As long as newcomers accept commoning as a common horizon of equality and solidarity, they should be allowed to express their difference and to initiate new processes of negotiations and agreements within the newly expanded community. Commoning should not be considered as a homogenizing set of social practices and institutions but, on the contrary, as the making of shared worlds crafted by people who decide to explore common grounds exactly because they are different and difference matters.

MV: Commoning is often described as a practice that goes beyond capitalist market dynamics and also beyond state control. Thinking about the image of an ever-expanding commoning, do you think it can nevertheless emerge under the current conditions of state control and capitalism?

StS: Indeed I do because the relation is always a dynamic one. As we know, capitalism has been emerging for many years, even centuries, from within a different system of social organization, inside feudalism. Capitalism was not a sudden creation. Inside an organized society with certain rules and hierarchical formations of power, a different system of economic relations and of practices related to production and reproduction had long developed. And I suppose that during that period, most of those new practices were contradictory. Can we say if there was an exact point at which capitalism was decisively established against other forms of social organization? No, we know that there were major ruptures, there were even revolutions, not always, not everywhere, but we know that capitalism emerged in a very complicated process. I tend to think that a society of emancipated people, a society of equality and solidarity, a society based on sharing will emerge the same way. To use John Holloway's phrase, "In, against, and beyond capitalism."

Maybe commoning is one of the major forces that sustains such a possibility—if we define commoning as egalitarian, based on solidarity, and as always expanding. When commoning of this form manages to spread

and support various actions inside capitalist societies, then I think commoning will really develop toward an emancipating social organization. Commoning initiatives in the form of alternative economies, in the form of organized actions of collaboration against austerity, or in the form of sharing practices can indeed expand the cracks of current capitalist crises. We need to imagine and to experience forms of social organization that do not look like the state. The state is a historical form of power arrangement; it has been created and in some time it will not be there. But to test new forms of social organization, to see if they can produce different kinds of social relations, I think we need to experience them today and not in the future as ideal utopias. The sharing of power is the ultimate form of commoning; the sharing of power is the exact opposite to the state-like forms for organizing societies. And we have very important experiments of power sharing today: the Zapatista autonomous areas in which a self-governance system based on egalitarian participation is taking place in, against, and beyond the capitalist Mexico state, and in the Rojava autonomous cantons (in Syrian territory) in which the experiment of democratic confederalism is unfolding.

MV: You speak of commoning as a practice of power sharing that goes against state-like forms of organization. Commoning initiatives sometimes find themselves in a double bind, supporting redistributive politics and at the same time disapproving of the state. Do you think that practices of commoning can be thought of together with claims for redistribution or are they contradictory?

StS: There are forms of redistribution that are opposed to egalitarian and expanding commoning. If we think that the state is the necessary mediator or distributor, redistribution does not lead to forms of commoning that prefigure and actualize different kinds of social organization. Nevertheless, it is of course important to always demand redistributive policies from the state because this is a way of pressuring the state to readjust and also a way of showing people the limits of such struggles. This helps us all realize that only through active participation in commoning is another kind of sharing possible. A kind of sharing that sustains and expands solidarity between equals. Therefore, I don't think that redistribution per se is a guarantee for emancipatory commoning.

MV: On the other hand, you often mention the importance of negotiation in commoning and of the self-organization in these negotiation processes. How do you see the relation between this emphasis on self-organization and what you call in your recent publications—perhaps surprisingly—the importance of institutions?

StS: In most cases, what seems very clearly reasoned is not so clear in practice or in action. For example, in the case of Rojava struggle for autonomy: Are those people building an autonomous area inside Syria? Do they want to build an autonomous state? A more egalitarian state perhaps, if that is ever possible? What are they trying to do? I had this conversation with comrades from Kobane a few months ago and they were saying that they are building an autonomous country and not a state. But what is a country? Many societies have long coexisted without defining the territories necessary for their survival as their demarcated property. Couldn't country be taken to designate an area of life in common that is not necessarily identified with a nation-state? Ambiguities concerning the autonomous area's limits serve practical reasons too in the case of Rojava. Because the autonomous region isn't recognized by the international community, those people can't run an international airport (no airline in the world would use it). So they allow the Syrian army to control the only airport in the area (considered thus a Syrian state territory) in order to be able to retain an open door to the rest of the world. This is a completely contradictory situation, of course, but under the prevailing war conditions this is a form of agreement that seems to help the Rojava experiment to survive.

In Rojava, institutions are on the make. Institutions express the difficulties and contradictions of an emerging society of equals. Institutions are not necessarily tools for imposing domination: they can emerge as tools for struggle and as tools for establishing emancipating forms of social life. I talk about institutions not as specifically recognizable power arrangements—which they are of course—but also as forms of regulating repeatable acts in society. Institutions are social mechanisms of a great variety corresponding to the vast variety of different societies we have, but what they all have in common is that they try to prefigure and predict the future. The question is if this necessarily leads to a predetermination of the future in terms of normalization procedures, and here I'm linking to Foucault's ideas on normalization techniques. I'm not sure that institutions need to be normalization techniques. There are indications that institutions considered as forms of repeatable actions can become tools through which societies reinvent themselves in a collective and participatory way. Societies that try to create rules for developing democracy, equality, and solidarity as necessary pillars of social coexistence need institutions that are shaped through negotiations based on those pillars. I propose that we call these institutions threshold institutions or counter-institutions or alternative institutions. I try to describe such institutions as forms of repeatability that are open to collective innovation without establishing specific limits to this innovation but without, at the same time, supporting fantasies of total innovation,

fantasies connected to a longing of total unpredictability in which people will always be exposed to unexpected things. I think the need to be able to predict the future somehow is deeply rooted in the constitutive acts of any form of social relation. If we do not collectively develop tools to shape and thus predict the future, then religion and mysticism enters. The crucial question is how we can devise institutions that can control the reinvention of the future through practices of sharing. Returning to the Rojava case, we should learn that the establishment of institutions of commoning and power sharing in conditions of struggle can be a really ambiguous and sometimes contradictory process. Historical contingencies produce transitory and hybrid institutions. Collective innovation allowed to flourish through threshold commoning institutions may promote emancipating experiments through constant inventive readjustments. I know that this suggestion is not so clear. But the conditions of the emergence of commoning as an emancipating force in and against capitalist and hierarchical societies are and will be ambiguous. The birth of another society inside and against this one will be a long, contradictory process. Although ruptures and discontinuities are more easy to detect, it is the everydayness of collective inventiveness and tacit disobedience that gives ruptures their transformative potentialities.

MV: You unhinge institutions from their connection to power and domination and describe them as social tools for emancipation. In your perspective, institutions allow for change and for new aspects to emerge. It seems to you that commoning is a slow, reformist process. It makes me wonder what the relationship between commoning and the revolution is? Is commoning a revolutionary practice?

StS: We don't know yet what forms the future will take following the current period in which commoning gains momentum in various social contexts that implicitly or explicitly challenge state-like formations. We don't yet have lots of examples—apart from the Zapatista and the Rojava experiments—in which important ruptures in existing forms of social organization have taken place. We know, on the one hand, that sometimes, or perhaps most of the time, revolutions of the past did not manage to avoid repeating the state-like hierarchical organizational models they originally fought against. Too often they reproduced the hierarchies and power relations that characterize societies based on domination. I think the future society of collective emancipation needs to be based on imaginaries that go beyond the idea that a radical rupture will have eventually to return to the good old recipe of state-like forms of organization. In the words of the Zapatista, which are always inspiring: "We need to fight capitalism in ways that don't look like capitalism." So to put it in a more abstract way: the means should look like the ends.

Revolution? Yes, if we mean by revolution the explosive ruptures inflicted upon existing forms of domination due to the confluence of commoning initiatives and political struggles that create forms of social organization based on the sharing of power. I'm not sharing the old anarchist dream of the abolition of power. There is no outside of power because power is inherent in all human relations. The important question is: How can we share power and how can we always be able to prevent any form of accumulation of power? Power in its molecular manifestation is expressed in the act of someone who imposes his or her will on someone else, either through knowledge, through economy, through mere brutality, through fantasy, and so forth. The problem is how to regulate power collectively. It's not only a question of personal ethics; we need to have concrete social mechanisms that prevent the accumulation of power. So if we talk about major important ruptures like revolutions then a necessary ingredient of those ruptures will be the advancement, the discovery or the defacto use of power sharing mechanisms, forms of governing in which the means and the end coincide. Like the rotation of duties in the Zapatista movement in which the people know how to govern themselves. They believe that governing is not a privilege but a burden, a duty. This is why they use this very nice phrase *Mandar Obedeciendo*, which means to govern by obeying. This is a form of revolution.

I have to say clearly that I don't think things will change because more and more commoning initiatives will be developed. We have to witness those historical qualitative leaps in which the importance of the sharing of power becomes prominent in order to be able to verify a major social change.

MV: Important ruptures and qualitative leaps have occurred at special historical moments and fundamentally changed the way we live together. But what are the conditions under which such changes comes into being? Do you see it as connected to moments of crisis?

StS: Perhaps moments of crisis offer more possibilities for people to realize the power of commoning. In periods of crisis, commoning practices potentially create those artifices of equality that gesture toward a beyond: beyond the existing forms of domination. There is a clash between an emerging potentiality and an existing dominant situation that characterizes periods in which a social system enters into crisis that is almost always connected with a crisis of its legitimacy. We have seen this potentiality, for example, in the Arab Spring uprisings (especially in Tunisia and Egypt) that have produced some important experiments of democracy in practice. Unfortunately, many of those experiments were erased soon afterward by the brutal intervention of armies or external

forces. How did huge numbers of people organize themselves in occupied public spaces in order to feed themselves, to resist attacks, to celebrate their own microcosms of solidarity and their emergent self-managed microcommunities? The women in Tahrir Square and Bourguiba Avenue were recognized for the first time as political subjects—they could exist as equal subjects of struggle. Of course, there have also been important contradictions in those massive and effervescent struggles, but emergent forms of commoning and power sharing were established during those days. I tend to search very attentively for such fragile experiences, and I have myself experienced solidarity and equality through public space commoning during the Syntagma Square occupation in Athens. This was a real experience, not just an imaginary construct.

MV: We are meeting here in Athens in the middle of an economic crash, harsh austerity politics, aggressive waves of privatization, and growing poverty and joblessness. In the midst of this crisis, can you elaborate a little bit on the situation today in Athens regarding commoning initiatives?

StS: Situations of crises can provide fertile grounds for commoning experiments to grow. And commoning initiatives are not only developed by people who are willing to fight existing dominant forms of social organization but also by those who realize that to be able to survive they need to devise new forms of collaboration. When the state continuously withdraws from any kind of guarantees for the people's everyday survival, urgent needs often force people to appropriate and reinvent welfare services as well as organize networks of sharing and exchange economies.

For example, in Greece we experienced a collapse of the health system due to devastating measures that extinguished public funding. It used to be a welfare-state health system but now lots of people can't afford to pay their contribution to social security funds or to private security contracts. People have to use public hospitals that are in really bad condition and not as well equipped as they should be because of the severe austerity cuts. There are fewer and fewer who can go to private clinics. So lots of people are being excluded from important health services and support. Emerging self-managed health medical centers, sometimes tolerated by the state, sometimes fiercely opposed by the state, are trying to help the victims of the crisis. In those centers, volunteer doctors and nurses try to self-organize in order to provide elementary health services. This is a kind of cellular form of commoning in the realm of health. It has been developed in most cases absolutely from below by people who were willing to work as volunteers to contribute their knowledge, to collect medicine, and so on. These are small communities in which support, solidarity, and sharing latently developed. The self-organized medical

center may be considered as an indicative form of commoning that arises because of the crisis but transcends the need to which it is initially devoted. I think people actually experienced different social relations in these centers. No matter how willing the doctors in existing hospitals are, there is a hierarchy, a protocol, et cetera. So to know that the doctor in front of you is a volunteer and that he works for you because he believes that he can give something to you is an experience of a potentiality: the dominant geometry of power relations in the health services market is in practice challenged.

Similar experiences occur in education. Lots of initiatives are devoted to the education of immigrant children: many of them, for example, cannot afford to pay to learn the Greek language when they choose to live in Greece. Other commoning education initiatives support people who can't afford to pay extra money to prepare themselves for the entrance examination to the universities. These are some examples connected to everyday practices.

Of course we also have examples of major ruptures and major events that produce new opportunities for commoning and forms of democracy. The Syntagma Square occupation or the self-managed occupation of the Greek Broadcasting Corporation (a form of struggle against the closing down of a public sector service that has evolved to an ad hoc media commoning) are two important, relevant examples. In all these cases we saw people finding an opportunity to work together and to organize beyond what started as a protest and eventually evolved into a rich set of practices of self-management and sharing.

We also had this huge developing network of trading without intermediaries that was severely attacked by former governments as a dangerous form of surpassing legal norms. It was necessarily a form of survival for lots of people, for consumers and producers, because bypassing intermediaries would mean different prices. So the crisis has produced many initiatives directly or indirectly connected to commoning. Some think that in times of crisis we need to rely on each other but when crisis is overcome we return to good old individualist aggressiveness. You can never be sure about this. One thing seems certain however: periods of crisis are periods of social experimentation, not only periods of misery; periods of hope not only periods of despair.

MV: I think there is also a danger to commoning and solidarity initiatives in moments of crisis—that they not only support people in need but actually facilitate the recovery of the system as a whole. How can commoning avoid being incorporated into the system?

StS: We cannot avoid contradictions in periods in which we try to transcend existing forms of social organizations. It's not a pure emergence of otherness, but a very mixed condition. However, there are some criteria that you can use to be able to distinguish commoning practices that have a certain emancipating potentiality from commoning practices that, from the beginning, only produce solutions that perpetuate domination. One of those criteria could be focused on the forms of organization that characterize every specific set of commoning practices. Are these forms egalitarian based on mechanisms of power sharing, or are these forms simply reproducing existing hierarchies? The typical example of the latter is philanthropy: philanthropy does not create subjects that share. Philanthropy creates subjects that are dependent upon the goodness of those that have. So from its beginning, philanthropy doesn't go beyond hierarchical relations.

Of course the boundaries between types of commoning practices are not always clear and there is no golden rule. For example, in Latin America during the era of the dictatorship in the 1970s, there were very important church initiatives organized around the idea of a theology of liberation. They were in a way transcending the basic hierarchies of the church as dominant institution because they were based on egalitarian relations between the priests, and between priests and the people in need.

I think that we need to study all those multiform and rich commoning experiences that develop around us. We need to elaborate criteria and to compare different cases. But we also need to develop our thoughts through experiences that are actually now unfolding quite near to us. This is what I myself try to do. Perhaps we don't have enough time to study events that follow each other rapidly in a period in which history seems to be running fast, but we urgently need to think and learn from commoning experiments as they happen.

Negotiating Addis Ababa's Spatial Transformations

Brook Teklehaimanot in Conversation with
Stefan Gruber and Vladimir Miller

To describe Addis Ababa's urbanization, Ethiopian architect Fasil Giorghis referred to a wind-up car, held back since the 1970s by the oppressive Derg regime, and now finally released. No other metropolis on the African continent is said to be growing faster than Addis Ababa.¹ Its urbanization reflects the complex dynamics of a city of four million inhabitants that has widely emerged from the bottom-up, and yet alongside the political and economic ambitions of an authoritarian government, Chinese, and other global investors. Informal settlements hunker next to social-housing slabs, an elevated light rail courses over rural grazing lots to Dubai-style shopping malls. Addis Ababa's ongoing urban transformation is generally framed through unchallenged paradigms of growth, development, and modernization. In the process, vast portions of traditional neighborhoods, largely labeled as slums by UN-Habitat reports are being torn down,² their inhabitants relocated to so-called Grand Housing Program condominiums. Thus, the promises of a better future often arrive in the form of disruption, appropriation, or reclamation, against which city dwellers must engage in everyday negotiations of use and access to Addis Ababa's urban spaces and resources.

Brook Teklehaimanot, a professor for Architecture and Design at the Ethiopian Institute of Architecture, Building Construction and City Development (EiABC), has worked on Addis Ababa's urban transformation with particular attention to questions of cultural heritage and an interest in the embedded intelligence of aggregate spatial practices that have organically shaped the city over the decades. The following conversation unfolds from a two-year collaboration between the EiABC and the Alle School of Fine Arts with the Spaces of Commoning research group, and captures some of our reflections on Addis Ababa's spatial transformation and its possible relation to notions of commoning.

Throughout our debates, one underlying question was what it meant to translate commoning into another language, another cultural context. At the beginning, in many discussions during respective visits to Addis Ababa and Vienna, the initial consensus was that the term and notion of commoning do not exist in Ethiopian culture. Of course, this made us very aware of how much our research group's discourse on commoning is rooted in a Western European epistemology. But as soon as we began discussing more specific examples of what practices of commoning might or might not entail, the term

1 See the report for the United Nations Human Settlements Programme: Tewodros Tigabu and Girma Semu, *Ethiopia: Addis Ababa Urban Profile* (Nairobi: UN-HABITAT, 2008).

2 See the working paper for the United Nations Human Settlements Programme: Eduardo López Moreno, *Slums of the World: The Face of Urban Poverty in the New Millennium?* (Nairobi: UN-HABITAT, 2003), 26.

itself became at once more tangible and complicated—revealing the inherent tensions and contradictions behind any efforts to negotiate ways of living-in-common.

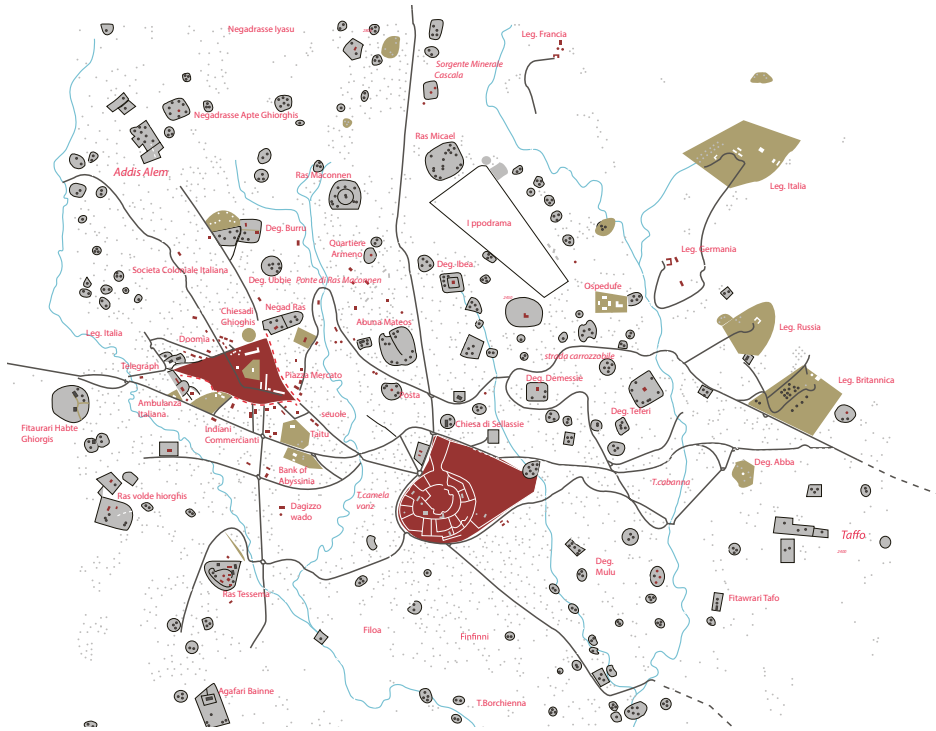


Fig. 3
Helawi Sewnet, map of Addis Ababa in 1912, 2014

Brook Teklehaimanot: Where should we start?

Stefan Gruber: We might start by framing a rather general question that has been preoccupying us in our research on the commons: Are there any correlations between practices of commoning and the material organization of spaces? In other words, are there specific spatial conditions that allow or even encourage spatial appropriation, sharing, and negotiation of use and access to spaces? And if so, what are such practices and spaces of commoning in Addis Ababa?

BT: For me, it seems easiest to discuss these questions based on two specific types of conditions: the *sefer* and the *meda*. Both reveal how the city of Addis Ababa started and also how our understanding of space is culturally embedded in the feudal history of the country, in a distinction between the governors and the governed. Historically speaking, one third of the land of the country belonged to the church and the rest was appropriated by the governor, the king, who then distributed it to military generals and the nobility. But that being said, studying the *sefers* in Addis Ababa, we also realized that some spaces that belong to the king were never assigned or appropriated by anybody. These gray zones gave room for appropriation.

The literal translation of *sefer* means “temporary military encampment.” Owing to incessant wars and instabilities, Ethiopia’s notion of urbanization is characterized by the continuous moving of the capital city. Our kings used to travel across the country from one camp to another. Whenever resources were depleted, they moved on to another site. The term *sefer* refers to the campsites of this era. In 1886 King Menelik came down from the hills of Entoto to the plains of Addis Ababa and set up a temporary camp. His wife, Empress Taytu, made him stay because of the natural thermal baths. Thus Addis Ababa became a permanent settlement and the nobility began to replace temporary tents with more durable buildings.

Thus on original maps or photos of Addis Ababa, the city looks like a large-scale urban camp site with circular encampments dispersed on the hills. The respective circular *sefer* belonged to generals or nobility and the space in between naturally belonged to the king. Imagine a city forming from circular bubbles—bubbles of *sefers*. The central hill was reserved for the king, while the other parts congregated randomly around it, protecting him from enemies. But *sefer* settlements did not only form around dignitaries, but were also founded by particular ethnic groups migrating to the capital, and craftsmen and artisans settling together in one area.

When we talk about cities, we usually talk about infrastructure, we talk about road layouts, efficiencies, and how the city functions—but these considerations were not the generative forces of Addis Ababa’s urbanization 130 years ago. The processes of gradual settling also explain why we have organic street patterns that sometimes seem irrational. In between *sefers*, one would find leftover, interstitial urban spaces that did not belong to anyone: sometimes they would become *medas*, sometimes they would be claimed by people for building informal houses and this is how the old historic *sefer* came about.

SG: As you tell about the history of the *sefers* and of Addis Ababa's morphology, it appears to me that practices of spatial negotiation are deeply rooted in the city's growth patterns. One aspect of it is the notion of a nomadic capital: Does the more ephemeral and transitional character of the built environment made of tents rather than being set in stone imply that there was less of an urge to fix things permanently? And did spatial configurations as a result remain more open for renegotiation over time? I find the notion of a nomadic capital really interesting as a foundational moment for a city, especially when compared to the Roman idea of urbanization. The organizational concept of the Roman camp is fundamentally rooted in the idea of growth. The orthogonal grid is the ultimate device for endless expansion, a colonization of territory to mark and control a growing empire.

This leads to the second aspect that fascinates me: both the orthogonal grid and concentric urban layout, the two prevailing European city models allow for continuous expansion and effective subdivision of land. Meanwhile, the polycentric setup will always produce differential in-between or overlapping spaces. As the multiple centers or *sefers* grow outward, they will always require negotiation. In the gridded or concentric city, everything is subordinated to a singular logic: the global coordinates or the absolute center. But here, because of the city's polycentric origin, we are confronted with multiple references, having to negotiate a relational field.

BT: The original organizational logic of Addis Ababa and current planning principles often clash and lead to contradictions. For example, the city now wants to regulate parcels and name blocks, streets and buildings because there is to date no logical way of navigating through the city. But, in fact, people refer to the *sefers* as a means of navigation. They say: I am living in this and this *sefer*. *Sefers* are points of orientation and provide identity. Each *sefer* has its own identity. Some *sefers* are notorious, some are intellectual, producing writers, poets and artisans, and others are commercially oriented. If Stefan is, for example, from Cherkos then people would say that Stefan is a bit notorious because he comes from this *sefer*. So it is also a way of identifying people, checking people's roots; it tells you about people's personalities and identities. But now that the government is trying to subject the city to modern planning principles, there is a tendency to erase existing complexities and start from scratch. All the existing patterns, the original spatial logic of the city, suddenly disappear because these principles bring something that is really not part of Addis Ababa's identity.

With a friend of mine, we have been working on a mapping project of navigating in Addis Ababa. In Europe, you arrive at the airport or a train station, get a city map, and can easily navigate from point A to point B. This is not

the case in Addis Ababa. Based on data from the Ministry of Transport and Communications, we tried to map the bus lines, the taxi lines, and the transportation hubs and nodes. In this process we wanted to put the *sefers* on the map. But today it is not clear where a *sefer* starts or stops—the *sefer* is a gray zone that cannot be pinpointed to an existing geographical landmark. The *sefer* is in fact a mental construct. We had to invent a means of graphic representation: the *sefer* is captured as a gradient with different shades of intensity, the areas clearly belonging to it are dark; in other areas, the *sefer* is more fluid. It is ironic but at the same time amazing to see a nonquantifiable concept so ingrained in the way a city of four million inhabitants functions. When the light rail recently started operating, some of its stations were named after *sefers*. But funnily the Chinese developer misspelled and mismatched some of the names, and the station names will now probably not change for a while. This will add yet another layer to the hybrid nature of the *sefer* and the names will have other associations—reflecting the changing dynamics of the city's rapid transformation. Although its meanings and roles are changing, the notion of *sefers* will never be lost—it will always be a reference in people's everyday routines and neighborhoods' identities. With *medas* things are somewhat different.

Vladimir Miller: What is the role of *medas* in the city of Addis Ababa and what kinds of activities are usually encountered there?

BT: *Medas* are typically wide meadows accessible to all and used as playgrounds and football fields, but also for religious ceremonies, weddings, and other social activities. Almost every neighborhood, though not every *sefer*, has a *meda*. Occasionally *medas* are also important points of reference. In the seventeen years of the Derg regime, between the 1970s and 1991, the *medas* were relatively preserved. But after 1991, the country's shifting political ideology gave rise to new housing developments and neighborhood transformations. In the search for land, *medas* turned into construction sites. The government's Grand Housing Program, for instance, mostly intervened in *medas*. As a result, the original spatial typology of the *meda* is quickly fading from the Addis Ababa urban landscape. *Medas* are rare these days. Although *medas* are open fields, in everyday life they seem to be reserved for noncommercial communal activities. In a Western public space or park, let's say in New York or London, you can go and have lunch, read a book, or walk your dog in public. However, you wouldn't do these rather individualistic things in a *meda*. Also I have never seen a private commercial venture occurring on a *meda*, so I couldn't say for sure if it would be tolerated or not, but it seems like a taboo in our context. So although the space seems programmatically open, it is actually socially determined—rules for spatial appropriation are not inexistent but more implicit.

VM: This last point is a very good reminder to not misunderstand the meda as a variation on European public space. While a European understanding of space is widely based on the dichotomy of private versus public, you rather describe the meda along the tension between the individual and the communal—what is allowed and what is prohibited in the meda is structured along a different paradigm here.

BT: But then there are also other examples of developing vacant land, examples of bottom-up and top-down negotiations: twenty years back or even less, there was still a lot of vacant land in Addis Ababa. People, especially from one specific region of Ethiopia, would gradually settle here and occupy prime areas: they usually specialized in selling big logs of eucalyptus that they would dump in one area and then bit by bit, the wood would become territorial markings, gradually turning into a fence. And then although their presence was still informal, after a couple of years, these people would begin to pay land taxes. One day the government introduced a law that granted legal rights to the land if people have payed taxes for ten years. This way these people eventually acquired the formal right to live on the land. And there are many of these kinds of processes in the city of Addis Ababa in which the in-between spaces between the sefers are gradually transformed. So while formalization is always driven by a desire to control loose development, it sometimes also has a flip side.

SG: The remarkable aspect about this example is that it seems that the negotiation of formalizing land-grabbing between squatters and the government was not ever made explicit, but rather remained implicit through a very slow but persistent spatial practice—the spatial practice of gradually unfolding material presence and a subversive affirmative action of embracing formality by paying taxes. At the same time, I would be concerned to romanticize land-grabbing and erase the conflicts and violence inscribed in either bottom-up and top-down modalities of occupying land. Here, I am also thinking of the conflicts embedded in Addis Ababa's grand master plan and the controversies and violent clashes that emerged when land ownership policies were contested.³

VM: When visiting Addis Ababa, I had the tendency of misinterpreting a lot of things—ephemeral constructions and the many activities in the street—as an expression of a freedom of spatial appropriation, while in retrospect it seems that those spaces are imbued with control and regulation, but the regulation taking the form of habit, tradition and a deeply intertwined communal fabric that extends beyond the private realm.

How would you contextualize self-organization and use of space in the streets? How do certain practices find their place between being subjected

to governmental regulation and social control? If we take, for example, the streets in the neighborhood surrounding the Alle Arts School, there are many different practices unfolding on the edge of the street, from selling goods to hanging out, from drying chickpeas to producing baskets, and repairing cars. On Vienna's streets, all these activities would be clearly defined and contained in either commercial or state-owned spaces. Once more, on Addis Ababa's streets these categories don't seem to apply. On the one hand, these activities leave the impression of being quite established, but nevertheless self-facilitated and self-organized. On the other hand, it is clear that precisely their public nature must also produce forms of regulation and control, starting from the ambivalent gesture of watching each other. How do you see those activities?

BT: In Addis Ababa, although technically all the land belongs to the government, individual lots are considered private and then there are the streets that are publicly used and accessible to everyone. But the appropriation of the street margins immediately adjacent to private lots is subject to negotiation. Here, all kinds of activities are tolerated by the city inhabitants as well as the government. When for example, people see that, without any notice, the street is closed off for a funeral or wedding, people won't complain. I sometimes complain because there is no way of getting around it, but this shows that it is accepted that streets are taken over for important social events. Here, people will willingly engage to negotiate public space. I don't know how it is in Europe, but I am under the impression that the use of public space is much more regulated, and that any encroachment on private or public property that will affect how the city operates would require special permits.

SG: This reminds me of one of our first discussions on practices of commoning in which you brought up the notion of shared space. The term "shared space" has recently been coined by the Dutch traffic engineer Hans Monderman, as a strategy for reorganizing European streets where all traffic signs and street markings are removed in favor of a continuous, undifferentiated ground surface. Rather than attempting to regulate traffic and the use of the street, various actors are thus incited to negotiate flows and the use of the streetscape among themselves. The shift from passively following the rules to actively negotiating the use of space apparently leads to overall

³ Endalk Chala, "Violent Clashes in Ethiopia over 'Master Plan' to Expand Addis," *Guardian*, December 11, 2015, <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/dec/11/ethiopia-protests-master-plan-addis-ababa-students>.

safer streets and a reduction in traffic accidents. In this context you pointed out, how odd it is for you that this concept is being discussed as an innovative development, while in fact this actually describes the very nature of streets in Addis Ababa. More generally, this insight raises the question of what can or should be planned in cities or the possibilities of planning the unplanned. Similar questions arise when we observe the daily choreography of urban street life among strangers. Can you talk more about the more ordinary everyday activities that spill out onto the streets? How are these activities negotiated? And are these negotiations of individual or collective nature?

BT: Do you mean activities such as grinding chili, or opening a repair shop? These are typically activities from adjacent properties, activities of people from that sefer, that neighborhood, that specific house using the adjacent street margins. Those activities are purely self-organized.

Then there are all these random activities on the street that just happen to make a living, to win your daily bread. These types of activities are all over Addis Ababa; they exist everywhere and are indicative of the role that informality plays in the city's economy. They are tolerated because they are useful in a way—we all benefit from having a convenience store close by. And even if in some parts they impede traffic flows, cause jams, or accidents, they make the city vibrant. Furthermore, there is less crime because everything is under the public eye.

VM: I guess my question is whether these things are completely “free” in the sense that anybody can come and join and do anything, or whether there are some kind of mechanisms of allocating or claiming space. If, for example, a group regularly occupies the same spot, does it ever become “their” space? Is access to those street margins administered by an unspoken consensus?

BT: One thing I have recently noticed is that the shoe shiners, who used to be everywhere in the city, have specific stations nowadays. These stations look more organized than before. And the shoe shiners have begun to wear some sort of uniform. Previously they were very mobile; they would be in one place for a week and in another place the next week. But recently they are becoming more stationary. I think the *Kebele* or the local ward administrations that were introduced during the communist era are involved in this. It is a way of making sure that they know who is working where for security reasons. This gradual change from mobility to a stationed address also has spatial significance. The shoe shiner's stations attract people and become small hubs within the sefer.

SG: I would like to address another prominent but ambivalent feature of the street in Addis Ababa. My first impression of the ubiquitous fences in the cityscape was that they are there to mark private property. Which to a certain extent they are and have always been: the original sefer were fenced off compounds and today fences are the expression of rising privatization, especially in more affluent neighborhoods. But in the traditional neighborhoods, they also seem to be acting as a support structure that establishes a clear line between the private habitat and the street margins—and as a result are the precondition for spatial negotiations between multiple users to unfold in that gray zone between the fence and the road. If you compare this to a more fluid urban space where boundaries are not so clearly demarcated, that activity of negotiating and appropriating space would probably turn into a threat.

VM: Similarly, one could also see the fencing of the courtyards in condominium blocks of the Grand Housing Project in Jemo as a first act of commoning, in a more historic sense of the word. The residents of the four condominium houses that form a block come together and say: This is our community, this is the space of our community, and we are going to demarcate it, protect it, and use it collectively. Although there are not many traces of the communal (yet), even coming up with the money together to actually be able to build that fence is an act of communal planning and ownership. What other modes of regulation of the communal life exist among the residents of the Grand Housing Project?

BT: In condominium communities, cooperatives that have been formally supported and approved by the government play an important role in regulating communal and public life.

SG: Are you saying that in the Grand Housing Projects what seems to be a public or social regulation is in the end government driven?

BT: Yes, social regulation is more or less influenced by government hands. For example, I live in an apartment with thirty-two other tenants. A couple of years ago, we formed a committee for the building's upkeep. We collect money and have a common bank account from which we pay the guards and keep things clean. Some building committees are even more engaged and will collect money for social activities, such as a barbecue or visits to a neighbor's house to have food for funerals. After a couple of years of the committee being in place, the government contacted us and began to push us to formalize it. They wanted to strengthen the committee by acknowledging it and for it to work more closely with the government for issues of security. Although for the inhabitants there are also some good reasons to formalize the committee, especially if some tenants do

not comply with internal regulations, we neglected to do so, mostly out of lack of time. You know, all of this is unpaid voluntary work and thus nobody takes it too seriously. But the government kept on persisting and some time ago, finally, the committee was formally established with an elected board of five or six, including a chair and a treasurer. So, on the one hand, the fact that the committee was formed ad hoc and bottom-up demonstrates that there is a culture of community organization and social responsibility. On the other hand, the very fact that the government pressures existing committees into formalization reveals the state's endeavor to control how things are run. Thus self-organization has multiple political dimensions. Social control always runs the danger of being instrumentalized for ideological purposes.

Cruising as

Moira Hille

The Sea

There are stories about the ocean as well as poems, songs, lyrics. The ocean as life enabling, as mysterious, as powerful. Full of resources. "All of this is now at risk, however, of dying, as the oceans are turned into the poisoned receptacle of the world's waste."¹ In the 1970s, the fishermen's movement started in Southern India to defend access to the ocean's resources and to affirm the ocean as a source of life; to defend a sustainable approach to its use and to ensure the inexhaustibility of fish, and to protect and defend the communities that depend on fishing for their livelihood. Compared to other sectors, the exploitation and use of the sea was and is much more emphasized than its preservation. Around two-thirds of the world is covered by ocean. The earth stretches out deeper into the ocean than high into the sky. The oceans are uncanny, opaque, nebulous. They swallow boats, planes, and tons of trash. Some items are spit out again and scientists will follow ocean streams to determine the place of origin and entry. The oceans are sometimes described as one global, interconnected, continuous body of water that interchange relatively freely. But there are other descriptions as well that specify the ocean in different oceans. Oceans are often used as borders, or serve as borders, or borders are inscribed onto them. As oceans have a fluid materiality, they are said to need a map that inscribes order into their fluidity and projects borders onto them. Borders can't be physically built on oceans. Sometimes vessels and warships *perform* borders on the ocean. Around six million European passengers traveled on cruise ships in 2014.² In 2015 around one million people made it across the European, Asian, and African borders without going through passport control. Most used the Aegean Sea for their crossing. At the time of writing, NATO war vessels are positioned between the Greek islands and the Turkish coast.³

Cruising

The etymology of cruising is connected to cross and crossing; it seems to originate from the Dutch word meaning "to cross" in the seventeenth century,

1 Silvia Federici, preface to *Our Mother Ocean: Enclosure, Commons, and the Global Fishermen's Movement*, by Monica Chilese, Mariarosa Dalla Costa (New York: Common Notions, 2015), i.

2 "The Global Economic Contribution of Cruise Tourism 2014," Cruise Line International Association, October 2015, http://cruising.org/docs/default-source/market-research/clia_2014eis_global.pdf.

3 Matthias Gebauer, "Nato-Mission in der Ägäis: Wie die Bundeswehr Flüchtlinge abschrecken soll," *Der Spiegel*, February 25, 2016, <http://www.spiegel.de/politik/ausland/nato-mission-bundeswehr-soll-in-der-aegaeis-fluechtlinge-abschrecken-a-1079280.html>.

when the Netherlands was at the height of its shipbuilding and colonial trade powers. The Age of Sail refers to a period between the sixteenth to the mid-nineteenth century, when sea power was the dominant force behind aggressive expansions from Europe. The sea was not just a trading zone, but also a battlefield. It was in this period when European settlers expanded to all parts of the world in one of the biggest migrations in recorded history. At that time, the term cruising was used to identify a specific type of movement—independent scouting, raiding, or commerce protection⁴—and not a vessel. It was not until the nineteenth century when vessels, then called cruisers, were built for this specific purpose. The first leisure cruising took place in 1822 and the business of pleasure voyages came to form cruise ships.⁵ Transportation was not the primary purpose and the trips were called “cruise to nowhere” and “nowhere voyages.” Once more, this is where the movement and purpose defined the meaning of cruises in contrast to ocean liners that provided transport-oriented “line voyages.” Outside of the tourism industry, cruisers and cruising are terms used for many forms of traveling by boat or other vessel on water. In the 1950s, the term cruising became popular for describing the pastime of slowly driving around “cruise strips” in a small town with a car. It describes a type of driving that is mostly aimless and concentrates more on the social interactions within the car or with other car drivers. It was part of a kind of event culture of “cruise nights,” and it later continued as a nostalgic retro event that still occurs today.

Cruising is often associated with an enclosed object in motion. According to Michel Foucault, the ship is the heterotopia par excellence. It is

a floating piece of space, a place without a place, that exists by itself, that is closed in on itself and at the same time is given over to the infinity of the sea and that, from port to port, from tack to tack, from brothel to brothel, it goes as far as the colonies in search of the most precious treasures they conceal in their gardens, you will understand why the boat has not only been for our civilization, from the sixteenth century until the present, the great instrument of economic development [...] but has been simultaneously the greatest reserve of the imagination.⁶

It is an immense weapon of colonizing the world, a violent dream machine that is imagining an open space that can be traveled on. The colonial apparatus covered its violent desires with the innocence of curiosity.⁷ In the same or different narrations we also find boats, ships, and vessels that were and are directed by pirates and outlaws.

Around the beginning of the twentieth century, cruising became a code word among gay men looking for sex. Cruising areas identify public places known within a gay community as places to find sex partners. The places

include public toilets or parks; they are public as well as hidden.⁸ The HIV/AIDS crisis probably served as a major rupture changing the practices of public sex acts and areas immensely. An age of safer sex followed, translating these queer practices and spaces past antisex and homophobic policing. Still, there is a nostalgic sentiment around gay communities that refers to this moment of free sexual pleasure. José Esteban Muñoz identifies this nostalgia in artworks that address unsafe sex in the moment when gay men were living during the AIDS pandemic. This backward move can also be understood as a form of queer cruising, a cruising within and through the times; a cruising through these utopian pictures that lets “us critique the present, to see beyond its ‘what is’ to worlds of political possibility, of ‘what might be.’”⁹

Cruising Commoning

We want to look at cruising as a practice of decentralized collective creation. We see it as a practice that allows occupying and commoning specific spaces in the city. It is a mode of acting together without assimilating the subjective desires within the common act. We want to learn from cruising and use it as a tool to understand and critique commoning and its processes of identification and group formation within urban spaces.¹⁰

Emerging out of the privatization of common goods, such as knowledge, land and water, language, and all kinds of collective products, the *commons* became a tool for thinking against privatization and in collectivity, commonly. Feminist discourse on commons expanded to all areas of social life, and to

4 Wikipedia, s.v., “Cruiser,” accessed April 8, 2016, <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cruiser>.

5 Ibid.

6 Michel Foucault, “Of Other Spaces: Utopias and Heterotopias,” *Architecture Mouvement Continuité* 5 (October 1984): 9.

7 “‘No one colonizes innocently,’ Aimé Césaire says. There are no innocent spaces; thus, all spaces are fraught with interests, both conflicting and contradictory. As feminists, we are not immune to these contradictions.” M. Jaqui Alexander, *Pedagogies of Crossing: Meditations on Feminism, Sexual Politics, Memory, and the Sacred* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2006), 125.

8 Helge Mooshammer, *Cruising: Architektur, Psychoanalyse und Queer Cultures* (Vienna: Böhlau Verlag, 2005).

9 José Esteban Muñoz, *Cruising Utopia: The Then and There of Queer Futurity* (New York: New York University Press, 2009), 38.

10 Program text for the summer school “Commoning the City,” which took place in June 2014 as part of the research project “Spaces of Commoning.” The cruising workshop was mainly organized by Christina Linortner, Vladimir Miller, Helge Mooshammer, Fer Nogueira, and myself. See <http://www.spacesofcommoning.net/summer-school/>.

“the need for practices that create new communitarian models.”¹¹ Silvia Federici connects the concept of the commons with a set of useful questions: “Are all these commons equivalent from the viewpoint of their political potential? Are they all compatible? And how can we ensure that they do not project a unity that remains to be constructed?”¹² Following these questions, I would like to propose thinking of the commons or commoning together with cruising as a queer movement:¹³ cruising commoning aimlessly and following the course of social relations and encounters rather than defining and categorizing those relations. Queer cruising itself is already based on the idea of commonly produced spaces and times, and as a practice that negotiates rules instead of resting on preexisting sets of laws. Lauren Berlant describes queer life in general as “exhausting because you kind of have to make it up all the time. There are so few conventions to rest in or cruise in.”¹⁴ Accordingly, cruising requires constant effort to be not just a movement between fixed location but a movement in itself. In proposing cruising as a term, I don’t want to highlight cruising areas as ideal places, as these places can hold violence for gay cruisers. But they still allow for the earlier mentioned moments of what might be, which Muñoz describes in his book *Cruising Utopia*, moments of imagining and living a different life. In the context of commoning, these moments are often described as trying to capture ways of being together beyond capitalist and nationalist order systems. Although this longing is often directed toward the future, ways of being might be found in the present and past as well; they are lost or found in fugitivity.¹⁵ Muñoz says that queerness is not yet here, but that there is a potentiality, there are traces in the here and now. In this sense, commoning also comprises desires, fantasies, and belonging in opposition to the idea of identity as a stable condition.¹⁶

I would like to develop queer cruising as a methodology that evolved out of queer histories and settings, out of their negotiations and involvements, desires, needs, wants, and fantasies. In these production of histories, relations, and being-together were made that concentrated more on the making of and the becoming than in concluding in a final version. But as there is no innocent term, it will never become one. Cruising needs to be continuously cruised to find its different meanings, uses, and ambivalences. What cruising learned as a queer practice is to wander the hidden places of transparent negotiations, where desires open common and conflictual spaces.

Following Gibson-Graham in their reference to the concept of being-in-common—“where subjects can understand one another but not necessarily have to be like each other”¹⁷—Karin Schönplflug and Christine M. Klapeer point out that “‘queer commons’ means not only rejecting the individualized and abstract ownership of oneself (including gender identities), commodities and land, it also accepts that there is a general interrelatedness and connectedness, a one-ness or a world’s ‘commons.’”¹⁸ This queer commons points to a

conflictual space, where everything is effected and is effecting. Gibson-Graham are producing languages of economic diversity that “denaturalize capitalist dominance” and are “opening the way to queering economic space.”¹⁹ To “queer the economy” means in their practice to “bring into visibility the great variety of noncapitalist practices that languish on the margins of economic representation.”²⁰ In Antke Engel’s argumentation we could also understand commoning as fantasies of “togetherness and being-in-common defined by competition, conflict, and violence—fantasies of negotiating the precarious thresholds between power, abuse of power, and violence, and the complex overdetermination of structural and symbolic inequalities, and of transformative agency.”²¹ In this understanding of commoning, multiple layers of rule and power relations cross each other, and commoning is not just a space where differences do not mark conflicts, but a space where the negotiation of inequalities and agencies mark the utopian.

On Crossing

Lesvos is an island in the Aegean Sea. It is part of Greece, and one of the islands besides Samos and Chios that is nearest to the Turkish coast. A width of 5.5 kilometers marks the closest point. In 2015 Lesvos especially experienced a never before number of EU border crossings that continues in 2016. At the same time, the number of people drowning in the Aegean Sea while crossing this border has peaked. For sure, this border has become one of the most

11 Silvia Federici, “Witchtales: An Interview with Silvia Federici,” by Verónica Gago, *Viewpoint Magazine*, April 15, 2015, <https://viewpointmag.com/2015/04/15/witchtales-an-interview-with-silvia-federici/>.

12 Silvia Federici, “Feminism and the Politics of the Commons,” in *The Wealth of the Commons: A World beyond Market and State*, ed. David Bollier and Silke Helfrich (Amherst, MA: Levellers Press, 2012), <http://wealthofthecommons.org/essay/feminism-and-politics-commons>.

13 For discussion on fluidity, queer subjectivities, and self-ownership, see Christine M. Klapeer and Karin Schönplflug, “Queer Needs Commons! Transgressing the Fiction of Self-Ownership, Challenging Westocentric Proprietism,” in *Global Justice and Desire: Queering Economy*, ed. Nikita Dhawan, Antke Engel, Christoph H. E. Holzhey, and Volker Woltersdorff (London: Routledge, 2015), 176.

14 “Interview with Lauren Berlant,” by David Seitz, *Society and Space*, accessed March 22, 2016, <http://societyandspace.com/material/interviews/interview-with-lauren-berlant/>.

15 Stefano Harney and Fred Moten, *The Undercommons: Fugitive Planning and Black Studies* (Wivenhoe: Minor Compositions, 2013).

16 Elspeth Probyn, *Outside Belongings* (New York: Routledge, 1996), 19.

17 Klapeer and Schönplflug, “Queer Needs Commons!,” 176.

18 Ibid.

19 J. K. Gibson-Graham, *A Postcapitalist Politics* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2006), xiii.

20 Gibson-Graham, *Postcapitalist Politics*, xxxii.

21 Antke Engel, “Desire for/within Economic Transformation,” *e-flux journal*, no. 17 (June 2010): 9, <http://www.e-flux.com/journal/desire-forwithin-economic-transformation/>.

well-known in Europe in 2015, though it has been used for undocumented crossings for many years now. While the Aegean is still deadly for many, border crossing by sea allows for higher numbers than on land, as the borders are much less controllable by patrols. The violent push backs, the practice of forcing people to return to their origin of departure by border control and Frontex, decreased in the Aegean after the Greek government changed in early 2015,²² but has increased again since the beginning of 2016 and has been recently fully legalized. Since the beginning of April 2016, ferries deployed by the EU transport and push-back people from Greece to beyond the external EU border.

According to Dimitris Papadopoulos and Vassilis Tsianos, migration control is not just applied to geopolitics on the ground but it is also about speed and regulation. Border control “is not there to block migration; it tries to institutionalize it by controlling its speed and magnitude. Sovereignty is not about sovereign borders. Secure borders do not exist and cannot exist; sovereignty is the futile attempt to regulate the porosity of borders: this can be conceived of as porocracy.”²³ The European borders were opened last summer by refugees and migrants.²⁴ When Germany and Austria declared their borders open on September 4, 2016, this can be seen as an act of sovereignty to control a situation where governing was already in immense crisis. Still what happened was that around one million people entered Germany in 2015, and most were distributed to a prechosen destination. When migration control is about migratory movements and labor market control,²⁵ we can see that Germany possesses an immense pool of highly qualified, easily accessible labor, both financially and geographically. How refugees and migrants will be filtered, who can stay and who cannot is connected to education, working abilities and professions, and so on. In addition, what becomes productive labor is the fact “that bodies can become mobile in the most averse circumstances.”²⁶ Since migration is not simply a response to political and social necessity,²⁷ but as a social movement it is also an important force under current political and social circumstances, Papadopoulos and Tsianos draw the figure of the “mobile commons.” These mobile commons exist as a shared and commonly produced space that gathers all the knowledge, tricks of survival, caring for each other and sociability. And these mobile commons are crucial to “survive the order of making these lives happen and for surviving the sovereignty and capitalist exploitation.”²⁸ This common space that is after all not free of hierarchies as the authors point out, is continuously under threat. But these forms of being in relation that are not easily captured, not fixed, and too opaque to control, enable us to imagine another living together, to produce a being-in-common or commoning. If we understand migration not as an individual situation, but as collective and commoning practices that involve multiple actors and political situatednesses,²⁹ we are able to think, recognize, and imagine multiple powerful forms of cruisings that are able to challenge those

dominant forces. Still, “we cannot say what new structures will replace the ones we live with yet, because once we have torn shit down, we will inevitably see more and see differently and feel a new sense of wanting and being and becoming. What we want after ‘the break’ will be different from what we think we want before the break, and both are necessarily different from the desire that issues from being in the break.”³⁰

Cruising and Crossing

A queer methodology evolves out of queer theory that concentrates on the fluidity of relations and practices. A queer methodology has to react to the fact that there is no fixed position in the research and that data can’t be normalized.³¹ Queerness doesn’t have a linear form, it is not straight—neither its multiple histories nor the positions of things and subjectivities.³² Queer theory doesn’t mean to just focus on deviant positions, but to queer the normative and to dismantle the stability of the heteronormative order. Cruising points to the instability and fluidity of things and communities. It has the potentiality

22 See Marion Bayer, Hagen Kopp, Laura Maikowski, and Maurice Stierl, eds., “Moving On: One Year Alarmphone,” *Alarmphone*, October 2014, <http://alarmphone.org/wp-content/uploads/sites/25/2016/01/AP-1year-Doku-Screen-04-DS.pdf>.

23 Dimitris Papadopoulos and Vassilis S. Tsianos, “After Citizenship: Autonomy of Migration, Organisational Ontology and Mobile Commons,” *Citizenship Studies* 17, no. 2 (2013): 178–96.

24 I am referring to the term “refugee” or “migrant” as a self-description chosen by activist and self-organized networks such as the Refugee Protest Movement.

25 “Migration control works as an equalizer between labour markets and migratory movements. For example, camps are less a form of blocking the circulation of mobility; they reinsert irregular migration back into the productive logics of society by making out of irregular mobility, either controllable populations or illegalised people; camps are speed boxes of migratory movements.” Papadopoulos and Tsianos, “After Citizenship,” 4.

26 *Ibid.*, 5.

27 “Migration is the empirical reality of struggles for movement that escape and subsequently delegitimize and derail

sovereign control. [...] Heterogeneity is the poison of sovereignty. In this sense, migration is an antidote: it reclaims the belief in the possibility to be free to move. [...] Migration, in this second sense is more related to an affective imaginary, it exists as potential and virtuality that becomes actualised and materialised through the divers movement of people.” *Ibid.*, 12.

28 *Ibid.*, 23.

29 Niki Kubaczek, “Papiere teilen: Möglichkeiten und Unmöglichkeiten des Gemeinsamen vor dem Hintergrund der Proteste gegen Politiken der Illegalisierung,” *Kamion* 1 (2015): 50–56.

30 Jack Halberstam, “The Wild Beyond: With and for the Undercommons,” preface to *The Undercommons: Fugitive Planning & Black Studies*, by Stefano Harney and Fred Moten (Wivenhoe: Minor Compositions, 2013), 6.

31 Kath Browne and Catherine J. Nash, eds., *Queer Methods and Methodologies: Intersecting Queer Theories and Social Science Research* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2010), 6.

32 Browne and Nash, eds., *Queer Methods and Methodologies*, 7.

to conceive of the political in an alternative way; that is, in its organizational instability. "Let's look at this 'methodology' then, this way of being in the world that has not yet fully manifested itself but that we know we want, that we yearn for. It's just not going to say: Here I am. It is a constant act of creation, recreation, reflection, imagination, living in community, however we constitute that, possession, radical self-possession, radical collective self-possession."³³

This concept of commoning is not built on identities but on ways of living together as continuously happening. Practices and examples are mediated from the past, happening in the present, and are imagined for the future. A politicized cruising is asking for an affective involvement with utopia. Following Muñoz, we have to cruise affective maps of the social, where we are able to feel hope and utopia. This affective perspective of a renewed and newly animated sense of the social produces a queer critique that concentrates at the varied potentialities possible.³⁴

Resonating with Papadoupoulos and Tsianos's concept of the mobile commons, M. Jacqui Alexander claims that knowledge is evolving from the crossing, from crossing.³⁵ Cruising and crossing are not just connected, but should be in complicity. This knowledge that evolves from all that is happening now and in future happenings has to be reflected in the way we think and live. Crossings are never undertaken all at once, and never once and for all.³⁶ The crossings stand against the segregation of knowledge, "they disturb and reassemble the inherited divides of Sacred and secular, the embodied and disembodied," and "summon subordinated knowledges that are produced in the context of the practices of marginalization in order that we might destabilize existing practices of knowing and thus cross the fictive boundaries of exclusion and marginalization."³⁷

We are constantly building communities; we practice building them and will continue to do so. The struggle for wholeness, for finding ways of belonging to each other, is not about sameness. Colonialism was a project of separation, fragmentation, and dismemberment. Today these borders are not torn down—they are in addition to new ones that are being built. To intervene in the dominant order that structures our lives, we have to allow for ways that challenge systems of oppression that enable different knowledge, experiences, and agendas to enter our perceptions and our multiple world-makings. We have to cross because "no one comes to consciousness alone, in isolation, only for herself, or passively."³⁸

Cruising Crossings, Crossing Cruisings

If I lost you on the way, I would be curious where and when we will meet again. If I lost the track, this might be what cruising is about: losing and finding. Writing and reading is a lot about cruising. And about crossing. I tried to meet you in the cruising and crossing around commoning, in thinking, writing, and doing with, against, and in opposition to you, the I, and the we. This is always conflictual. Commoning is the practice that evolves from being-in-common. Commoning hereby is a practice. It is not something that is just happening, but something that has to be done, that has to be constructed. Commoning doesn't evolve out of passivity. Nevertheless, passivity could be commoning.

Commoning goes to all areas of life. It has a general understanding of connectedness. This connectedness is not about sameness but about relation. Cruising and crossing are relational methodologies, evolved as minoritarian practices that concentrate on the relationality of being. We meet now, here, and there, in the past, present, or future; time and space cross each other. This could be our first conflictual space of commoning.

33 M. Jacqui Alexander, "Groundings on Rasanblaj with M. Jacqui Alexander," *Hemispheric Institute* 12, no. 1 (2015), <http://hemisphericinstitute.org/hemi/en/emisferica-121-caribbean-rasanblaj/alexander>.

34 Muñoz, *Cruising Utopia*, 18.

35 Alexander, *Pedagogies of Crossing*, 17. Alexander's central metaphor in *Pedagogies of Crossing* is drawn from the enforced Atlantic crossing of the millions of Africans that serviced from the fifteenth century through the twentieth the consolidation of British, French, Spanish, and Dutch empires.

36 *Ibid.*, 318.

37 *Ibid.*, 22.

38 *Ibid.*, 307.

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Study as Commoning Call to Order

A conversation composed of fragments from collective writings, e-mails, and discussions.

Call to order:

to formally signal the start of a meeting or function or assembly or court to demand the undertaking of a particular activity according to the rules

A: Can we finally start to work?!

B: Let's close the laptops.

C: It's Tuesday, June 30.

Shall we make a round of who is present?

—Just for the record.

D: Let's start ...

FM: What I'm supposed to do is to call that class to order, presupposing that there is no actual, already existing organization happening, that there's no study happening before I got there, that there was no study happening, no planning happening. I'm calling it to order, and then something can happen—then knowledge can be produced. That's the presumption ... Let's just see what happens if I don't make that gesture of calling the class to order—just that little moment in which my tone of voice turns and becomes slightly more authoritative so that everyone will know that the class has begun.

SH: We asked the question: What's the one thing you can't do at a university? And then we would pause and we would say: You can't study.

MA: You use study for an incredibly broad range of different activities. Where it became very obvious for me was this example of entering a classroom and recognizing that there is already studying going on. I am asking you about the decision of working with the broad notion: Doesn't it produce problems that are maybe not necessary?

SH: Study is an incomplete term and is a bit of an improper term—we cannot defend it fully. But at the same time, we are interested in what it gathers by being as elusive as it is. And that is precisely why I can't answer sufficiently the last part of your question, which is what else gathers becomes a problem.

E: Isn't that what's already happening within capitalism?—that experiences and relationship are being commodified. If even our feelings and our relationships are becoming a commodity, there is no outside any longer to capitalism—it's a total call to order.

F: It's a self-fulfilled prophecy ... Isn't that what Gibson-Graham mean by talking capitalism into being? It's quite violent to normalize all commodity relationships as capitalist commodity relationship.

G: And still we are exposed to the call to order.

H: We need to consider that a call to order is always performed in a certain knowledge system.

I: When I read my horoscope it says: "I think you should refrain from relying on experts. Be skeptical of professional opinions and highly paid authorities. Folk wisdom and street smarts will provide better guidance than elite consultants. Trust curious amateurs."

What calls me to order?

What calls my body to order?

What calls my desires to order?

What calls my obedience to order?

What calls my agency to order?

Who calls anyway?

What calls?

To which order?

Why call?

Members of the Spaces of Commoning research group (A, B, C, D, E, F, H, I) with Fred Moten (FM) and Stefano Harney (SH), authors of *The Undercommons* (2013), and a member of the audience (MA) in a public conversation on the occasion of the Vienna Art Week, 2015.

Designing Commoning Institutions The Dilemma of the Vienna Settlers, the Commoner, and the Architect

Stefan Gruber

Robert Park called the city “man’s most consistent and on the whole, his most successful attempt to remake the world he lives in more after his heart’s desire. But, if the city is the world which man created, it is the world in which he is henceforth condemned to live. Thus, indirectly, and without any clear sense of the nature of his task, in making the city man has remade himself.”¹ Decades later, in his book *Rebel City* (2012), David Harvey returned to Park’s utopian quest and argued, “The right to the city is, therefore, far more than a right of individual access to the resources that the city embodies: it is a right to change ourselves by changing the city more after our heart’s desire. It is, moreover, a collective rather than an individual right since changing the city inevitably depends upon the exercise of a collective power over the processes of urbanization.”²

As we recognize the right to exercise this collective power—the right to the city³—the disciplines of architecture, urban design, and planning face a dilemma. On the one hand, architecture renders material our social practices, relations, and values. On the other, the disposition of space is rendered for political-economic ends and also defines us. But while this interdependence infers a continuous process of negotiation and calibration, architecture is also violently conclusive: it petrifies, it cements. Architecture’s inertia means it will always be out of sync with the living social contract it embodies. Moreover, with the ascendance of neoliberalism, cities have moved away from redistributive to entrepreneurial governing. Under pressure in the global competition for capital, municipalities have become motors of speculative growth and privatization. Architecture is then mostly complicit as a generic commodity in urban development, or as a signature icon competing for symbolic capital. And if we can no longer rely on state institutions to regulate markets in the interest of the public good, how are we to disrupt the expanding vortex of influence from self-perpetuating hegemonies? How can we claim a collective right to the city? Can architecture untangle itself from the positive feedback loop where it serves prevailing power structures, and instead gain its own critical agency to expose and foster processes of negotiation in urbanization? Is it possible to imagine architectural and urban design as anything else than a top-down practice? Can architecture ever be an emancipatory project?

Vital social movements from Occupy Wall Street in New York to Tahir Square in Istanbul have protested against the mantras of profit-driven growth and

1 Robert Park, *On Social Control and Collective Behavior* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1967), 3.

2 David Harvey, *Rebel Cities: From the Right to the City to the Urban Revolution* (London: Verso, 2012), 4.

3 Henri Lefebvre, *Le droit à la ville* (Paris: Anthropos, 1968).

capitalist urbanization while claiming that another world is possible. In these movements, spatial practices and appropriations have been key for building and sustaining solidarity.⁴ It is against this backdrop that the current debate on the commons thrives. Challenging the binary dichotomy of private and public, the commons offer the perspective of a self-organized and non-commodified means of fulfilling people's needs, and more importantly, are understood as a process of making something common as commoners negotiate shared resources, norms, and values. There are no commons without incessant activities of commoning, of (re)producing in common.

The precarious nature of commoning defines its emancipatory promise. Its fragility signals the possibility of true participation, of taking or losing control. Commoning begins by acknowledging differences and related potential conflicts. The goal is not to erase differences through consensus, but to work together despite their irreconcilability. The notion of commoning as an outcome of continuous negotiation, reclaiming, and revocation, resonates with our understanding of the city. At the same time, the openness and inconclusive nature of commoning is in opposition to general notions of design and planning, a predefined set of actions irrespective of contingencies.

Thus commoning sheds light on architecture's inherent dilemma: if we recognized the city as a site for collective negotiations in the interest of the public good, but this common interest can no longer be articulated in a single narrative, and is instead unstable, then we must reconsider the outmoded notions of planning and design based on the illusions of control and potency. One underlying hypothesis of this argument is that architecture should embrace its inability to control the dynamics of urbanization, and instead gain political agency by focusing on its ability to work with contingencies instead.⁵ This might free architects to scrutinize those forces that actually do shape the built environment, and consequently ask how and in whose interests building codes, land-use regulations, construction norms, financing models, and tax benefits are structured. Deciphering these forces might be the first step toward redistributing planning authority. On the other hand, architecture's expertise on uncertainty and emergent behavior might expand its field of operations.⁶ Following Alejandro Zaera-Polo who defined his aim to "produce an updated politics of architecture in which the discipline is not merely reduced to a representation of ideal political concepts, but as an effective tool to produce change,"⁷ and focuses on the discipline's hard core—the performative effects of building envelopes—I argue for the reinterpretation of architecture's modalities of practice: to expand its scope beyond final products or singular objects, to include the design of processes under which architecture is produced—the design of political institutions, forms of governance, economic systems, and modes of production that determine most of our built environment. Only thus can we revive the idea of the political project that is

the city as a site of encounter and the collective negotiation of differences. This also implies imagining alternative institutions, constructing an alternative framework beyond state centrism, and capitalist market logic.

Can the commons contribute to such an endeavor? As much as the debate on the commons offers important insights for architectural and urban design, reversely, practices of commoning are also challenged when considered at the scale of the city. In effect, practices of commoning are most operative at a local scale, but what happens when the commons become the organizing principles at a larger scale, at the scale of neighborhoods or the city? How can practices of commoning grow beyond local initiatives, from islands of exception to triggering systemic change? And at a temporal scale, how can commoning, beyond the struggle for survival and as a mode of resistance, become a desirable condition to be sustained? When considered in the long term, commoning as social practice faces the challenge of remaining open (open to newcomers as well as open to adapt to changing conditions) and unyielding to enclosure, hierarchies, and discrimination.

These questions suggest that if we are to understand commoning—not only as a perspective or guiding utopian horizon, but as transformative social change leading to a noncapitalist forms of living-in-common—then commoners must confront the challenge of institutionalization. I refer to institutionalization here as a process of crystallization where everyday behavior consolidates into protocols, and eventually organizational structures and material complexes. In such an understanding of architecture, its material and spatial organization inevitably also contributes to institutionalization.

Thus it is here on the question of institutionalization that the articulation of the two seemingly incompatible practices, commoning and planning/design hinges. But to further pursue this question, it seems necessary to stop speaking of institutions in general, or design and commoning in general, and instead engage in a more concrete analysis of a specific ecology of social, political, financial, and spatial dynamics: the Vienna settlers' movement of the 1920s.

4 Stavros Stavrides, *Common Space: The City as Commons* (London: Zed Books, 2016).

5 Jeremy Till, *Architecture Depends* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2013).

6 Mark Wigley, "Towards a History of Quantity," *Volume #2: Doing (Almost) Nothing* (July 2005): 28–32.

7 Alejandro Zaera-Polo, "The Politics of the Envelope: A Political Critique of Materialism," *Volume #17: Content Management* (November 2008): 76–105.

Settlers' Movement

In 1919 Austria was on the verge of total economic collapse. After the First World War, it shrank from being a supranational empire to an atrophied province with few natural resources. Its inept, oversized administrative apparatus left its starving populace to its own devices.

This crisis was not the mere result of war. It had fomented over the nineteenth century and through Vienna's exponential industrial urbanization, when workers lived in overcrowded *Gründerzeit* quarters in precarious and unsanitary conditions. Already in 1912, 96,878 Viennese were homeless, 20,071 of which were children.⁸ The crisis reached its peak when veterans and refugees flocked to Vienna after the war. In her contribution "Housing Commons" in this book, Mara Verlic provides a more detailed account of the housing crisis and policies at the time.

In response, citizens began squatting on Vienna's urban fringe, clearing forest for wood and growing food in small allotment gardens. By 1918 over 1500 acres of cultivated land fed roughly 160,000 people,⁹ while farmers began erecting ad hoc housing. By 1919 about 60,000 settlers surrounded the former imperial capital,¹⁰ threatening not only the *Wald- und Wiesengürtel* (a ring of forests and meadows), but the city's loss of control over its unruly masses. Photos of women cutting wood and working the land in early allotments bear resemblance to the accounts of diggers and levelers in medieval England, and are often referred to as the origins of the commons in Europe. But Vienna's settlers quickly moved beyond self-help initiatives.

On September 26, 1920, the settlers marched down the *Ringstrasse* to demand rights to the land they occupied: "Give us land, wood and brick and we'll make bread out of it!"¹¹ The demonstration marked a tipping point for the 50,000 protesters: by orchestrating their energies, the settlers exerted political pressure on the city, as well as took advantage of economies of scale in the production of food and housing. Thus, the settlers began self-organizing in housing cooperatives. On April 3, 1921, the settlers took to the streets again and gained such momentum that then-mayor of Vienna, Jakob Reumann, conceded to support their endeavor. Realizing that the city could not provide for the people and anxious to prevent a looming revolution, the government legalized the settlements, granting the squatters long-term leases while retaining ownership of the land. This marked the beginning of the settlements' gradual institutionalization. It also laid the foundations for the city's coming and better-known Red Vienna program.

Invigorated by the city's support, settler associations created an alternative cooperative economy that would facilitate the construction of individual

houses with gardens for subsistence farming in forty-six different settlements. From 1919–24, the movement defined Vienna's urbanization. The settlers' cooperation was based on an intricate network of nested institutions of self-governed associations, cooperatives, and guilds, and also new municipal and governmental agencies. In quick succession, an umbrella association, the Verband für Siedlungs- und Kleingartenwesen (ÖVSuK) and a public utility settlement and building material procurement corporation, the *Gemeinschaftliche Siedlungs- und Baustoffanstalt* (Gesiba) were founded in 1921. ÖVSuK's goal was to respond to the settlers' most basic needs while making construction more effective. It developed elaborate distribution, financing, and labor accounting systems. Many smaller cooperatives assembled under ÖVSuK and Gesiba, collaborating to gain control over entire cycles of production, distribution and use, by unfolding a range of activities including the provision of raw building materials, the planning of settlements and housing prototypes, and the financing of construction via loans, insurance, and not-for-profit banking. In this way, the settler gained freedom from profit-driven market competition and unpredictable fluctuations, which ultimately gave rise to a new economic and political reform movement.

The speed at which the settlements constituted a "proto-state organizational structure" remains as one of the settlers' most astonishing accomplishments.¹² Klaus Novy, who has provided the most comprehensive documentation of the settlers' movement to date, stresses the importance of "strong self-regulating institutions" that first enabled the settlers to articulate common interests and thereafter implement their ambitions.¹³ The settlers' lessons for bottom-up initiatives remain just as valid today. Indeed many of the settlers' ambitions and strategies resonate with contemporary commoning initiatives nearly one century later: By separating land and home ownership via long-term leases, the settlers de-commodified their houses. By renting their cooperatively owned houses, the settlers ensured stable rents and that future decisions would be based on common rather than individual interests. By basing participation on the contribution of individual manual labor rather than capital, the settlers made housing accessible to wider, often excluded populations. By self-managing the diverse cooperative bodies based on basic democratic principles, they managed to retain control over their lives. By accepting hierarchies

8 Klaus Novy and Wolfgang Förster, *Einfach Bauen* (Vienna: Verein für moderne Kommunalpolitik, 1985), 11.

9 *Ibid.*, 130.

10 Otto Bauer, *Die Österreichische Revolution* (Vienna: Edition Ausblick, 2015).

11 Novy and Förster, *Einfach Bauen*, 28. Unless otherwise noted, all translations are my own.

12 Klaus Novy, "Selbsthilfe als Reformbewegung: Der Kampf der Wiener Siedler nach dem 1. Weltkrieg," *Arch +55, Kampf um Selbsthilfe* (February 1981): 39.

13 *Ibid.*, 154.

of nested institutions, cooperative federations, and umbrella organizations, they grew beyond local initiatives, free from market and governmental pressures.

But despite many ideological parallels, reading Vienna's historic settlements through a contemporary commoning perspective also reveals important disparities. If practices of commoning are rooted in the negotiation of differences, the recognition of varying abilities, privileges, hopes, and fears as the point of departure for coming together, how did the settlers' deal with tension and conflict? On the one hand, what makes the settler movement particularly interesting from today's post-political perspective is the diversity of its participants. "Here there is no difference between mental and manual workers. Factory and railway workers, art historians, writers, civil servants, anarchist, Christian socialists, libertarians and Baptist-theosophers, socialists, German nationalists and Jews work adjacent to and with one another. Here they are no '-ists."¹⁴ But how did the cooperative convergence of subjects then affect this *multitude*?¹⁵ The early illegal and informal settlers' activities are widely undocumented. We can only speculate on pre-institutional conflicts, repressions and exclusions. Accordingly, Novy writes, "It is unknown from literature, how many allotment gardens and settlers decided not to join the cooperative and thus also turned down financial aid, how many were expelled from the wildly appropriated land. In both cases, however, one can assume that there were many more than acknowledged by specialized literature from the institutional part of the movement."¹⁶ Two rather minor scenes may reveal some of the tensions, conflicts of interest, and attempts at appropriation integral to the settlers' institutionalization.

The Settlers' School

One central incentive for the settlers was the effective allocation of available resources, not only material and financial, but also skills and knowledge. In addition to social and cultural clubs, the settlers also launched a newspaper, museum, and school. But beyond a "curriculum" of a lecture series by prominent figures of the movement, the settlers' school remains widely unexplored. Meanwhile, the writings of two lecturers, namely, architects Adolf Loos and Margarete Schütte-Lihotzky, provide some insight into their ideas about the nature and role of education, and the production and reproduction of knowledge within the reform movement.

In his 1921 text "Wohnen lernen" (Learning how to dwell), Loos sets out his principals on how to live.¹⁷ Though leavened with humor, Loos's tone is patronizing and leaves no doubt of his expertise on the matter of how a "good settler" ought to dwell. Similarly, an announcement for a Loos lecture de-

clares, "Numerous attendance is the duty of the allotment gardener."¹⁸ Schütte-Lihotzky, Austria's first female architect, offers a more modest account in her memoir: "With the light of miserable candle stubs or hazy fuel lamps I talked in smoky and remote taverns and described to people, based on our drawings, how to imagine our designs for typical constructions from early allotment cottages to completed houses, and how based on self-help, mutual help, and our help, they could create more humane and dignified living conditions. [...] Through all these activities at the time, I got in touch with male and female workers."¹⁹ These excerpts suggest that Loos and Schütte-Lihotzky believed as much in the role of education as in architecture as emancipatory forces. At the same time, they provide diverging attitudes on the grassroots movement regarding their roles as architects and "educators." At the end of his involvement with the movement, Loos seemed disillusioned that none of his plans had been fully realized. Schütte-Lihotzky, however, continued referring to the settlers' movement as a formative experience in her long career. Though she is confident on the validity of her contribution to the settlers' movement, she also let the settlers transform her understanding of how to live. Albeit not explicitly, Schütte-Lihotzky's voice raises important issues for practices of participatory design: collaboration between experts and laypersons inevitably entails mechanisms of in- and exclusion, sensitive questions about the conditions for partaking, and whose voices are heard or silenced in decision-making processes. Here the abstract commitment to citizen democracy is one thing, the dynamics of micropolitics in everyday situations another. More generally, this example raises questions about the representation of the settler movement: Who was speaking in the name of the settlers and how were different, even conflicting interests taken into account?

As is so often the case with the history of poor peoples' movements, little is known about who the actual settlers were. Instead, most historic accounts present Gustav Scheu, Otto Neurath, Max Ermers, Hans Kampffmeyer, and Loos as the protagonists of the settler movement.²⁰ Ironically, for a grassroots movement, the protagonists are all academically trained men, none of whom

14 *Der Tag*, January 6, 1923, as quoted in Novy and Förster, *Einfach Bauen*, 134.

15 I am suggesting here a possible anachronic resonance between the settlers and Antonio Negri and Michael Hardt's notion of "multitude" as a heterogeneous network of workers, migrants, social movements, and nongovernmental organizations acting as unmediated, immanent, revolutionary collective social subject.

16 Novy and Förster, *Einfach Bauen*, 28.

17 Adolf Loos, "Wohnen Lernen" (1921), in *Adolf Loos über Architektur*, ed. Adolf Opel (Vienna: Prachner, 1995), 162–65.

18 Novy and Förster, *Einfach Bauen*, 59.

19 Margarete Schütte-Lihotzky, *Warum ich Architektin wurde* (Salzburg: Residenz Verlag, 2004), 87.

20 See, among others, *ibid.*, 46–83; or Eve Blau, *The Architecture of Red Vienna 1919–1934* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1999), 89–133.

were actual settlers’—the ones who literally built the settlements with their own hands were, in fact, often women. This fact should not diminish Kampffmeyer’s or Neurath’s contributions to the settlers’ cause, whose respective experience with the German garden city movement or the ideas of the British guild socialism were essential to the movement’s consolidation. Yet it puts the notion of the settlers’ bottom-up organization into perspective.

Das Siedleramt

In parallel to the settlers’ movement, the city began to institute its own agencies. Officials had many incentives for embracing the movement: not only did it offer a pragmatic response to a pressing crisis, but for a young social democratic government under pressure from all fronts, containing the unpredictable energies unfolding around the settlers was crucial for political survival. The *Siedleramt* became the city’s primary department in charge of the settlements. Its history is indicative of the settlers’ and municipality’s challenging, often twisted relationship. At first, the *Siedleramt* seemed to mirror the planning and design office of the ÖVSuK, led by George Karau and Franz Schuster. Both offices developed housing prototypes and layouts for the entire settlement. But the *Siedleramt* was also in charge of assigning land and regulating building developments as well as distributing subsidies, and thus grew increasingly influential. In contrast, the ÖVSuK closed its planning office in 1924 owing to financial difficulties. Furthermore, while the *Siedleramt* and the *Baubüro* seemed to compete for influence, according to many accounts, the controversial *Siedleramt* only came into being under heavy pressure from the settlers. Two years elapsed between Ermer’s appointment in 1919 to the founding of the *Siedleramt* in May 1921 under Kampffmeyer, who in turn appointed Loos as chief architect. All three were regarded as odd figures within Vienna’s bureaucratic apparatus, and disparaged for their informal and hands-on approach. Another minor anecdote from the Schütte-Lihotzky memoir reveals some of the tensions:

At the end of a corridor I found a narrow door with a cardboard sign: “Settlers’ Office of the City of Vienna.” At that time however the Settlers’ Office of the City of Vienna didn’t even exist yet, and every couple of days someone would remove the sign. Ermer, who worked behind that door, would time and again mount a new one. I mention this, because it shows how improvised everything was at the beginning.²¹

The scene raises the question: Who was appropriating what? Interwar historiography deems the “wild” settlements as a marginal movement, soon to be absorbed into the famed Red Vienna housing program. Though there are nuances to this telling, it suggests that once the most dramatic food and hous-

ing crises faded and the new government found its footing, the centrally planned, high-density municipal housing blocks of Red Vienna were exponentially more effective than the settlers. Yet Novy cautions against a clash between these two irreconcilable paradigms, bottom-up versus top-down urbanization, and argues instead that one led to the other: only the incredible success of the settlers could have paved the road for such a municipal program. Novy’s insistence on what might seem like a minute detail in fact contributes to the marginalization of bottom-up movements in history, a mechanism preventing the production and accumulation of knowledge on self-organization.

Now Ermer’s “sign incident” complicates things even more. Maybe the settlers were not victims of the state’s gradual appropriation, maybe the settlers were more subversive than that and saw the establishment of municipal bodies as an opportunity to infiltrate and transform the government from inside out. Or, beyond the settlers who worked long construction shifts and the municipality concerned with maintaining control over them, maybe there were other actors involved, genuinely supportive of the settlers’ cause, but pursuing their own ideological agendas. Were they the ultimate “architects” of the settlers’ movement?

Such framing would in fact suggest that much more than the design of individual houses, which was ultimately in the hands of future users, architects of the settler movement were equally concerned with designing the conditions under which architecture was produced, or the design of processes. Neurath’s diagram *Roots of a Settlement House* (fig. 4) indicates this mind-set: rather than rendering the settler’s house as such, Neurath meticulously traces all material flows and production processes required for its construction. The relational nature of Neurath’s drawing implies a shift in understanding architectural design beyond its mere product, the building, to include the design of the wider conditions, modalities, metabolisms, and institutions under which housing takes place. Read through this lens, the settlers’ movement glimpses at what an expanded practice of architecture might entail, one in which design takes into account the modalities of building production to identify strategic sites of “design” interventions.

Such a perspective also implies a further challenge to the historic binary opposition between the settler movements and Red Vienna. Instead of juxtaposing low-rise, low-density, and self-built dwellings defined by scarcity and pragmatism versus monumental, municipally planned super blocks designed to represent a singular political program, and comparing their architectural

²¹ Schütte-Lihotzky, *Warum ich Architektin wurde*, 47.

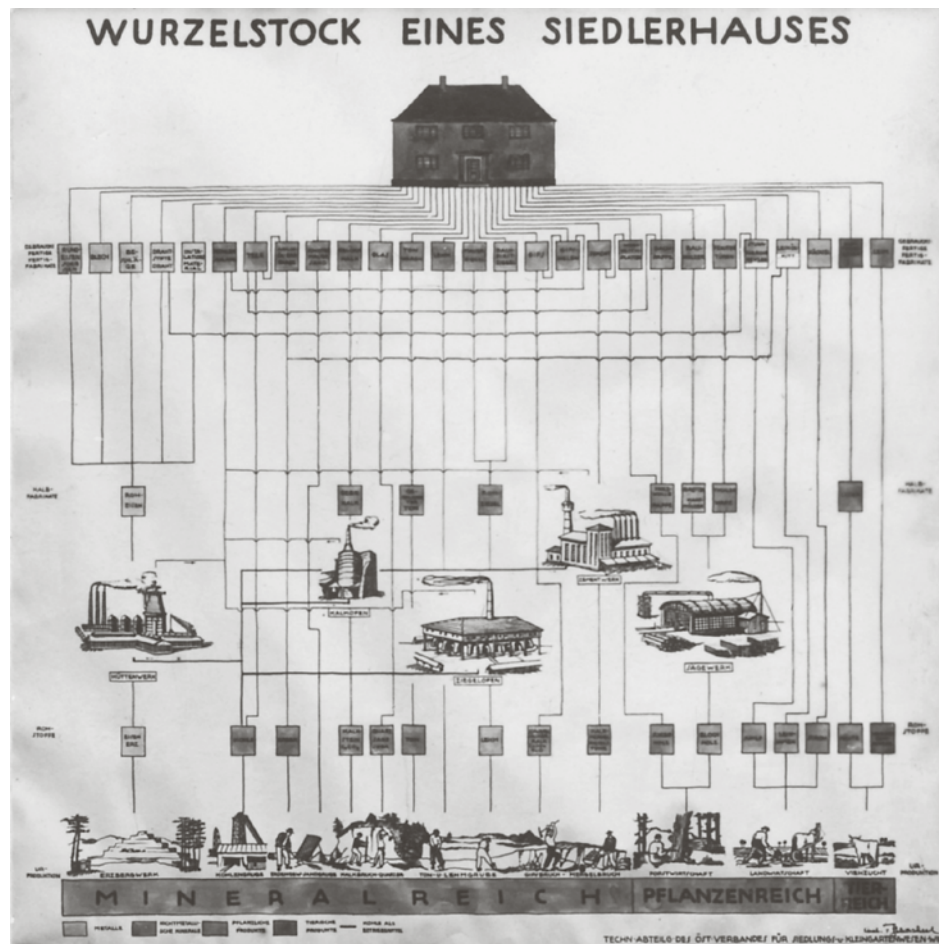


Fig. 4
Otto Neurath, *Roots of a Settlement House*, 1925

merits based on their material products, or the buildings as such, we may also measure the settlers' contributions to architecture on its own terms, namely, its ambitions of understanding architecture and the process of its production as steps to self-determination. In other words, if beyond mere survival, the settlers saw the collective act of construction as a means of "changing themselves by changing the city more after their heart's desire,"²² how did the settler institutions contribute to this effort?

For a fleeting moment, the settlers' intricate set of cooperative structures gave rise to a community economy embedded in an alternate understanding of democracy: self-government and operation in parallel to the state authority and market competition. But as its ambitions grew to induce systemic change beyond the autonomy of local initiatives, so grew its concessions and dependency on municipal subsidies and the so-called protagonist's expertise.

Without doubt, the experience of building settlements together had a catalytic effect on solidarity. The hands-on experience of constructing another, possible world was emancipatory. But as the acuteness of the crisis faded, so did the settlers' solidarity. Had the settlers focused too exclusively on their houses? Were they too concerned with material and financial flows to the detriment of their political subjectivities? Did they neglect to imagine life beyond the moment of completing their houses, and disregard the reproduction of everyday life and social relations? Could the settlers' institutions have been more concerned with the endurance and regeneration of the movement beyond the crisis? Could the settlers' institutions have been designed to resist erosion and predatory forces?

It is here that Silvia Federici's feminist perspective on the politics of the commons offers possible clues. In order to resist dependence on wage labor and subordination to capitalist relations and to create the material requirements for the construction of a commons-based economy, Federici insists that we need to begin with the material reproduction of everyday life. "Reproduction precedes social production. Touch the women, touch the rock,"²³ she quotes Peter Linebaugh, asserting that if the commons are to provide the foundation of an anticapitalist society, the struggle needs to begin by addressing gender discrimination and unpaid reproductive labor. Here it seems essential to point out that Federici does not concede to a naturalistic conception of femininity. For her this struggle is not a matter of identity but of labor and power.

²² Harvey, *Rebel Cities: From the Right to the City to the Urban Revolution*, 4.

²³ Peter Linebaugh, cited in Silvia Federici, "Feminism and the Politics of the Common in an Era of Primitive Accumulation" (2010),

in *Revolution at Point Zero: Housework, Reproduction, and Feminist Struggle*, ed. Silvia Federici (Oakland, CA: PM Press, 2012), 147.

Federici has dedicated a significant part of her work to demonstrating how women, historically and today, are the primary subjects of reproductive labor, and how they have consequently been at the forefront of the struggle against land enclosure since early capitalism, and that they are still essential for constructing autonomous spaces and collective livelihoods dissociated from the commodity flows of a global economy. The same is true for Vienna's settlers' movement: not only do many historic photographs of the settlements' construction sites feature women at work, but according to the ÖVSuK's calculations, their labor contributions were devaluated by a factor of 0.7.

Federici further points out that many forms of organizing struggle are unsustainable because they don't include cooperation in reproduction, without which there is no continuity. Thus, beyond the emancipatory power gained from the collectivization of everyday work, Federici argues that it is only by putting the reproduction of the everyday at the center of political struggles that the commons movement will gain the capacity to endure: "We cannot build an alternative society and a strong self-reproducing movement unless we redefine our reproduction in a more cooperative way and put an end to the separation between the personal and the political, and between political activism and the reproduction of everyday life."²⁴ Here Federici does not explicitly address the question of institutionalization, yet her argument implies widening the understanding of institutions beyond formal organizations and public establishments, and recognizing that processes of institutionalization in fact begin at point zero, with the repetition of practices that turn into patterns, crystalize into habits, and eventually consolidate into these norms, institutions, and material complexes. As Federici points out, commoning always begins with a small "c," and accordingly I would deduce institutionalization also starts with a small "i."

Studying the settlers' movement from a contemporary commoning perspective, it is here that a critique of the settlers' institutionalization must begin. On the one hand, the protagonists of the settlers' movement had the scope of vision to understand that if they were to build an alternate society, they would have to engage in negotiating bottom-up and top-down forces and thus expand their operations by imagining and establishing new collective forms of institutions. On the other hand, their concept of institutions remained limited to the reorganization of labor, economics, and politics required for the construction of houses. Institutions of everyday life, such as the nuclear family, marriage, and gender roles, remained untouched. Interestingly enough, Kampffmeyer points to the promising connection between the everyday and larger societal transformations, the micro and the macro: "It will be relatively easy to raise interest and find understanding for broader political-economic and social problems, with people who at a small scale have already implemented a piece of *Gemeinwirtschaft* (cooperative economy)."²⁵ But

Kampffmeyer only saw another opportunity to mobilize existing forces for his cause: the building of a new macro-economy, rather than recognizing an opportunity to fundamentally begin redefining and constructing alternate institutions from the bottom-up. Federici resonates with Kampffmeyer's observations, yet arrives at a different conclusion: "If the house is the *oikos* on which the economy is built, then it is women, historically the house worker and house prisoners, who must take initiative to reclaim the house as a center for collective life, one traversed by multiple people and forms of cooperation, providing safety without isolation and fixation, allowing for the sharing and circulation of community possessions, and above all, providing the foundation for collective forms of reproduction."²⁶ Drawing inspiration from Dolores Hayden's work on nineteenth-century materialist feminists, Federici argues that the reorganization of reproductive work inevitably requires the reorganization of housing and public space.

Although, as Hayden has shown, many socialist feminist housing experiments already existed across the United States and Europe at the time of the Vienna settlers,²⁷ it is here that the settlers' vision stopped short. The settlements were exclusively based on aggregate cells of single-family homes with individual gardens. While the construction of houses was a collective effort to the extent that families were only assigned an individual house via lottery upon completion of the entire settlement, reproductive labor—be it gardening, cooking, or childcare in the settlements—remained a spatially segregated and mostly individual enterprise, with each woman confined to her small auto-subsistent sphere. The occasional communal houses and shared facilities served mainly for political, social, and leisure activities. But they were rarely integral to everyday routines and eroded over time. Thus the very idea the movement emerged from—collective self-organization—was not reflected in its spatial organization.

Ultimately, the question of reproductive labor and its spatial organization point to the importance of the everyday as a starting point for rearticulating practices of architectural design and planning. Today, urbanization finds itself increasingly predetermined by institutional forces that seem beyond the influence of architecture and planning.²⁸ Meanwhile, J. K. Gibson-Graham argue that one of the key problems in tackling capitalism has been that our economic activities are essentialized as capitalist relations and thus "Capitalism" is talked into being

24 Silvia Federici, "Feminism and the Politics of the Common in an Era of Primitive Accumulation" (2010), in *Revolution at Point Zero: Housework, Reproduction, and Feminist Struggle*, ed. Silvia Federici (Oakland, CA: PM Press, 2012), 147.

25 Hans Kampffmeyer, *Siedlung und Kleingarten* (Vienna: Springer 1926), 73.

26 Federici, "Feminism and the Politics of the Common," 147.

27 See Dolores Hayden, *The Grand Domestic Revolution: A History of Feminist Designs for American Homes, Neighborhoods, and Cities* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1981). See also Julia Wieger's contribution on *Kitchen Politics* in this volume, 154–67.

as insurmountable monolith to which “there is no alternative.” Instead, Gibson-Graham suggest reframing wage labor based on monetary relations as the mere tip of the iceberg.²⁹ The greater and more significant portion of our relations and activities, they argue, are defined by in-kind payments, reciprocal labor, unpaid housework and family care, self-provisioning, and volunteer labor. Similarly, architects and planners cannot dispute sociopolitical agency by referring to the overwhelming power of “Institutions” that shape our built environment and contribute to growing spatial and social inequalities. Against this backdrop, Vienna’s settlers’ movement offers an inspiring account of an alternate mode for urbanization negotiating top-down and bottom-up forces. But the settlers’ project required strategically redefining the practice of architecture to include redesigning the material, economic, and legal frameworks under which housing is produced. Ironically, by doing so they neglected the very design of the house as the basis of the reproduction of everyday life, as much as the reproduction of the movement as a whole. Taken to its radical consequence, the settlers’ latent understanding of architecture would have not only required an attempt of designing new kinds of institutions tackling housing politics and economics at the macro-level, but also to recognize the house, beyond an object of design, as a strategic site for redesigning institutions of everyday relations.

Learning from the Vienna settlers and by being more attuned to the embedded micropolitics of everyday situations, the spatial layout of domestic labor and care, organizational mechanisms of in- and exclusion and distribution of ownership, we might begin locating utopia in the everyday and begin designing different kinds of buildings that in turn will shape us. And as we recognize how design and planning begin with everyday routines that consolidate into protocols and trickle up to give rise to alternative organizational structures and material complexes, we might end up with cities after our hearts’ desire.

28 Among others, and representing a current generation of architects, Bjarke Ingels has argued that “[architects] are not the creators of the city, but the midwives.” Ingels, in a conversation with Michael Kimmelman at a session titled “Social Infrastructure” at the “Cities for Tomorrow” conference in New York on July 21, 2015.

29 J. K. Gibson Graham, *The End of Capitalism (As We Knew It): A Feminist Critique of Political Economy* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2006), 79–101.

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Study across Time Glancing Back at Vienna's Settlers' Movement

Anette Baldauf, Stefan Gruber, Moira Hille,
Annette Krauss, Vladimir Miller,
Mara Verlič, Hong-Kai Wang, and Julia Wieger

In the early 1920s, to escape the postwar housing and food shortages besetting Vienna, citizens set off for the outskirts of the city to settle and cultivate the land. Vienna's settlers' movement was neither state-led nor market-driven, but rooted in self-organization and a bottom-up negotiation of the community's social contract and distribution of resources. As a group of artists, architects, and social scientists, we studied the movement's propositions for an alternate future through the lens of contemporary commons debates. At the same time, we also studied the settlers' cultural archives across time, so as not to seek answers in a nostalgic, remote past. Instead we attempted to situate our study within a specific historic struggle, thus distilling from the past another possible world in order to imagine another possible future.

Jose Esteban Muñoz's reflections on utopia enabled us to elaborate on these speculations. In his book *Cruising Utopia* (2009), Muñoz follows Ernst Bloch's distinction between abstract and concrete utopias, dismissing abstract utopias for being detached from any historical consciousness. Instead he favors concrete utopias for being "relational to historically situated struggles, a collectivity that is actualized or potential." Muñoz proposes a modality of utopia that is at once affect and methodology—a critical methodology that he describes as "a backwards glance that enacts a future vision."

We set out on a search to build (upon) practices of commoning, using insights into specific histories and by asking questions such as: Which practices of studying or living do we consider meaningful in terms of the production of commons? Which practices are and have been already among us? This "us" is tricky as it jumps generations,² it is full of difference, and is always in danger of appropriating. "Building (upon)" does not mean to follow a simple line of past-present-future, but to understand the present through the past, the past as a surprise for the future,³ and the future as a bold potential contained in the present.

With this perspective, our approach to the settlers' movement can be described as a series of encounters and iterative settings, an attempt to create situations that would allow us to collectively engage in the distinct, yet synchronous temporalities of the past, present, and future. These settings, described here as different glimpses of the settlers' movement, took place in the form of a collective walk, readings, an exercise in rewriting, a search for material traces by knocking on settlers' doors, a speculative walk through gaps in memory, and an enactment of an editorial meeting of the newspaper *Der Siedler*.

1 José Esteban Muñoz, *Cruising Utopia: The Then and There of Queer Futurity* (New York: New York University Press, 2009), 3–4.

2 Iris Van der Tuin, "Jumping Generations: On Second- and Third-Wave Feminist

Epistemology," *Australian Feminist Studies* 24, no. 59 (2009): 17–31.

3 Elizabeth Grosz, *Time Travels: Feminism, Nature, Power* (Crows Nest, NSW: Allen & Unwin, 2005).

First Glance: Collective Walks and Readings—Where Are We?

Stefan Gruber: This is the only map we have right now and it's oriented north.

Moira Hille: Is this the garden we passed by?

Vladimir Miller: We are somewhere here in between and I think these would be the communal houses.

Our first encounter with the settlers' movement took place on a collective walk through the present-day Rosenhügel settlement. At moments, we paused and read excerpts of texts on the settlers to one another: Adolf Loos's emphatic endorsement of the settlers' land rights struggles; Margarete Schütte-Lihotzky's more humble recollections of gathering in candle-lit taverns with settlers over construction plans; Eve Blau's history of the settlers' movement interpreted as the prelude to Vienna's more illustrious Red Vienna program; and Klaus Novy and Wolfgang Förster's meticulous account of the movement's institutionalization and their affirmatory eleven points on the relevance of settlers' experiences for cooperative initiatives of the 1980s.

SG: This was the first comprehensive publication on Vienna's settlers' movement, from Klaus Novy and Wolfgang Förster in the early 1980s. Here are historical images of the workers constructing their houses. And here is the *Genossenschaftshaus*, the cooperative house. This is what we should be looking for.

Anette Krauss: And what does it involve? What does it say on the map? Clubrooms, a gym, a mandoline orchestra, a theater ...

SG: It was also the place where they would meet and politically organize.

Anette Baldauf: What kind of communal house is it? Was there a community kitchen in the community house?

Mara Verlič: To me, the settlers' community building doesn't seem like a house where you would organize reproductive labor.

Reading aloud and listening to voices from the past, we started doubting the accounts of the settlers' movement we had heard so far. What has often been framed as the pioneering site for an emancipatory cooperative movement now rather felt like a petit bourgeois suburban neighborhood. The juxtaposition of the present moment with distinct, even diverging historic accounts underlined the extent to which our perception is slanted by narrative constructions. Numerous historic texts refer to the uncultivated forest and no-man's-land on which the settlers built their houses. Thus one recurring discussion arises from the fact that the settlers' movement coincided with intense European colonial activity.



Fig. 5
Spaces of Commoning research group, collective walk and reading, Rosenhügel settlement, Vienna, 2014

Hong-Kai Wang: The land that they occupied: Were there no inhabitants at all?

SG: I think it was originally farmland, owned by the city.

HKW: I am asking because the idea of settlement also includes the idea of erasure, classic colonialism, erasure of what has been there. (*The wind blows*)

AB: The promise is the same, no? The promise of setting off to other countries and supposedly there is nobody. And of course in these countries, a lot of people lived who were simply not regarded as human beings. The promise that there would be a better life is part of the colonial trade and the discourse that made these movements possible.

Second Glance: Knocking on Settlers' Doors—In Search of Material Traces

In one of the scenes of the 1980 documentary *Das Bauen ist ja nicht das Primäre* (Building is not the primary thing), the architect Margarete Schütte-Lihotzky revisits some of the houses she designed at the edge of Vienna's fourteenth district in the former settlement called Eden. Together with radio journalist Beatrix Füsser-Novy and architects Gerd Haag and Günter Uhlig, she tries to remember her involvement in the settlers' movement sixty years prior. The following scene begins with Schütte-Lihotzky sitting in a car, directing the driver toward a specific settler's house. She talks with residents over the fence.⁴

Margarete Schütte-Lihotzky: There we go. I think we need to leave the road here. Now we will see if we can still find the house for which I designed the interior. [...] Isn't it grotesque, that sixty years have passed ... ah ... someone is coming.

Resident: Good afternoon.

MSL: Good afternoon. We would like to ask you something with regard to the area here. I myself was member of the cooperative Eden many years ago. I have designed this house together with the architect Egli.

R: At that time I was very young. There was forest everywhere. And these three houses were built out of stone.

MSL: Yes, that could be. I worked on it in 1921. And for one of the inhabitants I furnished the entire house. The furniture wasn't freestanding, but with built-in furniture and a small library. [...] There was a fireplace in the corner. I can sketch it for you.

R: Are you talking about those houses?

MSL: Yes, but there is no bell.

R: The door is difficult to open. You have to knock hard.

MSL: Is it an older woman?

R: There was an older woman. She died, but her young daughter knows a lot.

MSL: Wonderful. Let's ask her.

R: Yes, try it. You need to knock with a lot of force.

Thirty years later, members of our research group, together with Elisabeth Kofler and Andreas Gautsch, from the Anarchist Library and Archive in Vienna, visit Eden again. For several days we walked around in a quest to find out more on the settlement. Eden's settlers were known to be particularly diverse, and included anarchists, members of diverse religious groups, theosophs, and practitioners of other life-reform movements. Its current inhabitants, however, seem to know little about the founders' original intentions. When we try talking with people, asking what they remember, we are sent from one house to an-

other in search of someone who might know something—those who were young or born here shortly after the houses were built. We learn of people who have just died; a man whose wife had found a suitcase filled with photos that belonged to her parents who lived here. The people we ask speculate about which house might be the one designed by Schütte-Lihotzky: "Who?" they ask. "A famous architect!" we say. "One of the first female architects in Vienna." We listen to rumors of a woman who ran a notorious *Gasthaus* or tavern. But when we arrive at the settlers' hang out, we find a store selling car insurance.

Performatively speaking, we could describe what we tried to do: the 2015 reenactment of the 1980s exercise of knocking on doors. However, this performative act was not done for the sake of repeating Schütte-Lihotzky, Novy-Füsser, and Uhlig. Instead, this reenactment was in pursuit of a certain legacy: a looking back as a search for the practices of self-organization from the past that we might identify as meaningful today, and whose traces we hoped to find in everyday encounters and conversations with people who live or have lived in this area. The practice of walking and engaging with current inhabitants then became a way to produce new relations between people, a way to encourage creative encounters and negotiations through which experiences and ideas are shared and organized, and from which sparks of resistance or creative alternatives to contemporary forms of domination might possibly emerge.

⁴ *Das Bauen ist ja nicht das Primäre*, 1980. Translation of scene by the authors.

Eleven Theses on the Relevance of the Cooperative Idea Today (1985)

by Klaus Novy and Wolfgang Förster

1. In a society where jobs are becoming scarce in spite of economic growth, housing security and good neighborly relations are increasingly important.
2. Because of unemployment, early retirement and the reduction in working hours, there is more free time available for which meaningful occupations have to be found.
3. When people leave working life early, or never reenter it, the most basic social interactions are at risk of being disrupted (often leading to loneliness or senselessness). Here, cooperative management, caring for the environment and actively contributing to one's neighborhood might be a meaningful compensation.
4. With real incomes declining, sustaining affordable housing becomes the most pressing issue in housing policies. Control over developments can only be achieved through increased participation of those who are most concerned (namely, the residents).
5. In order to control housing costs, self-help and participation of residents is necessary. But the residents' engagement must also be profitable for them. Hence legal, administrative structures and funding models are needed that foster the residents' agency—rather than inhibiting them, as they currently do.
6. Financial and social sustainability in the renovation of Vienna's old, often cheap housing stock is only reasonable with the participation of the residents. Users' interests must be prioritized over those of investors. The cooperative idea should be transferred to the renovation and maintenance of the old housing stock: "a community of users who buy the building" as cooperative.
7. For ecological reasons, it becomes increasingly necessary for residents and the municipality to coordinate regarding needs for energy, water supply and disposal, green areas and living quarters. Organizations that are close to residents can do pioneering work in this field.
8. Many of the services, provided by the Welfare State, are no longer financially feasible today. Thus it seems reasonable that some social and cultural tasks should be decentralized and transferred to organizations that are closer to the people.
9. Especially in times of financial crises, scarce public funds must be used purposefully and abuses of the social system avoided. One should examine whether committed small-scale cooperatives can offer more benefits than traditional subsidies of individual home ownership.
10. Compared to systems of individual home ownership subjected to state regulations and control, questions of urban design could be addressed more effectively through cooperative housing developments.
11. Finally, there is an increased interest in living in neighborhoods of one's personal choice with close relationships amongst neighbors. In terms of housing politics, the fact that the new housing model of "community housing" first emerged among an intellectual middle class does not diminish its importance. On the contrary it might even indicate that other classes will soon follow this trend.

Eleven Theses on the Relevance of the Cooperative Idea Today (2016)

by the Spaces of Commoning research group

1. In a society marked by financial crisis and austerity politics, we need to address income inequalities more boldly. How does income inequality correlate with housing security, social welfare, education, and migration policies? Cooperative structures offer a basis for organizing our everyday lives in a struggle against a paternalistic State and capitalist exploitation.
2. We find ourselves working under precarious conditions: we face unstable, short term jobs and looming unemployment which forces us into involuntary entrepreneurship. We have to devise mechanisms of escaping and resisting conditions that spur individualization, although they concern us all.
3. Today, social interactions are marked by an atmosphere of fear. Especially those who are disadvantaged are afraid of further losing their social security and welfare. While cooperative housing models offer new modes of support, they should also actively oppose neoliberal and right wing politics that tend to fuel and capitalize on fear.
4. With sharpening income inequality, affordable housing is one of the most pressing issues in housing politics. This can only be achieved by providing housing that operates outside the logic of exchange value and real estate speculation. Control over the housing economy can only be gained through increased participation of those who are most concerned (namely, the inhabitants).
5. To control housing costs, the de-commodification of housing stock is inevitable. Rather than a commodity with an exchange value, housing should not be defined by its use value and become commonly accessible to all. Only then can residents' self-management become a radical democratic form of organization and not just the participatory farce of roll-back neoliberalism.
6. In wide swathes of Vienna, the renovation of the old housing stock is almost complete. Set up as public-private partnerships and with relaxed rent regulation laws, Vienna's urban renewal program of the 1980s has spurred private investment. As a result, real estate prices are booming and rents are on the rise. Thus even old housing stock has become less affordable.
7. For ecological reasons, it becomes increasingly necessary for residents and the municipality to coordinate their needs for energy, water and garbage disposal, green areas and living quarters. Ubiquitous notions of sustainability have to be reframed in order to include social and cultural aspects as much as technical solutions. Otherwise sustainability becomes yet another market asset.
8. It is the State's responsibility to recognize and actively support bottom-up initiatives of communal self-organization. Emerging communities and organizations contribute to much needed decentralization and diversification of cultural and social life.
9. Small-scale cooperatives promote values of reciprocity and engagement instead of following the rules of efficiency and scarcity. They are uniquely positioned to develop and practice an alternative economy that contributes to social welfare rather than being its defining limit.
10. Urban design strategies have to include a range of cooperative models that meet the needs of diverse living situations. Cooperative models have to be affordable and accessible to all. They should not turn into privileged enclaves for the privileged and educated middle class.
11. There is and has always been interest in living in a self-determined environment with good neighborly relations. This interest has existed across different classes and times. It can be the motor for mutual support, but also entails the risk of segregation and exclusion. Practices of commoning can take place in rather different ideological set-ups and their ambiguity demands a thorough discussion on the principals that a commons or community is built on.

Figs. 6a, 6b

Spaces of Commoning research group, pages from *Zettlement Zine*, 2014

Third Glance: Rewriting Alternate Future—The Promise of Cooperative Structures

One of our central sources at the Rosenhügel was *Einfach Bauen*, a seminal book edited by Novy and Förster in 1985,⁵ which also accompanied a traveling exhibition Novy curated together with Günther Uhlig. By revisiting ideas of cooperative and self-organized housing, their comprehensive documentation contributed to a broader debate on prevalent economic crises and the early disintegration of the welfare state. One chapter is dedicated to eleven theses on what we can learn from the cooperative ideas of the settlers' movement today (namely, 1985). Novy and Förster's attempts at writing and rewriting history render palpable the extent to which their thoughts and positions are embedded in a specific moment in time. They inspired us to take a turn at reframing the ideas of the settlers from today's perspective by rewriting the eleven thesis (figs. 6a, 6b).

Fourth Glance: A Speculative Walk through the Gaps of Memories—Who Were the Settlers?

What is the relationship between the constitution of memories and practices of commoning? This question played a crucial role for yet another iteration of walking. However, this time we shifted our walks from the streets of the former settlements in Vienna to meandering through a series of photos and quotes extracted from the documentation of the movement. We hoped to evoke a "speculative walk" with reflections, associations, imaginings, and affective memories in order to study the potential of remembering radical histories. Trying to conjure a relationship between practices of commoning and the settlers' movement, the conversation evolved around the questions of who the settlers were, their motivations and aspirations.

In historiographies of the settlers' movement, a few protagonists are repeatedly mentioned: Hans Kampffmeyer, Otto Neurath, Max Ermers, Adolf Loos, or Margarete Schütte-Lihotzky. Accounts from male settlers are rare, and there are hardly any details about female settlers. How did they organize their everyday lives? What division of labor took place? What was the relationship to the land they were occupying?

The following excerpts stem from audio recordings of a *Bildkritik* during the speculative walk posing these questions to certain archive images. Interlocutors in the speculative walk included Kofler and Gautsch, Maria Mesner (a historian and docent at the Institute for Contemporary History, University of Vienna), Gerhard Rauscher (an activist in the Right to the City movement), and members of the Spaces of Commoning research group.



Fig. 7
Shortage of firewood leads to citizens' deforestation of Wienerwald, winter of 1918

VM: Who are these people? Why are there so many in the woods?

Gerhard Rauscher: They are actually cutting trees, not only branches, but whole trees.

AB: Are these settlers collecting wood for the settlements? So if the camera would shift a little, would there be a construction site next to it?

AG: Or are they people from the city who are looking for firewood? Or are they professionals, engaging in an informal economy of selling wood. [...]

MV: Haven't you just said that since 1918, Vienna's forests were protected? Is what they are doing against the law?

Maria Mesner: At that time the authorities were afraid of a socialist revolution. They were not afraid of the woods being cut down. They didn't really mind about the trees in the forest.

AK: And they did not see the cutting down of the trees as a part of the revolution?

5 Klaus Novy and Wolfgang Förster, *Einfach bauen: Katalog zu einer wachsenden Ausstellung* (Vienna: Verein für Kommunalpolitik, 1985).

MM: No, I don't think so!

Julia Wieger: But maybe it is not only about finding wood as building material or heating, but cutting down the forest to settle there? Land-grabbing so to say. And that's illegal. At least it sounds very daring!

MM: Yes, indeed. But I don't think we can compare our understanding of ownership and taking land to that following First World War. Ownership was then a much more undefined question.

HKW: Who are these women? Why was this photo taken? And where?

JW: I think this is a staged photo for educational purposes on how to organize the building site for one of the settlements.



Fig. 8
Pioneers of the Rosenhügel

VM: In the background, there are the last remains of the wild settlements. Do you see the sheds?

Elisabeth Kofler: The women have been doing this for weeks. They know how to do it. [...]

AB: Do you think the women were slightly pissed that their working hours were counted less than the hours of men?

MM: No, actually I think at that time, it was a gift. An improvement from no payment to a little payment.

AK: Phew ... depressing. [...]

MH: Do you think all settlers were workers?

AG: As far as I know it was a very heterogeneous movement. Civil servants, the unemployed, organized workers, especially railway men.

MM: We shouldn't forget that after the First World War, poor people started to claim the right to have a family. Having a family was a class issue.

GR: Thus there is clear link. Leaving the city, grabbing land, and building this very typical single-family settlers' house. Is this what we see here?

MV: Claiming rights sounds good. But weren't the authorities not exactly trying to tame the crowd by making them focus on the family.

MH: And how about supporting any alternative forms of living?

Fifth Glance: Editorial Meeting of *Der Siedler*— How to Carry On?

In 1921 the newly founded central settlers' association published the first issue of the newspaper *Der Siedler* (The settler), defined as "a periodical for allotment gardens, settlers, and housing reforms." The association and its media organ were two of many emerging institutions marking the transition from a series of loose self-help initiatives into an organized movement. In the effort to consolidate the different strands and smaller associations of the movement, *Der Siedler*, with a circulation of forty thousand, played a pivotal role. On the one hand, it served as a platform for exchanging information and practical advice. On the other hand, the newspaper aimed at evoking a coalition among settlers, speaking as its representative voice, and lobbying for its interests. Meanwhile, within the paper, ideologies did not always align and different contributions attempted to frame the movement one way or another.

Intrigued by the ambivalence of the newspaper's role, we set out to revisit the creation of the newspaper by organizing an editorial meeting nearly one hundred years after its original publication. We invited a group of organizers, activists, and researchers from Vienna to take on the role of guest editors and collectively read, review, and critique *Der Siedler's* first issue, and consequently imagine what questions a new edition might address today. The guest editors were selected for their engagement with the settlers' movement through research, or for their involvement and activism in projects and practices relevant for current debates on self-organization, cooperatives, or commoning in the city. Andreas Gautsch, Ernst Gruber, Michael Klein, Peter Krobath, Karin Lischke, Maria Mesner, Tina Wintersteiger and the members of the Spaces of Commoning research group all gathered in our office for an editorial meeting.

AK: Welcome to the editorial meeting of *Der Siedler*. The meeting will follow the typical structure of an editorial meeting and take place in two parts: we will start off with a critical reading of the last edition of the newspaper, the historical one from 1921, and will then proceed to collecting ideas and topics for the new edition from 2015. Let's start off with a quick round of introduction where everybody introduces themselves and names the editorial department they represent.

JW: My name is Julia, I'm an architect and I'm here today for the department of gardening.

Michael Klein: I'm Michi and I'm at home in the department of housing, today more precisely at the *Friedensstadt*.

Karin Lischke: I'm Karin, an architect and artist and I represent the association *Rasenna*.

Peter Krobath: I'm Peter, a freelance journalist and specialist for the *Rosenhügel*.



Fig. 9

Spaces of Commoning research group, *Der Siedler* editorial meeting, 2015

MH: I'm Moira and I'm in charge of the department, Miscellaneous.

SG: I'm Stefan and my responsibility today is the classified ads.

During the critique, each editor provided a summary and feedback on his or her assigned section, ranging from "Gardening in April" to the establishment of a "Settlers' Bank," or claims for the establishment of a "General Program of the Settlers' Movement." But the editors did not only find utopian qualities to the settlers' ideas. Some expressed concerns about how the authors prioritized hierarchical and efficient structures over the settlers' empowerment. Others were wary of the movement's antiurban sentiments: Doesn't the social control often inherent to rural life contradict the promise of urban emancipation, especially for women? Clearly, ideas of "living in nature" can also resonate with more conservative ideologies, even National Socialist ones, as made evident in the article entitled "Status and Character of the Austrian Settlers' Movement."

In the second part of the editorial meeting, we discussed the relevance of *Der Siedler* today, asking what topics and questions we would like to address in a contemporary edition. What can we learn from the historic newspaper for today's struggles of emancipatory and self-organizing movements? What

experiences and challenges are relevant one century later? And what aspects need to be reconsidered or radically revised? How can the projective mode of enacting an editorial meeting help us overcome mere criticality and instead engage in concrete utopias?

One point of discussion was the class dimension of the settlers' movement: To which extent did it address the most urgent housing needs of the working class, or was it rather a middle-class project with class-based exclusions?

Ernst Gruber: Before today I never thought of who the settlers actually were. I was just fascinated by the cooperative ideology and organizational form of guilds. But after reading the paper today more closely, I feel like it was primarily addressed to intellectuals and the bourgeoisie. Thus after reading *Der Siedler*, I feel like the settlement movement was probably less emancipatory than I had hoped.

JW: I can imagine writing an article about that today: the social exclusivity of contemporary cooperative housing. Maybe this article could be written in the style of the more hands-on, practical contributions to *Der Siedler* and include concrete advice on how to avoid such exclusive tendencies. I believe a lot of people in cooperative housing initiatives today are aware of mechanisms of exclusion.

MV: Knowing about it and wanting to act against it is not the same.

But can a settler's house rooted in the ideologies of the nuclear family ever inspire emancipatory powers? In fact, at the time of the settlers' movement, the notion of single-family homes was already subject to fierce criticism from the progressive Left as well as parts of the Social Democratic Party. Denser, multistory housing blocks with small individual flats and large communal spaces were generally seen as a more progressive kind of housing for the revolutionary working class.

When the editorial meeting ended, we felt the need to give our guest editors another chance to elaborate on the historical edition of *Der Siedler* as well as ideas for new fictional editions. Thus we asked them to propose articles they would like to write for an upcoming edition. Based on their ideas, we composed and collaged a fictional editorial letter of the settlers' newspaper one hundred years later.

Dear Readers,

It's been almost 100 years since *Der Siedler* first appeared. In some ways, it seems the basic conditions of the early 21st century aren't unlike the early 1900s when the settler movement appeared. Once again Vienna is growing due to the arrival of newcomers from all over the world. As with earlier, this has accelerated societal changes with all its implications: new potentials for development, a shortage of housing and employment, fear, insecurity, but also optimism. The settlers' vision for a democratic alternative to capitalism also seems to live on in an array of initiatives such as worker, consumer and housing cooperatives, community currencies, urban gardens, fair trade organizations, intentional communities and neighborhood self-help associations.

Meanwhile retrospection enables critical distance and requires us to use the reedition of *Der Siedler* as an opportunity to revisit the settlers' concerns. Beginning with the title, we would like a shift in focus to "un-settlement" and "resettlement." In light of the ongoing refugee movement, we hope *The Un-Settled* as the paper's new title will help to initiate debates on the uprootedness and fugitivity of current lives. Thus we aim to trace differences and parallels between the settler and the refugee movement – the search for housing, food, work and Lefebvre's "right to the city." But we cannot stop at renaming the paper. Thus we have carefully reconsidered the means of distribution and diffusing authorship and decided to relaunch *Der Siedler* as a zine that is easy to reproduce and share, physically and digitally. Furthermore, parts of the zine will be complemented by an online *Un-Settling-Wiki* that will spread authorship as widely as possible. We hope these multiple formats and outlets will allow us to weave a rhizomatic network of cooperation with likeminded yet diverse initiatives.

For the front of the paper, some of our new sections will tackle issues such as the colonial condition of settling and the promises and challenges of the cooperative structure today. Confronting the colonial dimension of the historic settler movement is long overdue. Indeed there has never been such thing as a blank site; settling always entails explicit or hidden displacement. But despite the fresh trauma of the war, massive migration and dispossession, the 1920s settlers seemed little concerned about the spirit of a new frontier, the implications of pioneers conquering the wild. The query on coloniality at large also ties into the present refugee crisis.

In our section on cooperatives today, we examine the timeliness of the settlers' original ideas. Their main goal was to create affordable, humane housing for people who were often unemployed but had the skills to build homes. The movement wanted to create space for a community striving for self-determination. But can today's cooperative accommodate the challenges of the early 21st century? If so, how? Amongst others, these questions are explored in a conversation between protagonists of the *Hauptverband für Siedlungswesen* (*1921) and the *Initiative für gemeinschaftliches Bauen und Wohnen* (*2009).

Despite many changes to the back section, we'll continue our favorite columns: the book review column and DIY tips for sustainable architecture. This month's review is of *Border as Method*. Or the *Multiplication of Labor* by Sandro Mezzadra and Brett Neilson from 2013. The review is a general reflection on the various border struggles in, around and also underneath the settler movement, and the lines drawn and redrawn in the search for a hands on solution to the crisis. As news you can use, we explain how to produce rammed earth bricks based on a 1919 instruction manual, recently retrieved from the basement of a settler house in Rosenhügel. For this edition we submitted a sample brick to a material performance testing agency and report our unlikely findings.

Fig. 10
Spaces of Commoning research group,
future editorial letter of *The Unsettled Newspaper*, 2021

Final Remarks

Looking back on the histories of Vienna's settlers' movement, we engaged in an interdisciplinary study of a movement where the making of a common and the making in common served as a guiding horizon. We walked into the past, tried to conjure gaps in memories, and reimagined everyday practices of commoning, from hands-on deforestation and self-help construction of houses to the redistribution of reproductive labor.

The movement's context, its put-to-practice aspirations and its ambivalent positions are what makes Vienna's settlers' movement an important historical milestone for understanding commoning today and its ideologically, sometimes deeply conflicted, applications in practice. The settlers' movement can be described as a movement for self-organized housing and is thus an important part of a yet to be built genealogy of alternatives to market and state-driven housing solutions. Yet its history is also a history of the delineation and subsequent occupation of "empty" land, and thus raises questions about a practice that resonates with the historic European position as a colonial power. Moreover, the settlers' movement provides the potential of a shared reconceptualization and rematerialization of space that points toward questions of spatial order and law. These considerations are crucial for practices of commoning. Last but not least, the settlers' movement offers a glimpse into a world where the separation of production, reproduction, and consumption has been routed, and thus serves as a starting point to engage with questions of the capitalist modes of production, reproductive labor, and gender.

These ambivalences and positions provided the conceptual-material basis for our interdisciplinary approach whose potential we identified, along the lines of Sara Ahmed, as "the failure to return texts, documents, and objects to their histories will do something."⁶ While our interdisciplinary approach, including artistic, sociological, urbanist, and everyday research practices, struggled with the parallel universes, in which each speaks and practices their own, hardly translatable languages, it was precisely the resonances between these diverse languages and practices that let us partake in several registers and let us speak a few languages at once. At best, it was in these resonances that we extended the frontiers of research—in our case, through the study of/as commoning with regard to the Vienna settlers' movement.

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Housing Commons between Redistribution and Self- Organization Vienna's Settlers' Movement Then and Now

Mara Verlič

Scattered over the outer districts of Vienna, we can still find houses from the 1920s settlers' movement today. They are small, their architecture is functional and modest. Their little fenced-garden atmosphere is conservative and slightly old-fashioned. Little does one suspect that the houses in these settlements are in fact the result of one of Vienna's most interesting housing movements. Born of an acute and fundamental crisis in housing in the early nineteenth century, the settlers' movement was built on self-organization, mutual help, and the production of alternatives to private property. But compared to the pride Vienna takes in its coeval large-scale social-housing buildings, the settlers' houses have received little notice. Top-down Red Vienna housing politics, also birthed in the interwar era, outdid the settlers' movement both in scale and redistributive effect with its building of more than sixty thousand public housing units. The famous Red Vienna housing projects still imbue parts of Vienna today with this specific socialist heritage, even as other parts of the city now move toward an incipient housing crisis. Meanwhile, current inhabitants of the settlers' houses struggle with affordability and the threat of privatization. This essay offers insight into the historical situation of the 1920s settlers' movement and traces the changes in housing politics that have since led to the decline in living conditions in the settlements today.

Housing Crisis, Red Vienna Politics, and the Settlers' Movement in 1920s Vienna

Like other European cities at the beginning of the twentieth century, Vienna too faced a massive housing crisis after the First World War. The developments that led to this substantial crisis were manifold: Vienna experienced rapid urban growth at the turn of the twentieth century. Between 1840 and 1918, Vienna's population grew from 440,000 to more than 2 million, mostly because as the capital of the Austro-Hungarian monarchy, it was thus the center for the proletarianization of rural people. The housing market was completely privatized;¹ there was no public housing program. Private building was unprofitable, however, as construction costs were high and the urban proletariat was only able to afford very low rents. The result was an extreme shortage of housing.² This meant overcrowding in apartments: in 1910³ there were 170,000 *Bettgeher_innen*.⁴ Furthermore, the quality of housing was rather low

1 See Peter Feldbauer, *Stadtwachstum und Wohnungsnot: Determinanten unzureichender Wohnungsversorgung in Wien 1848 bis 1914* (Vienna: Verlag für Geschichte und Politik, 1977).

2 See Rainer Bauböck, *Wohnungspolitik im sozialdemokratischen Wien 1919–1934* (Salzburg: Neugebauer, 1997).

for large swathes of the population: cheaply constructed *Bassena* housing⁵ with dark, small, and often unsanitary units.⁶ By the time the war ended, the economy had totally collapsed. The new republic was cut off from all essential supplies from the lands of the former monarchy, unemployment was massive, and food shortages in Vienna especially were severe.

Amid the massive postwar housing and food shortages, inhabitants of Vienna set out toward the city outskirts to find ways to survive in the woods and grasslands by cultivating land or building small sheds to live in. Not much is known about this early phase of the settlers' movement, as the movement was not yet centrally organized, and thus historical sources are scarce. Historical analyses, nevertheless, indicate that the actions of (at least some) of the settlers extended beyond sheer survival strategies, which raises the question of whether the settlers' movement intended to reinvent housing as a commons. But the idea of self-organization and self-determination in housing and (reproductive) work were central among early settlers. They relied on mutual help for constructing their houses. The decision of who would actually live in which house was often only made after construction of the entire settlement was finished.⁷

In the early 1920s, the city of Vienna also began officially addressing the massive housing crisis with large-scale interventions in the housing market and a public housing program enmeshed in the politics of Red Vienna. The Social Democratic Workers' Party (SDAP) politics of Red Vienna were based on the Austro-Marxist belief in revolution through reform,⁸ and the idea of educating workers to become socialists. Owing to this reformist approach, socialization mostly took place in the sphere of reproduction in the workers' leisure, cultural, and domestic lives.⁹ Administrative and tax reforms formed the basis of a cradle-to-grave public health and welfare system and an extensive workers' culture program. But the biggest intervention by far was the housing program of Red Vienna that affected the existing private market housing stock as well as being an outstanding municipal building project.

Political interventions in the private rental market to address the housing crisis consisted of two main measures in 1922.¹⁰ A Federal Rent Control Act decreased rents to a minimum and drastically increased affordability. The housing cost burden for Vienna's working-class households amounted to almost 15 percent of their average income before the war. After the war it decreased to only 2 percent.¹¹ Additionally the city passed an expropriation law to allow for the redistribution of unused or underused housing space. The centerpiece of Red Vienna's politics was the public housing program. Up until the Austrofascist coup in 1934, the city built a total of 64,000 housing units, translating to an 11 percent increase in housing resources in only fifteen years of governing.¹² A strongly redistributive taxation system and land acquisition by the city

formed the basis of the housing program. Red Vienna constructed housing mainly in the style of superblocks to indicate the (new) power of the proletariat, for example, the famous Karl-Marx-Hof. In general, administration of the new housing blocks was hierarchical and centralized with district and block supervisors overseeing standards of cleanliness and orderliness.¹³ The criteria for the allocation of housing furthermore shows that some people were favored while others were excluded from the program: the point system discriminated against non-Austrian citizens, non-Viennese residents, or people living in "disorderly" family structures.¹⁴ In line with the ideological foundations of Austro-Marxism of creating a "new human" to grow into socialism, Christoph Reinprecht, Claire Lévy-Vroelant, and Frank Wassenberg observe: "Social housing became a central tool not only for combating the housing-related misery of the working and popular classes in the aftermath of the First World War, but also more broadly for stimulating mass educational and moral reform."¹⁵

As Stefan Gruber writes in this publication, the relationship between the official politics of the city of Vienna and the settlers' movement was a complex one. The settlers fought for the city's financial support and the legalization of their squatted land. In the spirit of guild socialism, the settlers

3 See Peter Eigner, Herbert Matis Herbert, and Andreas Resch, "Sozialer Wohnbau in Wien: Eine historische Bestandsaufnahme," *Jahrbuch des Vereins für die Geschichte der Stadt Wien* 55 (1999): 49–100.

4 The term *Bettgeher_innen* refers to a very precarious kind of subletting where people rented only a bed during the time when the main tenant was at work.

5 The name *Bassena* ("water basin") housing indicates that the individual units had no access to running water but that water had to be taken from a shared basin in the public hallway of the building.

6 See Eve Blau, *The Architecture of Red Vienna 1919–1934* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1999).

7 See Klaus Novy and Wolfgang Förster, *Einfach bauen: Genossenschaftliche Selbsthilfe nach der Jahrhundertwende, zur Rekonstruktion der Wiener Siedlerbewegung* (Vienna: Picus, 1991).

8 See Otto Bauer, *Zwischen zwei Weltkriegen? Die Krise der Weltwirtschaft, der Demokratie und des Sozialismus* (Bratislava: Prager, 1936).

9 Rudolf Gerlich, *Die gescheiterte Alternative: Sozialisierung in Österreich*

nach dem ersten Weltkrieg (Vienna: Braumüller, 1980).

10 Interestingly, the measures concerning the private rental market were taken on a national level where the conservative Christian Socialists were the ruling party and not the SDAP, and they affected Vienna the most due to the city's large share of rental housing compared to the rest of the country.

11 Bauböck, *Wohnungspolitik*, 64.

12 See Hans Hautmann and Rudolf Hautmann, *Die Gemeindebauten des Roten Wien 1919–1934* (Vienna: Schönbrunn-Verlag, 1980).

13 Reinhard Sieder, "Housing Policy, Social Welfare, and Family Life in 'Red Vienna' 1919–34," *Oral History* 13, no. 2 (1985): 35–48.

14 See Blau, *Architecture of Red Vienna 1919–1934*.

15 Christoph Reinprecht, Claire Lévy-Vroelant, and Frank Wassenberg, "Learning from History: Changes and Path-dependancy in the Social Housing Sector in Austria, France and the Netherlands (1889–2008)," in *Social Housing in Europe II*, ed. Kathleen Scanlon et al. (London: LSE, 2008), 36.

founded associations and cooperatives that eventually came together under a national umbrella organization. As the bottom-up organization of the settlers consolidated, their public voice grew louder in forms of protests and publications. Finally, the city of Vienna recognized the importance of the movement. The city's support eventually led to the movement's fast-paced institutionalization and incorporation, which ended its self-organized character. In only a few months' time, the Austrian association of settlers and gardeners together with the city of Vienna and the federal government founded a cooperative provider for construction material (*Gesiba*), a construction guild (*Grundstein*), and a cooperative provider of affordable furniture (*Warentreuhand*). The city administration was now officially in charge of helping settlers find land, making loans from a newly established settlers' fund, and inspecting construction. The city also legalized the formerly squatted land of the settlers and gave the land to settlers' cooperatives through a special form of leasehold (*Bau-rechtvertrag*). Through the leaseholds, the land remained property of the city, while everything built on it was property of the cooperatives. Cooperatives paid an annual lease to the city that was turned over to the settlers as members of the cooperative via a user fee. Thus corresponding to their socialist ideas, institutionalization of the wild settlements into cooperative housing structures included the separation of use rights from property rights. Otto Neurath, an active participant in the settlers' movement, formulates the anti-private property ideal as follows: "Gardeners and settlers want to keep up solidarity among them and the whole entirety; they fight against all attempts to isolate the individual."¹⁶ But as the influence of *Gesiba* grew, housing construction and allocation changed: professional architects and planners were now in charge of building small single-family homes, and self-organization and mutual help among the settlers abated.¹⁷

Both the early settlers' movement and Red Vienna housing politics aimed at commoning housing, but in rather distinct ways. The city constructed housing on a large scale with a strong redistributive effect and aimed at providing housing for all as a common. The settlers pursued commoning of housing through self-organization and mutual help in planning and construction. While it seems likely that the settlers' movement created pressure on the ground, forcing the city to react to the housing crisis, the city's reaction in the form of a large-scale housing program also meant the institutionalization of the movement and thus the end of self-organization.

Changing Politics, Re-emerging Housing Crisis, and the Settlers' Movement in Vienna Today

Almost one hundred years after the wild beginnings of the settlers' movement, many of the houses still exist today. Yet Vienna faced a very different social, economic, and political situation at the end of the twentieth century: decades of post—Second World War welfare politics had kept substantial parts of the Red Vienna legacy alive, but political change began to set in in the 1980s and '90s.¹⁸ Up until today, the city mayor has belonged to the SPÖ (the former SDAP), but politics has changed nevertheless: "The end of Red Vienna consisted not of electoral defeats, but in the use of controlled modernization to empower business interests and abandon strategies of socializing the delivery of public services and democratizing the economy."¹⁹ In Vienna, the privatization of public administration, large-scale urban development projects in public-private partnerships and investment in real estate characterize urban politics today.²⁰ These social, economic, and political changes on the national and urban level have also translated to changes in the housing system. In the private rental market, the political measures have led to a re-commodification of housing. Two policy changes are characteristic here for attracting private capital to the market: a gradual deregulation of rent control on the national level and a public-private partnership model for renewal of the old housing stock in the city.²¹ Also, the public-housing sector—once the centerpiece of Red Vienna's political program—underwent fundamental changes. After decades of diminished construction activities, the city terminated the construction of public housing in 2004.²² In general, social housing building activities since the 1960s have shifted away from municipal public housing to a system of supply-side housing subsidies for nonprofit housing developers.²³ In addition to these changes in the private as well as the public housing segments, Vienna is growing at a fast pace: by 2025 Vienna will have more than two million residents—a number last reached in 1910. It is precisely an

16 Otto Neurath, *Gildensozialismus, Klassenkampf und Vollsozialisierung* (Dresden: Kaden & Comp, 1922), 25. Unless otherwise noted, all translations are my own.

17 Novy and Förster, *Einfach bauen*, 31.

18 Joachim Becker and Andreas Novy, "Divergence and Convergence of National and Local Regulation: The Case of Austria and Vienna," *European Urban and Regional Studies* 6, no. 2 (1999): 127–43.

19 Andreas Novy and Elisabeth Hammer, "Radical Innovation in the Era of Liberal Governance: The Case of Vienna," *European Urban and Regional Studies* 14, no. 3 (2007): 214.

20 Andreas Novy et al., "The End of Red Vienna: Recent Ruptures and Continuities in Urban Governance," *European Urban and Regional Studies* 8, no. 2 (2011): 131–44.

21 Justin Kadi and Mara Verlič, *Gentrification in Wien* (Vienna: Kammer für Arbeiter und Angestellte für Wien, 2015).

22 Only recently, the city announced to start building public housing again and that they are planning to build two thousand housing units in 2016.

23 Gerald Fröhlich, *Wohnbauförderung der Bundesländer: Ein Vergleich* (Vienna: Kammer für Arbeiter und Angestellte für Niederösterreich, 2012).

accessibility problem for the affordable segments of the housing market that characterizes Vienna today: long waiting lists and discriminatory criteria block access to public housing, while in the nonprofit sector, down payments pose a financial barrier to many. As a result, many low-income households must turn to the private rental market where high rents await them. Furthermore, tenant security is also under threat: an average of seven evictions take place in Vienna daily.²⁴ Meanwhile, political measures against alternative housing movements like political squatting or trailer parks are repressive. Dieter Schrage speaks of the city's carrot-and-stick approach, offering welfare and housing subsidies to some while repressing others.²⁵

I have conducted interviews with the chairwoman of the settlers' association Wolfersberg, Nora Roscher; the chairman of settler association Nordrandsiedlung, Gottfried Krause; a resident of the settlement Am Freihof and initiator of the protest group MGSSVÖ, Franz Xaver Ludwig; the representative from the settlement Am Rosenhügel to the nonprofit cooperative ah wohnen, Karl Sedlak; and the chief executive of the same cooperative, Heribert Thurner. About 6,500 units of the settlers' movement houses are spread out over the outskirts of the city. Of course not all of them are preserved in their original states. In some cases, the owners tore down the original houses completely and built modern houses instead, or they renovated and extended their formerly small houses. In interviews and meetings with people from the settler houses, the interviewees describe the current inhabitants of the houses as mostly direct descendants of the original settlers. People still refer to themselves as settlers and sometimes to the settlers from the 1920s as *Ursiedler*. The story of the settlement is thus often interwoven with the stories of the families, as in the examples of Nora Roscher and Franz-Xaver Ludwig:

My grandfather got the land here as a leasehold property from the city of Vienna before the First World War. And when the housing shortage became really pressing after the war, the city of Vienna imposed the obligation on the leaseholders to create housing on the land. But then the next war came. And after the war when my father came home from captivity, he found his apartment in Brigittenau bombed out. So he came to his father's land here, and because he was a carpenter he built the small wooden house that you can still see in the garden today. In 1950 I was born and soon the main house was built.²⁶

The settlers today are not the same settlers that once built the houses. No. They are their children and grandchildren and their housing needs have changed. Sixty square meters have become 120 or 150 square meters. Large amounts of money have been invested by the settlers with the plan of having something affordable to live in when one is older, and to hand something down to one's children and grandchildren.²⁷

The interviewees describe the inhabitants of the settlements today as mostly older people with limited financial resources. Roscher says: "The number of people earning a salary is constantly declining and the number people who receive minimum pensions is on the rise."²⁸

In general, there are two organizational forms in the settlements today that depend on the nature of the leasehold contract that the residents hold: the settlers are either part of a nonprofit cooperative that holds a collective leasehold for the whole settlement, or the settlers have agreed on individual leaseholds with the city of Vienna and have joined together in settlers' associations. In the settlement Wolfersberg as well as in the settlement Nordrandsiedlung, the settlers agreed on individual leaseholds and joined together in associations. In the beginning of the settlements, the associations were active in building streets and pavements, organizing construction and garden work. Today the associations mainly organize social activities, like garden parties and bus excursions. Roscher from the settlement Wolfersberg sees this development corresponding to a decline in self-help in construction work and gardening:

Here on the hill we live as in a village. Most of the people have known each other since first grade and have also married in crisscrosses. But the everyday life of the settlers' association has changed insofar as we don't need to spray fruit trees anymore, we don't need to kill off rats anymore, and we don't need anything else because we have everything: we have our sidewalks, we have our sewage, we have our streets. We don't need to fight for anything anymore. We just rest on our laurels now.²⁹

In other cases—for example, in the settlement Freihof—housing cooperatives founded in the interwar years have become large-scale nonprofit housing developers that administer the settlements. The manager of the cooperative ah-wohnen to which the settlement Am Rosenhügel also belongs says that today the cooperatives are strongly dedicated to idea of grassroots democracy.³⁰ He sees the participatory principles of the cooperative today living through a system of annual assemblies and elected delegates. Ludwig, resident of the settlement Freihof, which belongs to the cooperative Siedlungsunion, has a very different opinion of the democratic constitution of the cooperatives today. He claims that while historically, the members of the

24 Justin Kadi, "Die neue Wiener Wohnungsfrage: Delogierungen," in *Wer geht leer aus?*, ed. Willi Hejda et al. (Vienna: edition monochrom, 2015), 54–59.

25 Alice Hamdi and Willi Hejda, "Zuckerbrot und Peitsche: Ein Gespräch mit Dieter Schrage," in *ibid.*, 90–97.

26 Interview with Nora Roscher, Vienna, June 4, 2015.

27 Interview with Franz-Xaver Ludwig, Vienna, October 10, 2015.

28 *Ibid.*

29 Interview with Roscher.

30 Interview with Heribert Thurner, Vienna, June 15, 2015.

cooperative are also its owners, today the individual no longer has any say, and delegates make 99 percent of the decisions: “This is why we once placed a coffin in front of our cooperative’s building when we held a demonstration. To show that the cooperative is dying and that its founders would turn over in their graves if they saw it.”³¹

The major dispute sparking the distrust of many settlers in their cooperatives is a conflict over expiring leaseholds contracts. As mentioned above, those contracts gave the settlers ownership of their houses (either individually or via the cooperatives) without creating private property of land. Leasehold contracts from the interwar era are limited to eighty to ninety-nine years. When the first leaseholds expired in 2012, drastic developments threatened the settlers: the city administration (as landowner) demanded extreme increases in the annual leaseholds. The settlers condemned the increases, arguing that the increases would disavow all the work—performed by the settlers themselves or their ancestors—that had gone into building the houses and the settlement infrastructure. The city of Vienna presented those settlers who held individual leaseholds but were not part of a cooperative a choice: either buy the land their houses were built on or move out. A discount of 45 percent of the market prices was offered, but prices were nonetheless still very high. Many settlers are minimum wage earners or pensioners, and found it impossible to afford an increased leasehold rate, much less buy their houses, as stories from Krause and Ludwig show:

If you can’t pay, you can only move out. And if you are lucky, you have a contract where it says that you get 25 percent of the value of the house from the city of Vienna. But some people have other contracts where the law can force them to demolish their houses and give back the land cleaned up. Most of the people are over eighty. But you are also not automatically eligible for public housing. What are you supposed to do?³² Some people just couldn’t afford to pay. There was this one family, for example, who had unsuspectingly renewed their heating system and their windows just weeks before the leaseholds expired. So when they were given the choice to buy the land, the bank couldn’t allow them additional credit anymore.³³

In response to the expiring leaseholds, the settlers formed protest groups like MGSSVÖ, or the “Settlers defense association for tenants and members of cooperatives.” The group protested against increased leasehold rates and aimed at developing alternative models of extending the settlers’ leaseholds. So far, their actions have not been successful, as Ludwig describes: “And the city councilor said to me personally: ‘There is nothing left to discuss concerning the settlement Wolfersberg. Whoever can’t pay has to move out. In Vienna, thousands of people change apartments every year.’”³⁴ While many

of the inhabitants of the settlers’ movement houses still identify with the legacy of the settlers’ movement, the ideal of commoning housing doesn’t seem to be present anymore. Self-organization and mutual help is confined to special events of the settlers’ association and not present in everyday life. The original idea of separating use and property rights through leasehold contracts has become instead a situation in which low-income residents either face severe financial burdens, or the houses are privatized.

Epilogue

The story of the settlers’ movement indicates also more general characteristics of Vienna’s housing system in the interwar time and in the early twenty-first century. For the interwar era, the settlers’ movement is indicative of two major aspects. It shows how a housing crisis and potential housing commons movements interrelate. As we can see, the emergency situation in which so many people found themselves in sparked numerous ideas on how to reorganize housing, using both redistribution and self-organization. Furthermore, the history of the settlers’ movement shows how the redistributive politics of Red Vienna were connected to top-down planning and the institutionalization of social movements. But also for today’s housing situation, the settlers’ movement story is denunciatory: today we see how large-scale nonprofit-housing developers spawned from the settlers’ movement cooperatives. Moreover, we see how the interwar settlers’ houses have survived up until the present, but are now either facing drastic increases in their leasehold payments or are being privatized.

The story of the settlers’ movement leaves us with a pessimistic view of Vienna’s housing system under the perspective of housing commons. In the interwar era, Red Vienna politics had a strong redistributive effect but were clearly top-down, discouraging self-organization. Today Vienna’s housing system faces weakened redistributive measures in public housing as well as in the deregulated private market. However self-organization is also not encouraged as repressive policies show. In an outlook on possible future housing commons in the United Kingdom, Stuart Hodkinson remarks: “Producing housing commons, therefore, takes place at the apex of resistance and creation. In the very moment of struggle to defend the existing housing commons, we must seek to transform it along the principles of living-in-common wherever possible but *without weakening the protective shield that strategic housing commons provide.*”³⁵ The challenge for

31 Interview with Ludwig.

32 Interview with Gottfried Krause, Vienna, June 15, 2015.

33 Interview with Roscher.

34 Interview with Ludwig.

35 Stuart Hodkinson, “The Return of the Housing Question,” *ephemera* 12, no. 4 (2012): 439 (italics in original).

establishing housing commons might thus be to protect and enlarge redistribution of housing space, while at the same time allowing for its self-organization.

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Always Forward Hermann Neubacher and the Commons

Anette Baldauf, Maria Mesner,
and Mara Verlič



Fig. 11
Hermann Neubacher at the
opening of the Werkbund-
siedlung, Vienna, 1932



Fig. 12
Hermann Neubacher
discussing the plan
of Vienna, 1938



Fig. 13
Hermann Neubacher
pointing at Addis
Ababa's master plan,
1954

"All for all, with courage, strength and tenacious endurance, always forward: it's all or nothing," Hermann Neubacher wrote emphatically in the 1921 edition of the journal *Der Siedler*, published at the beginning of his long-winding career path.¹ This burning pathos—which closed his article on Gesiba, the *Gemeinwirtschaftliche Siedlungs- und Bauaktiengesellschaft*, which was

¹ Hermann Neubacher, "Zur Gründung der Gemeinwirtschaftlichen Siedlungs- und Baustoffanstalt," *Der Siedler* 7 (1921):

108. Unless otherwise noted, all translations by the authors.

founded in 1921 to support and administrate the settlers' movement in the city of Vienna—stands in stark contrast to the otherwise bureaucratic tone of his professional contributions. And yet it sheds light on the seemingly irreconcilable paths Neubacher navigated in his multifarious roles as director of Gesiba, to Vienna's first mayor after the Anschluss, Nazi Germany's emissary to Romania and then to Greece, and finally as the city consultant of Haile Selassie to Addis Ababa. Three black-and-white photographs, taken between 1932 and 1954, show Neubacher posing as an expert: surveying, calculating, and maximizing for the so-called common good. Commons is generally understood as a matter of sharing resources, however, does Neubacher's biography point to where commons veer into violence and genocide?

All for All ...

The first photograph (fig. 11) shows Neubacher at the 1932 opening of Vienna's Werkbundsiedlung housing settlement: Neubacher stands on a wooden pedestal, surrounded by what seems to be a construction site. He is giving a speech, looking calm and somewhat authoritarian; his hands rest on the railing. Neubacher's position is elevated above the crowd, everyone is formally dressed, important men are present. Someone in front of Neubacher holds a recording device. In the background, there are several houses. They look brand new and ostentatiously modern.

The internationally known Werkbundsiedlung is an example of modern architecture in Vienna. The original settlement consisted of seventy model houses designed by thirty-one architects, and typified a "new way of housing and living." The opening on June 4, 1932, attracted more than one hundred thousand visitors and extensive media coverage. In his opening speech, Neubacher praised the settlement for fulfilling the longing of "today's workers" for single-family houses with gardens. The Werkbundsiedlung had been built in collaboration with the nonprofit housing developer Gesiba—a partnership equally split between the city of Vienna, the Republic of Austria, and the Association of Settlers and Gardeners with the aim of supporting settlers—and the *Werkbund*, an association of Austrian architects, artists, and craftsmen responsible for the architectural design of the Werkbundsiedlung. For nearly a decade, Neubacher represented two key institutions of Vienna's housing politics, first as general director of Gesiba from 1924 to 1934, then as president of the Werkbund from 1928 to 1933.

The 1932 photograph of Neubacher at the Werkbundsiedlung opening already hints at contradictions in Neubacher's life, visible in the sundry and simultaneous connections of his person to housing politics from incongruous ideologies: as the director of Gesiba and someone closely linked to Red Vienna, Neubacher was clearly interested in the institutionalization of housing commons

in Vienna. Both the self-organized approach of the settlers' movement and Red Vienna's redistributive politics asserted a strong "we" in commoning housing. But after 1938, this "we" meant the exclusion and extinction of others. This shift disavows Neubacher's "all for all" claim in interwar Vienna; it also casts doubt on his role in 1950s Addis Ababa. A primal tension emerges between commons understood as a means of emancipatory empowerment, and "common goods" used as an instrument of exclusionary appropriation.

As a diverse and fragmented meeting of multiple actors and experimentation, Vienna's settlers' movement was a direct response to spiking housing and food shortages after the First World War. From their overcrowded, low-quality housing, people began setting out for city outskirts: some to collect wood, some to forage for wild edibles, some to stake land for cultivating vegetables and fruit, some to erect huts for shelter. In this early phase, the movement was based on self-organization and mutual help, and on creating a housing space beyond a state-led administration and the market. As such, the early settlers' movement was an attempt at commoning housing.

The city of Vienna also responded to the housing crisis. After the Social Democratic Workers' Party (SDAP) gained a clear majority in the 1920 elections, the party implemented the policies of what is now referred to as Red Vienna. On the back of a massive tax reform, Red Vienna policies reorganized the city's bureaucratic apparatus and introduced a public health program, a workers' culture initiative and—most of all—a public-housing program. The housing program included the construction of sixty thousand social-housing units over the course of ten years. "The *Gemeindebau* became the nexus of Red Vienna's institutions and the spatial embodiment of its communitarian and pedagogic ideals."² The housing program aimed at redistribution. Its goal was to provide good quality and healthy housing for *all* urban inhabitants. While housing was created for huge numbers of those in need and mostly shielded from market forces, the approach was clearly top-down, lacking any elements of self-organization by the people. The idea of commoning housing through redistribution in Red Vienna starkly contrasts with the self-determined building and housing of the settlers' movement.

While Neubacher himself was not part of the early settlers' movement, he was close to the SDAP and the Red Vienna city administration. These connections eventually paved his way to the public agency Gesiba,³ founded to serve as a hinge between Red Vienna housing politics and the settlers' movement.

² Eve Blau, *The Architecture of Red Vienna 1919–1934* (Cambridge, MA: MIT, 1999), 45.

³ Thomas Mayer, "Hermann Neubacher: Karriere eines Südosteuropa-Experten,"

in *Mitteleuropa und Südosteuropa als Planungsraum*, ed. Carola Sachse (Göttingen: Wallstein, 2010), 241–61.

It aimed at allocating the settlers with cheap construction materials and general assistance in planning and building. In 1924, when Neubacher was appointed Gesiba's general director, the agency had already expanded into the timber and construction material industries; after 1924 it also acted as a nonprofit housing developer for the construction of single-family homes.⁴ Municipal support for the settlers thus spurred the institutionalization of the movement and its incorporation into the city's official top-down housing program. It was Neubacher's task to administer the movement according to the ideas of efficiency, rationalization, and modernization; it is to his merit that the vision of self-determined housing commons could be absorbed by an administrative apparatus.

But while Gesiba aimed at the institutionalization and incorporation of the settlers' movement into official Red Vienna politics, the movement itself was not approved by all SDAP members. In fact, other socialist thinkers criticized single-family homes for the working class: they might foster bourgeois nuclear family structures.⁵ A pamphlet published on Gesiba's tenth anniversary provides insights into the ideological undertones of the debates because "The World War showed the German race the importance of a new and improved connection to land and it reasserted the improvement of homes. The settlement helped the housing and food crisis and as a deliberate cultural asset the settlement also became a social mass movement. With the aim of providing single-family homes for the masses, Gesiba is the chosen advocate of the settlers—a movement for improving the race."⁶

Neubacher's position on the settlers' movement ideology is not documented; his writing on Gesiba in *Der Siedler* is suspiciously silent on ideological motifs. But seventeen years later, his first programmatic speech as mayor of Vienna dripped with ideological references: "We are going to administrate this German city Vienna on the basis of National Socialism, and we will initiate an undreamt of booming, a booming [...] and design on top of which the highest, incomparable foreman will be our führer of the German people and of the *Großdeutsche Reich* with his truly royal building ethos."⁷ Red Vienna introduced sixty thousand apartments—the same number of apartments aryanized in Vienna during the Nazi regime. As mayor, Neubacher remained committed to the *Werkbund-siedlung*: after his appointment he called for the city to purchase unsold homes and the settlement's repainting. Soon afterward, twenty of the seventy houses fell victim to Aryanization.

... With Courage, Strength, and Tenacious Endurance ...

The second photograph (fig. 12), taken in 1938, shows Neubacher with a group of men in suits or uniforms, among them the German Nazi Minister of Interior in front of a table. Neubacher's body and his head are bent over

the map before them. Neubacher's left hand rests flatly on the map, the index finger of his right hand either points to one site or traces a line. As in the previous photograph, Neubacher is dressed in a gray suit but now a swastika armband emblazons the left sleeve of his jacket.

What can we tell, speculate, or fantasize about the trajectory between these two pictures? The two roles of Neubacher: first as a leading functionary in a political project aiming at progress and modernization, then as Vienna's National Socialist mayor a few years later. How can we map a mental geography that unites both roles—apparently contradictory from the vantage of the twenty-first century—in a single person? While Neubacher was involved in urban planning in Vienna, he participated prominently in social democratic networks, befriending high-ranking social democrats, with and without Jewish origin. At the same time, he was an activist in the *anschluss* movement in the second half of the twenties, which favored Austria's union with Germany. This involvement was an important motive in his mayoral appointment, apart from his close personal relations with *NS-Reichsstatthalter* Arthur Seyss-Inquart, whom Neubacher could also claim as a long-standing friend.

How can we imagine Neubacher's path to a leading Austrian National Socialist? From the limited data available, it seems likely that Neubacher came from a family of German nationalists. The young Hermann did what was expected of children with his background and upbringing: the university he attended was a stronghold of nationalist students.⁸ Neubacher was a member of the *Akademische Turnverein* (Academic gymnastics club), one of many moderate to radical and violent associations, fraternities, and political parties that made up the German nationalist milieu of the time.

The *anschluss* of Austria to Germany was the paramount goal of the German National movement in Austria's First Republic. The belief that Austria's inclusion in a larger Germany could solve the First Republic's serious economic problems was popular in 1920s Austrian politics. The *anschluss* had been banned by the peace treaties after the First World War. Neubacher was a member of several pro-*anschluss* associations: soon after the First World War, Neubacher

4 Franz Klar, *Gesiba: Eine Wohnbauphilosophie* (Vienna: Gesiba, 1981).

5 Klaus Novy and Wolfgang Förster, *Einfach bauen: Genossenschaftliche Selbsthilfe nach der Jahrhundertwende; Zur Rekonstruktion der Wiener Siedlerbewegung* (Vienna: Picus, 1991).

6 Philipp Knab, *10 Jahre Gesiba* (Vienna: Gesiba, 1932), 8.

7 *Die Begrüßung des Führers durch den Bürgermeister der Stadt Wien, Dr.-Ing.*

Hermann Neubacher [und dessen Erwiderung] (Vienna: Reißer, 1938), 1.

8 Joël Adami and Fabian Frommelt, "Der Nationalsozialistische Deutsche Studentenbund an der Hochschule für Bodenkultur," in *Österreichische Hochschulen im 20. Jahrhundert: Austrofaschismus, Nationalsozialismus und die Folgen* (Vienna: WUV, 2013), 85–101.

joined—together with his close friend Arthur Seyss-Inquart, who was to play a major role in the German annexation of Austria in 1938—a group called Deutsche Gemeinschaft, who indulged in middle-class anti-Semitism and the fight against the Red Scare.⁹ Unlike his companion, Neubacher was probably not an active member, but he also didn't bother leaving the organization until its demise in the early 1930s. In 1925, however, Neubacher founded another pro-anschluss association, the Österreichisch-Deutscher Volksbund, which seemed more to his tastes: a nonpartisan mass organization campaigning widely for a union between Germany and Austria and the lift of the international ban. Representatives of all major political parties served on its board, among them leading Social Democrats like Otto Bauer and Karl Renner as well as outstanding liberal economic experts like Gustav Stolper and Seyss-Inquart, the Volksbund's treasurer. In the years to come, Neubacher was very active within the Volksbund. He became its president and even established its headquarters in his Gesiba office. Obviously, his employer did not object to his pro-anschluss activism at that time; a pan-German attitude and social democratic reform politics did not yet seem irreconcilable before the National Socialist Party took power in Germany in 1933.

Fissures appeared in the early 1930s. After the elections of April 1932, the NSDAP (Nazi) party presented itself as a political option to hitherto skeptical supporters of the anschluss, and when the Hague court decided in September 1931 that a *Zollunion* (customs union) between the German Reich and Austria infringed upon international law, more moderate anschluss supporters, including Neubacher, saw a dead end. Around the same time, Neubacher started to pursue more aggressive tactics in his anschluss activities. He joined the Styrian Heimatschutz, a militant antirepublican, pan-German right-wing group, and became "intimately involved" in Nazi politics, which led to the anschluss in 1938 and, as another consequence, his nomination as the mayor of Vienna.¹¹

Neubacher was obviously interested in social reform; he himself cited Ebenezer Howard's idea of the garden city as an important influence.¹¹ He wanted a "modern" bright future for his *Volk*. He imagined a community for the "nation," a community based on national criteria of inclusion and exclusion. However, between Neubacher's days as director of Gesiba and when he became mayor of Vienna, his take on the nation had changed at least in two aspects: First, people of Jewish origin were strictly excluded. Second, democratic procedures were abolished from German national politics.

Referring to the democratic attitudes of decision-making, Harry Ritter calls Neubacher's attitude toward republicanism during the 1920s "neutral."¹² He believed in experts' allegedly objective wisdom, not in the power of mass participation in decision-making or the political negotiation of conflicting

interests. We can assume that he did not mind exactly how and by which procedures the experts' truth and the projects growing from it were put into effect for a common good—that is, a common good based on authoritative orders, not collective decisions.

Tracing down the group of people Neubacher imagined for his project of commoning, his first move as the new mayor offers important hints. By March 1938, Neubacher began referring to his pre-Nazi work in housing reform and modernization to address and win over his former social democratic constituents. He immediately started "Aktion Neubacher,"¹³ a campaign to reemploy former Social Democrats dismissed by the Austrofascists from 1934 and onward. Neubacher also announced plans to build one hundred thousand low-rent apartments to provide living spaces for Viennese workers, a scale that outrivals Red Vienna policies. Workers clearly belonged in his version of commoning. In plain contrast to the 1920s, racist delineations of inclusion and exclusion had become important by 1938. In scrutinizing the mortal exclusion of people of alleged Jewish origin from Neubacher's project of commoning, a sharp rupture is obvious. On the one hand, the available research shows no traces of activism or even attention anti-Semitism before 1934, when he left public office. He had Jewish friends, he socialized with Jewish intellectuals and artists. On the other hand, there is also no sign that Neubacher had any misgivings when he closely witnessed the expropriation, expulsion, and extinction of the Jewish population in Vienna as mayor. On the contrary, his plans for Vienna heavily relied on all three: Leopoldstadt, Vienna's second district where most of its 180,000 Jewish citizens lived, was designated for destruction according to a gigantomantic master plan.¹⁴ The district had been mostly settled by poor, Jewish immigrants from the eastern part of the monarchy. Narrow, windy streets, crowded small apartments with little daylight and appalling hygienic conditions were typical. Nazi plans for Vienna envisioned a modern, German city with an imperialist gate to the East to bring Vienna closer to the Danube, wide and long avenues suitable for military parades, huge squares for mass Nazi gatherings and the deployment of troops, and the leveling of narrow streets with a sobering grid.

More powerful National Socialist competitors and the outbreak of the war hindered the realization of Neubacher's 1938 plans. The demolition of Leopoldstadt did not take place (until the bombs of the Second World War

9 Harry Ritter, "Hermann Neubacher and Austrian Anschluss Movement 1918–40," *Central European History* 8, no. 4 (1975): 350.

10 *Ibid.*, 360.

11 *Ibid.*, 352.

12 *Ibid.*, 349.

13 Gerhard Botz, *Nationalsozialismus in Wien: Machtübernahme, Herrschaftssicherung, Radikalisierung, 1938/1939* (Vienna: Madelbaum, 2008), 271.

14 Helmut Weihsmann, *Bauen unterm Hakenkreuz: Architektur des Untergangs* (Vienna: Promedia, 1998), 1021.

hit); neither were one hundred thousand low-rent apartments built. One of the few projects Neubacher succeeded in realizing was the creation of “Greater Vienna.” The second black-and-white photo from 1938 (fig. 12) seems to show Neubacher with the correlating city map. By annexing nearly one hundred smaller, surrounding counties, Vienna grew to more than 400 percent of its former area. Perhaps Neubacher imagined that this would bring Vienna closer to the garden city he imagined in the 1920s. In July 1938, during the groundbreaking ceremony for the Lockerwiese, one of a few settlements the National Socialists built, Neubacher explicitly referred to his past involvement with the settlers: as “a man, who had been involved with the settlement for so many years,” Neubacher now promised to do everything within his powers to create single-family houses for merry, healthy children to grow up in, and for his *Volksgenossen* to live in.¹⁵

... It’s All or Nothing ...

The third photograph (fig. 13) also depicts Neubacher in front of a city map. He’s again dressed in a gray suit; his pose is one of casual authority. His left hand rests in the pockets of his pants, and his right hand, again, points at a map in front of him, his index finger on the map. The header of the map reads “Addis Ababa.”

The picture was taken in 1954, less than two years after Neubacher’s untimely release from a Serbian labor camp. In August 1951, the Yugoslavian military court had sentenced Neubacher to twenty years of forced labor. Only months after the verdict, he was released. (The details of the bargain remain unknown though Julius Deutsch claims to have galvanized efforts to free him.) In looking at the photograph, what could Neubacher be possibly pointing out on the map of Addis Ababa?

Neubacher arrived in Addis Ababa on March 12, 1954. According to his own account, His Majesty Haile Selassie I, Emperor of Ethiopia, invited him to advise on the modernization of Ethiopia’s capital. The modernization that Selassie envisioned was deeply rooted in colonial ideas, which relegated non-Western societies as backward and modernization as the adaptation of Western values and institutions.¹⁶ For two and a half years, Neubacher worked as an adviser and commissioner for administration for the city of Addis Ababa, as well as an adviser to the Ministry of Interior Affairs.

Sixteen years elapse between the first and the second photographs, time that Neubacher dedicated as Hitler’s emissary to organizing the economic exploitation of Bulgaria in favor of the Nazi German war machine. From Bulgaria he was sent to Greece. His mandate was to bring economic stability to Greece,

which then suffered inflation owing to war costs. To achieve his goal, he evidently took advantage of Jewish property looted in Greece,¹⁷ and was therefore intimately involved in the detention and expropriation of about sixty thousand people of Jewish origin, who were then transported to the German extermination camps. Between 1938 and 1945, Neubacher was indisputably involved in Nazi warfare, slaughter, and genocide, most of which were executed based on well-crafted maps.

Neubacher was released from the labor camp in 1952. Back in Austria, he wrote the book *Sonderauftrag Südost*, where he tried to position himself as a hardworking soldier, who had done nothing more or less than serve his home country. In the book’s prologue, he recalls “the dark hardship” during the years of imprisonment. He concludes with, “I do not hate anybody. Life begins always again tomorrow,” and signs off with the date, July 1953.¹⁸

Following modern chronopolitics, Neubacher seemingly went to Addis Ababa, a city he saw caught up in the past, to invigorate his life with a presence that promised a new future. His book *Die Festung der Löwen: Äthiopien von Salomon bis zur Gegenwart* is a celebration of Ethiopian people, history, and culture;¹⁹ it reproduces the conventions of Ethiopian exceptionalism, asserting Ethiopia’s Christianity and its victory over Italy in the battle of Adwa. Working for, or on, what he possibly considered the Aryans of Africa, Neubacher perhaps saw Addis Ababa as his chance to realize the ambition he once had for the city of Vienna—to move a city into the future.

There is little evidence on what Neubacher actually did in Addis Ababa. We asked some Ethiopian thinkers to speculate with us on Neubacher’s role and impact on the city, and as we pursued a series of leads, both speculative and empirical, we explored the connection between Neubacher’s vision and today’s governmental master plan for Addis Ababa. Soon after his arrival in 1954, Neubacher convinced Selassie to commission the British city planner Patrick Abercrombie, then known for his efforts to frame urban planning in scientific terms, to develop a new master plan for Addis Ababa. Hans Jenny, another émigré to Ethiopia, recalls Neubacher sitting in his office in front of a

15 Ingeburg Weinberger, “Siedlungs- und Wohnungsbau in Groß-Wien,” in *Wien: Die Perle des Reiches. Pläne für Hitler*, ed. Architekturzentrum Wien (Vienna: Park Books, 2015), 67–83.

16 Kebede Messay, “The Roots and Fallouts of Haile Selassie’s Educational Policy,” *UNESCO Forum Occasional Paper Series* 10 (2006).

17 Götz Aly, *Hitlers Volksstaat: Raub, Rassenkrieg und nationaler Sozialismus*

(Frankfurt am Main: Fischer Verlag, 2006), 248.

18 Hermann Neubacher, *Sonderauftrag Südost 1940–45: Bericht eines fliegenden Diplomaten* (Göttingen: Musterschmidt, 1956), 11.

19 Hermann Neubacher, *Die Festung der Löwen. Äthiopien von Salomon bis zur Gegenwart* (Olten und Freiburg im Breisgau: Walter-Verlag, 1959).

city map and enthusiastically praising the modernization now in sight: "At the center of the Haile Selassie Avenue and the Churchill Road we are going to establish a modern business quarter. On its east end [...] we will introduce a modern boulevard housing the government quarter and all its ministries. We will move the ambassadors' quarter further away and into the woods. We will preserve the market in the west and introduce the cultural center between the post office and the train station."²⁰

Jenny also recalled Neubacher's appraisal of the city's "unhindered" planning power. He appreciated that large-scale interventions could be pursued independent of expert commissions, government representatives, and any costs to individuals: if the extension of a street required the removal of old homes, notification would arrive a few days ahead of the destruction.²¹ What links the photographs of 1938 and 1954 might not only reside in Neubacher's persona as a bureaucrat and expert in financial efficiency and modernization, but also the scale of violence that he was willing to inflict upon the lives of others in order to achieve his grand goals. When the 1954 photograph was taken of Neubacher in front of the Addis Ababa map, did Neubacher remember the different maps he had touched before? Did he remember?

Abercrombie's master plan for Addis Ababa proposed radical restructuring and massive expansion. Both ambitions relied on dispossession. When in the late nineteenth century, Emperor Menelik ceased to move his royal entourage around, he chose to settle at a place known as Finefinne and called it Addis Ababa. Addis Ababa city was and still is built on land that is part of the Oromo nation. As the Oromo people have been marginalized by various political regimes, the people living in what became known as Addis Ababa perceived the founding of the capital as politics of erasure.²² When in 1954, Neubacher looked at the city map of Addis Ababa, he most likely saw the black contours of previous developments instigated by Menelik and Selassie, as well as unidentified grayness and undeveloped land, in other words, the land of the Oromo nation. Abercrombie's plan, for example, to move the ambassadors' quarters into the forest relied on the destruction of houses and the appropriation of common woods. Looking at the map of Addis Ababa, did Neubacher see people who would soon be deprived of their homes and means of survival? What he saw, most likely, was the potential for modernization.

The ambassadors' residences were built on the outskirts of the city, and in many instances the Oromo population countered the invasion with a gesture of subtle resistance: they embedded the villas in an expansive landscape of "moon houses"—houses that become legal when erected in one single night. But the conflict established at the roots of Addis Ababa's foundation and aggravated by experts like Neubacher continued to erupt over the course of the city's continuous expansion. In 2014 the government introduced a new five-

year master plan. It also announced the incorporation of Oromo towns into Addis Ababa's territory. According to Human Rights Watch, by the end 2015 the army and special forces shot at least two hundred people, many of them from the Oromo nation demonstrating against the appropriation of houses, farmland, and taxes.²³ Still refusing to openly discuss the conflict, the government finally put the master-plan project on hold in early 2016.

In the 1938 photograph of Neubacher, the sleeve of his left arm clearly shows his ideology. The swastika makes explicit his place of enunciation. In the 1954 photograph, Neubacher's left arm is conveniently outside the frame. What sign would mark his left sleeve if Neubacher's political alignments were made visible? Surveilling from a bird's-eye perspective, organizing, calculating, and maximizing to move the city forward—were these the technologies Neubacher brought to Addis Ababa? In England, the settlers' movement strongly identified with social reform; critics position the movement at the intersection of the two powerful discourses shaping the nineteenth century: the social and the colonial.²⁴ In the midst of the colonization of "darkest Africa" (i.e., the so-called outer colonization), the settlers' movement was framed as a project of inner colonization, that is, the colonization of "darkest England."²⁵ Inner and outer colonization were linked by predefined relations and frozen hierarchies, both aiming at submission and conversion. Theorists like Walter D. Mignolo, Arturo Escobar, Ramon Grosfoguel, Linda Tuhiwai Smith, and many others have all traced the intimate link between Europe's modernity and coloniality: "'Modernity' is a European narrative that hides its darker side, 'coloniality.' Coloniality, in other words, is constitutive of modernity—there is no modernity without coloniality," Mignolo famously argues.²⁶ Neubacher's biography captures a series of moments when the drives of modernization, development, and colonization collapse into one indistinguishable force. These are also the moments when the quest for the common good coincides with a destructive quest for submission, exclusion, and expulsion.

20 Hans Jenny, *Äthiopien: Land im Aufbruch* (Stuttgart: Deutsche Verlags-Anstalt 1957), 236.

21 Ibid.

22 Shimelis Bensa Gulema, "City as Nation: Imagining and Practicing Addis Ababa as a Modern and National Space," *Northeast African Studies* 13, no. 1 (2013): 168.

23 Human Rights Watch, "Ethiopia: No Let Up in Crackdown on Protests," February 21, 2016, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2016/02/21/ethiopia-no-let-crackdown-protests>.

24 Alexa Geisthövel, Ute Siebert, and Sonja Finkbbeiner, "Menschenfieber: Über die

Parallelen von innerer und äußerer Mission um 1900," in *Wer in den Osten geht, geht in ein anderes Land: Die Settlementbewegung in Berlin zwischen Kaiserreich und Weimarer Republik*, ed. Rolf Lindner (Berlin: Akademie, 1996): 7–47.

25 Heidi Niederkofler, "Wiener Settlement" (unpublished manuscript, 2015).

26 Walter D. Mignolo, "Coloniality: The Darker Side of Modernity," in *Modernologies: Contemporary Artists Researching Modernity and Modernism*, ed. Sabine Breitwieser (Barcelona: MACBA, 2009), 39.

Epilogue

In 1956 Neubacher returned to Austria, supposedly frustrated with Selassie's autocratic ways of making decisions. Only two years later he found his way back into Austrian politics: The newly formed Austrian Airlines appointed him as the company's financial adviser, but had to renounce the hiring due to the protest of Jewish organizations. He was also active in the Austrian Freedom Party (FPÖ), and when Anton Reinthaller, former SS Gauamtsleiter and Brigadeführer, finished his first term as the head of the party, Neubacher offered his candidacy, but lost the internal election against Friedrich Peter, former member of the 10th regiment of the 1st SS Infantry Brigade. In 1960 Neubacher died at the age of sixty-seven. In 2006, Marcus J. Carney made the documentary film, *The End of the Neubacher Project* (Austria/Netherlands, 2006, 74 min.), within which Neubacher's grandnephew tries to come to terms with his family's Nazi past, its entanglement and deep level of denial.

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Study as Commoning Wage Labor and Reproductive Labor

A conversation composed of fragments from collective writings, e-mails, and discussions.

A: We find ourselves as a group of eight members: one senior researcher who receives no salary from the project money, but receives a full salary from the larger institution; one senior researcher who receives a half-salary from the project and another half-salary from the larger institution for half of the project-run time; four pre-doc researchers who receive half-salaries from the project, none of them receiving additional salaries from the larger institution; one pre-doc researcher receiving no salary from the project but a full salary from the larger institution; one pre-doc researcher who receives no salary from the project but receives a half-salary from the larger institution for half of the project time.

GG: The iceberg image is one way of illustrating that what is usually regarded as “the economy”—wage labor, market exchange of commodities, and capitalist enterprise—comprises but a small subset of the activities by which we produce, exchange, and distribute values.

B: It is not commoning if it doesn't hurt.

C: How much money should I give to my fellow commoners to feel good about the pain? As we attempt to address the economic conditions and inequalities of our study in common, wage labor matters, but should we not also take into account the many other exchanges and currencies at play in our collaboration?

D: It is exactly the different situatedness of the members of a group seems to be basis from which a process of commoning can start; we cannot ignore our differences, our privileges, and our experiences of discrimination. How can we start this conversation?

E: It seems to be too complex. This might be too much work. Let's not research them. But researching would dismantle them, no? Or is it too self-referential?

F: For Silvia Federici, as I understand it, there is no commoning without reproductive labor. Federici concluded her answer to my question by pointing at the unsustainability of social movements if they don't include cooperation and reproduction. Only self-reproducing movements are able to have a continuity (and thus agency)—meaning taking care of each other and responsibilities of each other's lives.

G: But meanwhile, I am finding strong resonance and maybe even a sense of hope in searching agency within (oppressive) situations of maintenance and reproductive labor.

SF: The first lesson we can gain from these struggles is that the “commoning” of the material means of reproduction is the primary mechanism by which a collective interest and mutual bonds are created.

SH: You simply struggle to be able try to arrange your lives together in such a way that you can spend the time you need to be together, to consider ideas and work together, and to try to affect some kind of experiment or transformation in the way that we approach knowledge together and the ways in which we try to transform a relationship of strictly teaching and learning into one of some kind of collective study.

H: I just cleaned up our space (again) from moldy, half-drunk Starbucks cups, half-eaten rice waffles, and more ... After a week of working here please clean up after yourself. (Yes, this is a call to order, but please don't quote me in the study text). Best and looking forward to next week!

Members of the Spaces of Commoning research group (A, B, C, D, E, F, G, H) with J. K. Gibson-Graham (GG), Silvia Federici (SF), and Stefano Harney (SH).

A Great Source of Teaching for All of Us

Silvia Federici in Conversation with Aluminé Cabrera

In June 2014 Silvia Federici joined the “International Summer School: Commoning the City,” organized by the Spaces of Commoning research team at the Academy of Fine Arts Vienna. Together we explored the role of reproductive labor in commoning practices with regard to the division between waged and unwaged work as well as the global division of labor. Federici’s input recalled the inspiration of commoning initiatives fostered by feminist movements in Latin America and the great source of teaching that she found in Zapatismo. When Federici visited San Cristóbal de las Casas, Mexico, in 2015, Aluminé Cabrera talked with her on the relationship between the commons, social reproduction, and feminism. The following interview was originally published in *Marcha* and *The Dawn*.¹

Aluminé Cabrera: Taking into account that you travel a lot, how do your presentations vary, if they vary, according to the country you are visiting?

Silvia Federici: When I arrive in Mexico, or in any other country of Latin America, I find myself in a peculiar situation: since the ‘90s, Latin American social movements in general and the Zapatista Army of National Liberation (EZLN) in particular have influenced my work, my thoughts, and my activism. For me coming to Mexico means, above all, returning to a place where I learn. What has inspired me most is the way women have organized themselves, the efforts they have made to create new, autonomous relationships of reproduction. This is now a central point of my work and of my political interest.

AC: In this regard, what do you think of Zapatismo and women’s work there?

SF: Since the ‘90s, Zapatismo has been a great source of teaching for all of us, and what I have learned in the last years, above all, has been the role that women had in giving Zapatismo a political direction. Before the uprising of 1994, many women had already gotten together and left their homes to live collectively in the mountains. These women slowly gave shape to the political project within Zapatismo, and this is how within the EZLN the Revolutionary Law of Women was approved. For me, that was a great learning experience. During this trip I had the opportunity to visit a *caracol*,²

¹ This interview was first published in Spanish in *Marcha* on November 20, 2015; <http://www.marcha.org.ar/silvia-federici-los-movimientos-sociales-latinoamericanos-han-influenciado-mi-trabajo-mi-pensamiento-y-mi-practica>. It was translated into English and published in *The Dawn* on January 25, 2016; <http://www.thedawn-news.org/2016/01/25>

[/silvia-federici-latin-american-social-movements-have-influenced-my-work-my-thinking-and-my-activism/](#). It has been revised for this publication.
² *Caracol* in Spanish literally means “snail.” It refers to the regional units of the EZLN (Ejército Zapatista de Liberación Nacional) that provide the grassroots elements of the larger movement.

and I talked extensively with a woman, who knew the Zapatista movement very well. She told me that before Zapatismo in many rural communities when, for example, women ate they were not allowed to look at the men, they had to eat with their backs turned at them. On a physical level this is a very serious discrimination, treating women as if they were a different species. Nowadays, many women are promoters of health and education. This is the real revolution.

AC: Before coming here to San Cristóbal, you went to Puebla and visited the Congreso de Comunalidad, a conference on the commons. What did you think of that experience?

SF: It was a very good experience for me and also for the others; it was a historic meeting that introduced a new type of political discourse. The concept of the commons has different forms around the world: it brings together the past and the present, and it combines several movements, including feminism, ecologism, urban, and rural movements. It becomes increasingly apparent that without a reconstruction of a common fabric, without the creation of a society based on cooperation, there is no way of exiting the catastrophe of neoliberalism and of capitalism. It is a catastrophe that for more than five hundred years has been drowning us in poverty and war.

AC: Of the many places that you have visited in Latin America, where did you find the making of commons as a way to advance against the capitalist model?

SF: The encounter with women of the popular fronts has impressed me greatly but I have also learned a lot from the women of the slums in Argentina, most of all one particular slum that I visited in Buenos Aires, the so-called Villa 31-bis, in the neighborhood of Retiro. There women told me their story and showed me the structures of reproduction that they have created, including community kitchens and women's shelters. They are fighters who have had the ability to politicize each moment of their lives, to get together and recreate a world of new relationships, relationships autonomous from the state. Throughout all these years, they have struggled and negotiated with the state but only to obtain resources, supplies, and materials to build their neighborhood without allowing the state to organize their lives. This is very important because we can't completely forego the state since it continues to hold a great part of the social wealth. I greatly admire the Zapatistas for their effort to build something without any type of negotiation with the state. However, many people find it extremely difficult to use that strategy. I know that these types of experiences of collective domestic work, of commu-

nity kitchens, are not new in Latin America; they are experiences that began in the '70s and in Argentina they have intensified in 2000 and 2001. As Verónica Gago and Natalia Quiroga Díaz wrote, when the monetary economy failed in Argentina, another economy took its place, one that had been invisible until then.³ It was an informal economy, the economy of reproduction of the *piquetero* women who brought their cooking pots to the demonstrations and who had the ability to continue the reproduction of life. It is clear that these movements are scarce because they are threatened by capitalist relations; they have internal contradictions and they are also harassed. But they have the great ability to come up with new forms of interventions, which are independent of the state and outside of the market, outside of capitalism. To me these moments provide a great contribution and even though they might be quickly absorbed they have the power of a historic truth.

AC: Can you envision an ideal, maybe a utopian scenario, where domestic and reproduction work that has long been devalued and at the same time used as an engine for capitalist accumulation, is valorized again?

SF: What I saw in the 31-bis slum in Argentina seems the most utopian of all. (*Laughs*) I saw women coming together, becoming involved, joining their lives. I saw neighborhoods, where the children belong to everybody, where the streets bring together the houses instead of dividing them, and where a new social fabric have been slowly rebuilt over years. I believe that today there are many paths toward the re-valorization of domestic work. These days I am writing an article on the struggle of paid domestic workers, who in their great majority are migrant women, who travel to Europe and the US, many of them are forced to move out from their home countries because of the neoliberal policies. One of the themes of my essay is that these women are re-valorizing themselves, bringing back the issue of domestic work that a great part of the '80s feminists abandoned because at that time the prevalent feminist goal was to enter the job market, to be able to work in jobs that were typically done by men. These domestic workers are very strong because, in the first place, surviving the migrant process is an experience that gives you strength, and, secondly, because they are conscious of the importance of their work, of their contribution to the economies of the countries where they arrive and to the lives of the people for whom they work. They say what we

³ Verónica Gago and Natalia Quiroga Díaz, "Los comunes en femenino: Cuerpo y poder ante la expropiación de las economías para la vida," *Economía Sociedad* 19, no. 45 (2014): 1-18.

said many years ago: "Nothing moves without us." For me, this is a path that takes monetary forms but that also contrasts with the dominant social view on what domestic work is. I don't believe that there is as big difference between the women who do paid domestic work today and the ones who try to build forms of reproduction outside the state. I believe that, in both cases, we are facing a fight that opposes the state and the capitalist society.

Kitchen Politics

Julia Wieger

Eight members of the Spaces of Commoning research group sit around a large office table. They are organizing a summer school called “Commoning the City” and it is one of their last meetings before the event.¹ They are still undecided on how to organize the provision of food:

A: So, I spoke to the organic food store and they said they could deliver a meal each day, including salad, for quite a reasonable price.

B: I still like the idea that summer school participants prepare food together. It’s a way of getting to know one another and it could become part of our knowledge production.

C: On paper this sounds great, but if you think about it there would always be a group spending the whole morning organizing and preparing food. When you think of our dense program, we just don’t have enough time ...

D: Have you ever organized collective cooking as part of an event? It eats up all the time and attention and pretty much dominates the entire setting. Do we really want this? We have so many interesting guests coming!

C: And cooking is one thing, but afterward, washing the dishes?

E: Still, I think it would be great if everyone is involved in the reproductive parts of the summer school—it’s part of the issue at stake. If each person attends one shift during the week it could really work. It’s half of a day you would miss.

F: I think C is right, I didn’t think about washing dishes. That’s a hassle. It really puts me off.

A: I can ask if the organic food store can take care of the dishes as well.

I wrote the above dialogue based on my recollections of the numerous meetings of the Spaces of Commoning research group. In June 2014 we organized a summer school and discussed, sometimes at great length, how we would provide food for our fifty guests during those nine days of workshops, discussions, tours, and talks. It’s no surprise that the actual exchanges (in contrast to our many other discussions) were not recorded—usually these issues do not take center stage. We, too, couldn’t help distinguishing between the work of discussing issues and developing ideas on commoning and the city, and the work of meeting the participants’ everyday needs. We understood that practices of commoning and reproductive labor—such as the provision of food—are closely related, but we struggled in tying the immediate and practical

¹ The summer school “Commoning the City” took place from June 22–29, 2014, at the Academy of Fine Arts Vienna, and was organized by the Spaces of Commoning research group.

questions of the group's physical needs with our academic and artistic formats of workshops, tours, and talks. Doubtless, unrecorded discussions like this one point to the difficulties we face when trying to overcome an existing order, one that ascribes less value to reproductive tasks than those one can list in a résumé. So what are the relations between the spaces of commoning and reproductive labor? How do such relations manifest themselves in designs or built spaces? How can one oppose established, spatial orders of productive/reproductive labor? What kinds of spaces are able to support such struggles? And what other power relations are involved in the organization of reproductive labor and commoning?

Our struggle to reevaluate and restructure tasks like cooking and cleaning isn't new. In the 1970s feminist Marxist thinkers and activists like Mariarosa Dalla Costa, Selma James, and Silvia Federici introduced the term "reproductive labor" to describe the unpaid domestic labor typically carried out by women in private homes. In their Wages for Housework campaign, they criticized traditional Marxist concepts for ignoring the significance of domestic labor, and therefore papering over a gendered division of the working class between those who get paid for their work and those who do not. This was possible, they argued, because women's labor in the private home had been made invisible by the ideology of the family, which framed domestic labor as being in the nature of women.² Feminist economists like J. K. Gibson-Graham later showed that such argumentation still adhered to a rather capital-centric imaginary (as well as epistemology), and missed out on alternative forms within a diverse range of economies not covered by the dichotomies of waged/unwaged, productive/reproductive labor.³ Still, the campaign powerfully revealed and helped to understand the mechanisms of capitalism's devaluation of reproductive labor—which is still worth keeping in mind today.⁴

As a reaction to the social and economic restructuring that globalization brought about in the 1980s and '90s, Federici abandoned her stance in the Wages for Housework campaign and called for the organization of reproductive commons. The re-territorialization of the international work divide, new enclosures of resources in former colonized countries, destruction of the institutions of the workers' movement, and the crumbling of countermovements from the '60s had broken established forms of resistance to capitalist exploitation and made it necessary to rethink a feminist stance on reproductive labor.⁵ Expanding her notion of reproductive labor to include subsistence economies and the means of (re)production, she argues that collective forms of reproduction and practices of commoning can enable our independence from wage labor and subordination to capitalist relations.⁶ This does not mean, however, that practices of care, maintenance, or mutual aid disappear. On the contrary, Federici's notion of the commons is tightly linked to reproductive labor. In contrast to many other discussions on the commons, which

avoid questions of everyday reproduction,⁷ she insists (referring to Maria Mies) that "the production of commons requires first a profound transformation in our everyday life, in order to recombine what the social division of labor in capitalism has separated."⁸ As one of our guests at the "Commoning the City" summer school, Federici concluded our discussion with a related remark reminding us that social movements are only sustainable if they include cooperation and reproduction; only self-reproducing movements are able to establish continuity and thus also agency. This involves taking care of each other and taking responsibility for each other's lives.

Functionalist Architecture, Kitchens, and Collectivity

Architect Margarete Schütte-Lihotzky, who set the standard of modernist planning in the late 1920s through her work in the New Frankfurt social-housing program, urban researcher Günther Uhlig, and radio journalist Bea Füsser-Novy sit at a garden table. Uhlig and Füsser-Novy interview Schütte-Lihotzky for their documentary film, *Das Bauen ist ja nicht das Primäre ...*⁹

Margarete Schütte-Lihotzky: Today people think that the functionalist architects believed that once a function is solved, everything is fine. But that's not how it was. That's a false impression that I would like to correct. I have known no one who believed that things are automatically beautiful when they function well. One could put it like this: functionalism developed at a break—a break between crafts and a rather advanced industrialization. This brought up tremendous problems and functionalism approached these problems rather bravely. This is what I wanted to say to conclude Frankfurt.

- 2 Nicole Cox and Silvia Federici, *Counter-Planning from the Kitchen: Wages for Housework; A Perspective on Capital and the Left* (Brooklyn: New York Wages for Housework Committee, 1976).
- 3 J. K. Gibson-Graham, Esra Erdem, and Ceren Özselçuk, "Thinking with Marx towards a Feminist Postcapitalist Politics," in *Karl Marx: Perspektiven der Gesellschaftskritik*, ed. Rahel Jaeggi and Daniel Loick (Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 2013), 275–85.
- 4 For more information on the Wages for Housework campaign, see <http://caringlabor.wordpress.com/category/housework>.
- 5 Silvia Federici, introduction to *Revolution at Point Zero: Housework, Reproduction,*

- and Feminist Struggle*, ed. Silvia Federici (Oakland, CA: PM Press, 2012), 5–14.
- 6 Silvia Federici, "Feminism and the Politics of the Common in an Era of Primitive Accumulation," in *ibid*.
- 7 See, for example, Antonio Negri and Michael Hardt's trilogy of books that emphasis on knowledge production and information: *Empire* (2000), *Multitude* (2004), and *Commonwealth* (2009).
- 8 Federici, "Feminism and the Politics of the Common," 144.
- 9 *Das Bauen ist ja nicht das Primäre ...: Erinnerungen der Architektin Margarete Schütte-Lihotzky*, directed by Bea Füsser-Novy, Gerd Haag, and Günther Uhlig (Cologne: Westdeutscher Rundfunk, 1980).

Günther Uhlig: There are some questions—you described it very well, the question is ...

MSL: (*Knocking on the table*) I forgot something—something rather important. We were aware that functionalism—if you need to use such a catchword—we were absolutely aware that this was a transitional stage ...

GU: That's important.

MSL: At best it was, let's say, the very first beginning of an architecture of the twentieth and twenty-first century. The very beginning.¹⁰

The title of the film translates as “Building is not the primary thing ...” and the transcript is part of its concluding conversation. There Schütte-Lihotzky tells Uhlig and Füsser-Novy about how she had learned over the course of her career that she and many of her colleagues in the functionalist movement had been wrong to think that architecture could change people. “It is rather the opposite,” she says.

Schütte-Lihotzky is most famous for her 1926 design of the Frankfurt kitchen. A paradigmatic example of functionalist design, it is the standard model for the work kitchen in tenement buildings in Europe for the rest of the twentieth century. The narrow layout of the Frankfurt kitchen was a reaction to constraints in space and cost in the late 1920s New Frankfurt social-housing program. The kitchen, planned as a separate space within the apartment, was not only determined by the dire interwar economics. Schütte-Lihotzky also supported the idea that the household, like the factory or the modern office, should be rationalized. In her opinion, women of all class backgrounds had to be relieved of the heavy burden of domestic labor, and her kitchen design, inspired by the rationalization of industrial production, helped to free them.¹¹

Back then, critique of Schütte-Lihotzky's design focused on the particular workflows it forced on its users. It was only in the 1970s and '80s that feminists questioned its implications on women's emancipation. Susan Henderson, for example, argues that Schütte-Lihotzky's work kitchen tapped into the general feminist backlash that took hold of 1920s Germany and sought to re-domesticate women.¹² Under the aegis of progress and modernization, a largely conservative women's movement promised emancipation through the professionalization of the housewife. As Henderson explains, their pre-emption was that “the best social purpose of managerial and technical expertise was to bolster the existing model of the family and woman's role within it.”¹³ The dream of a kitchen machine went well with many architects' functionalist ideas and their obsessions with mass production and industrialization. For women though, it meant the kitchen machine would bind them once again to the household.

Uhlig, who coconducted the interview with Schütte-Lihotzky, found another 1920s kitchen concept baring the potential for emancipation and alternative forms of living: the *Einküchenhaus*, which means “one-kitchen building.” The one-kitchen building was a multistory apartment building featuring living units without (or very minimal) cooking facilities. Instead, meals were served to the tenants out of a central kitchen. The housing model was discussed and tested throughout Europe for different reasons: for bourgeois city dwellers, it was a way to save on costs for servants while keeping up their lifestyles, but also to realize reformist ideas of living; for parts of the socialist feminist movement, the model promised independence for women.¹⁴

Uhlig looks at the rise and fall of the one-kitchen building from the perspective of the late 1970s. Criticizing housing and planning policies of his own time,¹⁵ he argues that standardized mass housing for the nuclear family—inherited from functionalist planning ideas—dominated building practices and left no room for alternative approaches to the production of living environments. While the idea of the one-kitchen building also emerged out of the desire for rationalizing living arrangements, it still held the potential for alternatives, Uhlig argues. This potential lay in its collectivity, and opened the doors to a much wider range in modes of living. Its urban typology also further invited heterogeneity into the building.¹⁶

The demise of the one-kitchen building came about for different reasons: not enough middle-class families were attracted to the idea to make it economically feasible on a large scale. Among feminist socialists, discussions on the one-kitchen building remained stuck in conflict between micro-political reformist ideas and more sweeping demands for a wholesale revolution. Schütte-Lihotzky herself came to the conclusion that for the masses of the working class, the one-kitchen building was not affordable and that architects would do better to improve individual kitchens. For her as well as for Uhlig, the pos-

¹⁰ Ibid. Unless otherwise noted, all translations are my own.

¹¹ Margarete Schütte-Lihotzky, “Rationalisierung im Haushalt,” in *Wien und der Wiener Kreis*, ed. Volker Thurm and Elisabeth Nemeth (Vienna: Facultas, 2003), 283–85.

¹² Susan Henderson, “A Revolution in the Woman's Sphere: Grete Lihotzky and the Frankfurt Kitchen,” in *Architecture and Feminism*, ed. Debra Coleman, Elizabeth Danze, and Carol Henderson (Princeton, NJ: Princeton Architectural Press, 1996), 221–48.

¹³ Ibid., 229.

¹⁴ Günther Uhlig, *Kollektivmodell “Einküchenhaus”: Wohnreform und Architekturdebatte Zwischen Frauenbewegung und Funktionalismus, 1900–1933* (Gießen: Anabas-Verlag, 1981).

¹⁵ A prominent example for Uhlig's critique of mass housing is the housing estate Märkisches Viertel in West Berlin, built between 1963–74, providing apartments for fifty thousand inhabitants.

¹⁶ Günther Uhlig, “Kollektivmodell Einküchenhaus: Wirtschaftsgenossenschaften (auch) als kulturelle alternative zum Massenwohnungsbau,” *Arch+ 45* (1979): 26–34.

sibilities of habitating differently and influencing gender relations through the design of a building are connected to multiple other struggles,¹⁷ such as who can actually afford organizing reproductive labor differently, or arranging life collectively, and how such efforts relate to greater economical and political systems.

In her queer reading of the only one-kitchen building ever realized in Vienna—the Heimhof Einküchenhaus built between 1922 and 1926—Heidrun Aigner observes that for the purpose of women’s liberation, the building was not especially useful.¹⁸ Initiated by one of Vienna’s leading feminist activists of the time, Auguste Fickert, the building was realized to support single or working women. With its central kitchen, laundry facilities, and employees who managed many household tasks, the building had the character of a hotel. Still, the Heimhof Einküchenhaus was not able to subvert the gender relations of housework. Even though they were employed and paid, it was still women in the kitchen, cleaning the apartments, doing laundry. Here, too, housework remained the women’s domain. Nor was the building able to transcend oppressive class relations. Only well-off middle-class women and men could afford to live there; meanwhile, their domestic needs were fulfilled by less affluent women.

Nonetheless, drawing on interviews with witnesses from the project’s early years, Aigner discerns a hint of resistance amid the different co-living constellations the building allowed for. Reports include a great diversity of living models that diverge from the heteronormative model of the nuclear family. They tell about inhabitants appropriating the communal spaces of the building and creating a public situation within the private building that supported and fostered alternative modes of living.¹⁹

Political Work, Queer Households, Reproductive Commons

Cordula Thym, Dani Baumgartner, Florian Anrather, Jasmin Rilke, all inhabitants of a shared apartment in the Türkis Rosa Lila Villa, and my colleague Mara Verlič and I sit at a round kitchen table. Mara and I have come to ask them about their everyday lives (with a focus on reproductive labor) in the villa. Cordula has prepared homemade dumplings but everyone ensures us that they don’t eat together every day. Türkis Rosa Lila Villa is a self-administered queer cohousing project and community center for gay, lesbian, and trans people. It was founded in 1982 and is still an important address for queer Vienna today:

JW: You are part of the Wohnverein [an association for co-living in the villa]. What kinds of things do you do together? You organize the annual

party, you go to the assemblies, and you manage the house together. But what else do you do together as a house collective or a shared apartment that includes political work? Or do you do these things individually?

DB: Well, for example the refugee project—today it is called Queer Base—was initiated by the Wohnverein. Sure, it wasn’t run for long by the Wohnverein—it quickly became too large—but it is cool if projects can grow from here.

FA: If you don’t know about the project—it is about organizing living space for LGBTIQ refugees and asylum seekers. Additionally, many people contribute to Tips (an information and counseling center) and through this work, interpersonal alliances can emerge that are project based. There are always different things happening, and different groups of people work together on different projects.

MV: So the project is not only organized by people living in the villa but also by people from outside?

DB: Exactly. By many other people!

MV: And today, the project is not at all connected to the villa?

FA: They founded an independent association, if I remember it right.

CT: But this association is still based at the villa! We often do things as a reaction to an event or a situation. If something is happening, we organize something together, as a living association, or as people from the house.

Türkis Rosa Lila Villa started out as a gay and lesbian activist and cohousing project.²⁰ Its beginnings were embedded in an emerging gay and lesbian movement, as well as in Vienna’s squatting scene that opposed rising rents and real estate speculation in the city.²¹ Activists squatted in an abandoned apartment building owned by the city that was about to be razed. Later they renovated the building and adopted its spaces to house several gay and lesbian shared apartments, a community cafe and a counseling center. At present these are the three core elements of the project.

17 See Schütte-Lihotzky, “Rationalisierung im Haushalt”; and Uhlig, “Kollektivmodell Einküchenhaus.”

18 Heidrun Aigner, “Das Einküchenhaus Heimhof auf der Schmelz zum Potential queer/feministischer Zwischenräume,” in *Orts-Erkundungen: Der Stadt auf der Spur*, ed. Alexandra Schwell and Jens Wietschorke (Vienna: Verlag des Instituts für Europäische Ethnologie, 2012), 135–52.

19 *Ibid.*, 149.

20 The word *Türkis* was added to the project’s original name, Rosa Lila Villa, in reflection of discussions and the political activism of the villa community that, since its founding, expanded to include trans* activism. See “Geschichte,” *Die Villa* website, accessed January 15, 2016, <http://dievilla.at/geschichte>.

21 Marty Huber, “DO IT! 30 JAHRE ROSA LILA VILLA: UND SIE BEWEGT SICH IMMER NOCH,” in *Besetzt!*, ed. Martina Nußbaumer and Werner Michael Schwarz (Vienna: Czernin Verlag, 2012), 208–10.

While the founders of Türkis Rosa Lila Villa hoped that theirs would be the first of many gay and lesbian cohousing projects, the villa has remained the only such effort in Vienna for years.²² This may be one of the reasons the villa is a famous house in Vienna—well known beyond the queer, lesbian, and gay scene. Compared to other cohousing projects, even those based in alternative contexts, the combination of political work and the everyday is unique. While being an important space for LGBTIQ activism in Vienna, translating ideas of alternative ways of living and emancipatory strategies into practices of everyday life has been an important objective in the villa. From its beginning, the project “was not only a living space, but also a matter of radical, emancipatory politics.”²³ For the villa, overcoming the heteronormative model of living in the nuclear family is closely connected to political work reaching beyond the domestic realm.

In terms of domestic reproductive labor, members of the shared apartment said they just recently agreed on a new plan to structure the cleaning of the shared areas in their apartment: the kitchen, bathroom, toilet, living room, and hallway. The work is distributed in such a way that each member of the household oversees the area they are most finicky about, but one may also swap tasks such as walking a dog.²⁴ I detail this because such agreements, common to co-living situations, do something that more conventional arrangements often don't: put up the reproductive tasks of the household for negotiation. While conflicts are likely unavoidable, defining and distributing a range of tasks and making written lists ultimately renders them more visible and concrete.

While infinitely rewarding, one should not underestimate the demands and challenges of such a living situation. Conflicts are inevitable between the different activist groups in the villa, the inhabitants or those who run the café. Then there are mundane disputes over the yearly celebration. Recalling Federici's ideas of sustainability and reproduction of social movements though, I would say that part of what the residents and activists of the villa provide to a larger community is exactly that—a place of support, a backbone maintaining the community's activism and contributing to its agency. As such, it is experimental ground for establishing reproductive commons, showing that questions of reproduction can go well beyond the designated realm of the kitchen.

Architecture, Performativity, and Exclusion

Mady Schutzman and I sit across from each other at a small kitchen table in Schutzman's house in Los Angeles. I am meeting her to speak about the Llano del Rio Co-operative Colony, a utopian, socialist experiment between 1914 to 1917 northeast of Los Angeles in the Mojave Desert. Schutzman just finished her film *Dear Comrade*,²⁵ which is partly about the experiment in Llano del Rio, and I am starting an interview project on the experiment, being especially interested in the role of feminist architect Alice Constance Austin:

Julia Wieger: I first read about Llano del Rio in Dolores Hayden's book *The Grand Domestic Revolution*.²⁶ She writes about Llano as an example of early feminist planning. So when I started my research, here in LA, I was a little disappointed that this feminist element wasn't so obvious.

Mady Schutzman: If Alice Constance Austin, the architect, actually had built her designs, and if people had actually lived in it, it may have changed the gender dynamic. My understanding was that she was really trying to minimize the domestic labor demands of the women. And that the units [she proposed in her plans] didn't even have kitchens. Did they?

JW: No. No kitchens.

MS: Yeah. But it never got built, and people were still just struggling in their little nuclear family huts. So there was really no intervention in the gender politics or the division of labor that her design was hoping to effect.

JW: But there must have been some sort of affinity to feminism, otherwise they wouldn't have employed an architect who had these ideas?

MS: It came from Harriman.²⁷ He was very much a supporter of feminist ideas. I know he wrote quite a bit about it. So ideologically there was support. They were just struggling so much for money that they ended up not exactly facilitating a feminist way of living.²⁸

22 Currently, the queer cohousing project Queerbau is realized at the outskirts of Vienna in Seestadt Aspern. See <https://queerbaudotat.wordpress.com>.

23 “Popolitik,” *Die Villa* website, accessed January 15, 2016, <http://dievilla.at/popolitik>.

24 Florian Anrather, Dani Baumgartner, Jasmin Rilke, and Cordula Thym, interview by Julia Wieger and Mara Verlič, Rosa Lila Villa, Vienna, January 14, 2016.

25 *Dear Comrade*, directed by Mady Schutzman (Los Angeles, 2013).

26 Dolores Hayden, *The Grand Domestic Revolution: A History of Feminist Designs for American Homes, Neighborhoods, and Cities* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1981).

27 Job Harriman was a Marxist lawyer who unsuccessfully ran for mayor of Los Angeles and was one of the founding members of Llano del Rio.

28 Julia Wieger, *MOVEMENTS ARCHIVES WAVES GARDENS CITIES PERMACULTURES COSMIC DESIGN AGENCY ORGANIZING PUBLIC BICYCLES* (Los Angeles: MAK Center for Art and Architecture, 2012).

For her film, Schutzman delved into the archives of Llano del Rio, and she was well aware of the hardships the people of Llano faced when their dreams collapsed in the desert dust. I, on the other hand, coming from the field of planning and looking for early feminist architecture, kept wondering how important it was whether the plans of the architect were actually built. Did the architect's feminist ideas of houses without kitchens provoke discussions and maybe even new practices aiming to redistribute collective labor through the town's co-operative structures?

Llano del Rio was initiated in 1914 by a group of leftist Californian activists and supported by a broad, enthusiastic socialist movement. The group envisioned a city that would defy individual property and capitalist competition, a city that would take care of its inhabitants rather than exploit them. But their ideas of an autonomous life in the desert were harder to realize than they had thought. They had to give up Llano del Rio by the end of 1917. Nevertheless, during those four years, the experiment offered the possibility to try out a co-operative form of living, to test its social and political structures, as well as to think about its built environment, its infrastructures and architectures.

The cooperative colony hired Austin, who developed a rough scheme for future Llano del Rio. Inspired by the European garden city movement, her design organized cooperative life in a strict radial layout, detailing the housing units without kitchens. Intending to free women from domestic labor, Austin proposed to the people of Llano building a city where the tasks of cleaning, cooking, buying food, and childcare would be organized in cooperative, centralized infrastructures. Austin's Llano del Rio featured bucolic, low-density suburban housing developments between plenty of green space. In her book *The Next Step*, where she published some of her ideas for Llano del Rio, Austin draws suburban, almost rural houses for families that lack kitchens in a strangely inconspicuous way, as if she was trying to play down her radical proposal.²⁹ Austin's ambitious plans for Llano del Rio accommodated up to ten thousand inhabitants. Only fragments were ever realized.

Of the few buildings ever realized, only stone ruins remain. But documents chronicling life in Llano del Rio can be found in several LA archives.³⁰ For long periods, people lived in tents and huts, and it is safe to assume that their lives were shaped by improvisation. One can find traces pointing to ideas of gender equality. To become a member of the colony, every inhabitant had to state their skills and preferred field of occupation, irrespective of gender. A caption in the town's official magazine, *The Western Comrade*, describes a group of children led by a girl: "Lots of willing workers in the industrial school. Note the teamster, showing equality of sexes, as well as equal suffrage at Llano."³¹ It is unclear though, whether the tasks of domestic labor were also distributed evenly between men and women. I found two photographs that

point to a possible shift in the gendered distribution of labor: the first shows five women in overalls standing in front of a construction site. One holds a hammer and all look rather satisfied, as if they had just finished the job of building a house.³² In the second image, Austin stands in the middle of a group of Llano inhabitants around a model of the above housing unit.³³ In both pictures, I would say we see women transgressing existing norms of gendered professional roles. Architecture is involved in both. I would like to think that Austin's proposals were part of everyday negotiations of gender roles and the redistribution and valuation of labor.

But while the plans and drawings were tools for imagining a radically different everyday, they were also part of processes of exclusion and occupation. A crucial question for establishing a cooperative city, especially on this scale: who can be part of the community? While Llano del Rio allowed women to get a step closer to emancipation, it also actively excluded many other groups who sought to participate. In the *Western Comrade's* April 1916 issue, a detailed call for members entitled "A Gateway to Freedom through Co-operative Action" states at the bottom: "Only Caucasians are admitted. We have had applications from Negroes, Hindus, Mongolians, and Malays. The rejection of these applications are not due to race prejudice, but because it is not deemed expedient to mix the races in these communities."³⁴ I would like to add Karl Hardy's reminder that "all the various expressions of utopianism—from intentional communities to radicalized politics—which emerge from [...] settler societies ought to be recognized and being predicated upon and therefore implicated in the ongoing naturalization of settler colonization."³⁵

When we seek out ideas of reproductive commons today, looking to escape the exploitative orders of reproduction of our everyday lives, when we look to historic examples of feminist reformist projects of the past, as Federici recommends us to do, we can learn from their radical aspirations, but also from their blind spots, limitations, and complicities in other people's oppression that we surely still have today. While efforts to collectively transform our

29 Alice Constance Austin, *The Next Step: How to Plan for Beauty, Comfort, and Peace with Great Savings Effected by the Reduction of Waste* (Los Angeles: Institute Press, 1935).

30 For example, the Huntington Library and the Special Collections & University Archives at UC Riverside.

31 Kate Sennert, "Llano del Rio: A Utopian Dream That Flowered and Wilted in the California Desert," *Kate Sennert* (blog), October 27, 2013, http://katesennert.com/858/#_ftn3.

32 UC Riverside Special Collections & Archives, Walter Millsap papers (collection 157), box 9, folder 2.

33 Hayden, *Grand Domestic Revolution*, 244.

34 "A Gateway to Freedom through Co-operative Action," advertisement in *The Western Comrade*, April 1916.

35 Karl Hardy, "Unsettling Hope: Settler Colonialism and Utopianism," *Spaces of Utopia: An Electronic Journal* 2, no. 1 (2012): 123–36.

everyday lives and the spaces we inhabit can be extremely rewarding, contemporary and historical examples show how much resistance such endeavors can face. They demand a considerable amount of time and energy on the part of the people pursuing them, not least in order to cope with the contradictions that run through them.

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Site for Unlearning (Art Organization)

Team at Casco—Office for Art, Design and Theory
and Annette Krauss

The following series of unlearning exercises are a result of an ongoing collaboration between the team at Casco—Office for Art, Design and Theory in Utrecht, the Netherlands, and artist Annette Krauss since 2013. This collaboration pursues the question which institutional habits can be collectively unlearned with the practice of a commons-based approach to daily (organizational) work. The following exercises are reworked from the initial tear pads created for Casco's exhibition and study program, "We Are the Time Machine: Time and Tools for Commoning" (November 15, 2015–March 13, 2016).

Fig. 14
Team at Casco—Office for Art, Design and
Theory and Annette Krauss, *Site for
Unlearning (Art Organization)*, series of
unlearning exercises, 2014–ongoing

SITE FOR UNLEARNING

How can we actively practice a commons-based approach in our daily work?
 What is the role of an artist in all of this?
 What is the relationship between an art institution's vision and engagement in cultural production and its day-to-day workings that inform an administrative and managerial ethos?

Site for Unlearning (Art Organization) is an ongoing, collaborative research project for unlearning specific art organizational habits, normative behaviors, and ways of thinking in light of the value of the commons. Begun in Spring 2014 and co-developed by the Casco team and artist Annette Krauss, the project takes Casco as a concrete site for research and subject for change, while placing emphasis on unlearning, however impossible, as integral to learning something new.

So far the central thing we have been unlearning is "busyness," the familiar state and prevalent mode of "business." Running a business, in particular the business of an art institution, is irrevocably tied up with our feeling of

(art organization)

constantly "being busy," loaded with stress and anxiety. This sense of busyness stems from our habit of undervaluing certain reproductive tasks such as (digital) cleaning, cooking, and hosting, as well as non-public administrative work, maintenance work, organizational tasks, and relations. The Casco team and Krauss have together been analyzing features and characteristics of "being busy" and its cause, while coming up with proposals for ways to "unlearn" them. This compilation shares some of those proposals as "unlearning exercises" with our peer organizations and other communities who might have the same problems and desire to unlearn them.

Why are we always so busy?
 What does being productive mean to us?
 How does this particular feeling of responsibility affect our bodies and minds, all the while knowing that without productive work our institution would not exist?
 How can we unlearn this habit of following a form of productivity that feeds on business?
 How can we value reproductive labor as an essential part of productivity and dismantle the rushed feeling of always being too busy?

UNLEARNING EXERCISES

2. Meeting

2.1 Off-balancing Chairs

2.2 Assembly

3. Cleaning Together

3.1 Digital Cleaning

4. Reading Together

4.1 Rewriting Maintenance Manifesto

5. Care Network

5.1 Mood Color

6. Property Relations

7. Time Diary

8. Passion and Obstacle

(business/business)

Reference

The research project 'Sites for Unlearning' by artist Annette Krauss comprises experimental and collaborative settings of different durations through which concrete efforts to unlearn specific tasks are initiated, explored, discussed, and conceptualized. Site for Unlearning (Art Organization) is the third and long-term installment of the project, this time made in collaboration with Casco after unlearning projects with other groups focusing on "unlearning to ride a bike" and "unlearning my library." The research is based on "unlearning by doing": dealing with, identifying, and reordering dominant forms of thinking and behaving. At the core of these experiments is the investigation of art's potential to engage with the seemingly "impossible" and to imagine things otherwise.

Note

Exercise's etymological origin in Latin, *exercere*, means "keep busy," connoting its use in hierarchical disciplinary contexts such as existing educational institutions, professional sports training facilities, military training facilities, and so on. Our unlearning proposal aims to unlearn our sense of busyness and opposes this mode of discipline, hence we propose to use the term "unlearning exercise."

Acknowledgement

The team of Casco – Office for Art, Design and Theory (Utrecht) consists of 7 regular staff, 4 non-regular and 1 paid intern. At the time of writing (March 2016) the team includes: Steyn Bergs (media and research), Binna Choi (director), Yolande van der Heide (publishing and education), Marleen de Kok (financial administration), Ying Que (project and community), Suzanne Timersma (project and infrastructure), and Anne Punt (intern). Janine Armin (editor), Carlijn Bakker (office), Sanne Oorthuizen (curator/editor), Ika Putranto

(design support). Others who have been involved in Site of Unlearning (Art Organization) include former team members Ester Barreira, Roel Griffioen, Jakob Proyer, and Jason Waite, and former interns Lara Garcia Diaz, Simone der Kinderen, Malcolm Kratz, Björn van der Loft, Deborah Siefert, Marielem Tordo, and Sofie Mienda. The transcripts are made by Whitney Stark. The design is by Rosie Eveleigh.

www.cascoprojects.org
 siteforunlearning.tumblr.com

SITE FOR UNLEARNING

2. Meeting

Unlearning Exercise

Besides the regular weekly team meeting on Monday, we have been trying to have our “unlearning” meeting regularly too, which we were not really successful at. After several attempts, we have established a “3 week cycle,” each week having one of three types of unlearning meetings: 1. general meeting with all participants; 2. working group meeting when research strand groups meet; and 3. the yet to be practiced collective study wherein a major issue arising from unlearning is intensively studied by the team with invited guests or in public.

What to Unlearn

Structural forms that prevent common rhythms and which don't enable collaborative research and a sense of structurelessness.

Transcription

11 May 2015
Annette, Binna, Carlijn, Ika, Jason, Sanne, Staci, Suzanne, Ying, Yolande

SU
For me, though it's not only about the Monday [annoyance is due to the significant amount of time the team spend on the weekly team meeting and unlearning meeting every Monday]. I like to start things on that day, get on track. On the other hand, it's very good to hear what's coming up and what everyone is doing on Mondays. So it's double, actually.

B
Maybe we should change the time?

J
Yeah, it's rough on Monday mornings with all the weekend's e-mails.

B
There's a general issue about working hours though. The nice thing about Cooperativa Grater Invertido, Ruangrupa, or KUNCI Cultural Studies Center is that their time is very fluid. But that's not what I am advocating. In the case of Suzanne, her time is not fluid,

but we also know it very well so we have an easiness about it. The time does not change much — we know what it is, we share the rhythms. So what if we just make a certain time that is super necessary for us all to be there and otherwise leave it super open?

SU
It's really good to have time just to meet, not by appointment, but just because we are there. You can say, “Hey, shall we sit for ten minutes and do this?”

Note

We also get tired of meetings and confused as to whether they need to be as efficient or as open as possible to keep conversation flowing. We adopted a stronger structure by appointing a time-keeper, facilitator, and action-point maker, to the point that the structure is similar to that of our board meetings. We miss the open conversations during which we went deep into certain issues.

(art organization)

SITE FOR UNLEARNING

2.1 Off-balancing Chairs

Unlearning Exercise

While having a meeting, we sit in our (office) chairs balancing on three legs by holding each other.

What to Unlearn

Non-physicality of meetings that tend to be focused on the verbal and in which we remain in the same standard posture; taking for granted the horizontality of roundtable discussions; and routines of “meeting culture.”



Transcription

14 April 2014
Annette, Binna, Carlijn, Deborah, Ester, Janine, Jason, Malcolm, Sanne, Suzanne, Ying, Yolande

JAN
If this were true, that this were an alternative space in which participation is necessarily voluntary, production wouldn't be a task. Given my slight refusal of the balancing chairs exercise, because I don't like wobbly chairs, I feel we should have the opportunity to change the task. It never seemed that there were rules at the beginning of this process. It kind of confuses me as to why we now have them. The initial exercise was to sit on chairs differently, what would that mean for you?

A
I think it is possible to retreat, pull away from the participation. This of course is a really interesting point. As for my own position I would also have anxieties about that.

JAN
To me it is not a vilification of the project, but the suggestion of accommodating all individuals.

A
When I was thinking about the production process, I was simply putting forward the issue of money. With the question as to how far this hour would be compensated in terms of participants being

paid, which anyway can only be a symbolic payment.

JAN
But also how this can be made transparent and appreciated, instead of us becoming neglectful proponents of precarity. Sorry I am speaking like this, I don't know why. Possibly because it is a Monday — it's something about trying to recognize what it is we are doing presently.

Extension

Another version of this unlearning exercise was developed as part of a seminar given by Casco in the Critical Studies program at Sandberg Institute in Amsterdam in 2014. Tired of an hours-long discussion, a proposal was made to silently look at a tiny part of a big old tree for 10 minutes.

Acknowledgement

This exercise was developed in Tower Hamlets, London, 2013 during a workshop with Krauss and students from St Pauls Way Trust School including Murad Mohammed Ahmed, Nozir Ali, Sayidul Alum, Rukhsana Bhanu, Jaber Chowdhury, Opeyemi Rakunle, Sayeeda Firdaus, and Anliqua Islam.

(art organization)

SITE FOR UNLEARNING

2.2 Assembly

Unlearning Exercise

The general team meeting for discussion and planning of the future program takes place at home if possible, with meals and time for conversation.

What to Unlearn

Lack of common understanding of programming and planning and top-down programming or programming led by one person.

(art organization)

SITE FOR UNLEARNING

3. Cleaning Together

Unlearning Exercise

We clean our office together every Monday morning after the team meeting. We divide the tasks, put on music (sometimes), and set the time for around 30 minutes. It's important to begin cleaning together and feel we are collectively responsible.



What to Unlearn

Undervaluing reproductive labor; hierarchies and unequal division in domestic labor in terms of who does what; and making reproductive labor the last priority and not finding any satisfaction in it.

Transcription

6 October 2014
Annette, Binna, Björn, Ester,
Jason, Lara, Sanna, Suzanne,
Ying, Yolande

YI

So, we have cleaned collectively a few times, because we would like to unlearn undervaluing reproductive labor. Through collective cleaning, do we try to revalue it? How has it worked?

E

It hasn't. I already value cleaning a lot, so it didn't change anything for me.

SU

Well, for me I think I value that we did it collectively. It was a team effort.

L

It depends. Okay, as an intern, I clean when you do the important stuff. That's when this labor starts to make no sense to me. I think it's a really powerful thing to do this together.

YI

That points to the collective aspect of it, which is crucial to revaluing it. I agree that maybe, individually, I feel the same about cleaning as a job, or cleaning in general. But doing it collectively does something to the implications of the work of cleaning within an institution.

YO

Yeah, I also think we are forgetting that. We're trying to think about the things that we internalize, because even if I value cleaning as an activity, I still make it a last priority.

(art organization)

SITE FOR UNLEARNING

3.1 Digital Cleaning

Unlearning Exercise

We exchange with designers, researchers, and accountants whose occupations involve digital maintenance. Alongside this we develop our own method and habit of organizing and cleaning digital files on our desktops, laptops, and in our archives, allocating time for digital cleaning as part of our weekly cleaning and visualizing this activity toward common recognition and validation of cleaning.

What to Unlearn

Sticking to physical cleaning as a recurring metaphor for reproductive labor and instead extending it to maintenance of digital files in computers and other digital archives.



Transcription

23 March 2015
Annette, Binna, Carlijn, Jason,
Sanne, Simone, Suzanne, Ying,
Yolande

YO
I think we all define cleaning in different ways. Cleaning and maintaining the space, and here I mean maintaining the physical space, is the most visible and obvious thing of course. But there's other work that I would also deem cleaning work that happens behind glowing computer screens. This is invisible labor and falls under maintenance work as well.

(art organization)

SITE FOR UNLEARNING

4. Reading Together

Unlearning Exercise

Whenever a text appears relevant to our common interest, we propose to read it together in a meeting. We each read sections aloud until it is finished, and then discuss and/or analyze the content.

What to Unlearn

Individualized research and the division of labor by intellectuals or non-intellectuals in order to practice studying together.

Note

Furthermore reading aloud is a gentle way of getting to know each other's differences (accents, pace, rhythm) and moving in the direction of negotiation and mutual learning processes.

Reference

So far we have been reading Marina Vishmidt's "All Shall Be Unicorns: About Commons, Aesthetics and Time" (Casco and Open!, 2014), Manueia Zechner's "Barcelona en Comú: the city as horizon for radical democracy" (FOAR Magazine (or Reflections on a Revolution), 2015), and Mierle Laderman Ukeles's "Manifesto for Maintenance Art, 1969" (written in 1969 and reprinted in Grand Domestic Revolution Handbook, Casco and Valiz, 2014).

(art organization)

SITE FOR UNLEARNING

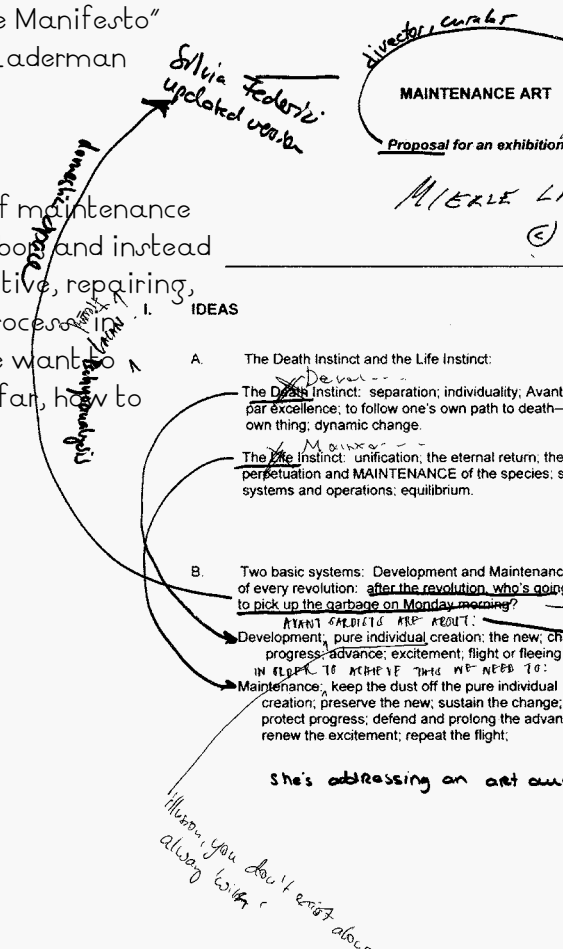
4.1 Rewriting Maintenance Manifesto

Unlearning Exercise

We collectively read, comment on, and rewrite the "Maintenance Manifesto" written by artist Mierle Laderman Ukeles in 1969.

What to Unlearn

Limited understanding of maintenance work and reproductive labor and instead extending it to any repetitive, repairing, fixing, care work, and "processes" in general; additionally we want to learn to speak loud and far, how to make things public!



(art organization)

SITE FOR UNLEARNING

5. Care Network

Unlearning Exercise

We map the care relations that hold our group together. What kind of relating and interactions can we identify as care relations? To whom and to what are we related in terms of care in our working environment?

What to Unlearn

Understanding the team as just a functional body or a combination of different functions; the notion of objective, not affective, working relations; and independence in the idea of professionalism.

Transcription

20 October 2014
Annette, Birna, Björn, Jason, Lara, Same, Suzanne, Ying

SU
But then I'm also wondering what care relations are in our office. For instance, is baking a cake for someone's birthday, sitting down, eating it, having a chat, etc., the same as collectively cleaning the office? We clean it collectively because we want to give it value together. But, at the same time, it's also something you do for the space, for the institution, while these other small things don't feel like you're doing them for the space or the institution, because they're not necessarily jobs.

Y I don't really agree because the intention of cleaning together is also to share the burden, which wasn't shared in the beginning.

B It is interesting to consider why we need to differentiate care relations from domestic labor, or think of them together.

SA ... maybe, for me, they relate to one another because both are often undervalued.

A Can we connect these to bigger structures and the hierarchies

that might then come in? Take care relations. If it becomes obvious that at the end it's always the same person who does this work... at home, for example, who takes care of the relations? If you look into heterosexual relationships, the women are very often the ones who take time to take care of the relations: talking to the relatives, friends, neighbors. Kind of maintaining a social life. The devaluing comes in when women are stereotyped as chatty when they are sustaining relations. It's a vicious circle...

(art organization)

SITE FOR UNLEARNING

5.1 Mood Color

Unlearning Exercise

At the beginning of a week or a day, we pick a color or a few out of a set we think represent(s) our current state of mind and feeling. We create a moment in which to discuss why people chose which colors. You can choose to share your motivation or not. This helps us to address the affective climate in the team as well as open up ways to support each other if someone asks for that.

What to Unlearn

Holding on to negative feelings individually or not voicing unspoken tensions within the group; the inability to share or discuss; and the idea that the workplace is no space for emotions.



(art organization)

SITE FOR UNLEARNING

6. Property Relations

Unlearning Exercise

We identify things we own from electronics to intangible capital and possible heritage. We elaborate on the ways these have become our property and how they are entangled with our relationships to objects and work vis-a-vis security, care, and solidarity. Concretely we rethink the wage system and employment contract that as a given binds our work to duty, and move toward the possibility of material commons.

What to Unlearn

Focusing only on an affective approach to the commons, weakness in political-economic thinking, and changing the materialistic condition for our work.

Transcription

26 February 2015
Annette, Binna, Carlijn, Ester,
Jason, Sanne, Suzanne, Ying

E Uh, for me it doesn't make sense to look into property. I understand property literally as what you own in a materialistic way. Personally, what would it matter for commons and unlearning? I can't understand. What would it matter that I have a bike and twenty books?

SA We are not only looking into what we have, but how we got

these things — things we pay for, are still paying for, and things that we haven't paid for but nevertheless have.

For instance, things you have or own through partnership, bought, inherited, stole, and got as a present ...

J It's not about you having a bike, three plates, and a boyfriend. What we try to get at is that property is not about material things in the first place. It's the rules that govern our relationship with objects and people. So immediately this became

essential to understanding the rules by which we relate to each other.

Y Phew, it's so much about language as well. It's a narrative that you start to believe in, so you need to focus on what kinds of narratives exist. I'm not sure how we can practically change something in a physical space when it comes to property relations because I imagine you can change narratives about it and get a different perspective on it, but I don't see a way of actually doing it yet.

(art organization)

SITE FOR UNLEARNING

7. Time Diary

Unlearning Exercise

For a limited period (a few days to a few weeks), every team member makes a record of their day beyond set working hours by noting down what they are doing from time to time. Together we try to distinguish categories invisible, care, productive, communicative, "intellectual" for different activities and analyze this by identifying our working habits, breaking down logics of efficiency and productivity, and recognizing other values. We also read aloud together, revaluing our day-to-day activities especially with respect to what are normally considered unproductive moments.

What to Unlearn

Way of dealing with time and planning based on logic of efficiency and productivity while undervaluing even attempting to kill reproductive time; entanglement between no time, busyness, and business; and struggle with different ways of working and rhythms.

(art organization)

Transcription

16 March 2015
Annette, Binna, Carlijn, Jason,
Sanne, Simone, Suzanne, Ying,
Yolande

B So we documented what we do every day for two weeks. I think what we enjoyed in common was appreciating each step of the working process, realizing that reproductive dimensions are constantly generated within the productivity regime. You get annoyed when something goes wrong and you have to fix it—that's reproduction. If we are able to appreciate this

Notes

There's some fear to share this diary. In fact, it could be considered a general exercise/method used in big institutions and companies to control their workers and make them more efficient. It's important to articulate again and again the purpose of writing this diary. There's no fundamental necessity to share them, though this allows for the recognition of differences and collective analysis of the personal as the political. We are also looking for a more affective and easy way of doing and sharing this diary.

reproductive labor as part of the process, part of what do, we may feel happier, have less frustration.

YI Politically, I am not so sure. Still, it made sense to formalize cleaning. But does it make sense to formalize these other things? Or does it take away their value? Not to forget the control issue.

A It's about abusing this form of tracking or not, no?

SITE FOR UNLEARNING

8. Passion and Obstacle

Unlearning Exercise

Each of us writes down her/his passions for what she/he does around the workplace and obstacles that hinder that passion. Afterward we find links between the different passions and obstacles to deepen our analysis (time was a common obstacle). We are aware that every obstacle could become a passion, and every passion an obstacle.

What to Unlearn

Work because of "duty" (externally given); doing without awareness of purpose; and opposition between passion and obstacle. Through this unlearning, we learn to focus, make choices, and carefully discern things to intensify or concentrate instead of simply accelerating for the sake of doing many things.

(art organization)

Transcription

11 May 2015
Annette, Binna, Carlijn, Ika,
Jason, Sanne, Staci, Suzanne,
Ying, Yolande

SU I think working together is maybe number one for me with exhibition making, because that's what we do together and that's the main thing, as well as mentoring interns. I think I really like to do that. And the hindrance: the life/work divide, which still feels like a struggle. I've found a good way to deal with it, but it does come up often. How to

manage different schedules and demands – family and work. And time management, for sure. A lot of small, little tasks that I see as a huge hindrance to the things that I think need my attention. But that's like a basic hindrance in life no?

A Of course everyday life seems like a big obstacle. At the same time I'm completely fascinated, maybe because I wonder, "How can it be such an obstacle?" Of course, part of it is the time issue again. But it is also about positionality.

And what's my own position in that and how can I shape it? This relates again to the moment of working together, sharing. Maybe shaping is the desire, the passion for shaping a situation, shaping a position. The desire for shaping a position that works with these other desires.

Extension

This exercise was applied in an Arts Collaboratory Assembly in Senegal, April 2015 as part of the process of building a common future for the network.

Study as Commoning Noise as Border

The Australian composer and poet Chris Mann once said to me that a new meaning could be generated when all words collapse. This proposition takes one's distrust of language as its point of departure. Can one distrust a language that one does not understand? What kind of meaning could emerge out of communication between linguistic barriers?

As the only non-German researcher in the Spaces of Commoning research group, I am acutely aware of those moments where a unanimous switch from English to German happens. Suddenly, or continuously, a language I don't understand fills up the room, whereby more than one mode of study comes to reveal themselves. Who do I study with at the time? What do I share "in common" with those foreign tongues at the moment? Does it matter, if there is no subject of study?

Inclusion is always built on exclusion.

At the threshold of those moments, there is a choice of not being so much as an outsider who is excluded from the "linguistically composed meaning," but as an outsider who composes various meanings out of linguistic noise. Noise, in this sense, is a cacophony of sonic information that emanates in order for the listener to compose her or his own attention. That's up to the listener's interpretation. The listener is therefore not excluded or included. And this listener is someone without which that something would not have happened.

A voice from a member of the Spaces of Commoning research group.

How to Hear in Common The More Impossible, the More Political, No?

Ultra-red

Ultra-red

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I hug myself. I'm sagging. If I choose to say something else, I won't be heard. They won't hear me. I'm in solitary confinement. Limbo. Not where they are. And not where I used to be, have moved forever from that place. Would just be hollering into the toilet bowl for the echo of my own voice.

—Toni Cade Bambara, "Broken Field Running"

Listening begins with the intention of learning, but we struggle with what we hear as we sit around the table or stand in the street together. Have we actually been touched by what we have heard?

Here and now then, who *are* we?

We are a proposition waiting to be tested. We listen, we hear, we say what we have heard. It is not easy to listen to someone's testimony of survival, of repression, of being hated by the general public. It's not easy to listen to stories of solidarity and endurance. We may not know what this means to us in the moment. What do we hear? Do we trust it? Do we feel safe? Do we feel part of it? Are we responsible for its future from this point. Again, who are we?

1: Listening

1.1 Ultra-red are used to working within the dynamic tension of the following two statements regarding silence: that "silence is a condition of listening," and that "silence = death." The former comes from Paulo Freire and demands that listening means to organize collectivity. The latter from ACT UP stems from angry hearts surrounded by dying friends who refused silent acquiescence in favor of direct action to end the AIDS crisis.

When we undertake listening sessions and listening walks, where do we position ourselves in regard to these two statements?

1.2 Silence as a condition of listening attempts to level out participation in the experience of listening together by providing a protocol for how we listen together.¹ It also seeks to challenge any participant's domination of the collective act by gently suggesting that the act of silent listening together may be more powerful than what we can instantly say about what we heard when asked the question: What did you hear?

1.3 The impossible, the transversal, the intersectional, the social unconscious, the contradictions and their attendant discontents tend to lead us more to

difference in collective listening than the easier, but liberal humanistic search for commonality. Difference is a conflict that's negotiable by us or not. Putting listening to use attempts to open up the tension of difference by asking, what did you hear? That is, what don't we share in common, with our differences, in the dissonances we hear in the room. That is to not assimilate difference into phony commonality for the sake of the event, the project, or the institution. That is not to erase differences within any conceptualization we share about the commons.

1.4 In the first moment of shared silence, we can ask the questions: Who are we in this room and how do we come to be here? From this initial attempt to situate our collective body in the mix of the intersection of class, race, sexualities, and genders, we try to understand how these two questions can direct us to listen to exactly *what* is embodied by *whom* in struggle and, simultaneously, what is forced on and into that body from the systemic oppressive violence against them.² From this inquiry, we might see what things, what advantages, what privileges, what attitudes, what economies, what languages, what knowledges, what ways of seeing, and what gestures we might have to give up as a political act.

1.5 When we listen to others' struggles, where do we experience the visceral? When we hear of violence that we do not experience in the everyday nor expect to experience, what moves us from in these testimonies of the struggle for freedom and where do we experience these physically? What do we feel? What pains? What joys? Or maybe we feel nothing at all? From this comes learning and maybe holding off on insisting that as artists (or whatever) we might have something to say. If silence is the condition of listening, maybe the political response to listening to struggle is to say nothing, to remain in silence, and to find ourselves with nothing to say for once, and to let our bodies do the talking as we sit together in the room or listening site. How do we listen to these histories? Maybe just by listening to our listening. This is the start of solidarity.

1.6 Sensually, being visceral, embodied, in pain, to feel joy, to be actually touched by listening, is to hear in sound a call for solidarity: Do not let us be attacked anymore. Do not let us be violently evicted anymore. Do not let us be humiliated anymore. This moment of tense hearing may then be our limit point of silent listening before such viscosity has to be expressed, translated, articulated back into words that lead to a collective consequence. That's a struggle. "Silence = death." We cannot ultimately say nothing or do nothing.

2: Sharing

2.1 "This afternoon we will be listening to the sounds and testimonies of the city of Vienna at the sites of tense political moments, past and ongoing struggles." Such organized listening through sound objects, locations and sites, and testimonies is the anchor for this moment of sharing. Such sharing takes place under the shelter of both generosity and care.

2.2 This ecology of listening, that is, both historical and geographical, leads us to no other conclusion than how we must organize our survival, and how such organizing means a struggle that in turn demands solidarity. From such urgent ecology, we have to take stock of our individual and collective bodies. What is at stake for anybody in the room? Where do we position ourselves in relation to the struggle of another? What are the consequences of what we produce together in the room?

2.3 A later observation from this Ultra-red work in Vienna was that during the listening sessions, listening walks, and later discussions, those who are already engaged in acts of solidarity with others in a struggle are easy to work with. From this, we need a bridge between those people and others who are moved viscerally by what they've heard, but who are not yet moving on it. Listening bodies and the affect of listening opens up a moment of silent learning whereby an intention is produced that, at that moment, is only a delicate sensation of needing to do something different from now on. How to collectively learn from all these feelings and experiences in the room then, without the poor judgment of "activism" being the political high ground?³ But more so, how to find time to develop this collective movement when time is what we also always struggle for?

1 "In the process of speaking and listening, the discipline of silence, which needs to be developed with serious intent by subjects who speak and listen, is a *sine qua non* of dialogical communication. The person who knows how to listen demonstrates this, in obvious fashion, by being able to control the urge to speak (which is a right), as well as his or her personal preference (something worthy of respect). Whoever has something worth saying has also the right and the duty to say it. Conversely, it is also obvious that those who have something to say should know that they are not the only ones with ideas and opinions that need to be

expressed." Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of Freedom: Ethics, Democracy and Civic Courage*, trans. Patrick Clark (London: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2000), 105.

2 There was little time in a packed day to look and feel intersectionality across the sites we had chosen to look at, for example, at how Viennese public housing and border control policy might sync, the sexism and gender oppressions in the squat scenes, how "preservation" of neighborhoods against demolition in the 1970s led to displacement of migrant populations, and so forth.

2.4 This affect of listening works on the body in both negative and positive ways. What comes from sadness? What comes from joy? What comes from confusion? What comes from conviction? What comes from your heart beating faster? What comes from fleeting eye contact across the table? What comes from boredom or irritation? What comes from giving something up? What comes from sharing these before we have even uttered a word? What are the consequences then of sound and listening in its capacity to change a body—the heartbeat, sweat, a smile, a few tears?

2.5 Pedagogical process accepts all of these plus alienation, disinterest, expectation, and so on, and has to feed this into the togetherness.

2.6 It's true, then, that we need to take care in and of our collective listening. We make this moment for all and it has an afterlife that needs looking after.

2.7 It's also true that we shouldn't break the sharing by later privatization of what we learned.

3: Commoning

3.1 When we listen together, it is experimental in practice. It is not an all-encompassing and prefigured process that seeks one conclusion. We ask questions that we do not necessarily need to answer. We work without attempting to resolve tensions or difference. Commoning is never resolved lest it becomes bordered. Commoning means getting our hands dirty. The result of this cannot be truth but less suffering in the world.

3.2 Commoning goes beyond participating. The commons is not a humanist proposition or projection. Commoning carries with it a history and geography of expropriation, un-enclosure, and the tactic of violence. Our collective question—what does it mean to participate?—leads us back to the question of the state, which we have not solved via the commons. Nor have we solved the question of institutions and their violent enclosures. It leads to questions of tactics, strategy, and fidelity to antagonistic modes and manners. Commoning attacks at the same time as it always defends.⁴

4: Occupation

4.1 If, as Élisée Reclus describes, “geography is history in space whilst history is geography in time,” it seems necessary to situate ourselves precisely at the locations and junctions where struggles are present. We place this site in tension with who we are and who is yet to be here; with where we are and

where we are not; and with “what do we have that we want to keep”⁵ and what more do we want. The commons is also imaginary.

4.2 In preparation, we had proposed that: “It would probably also be a good time to get away from the theorizing of ‘the commons’ and to investigate the spaces, times, encounters where the commons is both present but fucked around with. In this we mean, we push ourselves harder for a real look at what makes something in common and whether the niceties of those things placed in common are actually not so nice but also, are they defended with real antagonisms kept intact. Maybe we need some impolite investigation to ward off any walking of the streets from appearing as a kind of urban safari on the lookout for something exotic.” (Ultra-red, e-mail to Hong-Kai Wang)

4.3 And: “Maybe site is important to think slightly above the acts of listening before any particular recordings are chosen. Then, it might be necessary to identify what a more nervous site is and who might find it nervous, and who listens and who retells; or all the said acts can maybe ‘traverse.’ How can we allow ourselves to be changed collectively during this process? The proposition of using tense political sites in negotiating our own production of shared testimony can be quite useful to instigate a moment of that.” (Hong-Kai Wang, e-mail to Ultra-red). This leads us quite quickly to acts of occupation in time and space.

3 “The word activism comprises many meaning and interpretations, I think that contemporary idea of activism created by the so-called First World, is just an ethical and humanitarian action, the result of the superiority complex of the white and Eurocentrism. As for me I am someone with a persecuted cause [...] decolonization cannot take place through activism practices or political actions that are inherent or reproduce themselves in the frame of colonial institutions but they have to generate themselves out of it clearly. For this purpose, a rival whose capacity to deploy violence is equal or superior to the colonial institutions themselves has to be found.” Firas Shehadeh, “A Conversation between Firas Shehadeh and David Armengol,” in *I Came from There* (Barcelona: Flames & Institut de Cultura de l'Ajuntament de Barcelona, 2015), 31.

4 Toni Cade Bambara's profound short story “The Organizer's Wife” was a constant

conversation with these two paragraphs. It can be found in her collection *The Sea Birds Are Still Alive* (New York: Vintage, 1982), each story being an intense examination of the tensions of both affect and political work, action and reflection.

5 This necessary question refers to a set of interrelated questions that can be found in the “Freedom School Curriculum,” the core educational text from the Freedom Schools, established in Mississippi in 1964 as part of the intense black emancipation struggles of that decade. The full list of questions reads: Why are we (teachers and students) in Freedom Schools? What is the Freedom Movement? What alternatives does the Freedom Movement offer us? What does the majority culture have that we want? What does the majority culture have that we don't want? What do we have that we want to keep? See <http://www.educationanddemocracy.org/FSCpdf/CurrTextOnlyAll.pdf>.

4.4 Commoning by occupation is a mode of survival and resistance at the same time. Occupations produce changed social relations and sometimes changed city spaces as well. Occupations disrupt the flow of the everyday lockdown. Occupation by taking common spaces, resources, ideas, and so on back into the commons is the question and the moment of expropriation. Commoning by occupation seeks actions and demands solidarity. It seeks to move beyond a limit and to produce a rupture of isolation.

4.5 But solidarity is not based in a perception of migrants, women, homeless people, and so on, as victims who need our help. Do we listen outside of the definitions, beyond the categorizations? What do we hear? Who do we feel we are?

4.6 When we listen together there is pertinence in asking: Who are the antagonists in this situation? Is it really us? What commons do we really desire to bring into being? If we can't sometimes give something up, we may betray our shared acts of listening and the histories and demands of the struggles that have been generously brought to us.

Acknowledgments

For the WWTF International Summer School "Commoning the City" in Vienna, Ultra-red members and comrades led four listening walks in the city around historical and contemporary sites of commoning and occupation. All walks followed short and previously mapped-out routes in different districts of Vienna, and each walk was based on a political theme. At highlighted stops on the route, testimonies or historical background was given by either those leading the walks or by others involved in current struggles at the sites, or from conversations made by the larger group in addition to what had been presented. The other side of a listening walk is that between sites and as people walk together, they are asked to remain silent and to spend this time just listening to what they hear. The sites: Refugee occupations in Vienna (facilitated by Janna, Nico, and Leah. Testimony from Mir Jahangir, Khan Adalat, Yusuf, Rahim Ihsan, and Rehman Ziat, with help from Kathi); Squats and gentrification in Vienna's 10th district (facilitated by Annette, with help from Sissi and Andi); Public housing in Vienna's 5th district and its discontents (facilitated by Chris, with help from Gerhard); Squats and gentrification in Vienna's 2nd and 7th districts (facilitated by Hong-Kai, with help from Mara). Sustained reflections between Hong-Kai Wang and Ultra-red on the work produced for the Summer School are the basis for this text. Ultra-red are deeply grateful to Hong-Kai for both the invitation to be part of the project and for the sharing of ideas, insights, and intuitions during later conversations.

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Study across Borders Addis Ababa — Vienna

Anette Baldauf, Tesfaye Bekele Beri, Stefan Gruber,
Mihret Kebede, Moira Hille, Annette Krauss, Vladimir Miller,
Mara Verlič, Hong-Kai Wang, and Julia Wieger

Sticky term “research”: The word itself, “research,” is probably one of the dirtiest words in the indigenous world’s vocabulary. When mentioned in many indigenous contexts, it stirs up silence, it conjures up bad memories, it raises a smile that is knowing and distrustful. [...] The ways in which scientific research is implicated in the worst excesses of colonialism remains a powerful remembered history for many of the world’s colonized peoples. (Linda Tuhiwai Smith, *Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples*, 1999)¹



Fig. 15
School of Commoning, Alle School of Fine Arts and Design, Addis Ababa, 2015

¹ The concept of “sticky terms of and for the commons” is inspired by a collaboration between Kunci Center for Cultural Studies, Yogyakarta, and the artist collectives Read-in and PEL. Using the commons as lens of analysis, its aim was to gather etymologies, histories, practices, and impossible translations as they circulate in written, spoken, and embodied languages in a specific context. Based on the workshop conversations, the collaboration worked out entries that reflected the diverse cultural backgrounds and languages/mother tongues of the workshop participants, which were then openly edited and rewritten in the course of an

ongoing process. Similar to the commons research group in Vienna and Addis Ababa, the collaboration in Indonesia asked how these etymologies, histories, practices, and impossible translations relate to the commons as a micro-political instance, as a set of material conditions, relations, and attitudes in the immediate neighborhood, as well as recurring trajectories that have been compounded by neoliberal forces such as gentrification or economization. See “Uncommon Reading: A Glossary of Sticky Terms of and for the Commons,” *Read-in*, March 2015, <http://read-in.info/?p=480>.

School of Commoning

The notion of a “school” repeatedly emerged when we, the Spaces of Commoning research group, opened up our discussion on the commons to a larger group of people. It helped us to approach pedagogies of commoning from different perspectives, forcing us to confront a series of questions: How do we engage with an “outside”? What do we bring to the encounter, what do we leave open? How do we learn and unlearn from each other? While some of us favored the formalization of our work, we were also concerned with the risk of streamlining ideas and practices, excluding voices, and erasing differences. The concept of a “school of commoning” contains both a range of paradoxes and contradictions, as well as potentials and expectations that make us hold on to such an unwieldy concept. Put simply, a school is an institution designed for teaching students under the guidance of teachers. Following this straightforward definition, a school of commoning suggests that commoning can be a subject of teaching. But several entries in this publication point to the troubled relationship between the commons and institutions: Are the institutions we are involved in “uncommoning” us, rather than providing spaces facilitating commoning? When we insist on a school of commoning, the question we pose isn’t necessarily about whether a school transforms histories of commoning into valuable knowledge. Rather, we ask if commoning can be the central principle by which a school operates. Can we envision a school where commoning is a practice to grapple with, instead of a subject to convey? Can we imagine education as a commons, as a pooled resource that is accessible for everyone? These are critical questions in times of drastic downsizing in education when, increasingly, economic conditions determine who will be part of a school community and who won’t.

Consequently, a great challenge to education posed by the commons is the resistance of enclosure from the outside as well as inside. As Stavros Stavrides argues in this book, a commons community needs to be intrinsically porous, sensitive to difference, and open to newcomers.² Can a school provide and sustain the making of such a community? In school settings, practices of in- and exclusion are visibly fixed in curricula and less visibly maintained through the hidden curricula of everyday school life. Mechanisms of in- and exclusion are manifest in codes of conduct and what is regarded as legitimate knowledge. These hierarchies of knowledge are rooted in politics of distribution and representation; they reside in decisions on what will not be addressed or represented. How do representation and distribution relate to a possible curriculum in a school of commoning?

As a research group, we oscillated between a longing for a school of commoning and an understanding of the necessity for “commoning the school.” This oscillation unleashed an understanding of commoning that could hardly be

reduced to “teaching commoning.” Instead, we turned to a study of and as commoning: its predicaments, expectations, and longings—namely, the conditions that a school of commoning itself is subject to. As Stefano Harney puts it, “These conditions may begin as the conditions of study, but they have to be transformed into the study itself [...] and by that they become the object of the transformation of being together.”³

Planning: Site of Un/commoning

Our research in Vienna evolved through our collective study as/of commoning, finding inspiration both in our internal group processes and in Vienna’s settlers’ movement at the turn of the twentieth century. For our third site, we collaborated with the Alle School of Fine Arts and Design and the Ethiopian Institute of Architecture Building Construction and City Development (EiABC) at the University of Addis Ababa. To our colleagues, we proposed looking into the urban transformation of the capital of Ethiopia. We had read about the Grand Housing Program (GHP), established by the government in 2004 to improve overall housing conditions, the satellite cities built from scratch and the large-scale resettlements, and in our minds we made tricky connections to the Red Vienna housing initiative and its proclaimed modernization in the early twentieth century. With these invisible strings in mind, we approached our colleagues in Addis and asked if, together, we could visit one of the GHP locations and explore it as site of un/commoning.

Sticky term “Africa”: Africa as a name, as an idea, and as an object of academic and public discourse has been, and remains, fraught. [...] Indeed, Africa is not only perpetually caught and imagined within a web of difference and absolute otherness. More radically, the sign is fraught because Africa so often ends up epitomizing the intractable, the mute, the abject, or the other-worldly. (Achille Mbembe and Sarah Nuttall, “Writing the World from an African Metropolis,” 2004)

With our colleagues in Addis, we wanted as much to share as challenge the insights and methods we had developed in Vienna. We also wanted to engage in a common practice. Could we envision the massive block formations of the Grand Housing Program as a glimpse of a future to come? Turning José Esteban Muñoz’s methodology of utopia on its head,⁴ would our views of the

² See Stavros Stavrides in conversation with Mara Verlič, in this volume, 48–59.

³ Stefano Harney in a panel discussion at “Study as Commoning,” Vienna Art Week, Vienna, November 17, 2015.

⁴ See in this volume “Study across Time,” 102–19.

new sub-cities, built from scratch, allow for a speculative walk into the past? As the new residents moved from patched-together, single-story neighborhoods into the solid, multistory block formations, which offered four apartment typologies to choose from, would the processes of adjustment, spatially and socially, make visible the features of their previous everyday life that were taken for granted? Would it bring to the forefront the multilayered practices of commoning, the self-help associations, the infrastructures of reproductive labor, and close-knit networks of care? Finally, would it be possible for the newly arrived residents to compensate for the loss of old networks by weaving new connections?

Upon our arrival in Addis Ababa, the premise of utopia as a critical methodology was immediately lost in translation. The concept of utopia, we quickly learned, is another sticky concept. Like superglue, it is enmeshed within a multiplicity of other, equally adhesive elements: development as westernization, the teleology of evolution and progress, all imbued with the ideology of modernization and the colonial condition.

Sticky term “utopia”: Our collaborators from the Alle School and the EiABC were quick to point out that from the mid-1970s to 1991, Ethiopia lived out the utopia of the Marxist Derg regime. Hundreds of thousands were killed as a result of the Red Terror; mass deportations and famine were used as means for destruction. In the 2015 election, the now-ruling Ethiopian People’s Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF) was credited with 100 percent of the votes, and Ethiopians once again confronted the realities of absolute utopia. In 2004 the government presented the “Addis Ababa Integrated Regional Development Plan” (“master plan” in short), which aimed to introduce five hundred thousand new housing units. The master plan drew an image of the city to come; it was a totalized bird’s eye perspective, abstracted from everyday life. In 2015 the government reaffirmed the plan and announced its plans for expansion. But underneath it all, or maybe above or behind the widespread suspicions about the concept of utopia looms Addis’ colonial heritage and the understanding of utopia as a means of the politics of Western modernization, which uses abstract concepts like development, progress, and modernization as a cover to further exploit and widen excess inequalities.

Undoing Research

As we gave up on our methodological framework—our own abstract utopia of collaboration—we turned around to face a very basic question: What can we study together?

We sat down in a circle and started collecting different words for commoning practices and names for spaces of commoning. We exchanged experiences with the formalization of neighborhood banks; we compared different networks of care and obligation.

When we study together, can we allow ourselves to be dispossessed and repossessed by each other’s ideas? Can we explore new frameworks of looking, listening, making? In common, can we transcend the limits of phenomenology and move beyond the parameters of what we are used to seeing, hearing, and narrating? Can we transcend the limits we confront because of our bodily situatedness, the partial perspective, and limited repertoire of experience? Together, can we unlearn our prejudice, unlearn othering and estrangement? To un-hear, un-see, and un-narrate our perception?

As we discussed the potential of commoning, the visions driving them, and the borders that continuously bind them, our focus moved to the conditions of our own coming together. Is it possible to engage in a common study in light of current European immigration politics, the fences and walls erected around us? Is it possible to study across borders?

Sticky term “borders”: You have come from Vienna to study with us commoning. Here we are studying together. Soon you leave and we will not be able to visit you and study commoning in Vienna. Is that commoning? (School of Commoning, zine, 2015)

Dear Border, How is it going? Have you been on holidays recently. If not—how about taking a break? Being off for some time? (From the poster *Dear Border*, 2015)

On-Site: Eight Acts

Protagonists: Anette Baldauf, Tesfaye Bekele Beri, Fasil Giorgis, Dawit Girma, Stefan Gruber, Moira Hille, Mihret Kebede, Annette Krauss, Ermyas Legesse, Shalom Lemma, Vladimir Miller, Mara Verlič, Hong-Kai Wang, Julia Wieger, Emnet Woubishet, Helen Zeru

Scheme: The Grand Housing Program aims to construct up to fifty thousand housing units per year, creating forty thousand jobs and supporting fifteen hundred micro- and small enterprises.

Site: Jemo Condominium Site I, II, and III are satellite cities approximately eight kilometers southwest of the Addis Ababa city center. Construction started in 2006. Total amount of newly introduced units: ten thousand; expected number of dwellers: fifty thousand.



Fig. 16
School of Commoning, Jemo Condominium Site III, Addis Ababa, 2015

Sticky term “development”: Since 2005 Ethiopia has been implementing an ambitious government-led low- and middle-income housing program: The Integrated Housing Development Program (IHDP). The initial goal of the program was to construct four hundred thousand condominium units, create two hundred thousand jobs, promote the development of ten thousand micro- and small enterprises, enhance the capacity of the construction sector, regenerate inner-city slum areas, and promote homeownership for low-income households. (UN-HABITAT, “The Ethiopia Case of Condominium Housing: The Integrated Housing Development Programme,” 2011)

Development can best be described as an apparatus that links forms of knowledge about the Third World with the deployment of forms of power and intervention, resulting in the mapping and production of Third World societies. (Arturo Escobar, “Imagining a Post-development Era?,” 1996)

Act 1: How Will We Live? A Question Addressed to Fasil Giorgis

Fasil Giorgis: The UN-Habitat studies of the 1980s and '90s said that Addis Ababa was 80 percent slum. This is a very depressing statement for the leaders of any country. In 1974, when the military regime nationalized extra housing in Addis Ababa, there were a lot of *kebele* houses that soon started to decay because the people who did not own their own homes rarely wanted to invest in renovations. Between 1974 and the early 1990s, the city was going down; there was war and famine. The slum effect addressed by UN-Habitat was evident. This is why politicians wanted something that would radically transform the existing city—they wanted a brave, modern, new world city. We were not against improvements in housing, but we were very cautious about the price. When I say price I don't mean the cost of building, I mean the social price, the resettlement. We took an in-between position: we said, yes, we can have medium high-rise buildings, but be careful about the urban fabric. Eventually, our approach was incompatible with the image of the city the politicians wanted to create.

When the Grand Housing Program was initiated, some of us were involved and pushed for better neighborhood planning and social consciousness. But already the pilot project made us realize that for politicians with an ambitious plan, it is very difficult to break from a grand-scale program. We have seen this in many parts of the world: the politicians aggressively went for it and in the end there was very little neighborhood planning. They created four modern types of apartments: A, B, C, and D. Four types of apartments! For me it was a shock: How can you remake a city with four typologies? It condemned all of us to live the same way. The aim was to create cost-effective,

easy-to-manage housing. From the decision makers' point of view, they introduced thousands of new apartments and blocks, people were moving, they were happy. It was an improvement for areas where there were no proper toilets or water supplies. But on the other hand, the social cohesion—the community, the social fabric—was torn apart. When the first condominiums were built people asked, How will we live? Almost every Ethiopian family prepares food at home but this cannot be done easily in an apartment. Will people be happy to go upstairs and make their *injera*? People were asking about how to maintain their community life—for example, where would we set up the tents for funerals or weddings? In old neighborhoods, people have known each other for years; everybody looks after each other. There are social organizations called *Idir*. When people move into the new condominiums, these organizations are disrupted. This was what urban anthropologists, geographers, and some of us architects feared.

In the traditional neighborhoods, many people are unemployed—they work in the informal sector, mostly close to their neighborhood. When you take people ten kilometers out of the town, or into the suburbs like Jemo, you see that their source of income is disrupted. I have learned that when the condominiums are built close to the original settlement, they have a better chance of housing the same people, and then people are closer to their source of income.

As it turns out, the social networks are robust; society depends on and needs these community organizations. I recently visited the condominiums in Canissa, when a relative of mine died. I went there and I was very curious to see how the funeral was going to take place because in low-rise housing people put up tents—they use the *Idir* to help the family. I visited the condominiums and the people of course sat in the corridors and the balconies and the verandas. They told me that the new neighbors had already formed a kind of *Idir* and that people were trying to help.

Sticky term “Idir”: *Idir* is an association established among neighbors or workers to raise funds that will be used during emergencies, such as death within these groups and their families. *Idir* [characterized as a form of] group life insurance, usually has a large membership and the weekly or monthly membership is minimal and affordable by all. *Idir* guarantees grieving families, for instance, the complete assistance (financial or otherwise) they seek in times of emergency. *Idir* members are required to attend funerals and must always be ready to help. *Idir* can be established by a community or village, at the work place, or among friends and family. (Ayele Bekerie, “Iqub and *Idir*: Socio-Economic Traditions of the Ethiopians,” 2003)

It might be assumed that all members do have friendly relationships, and advises would be received with great warmth. However, there are members

who enjoy rumor. In short, all members are not positive thinkers. Thus, they create disharmony among members. For example, if you mistakenly did something wrong, you might hear some members talking behind your back as if you did it purposely. This affects your self-esteem and the way others treat you. (Interviewee, quoted in Elias Teshome et al., “Participation and Significance of Self-Help Groups for Social Development: Exploring the Community Capacity in Ethiopia,” 2014)

Act 2: How Do We Hear? A Concern Raised by Hong-Kai Wang and Mihret Kebede

Listening is a way of studying together, without the pressure of preparing a speech or authoring oneself. At the Jemo Condominium Site II, we take several silent walks in small groups and listen to what comes within earshot. In between the walks, we describe to one another what we have heard until we exhaust our responses. Later on, we do another listening exercise in small groups and try to strike up conversations with the residents of Jemo about their everyday life.

Inspired by Ultra-red's pedagogical work, we do the listening exercises in a context that not everybody involved is familiar with.⁵ Some of us live in Addis Ababa and the others live in Europe. “What did you hear?” we ask one another. For instance, there is the sound of wind rattling the shack; there is the sound of construction from afar; there is the sound of music playing from a stereo nearby; and there is also the sound of something that some of us cannot make out.

Is there a single listening moment for us to grasp? Perhaps, or perhaps not. The sounds come all at once from the environment, and in order to make sense of our hearing, we listen to others with our preconceptions.

On the other hand, we somehow shape the listening process and presuppose what we hear when we talk with some of the Jemo residents. They complain a lot about the management and the infrastructure of the condominium. In many ways, the needs of the community simply cannot be met by the top-down system.

And it is important to stress how our seeing interrupts the listening process as we associate what we listen to with what we see in creating meaning to it. Listening happens within other processes.

⁵ See in this volume, “How to Hear in Common,” 186–93.

Act 3: From Miscommunication Station to Eight-Second Sonic Refuge

There is a great gap between those who are free to speak and those who are governed by silence. Our bodies simply cannot cross that gap easily, and neither can our tongues. At Jemo Condominium Site, we do a small exercise: we interview one another as if we were on a radio show and reflect on our conversation with a family displaced from Piazza.

(A cell phone rings)

Tesfaye Bekele Beri: Mihret, we are in the second minibus.

Dawit Girma: Yes, the second minibus.

HKW: Do you want to talk about the lack of trust because of the frequent relocations from one condominium site to another, making it very difficult to build trust among neighbors?

DG: The problem with trust at this site is that people here come from different areas. They don't know each other, and even if there is an open space, it is not functioning. The person we talked with needs to reestablish his social life every time he moves. Mihret, do you want to comment on that?

Mihret Kebede: I don't know what you are talking about.

DG: The lack of trust people have in not allowing their children to live and play with the community.

MK: They have not known the neighborhood for a long time. In their previous living situation, they had lived in a neighborhood for a very long time so they knew they could trust each other. Here everybody is from a different place. People here have no idea who lives next to them.

TB: When you went inside his apartment, I stayed outside. Did you meet his children?

DG: Yes, he has two children.

HKW: We talked to one of them. The girl said she does not play with the kids from the condominium. She only plays with her little brother.

MK: Her dad doesn't trust the neighborhood enough to let her go outside. And there is no space to play. So he sends her to her grandmother's house and his friends.

HKW: The daughter said that her schoolmates who live in Jemo I have more communal spaces.

TB: Why did he move to Jemo I from Jemo III?

MK: Because of the high rent.

We call this constellation a miscommunication station: the politicians, who try to respond to the needs of the society operate top-down. This is a failed system because it does not start from what is needed on the ground. Most

people are not free to complain and respond to this system. They prefer to be silent as they clearly know the consequences for speaking out.

At some point, few of the residents at Jemo I express their dissatisfaction, caught between fear and desire to speak out. So this short conversation does very little, except that it engages us in listening because we are part of the fear that is filling the atmosphere.

We try to sketch out a kind of imagined freedom in the form of radio waves and here it is the "eight-second sonic refuge":

There is only one private radio station in Ethiopia. The rest is government-controlled in one way or another. Radiophonic expressions and transmissions are to be authorized by the ruling system that we live in. The governmental stations do not operate without restrictions. Journalists who work there divulge to us that the stations play a trick with programs that brush against any conceivably sensitive subject. They invented the tactics of an "eight-second hold" during live broadcasts, whether it is an interview with someone influential or a call-in on community-based issues. They HOLD the transmission for eight seconds before it reaches the audience, so as to fool them into thinking that it is live. If one does the math, can you imagine how many of those eight seconds we have lost altogether? What kind of constructed temporality are we forced to live in?

Now that we have come to "know of" the times, airwaves, sounds, voices, and so on, that are lost in nowhere. We want to build an eight-second sonic refuge, where all can feel safe to speak and pronounce an eight-second freedom.

Act 4: Where Are We? Reflections by Vladimir Miller and Anette Baldauf

We find ourselves in the middle of the vast grass meadow just behind the main road at Jemo Condominium Site. We look around. We are surrounded by a panorama of buildings, roads, and yards. Buildings appear as standardized model houses carefully placed in an architectural rendering. We study the panorama from a distance. A bull appears out of nowhere and we jump to run out of its way, thinking it might chase us. It is silly and funny and afterward, our laughter mixes with the shock of non-belonging still buzzing in our bodies.

On the meadow looking at the condominium blocks, the scene we find ourselves in is overwritten, written all over. The official narrative for this site is

one of modernization and the government's aim to create adequate housing. But there are many other stories, some told in whispers, some discussed behind closed doors. Who lived on the land before the construction workers arrived? Whose cattle grazed here, who collected firewood in that forest? How do we measure a city's well-being when uprooting a life is a justified measure? And who are we to question motivations and desires for modernization?

So we stand there, try to observe and listen—but we cannot grasp what we see and hear. We cannot make sense. We don't move because we don't know which direction to take. Doing research is such a strange way to get to know a neighborhood. We turn and only see ourselves: sticking out, our presence is all too obvious. A group of mostly white researchers scrutinizing, measuring, judging, dismissing, and finally returning to their comfort zone. Keeping a safe distance to the object of study, since, after all, it is far closer than it appears. The call for improvement, for change, and development as an echo of well-known imperatives. We feel implicated, guilty by association in that mad improvement paradigm that the project of Western modernity let loose on the world. The housing blocks appear as foreign to the landscape as we are walking between them. So what to do here in the kaleidoscope of global relations—this experimental laboratory of a utopian future and a magnifying glass of the past? Can we meet here and not do anything, or nothing productive? Can we just watch and be aware of our glasses, listen and acknowledge the sonic registers?

Act 5: Why Is It Done Like This?

Emnet Woubishet: The residents told us that they fenced off the compound with a wire-mesh fence about three months ago. They said that without a fence anyone can get in, and out and they wanted to protect their children.

Helen Zuru: It is not only that the parents were scared that somebody might come in from the outside, but also that animals and small children might get lost.

EW: Maybe they are also afraid that at night animals like hyenas come inside. The fence keeps animals out.

VM: Do any of these households keep cattle?

HZ: Hannah, one of the residents we spoke to said she just came back from feeding the sheep. [...] Hannah said it will take her time to get to know everybody around here and to engage in the *Idir*.

VM: Hannah mentioned that when the residents move in, they first complete the interior spaces, their own space. Now that two years have

passed, most of the residents have finished working on their apartments, and are now starting to take care of the communal spaces. This is why the fence only appears now. It took the residents two years to organize themselves in such a way so that they could finance the fence collectively.

EW: Hannah also talked about the communal gardens: any of the residents can cultivate the small strips of land around the houses. Her father made the garden because he wanted to grow potatoes. Anybody can participate in gardening. It is done according to the people's interest and availability. Most people living here commute for work; they don't have time for gardening. Hannah's father stays at home; that is how he can do it.

VM: The gardens are placed in what seem to be leftover spaces—between the building and the outer fence in the corner. Wouldn't it be more practical to use a part of the central space for gardening. Why is it done like this?



Fig. 17
School of Commoning, Jemo Condominium Site III, Addis Ababa, 2015

EW: When we asked the residents, they mentioned that the central space is reserved for the building up of tents for bigger communal events and activities, for example, in case of a funeral. Also it is a playground for the children. And it is used for parking. Thus the space in-between the wall and fence is more suitable for plants because they are more protected.

EW: The big plot of land, which is used for events like weddings and funerals, is also used to dry clothes. Clothes are mostly handwashed and dried in the sun. The laundry line belongs to everyone. That is a commoning element.

VM: We also saw an herbal garden. One person did this, but everybody can pick fresh herbs there.

EW: Yes, herbs are used in small amounts, so everyone can take some. These plants are mostly used for medicinal purposes so everyone is invested in protecting them.

HZ: In my house we have these types of plants a lot, and our neighbors knock and ask if they can pick a little if somebody is ill in their family.

VM: It seems we misunderstood the fences around the small garden in the beginning. The fences are actually a protection against animals and not necessarily an enclosure of communal space since, as you have explained, everybody is welcome to join in the gardening process.

Act 6: Buying and Selling: A Project by Tesfaye Bekele Beri

For the “Wax and Gold” project, the main goal of my public art performance was to stimulate reflection on the condominium houses in Ethiopia.⁶ I did a public performance on a street where I auctioned off models of the condominium houses to the public. The event took place at a time when the government started registrations for those spaces, so the mentality of selling and buying a space (especially condominium flats) was very present. People, the media, everybody talked about the condominium houses.

I built small models of condominium houses from the four typologies the government provided. During the performance, people were very active. They raised questions and criticized the role of the government, they engaged in the public spaces in Addis and they participated in a discussion on the situation. They talked with each other and there was a lot of bargaining since some buyers started reselling their models. The process of buying and selling allowed for a discussion about what was going on in Addis.



Fig. 18
Tefsaye Bekele Beri, “Wax and Gold” project, Addis Ababa, 2013

Act 7: Can You Teach Me? A Conversation between Moira Hille, Annette Krauss, Ermyas Legesse, and Shalom Lemma

Shalom Lemma: When we walked through the meda, children were playing there. I would like to investigate the meda a bit more.

MH: What kind of space is it? What do you know about medas?

Ermyas Legesse: In the urban communities, we use the medas for playing soccer and shepherds take their cattle there to graze. Today, it’s rare that you find these large medas unless they are near a riverbed, and people don’t build close to those because the soil is not so strong. You

⁶ “Wax and Gold” was the title of a performance art event dedicated to freedom of expression and censorship with participating artists from Ethiopia, Kenya, Zambia, and Scotland that took place in Addis Ababa between July 15–17, 2013.

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Merkato and the Mall A Short History of Modernization

Anette Baldauf and Elizabeth Giorgis

Merkato is considered Africa's largest open-air market, and Dembel Mall is Ethiopia's first upscale shopping mall. The two sites are currently connected by the Addis Ababa master plan, which imagines the shopping mall as an ideal form of modernization. Can the enforcement of enclosure and verticalization overwrite local sensitivities and the tradition of negotiation? A group of artists, architects, and social theorists from Addis Ababa and Vienna visited both Merkato and Dembel Mall, and through an exercise in speculation tried to trace lines of association and drift.

Within and against the City

The evening before our site visit to Merkato, our Ethiopian collaborators tell us to go without bags, with cameras safely put away in our pockets, as distracted tourists are sometimes taken advantage of in the Merkato environs. Immediately upon arrival, our group of visitors from the Austrian art academy is absorbed by a swarming host of people and goods moving along a thick sound cloud of metal strokes, the pounding of café beans, and the desperate cackling of chicken. Merkato claims to provide the largest open-air market in Africa; it encompasses an area of five hundred acres and accommodates around one hundred thousand inhabitants. It is known as a hub of trade that combines diverse sectors (spices, metalwork, textiles, plastics, imported electronics, etc.), but the points of sale are in fact integrated into a dense landscape of production and reproduction. We are introduced to an intimate enfolding of formal (trade unions, associations, etc.) and informal forms of collaboration (networks of care, exchange of reproductive labor, Iddir, etc.) sustaining the complex, self-fueling ecological system that operates across multiple areas and scales.¹

Merkato was established during the Italian occupation (1935–41) over the course of Italy's attempted Apartheid-type solution for residential and commercial land use, dividing the city into sectors dedicated to Ethiopians and Italians. To make space for the piazza, the Italians moved the old Arada Market to Addis Ketema (meaning "new town"), where it was integrated into the extensive Roman-style grid pattern. The encounter of rigid parcelization with the traditions of negotiation and permeation gave rise to a place where global forces met with and were continuously contested by local sensibilities. In their everyday activities, merchants and shoppers challenged the separationist order, approaching the inscriptions of colonial power as sources of potential

¹ Cary Siress and Marc Angélil, "Addis through the Looking Glass," *disP: The Planning Review* 182, no. 3 (October 2010): 8–13.



Fig. 20
Merkato, Addis Ababa, 2015

subversion and collective redefinition. In effect, Emanuel Admassu argues, the colonial act of displacement generated a space that functioned both within and against the city of Addis Ababa:

Throughout this endless act of negotiation, the marketplace has increasingly become a microcosm of a nation that absorbs the frictions caused by its lack of uniformity. Merchants and customers who speak more than eighty different languages meet and negotiate over sales with varying degrees of spatial and legal formality. This allows for a growing number of registered and unregistered businesses to operate in the slippages between structured and loosely defined means of trade. Because most of the original architecture in Merkato was built cheaply from eucalyptus framing systems clad with corrugated sheet metal, modifications have been relatively affordable, allowing it to adopt various material and spatial identities over its seventy-five year history.²

As we walk along the grid alignments of small stalls, passing by towers of red peppers and chickpea powder laid out on the floor, we notice the encroaching development that is taking hold of the area. Multistory building constructions are eating up small businesses. In the midst of an extensive construction site,

women have spread out their assortment of plastic containers; some women load donkeys with canisters, others carry baggage on their backs. A woman walks by. On her back she carries a baby, and in front of her there is a large metal tray with cups of tea to go. Behind the women, the building under construction is six stories high. With its ostentatious glass front and bright red decor it seems fully out of place, but it is also easy to imagine that as construction begins creeping around every corner, the spatial verticalization might soon outdate Merkato's currently more fluid, horizontal organization of exchange. Those left behind will most likely include the women with plastic containers: How will they fit into the multistory commercial building? How will their economies, charged with a multiplicity of small—and for many outsiders—invisible services, find their way into the new order of enclosure?

Merkato started to change rapidly with the reestablishment of the free-market economy in Ethiopia in the early 1990s. In 2000 a Malaysian investment firm proposed to buy the land-use rights to turn Merkato into a new business and shopping district. Even though the majority of the shops were still owned by the Ethiopian government, the increase in demand caused by the city's overall transformation turned Merkato into the city's most expensive real estate. The concerted efforts of trade unions and newly formed associations and alliances eventually led the government to turn down the offer and allow Merkato merchants to develop their own land. But the Local Development Plan for Merkato stipulated that for merchants to keep their rights to the land, the building structure must be transformed and units placed in buildings that are at least five stories high. In other words, the plan prescribed that businesses move into mini-malls.

To avoid displacement, some shop owners have formed cooperatives to introduce a common structure; others now rent spaces from developers. But the overall move to enclosure not only challenges Merkato's spatial organization, it also affects its social fabric: when merchants move into multistory buildings they often lose access to the vibrancy of the old Merkato. They find themselves cut off from the multiple networks of informal economies that rely on more fluid, intermediate spaces, and the economy of services and small favors. In effect, spaces of production and reproduction are often unlinked in the enclosed spaces of consumption, informal economies expelled, prices fixed, and social roles defined (as, for example, buyer or seller). Hence, some visitors to Merkato refuse to walk up the stairs to the upper floors.

² Emanuel Admassu, "Merged Merkato," *ARPA Journal* 3 (July 2015), <http://www.arpajournal.net/menged-merkato/>.

Archaeology

In Ethiopia, Western styles were particularly revered in the beginning of the twentieth century. For instance, a most fundamental shift in social and cultural orientation arose from Emperor Menelik II's (1844–1913) modern nation-building projects, which continued through ensuing regimes. Menelik II's ambitious modern nation-building project started to take shape before the victory of Adwa in 1896, when Ethiopian soldiers defeated Italian colonial aggression, making Ethiopia the first African country to defeat a white, heretofore invincible army. But the victory had galvanized modern consciousness even more. No evidence is more telling than the period's poetry, music, advertisements, and fashion to understand the extent of the adoption of modern concepts into the social thread and imaginary. A new elite had just begun to appreciate everything about the modern world, and in newspapers like *Berhanena Selam* (1925–35) the most striking features of the "modern" appeared in visual displays in the forms of advertisement and fashion.

While trends in style and fashion continued to burgeon in the 1930s through to the '50s, it was not until the '60s when a group of elite who were educated in the West re-immigrated that a different genre and sensibility of the modern mushroomed. Clothing shops like La Petit Paris, La Bergerie, and Moda Nova catered to a fashionable clientele concerned with the embodiment of panache and polish. It was also around this time that three hundred thousand peasants from Wollo and Tigray died of famine, and on October 18, 1973, the world became aware of Ethiopia's agonizing catastrophe through British journalist Jonathan Dimbleby's program, *The Unknown Famine*. The 1973 famine consequently became one of the major precursors to the 1974 uprising. The period's revolutionaries emerged from a sentiment of injustice. Their identification with Ethiopia was far away from the elite's obsession with the smartness of their clothes. With an acute awareness and sensitivity to inequality, they addressed their historical condition through critical engagement and by forging a drama of social protest.

However, military officers around the same time formed the Derg (the Coordinating Committee of the Armed Forces, Police, and Territorial Army), which ruled the country from 1974 to 1987, and immediately after the uprising, the military junta hijacked the revolution. Shortly after it came to power, the Derg not only executed sixty of Emperor Haile Selassie's (1892–1975) trusted officials and cabinet members, but also imprisoned many who were associated to the emperor's regime. The emperor died in August 1975 under mysterious circumstances, and the monarchy was formally abolished. With an entirely new political framework and ideology, Ethiopia was declared a Marxist-Leninist state and Mengistu Haile Mariam became the chair of the Derg. In 1987 the Derg was formally dissolved and the country became the People's Democratic

Republic of Ethiopia (PDRE, 1987–91), with strong ties to the Soviet Union and Eastern bloc countries.

Enat Hager Weym Mot (Revolutionary motherland or death) became the revolutionary slogan of the state. A visual culture of signs and symbols that represented the ideology of the state flooded public squares. Billboards and posters in all the major squares of Addis Ababa displayed Marx, Lenin, Engels, and Colonel Haile Mariam. Parades, performances, blue khaki uniforms manufactured in North Korea as everyday wardrobes for civil servants, national military service, and national student service to the countryside were among the many projects that attempted to flaunt the state's authoritarian nationalism, where propaganda and terror freely interchanged.

It should nonetheless be noted that visual artists, playwrights, literary intellectuals, musicians, and students were the first to concede to the promises of equality and justice, and during the first few years of the military regime, many embraced the Derg's political goals. Western fashions and styles were seen as imperialistic, and the politics of embodiment projected tropes linked to the ideology of Marxism-Leninism as well as to critiques of Western imperialism. Forms of embodiment signified the extent of revolutionary commitment. For the youth, a Che Guevara-style beret and military fatigues reflected obligation and dedication to Marxist-Leninist ideals. And for civil servants, blue khaki uniforms referenced the ordinary lives of revolutionaries devoted to addressing urgent political questions. Magazines and newspapers presented heroes and heroines attired in military outfits with Kalashnikovs tied to their waists. In this regard, the clothing's political relationship to the body was all too visible in the early years of the revolution.

It was later in the military regime's history, and particularly after the 1979 Red Terror campaign, when hundreds of thousands of Ethiopian men and women activists were slaughtered for allegedly being reactionaries, that many people who were exuberant radicals during the early years of the revolution were now either exiled or killed, and those who remained in the country were completely disillusioned. Vast parts of the population became victims of state political violence and the pressure of living under the regime's tight control made Western culture once again seem appealing. Indeed, boutiques were rare under the military regime but a new phenomenon of trading called *Ayer be Ayer*—literally meaning "air by air"—but ultimately referring to contraband goods had flourished. Since free travel was restricted, Ethiopian Airlines stewardesses, who were among the privileged few to travel to Western countries, legitimated a particular type of exchange. Goods imported via air were sold in the open market without a physical and located space. Stewardesses brought into the country items ranging from clothes to perfumes, and even toilet papers that were not readily available in the local market. These items

were sold for exorbitant prices to an exclusive clientele such as people who lived on remittances provided by family members living abroad, military officials and their wives, and local employees of international organizations.

Though this arrangement was largely illicit, it was widely practiced in the Ayer be Ayer market network that also implicated high government officials—the same officials who promoted and advocated the fantasies of revolutionary embodiments. Several important meanings that are subject to many interpretations can be gleaned from this experience: that the ideation of a false future whose creation was motivated by wishes suddenly went awry for the true revolutionaries of the early years, and that the facts of an external reality, such as the politics of the Cold War, dictated its final outcome. And, finally, that the political leanings of government officials subsequently surrendered to the cultural desires of the West, if not to its political belief system. Shaped within the framework of Cold War militarization, the military regime was embattled by both internal and external conflicts that resulted in political repression and relentless human rights violations. But equally interesting was their lack of faith and enthusiasm for communist lifestyles. Eventually, they too surrendered to the cultural desires of the West. While they grudgingly continued to wear blue North Korean khaki uniforms, they solicited the help of airline stewardesses in dressing their wives in Western styles. The uneasy combination between the desired Western lifestyle and an official narrative of contempt for its accompanying political beliefs was a source of considerable anxiety for the military elite.

The current regime—the Ethiopian Peoples' Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF)—overthrew the military regime in 1991 and came into power amid this unsettling account. And the understanding of Western culture and the political effects of embodiment drastically shifted and a particularly visible style emerged. It is in this historical context that Dembel Mall came into existence thirteen years later.

The New and the Modern

Dembel opened its doors in 2004. The complex was developed by a firm called Yecomad. The major shareholder and general director of the developing firm, Yemiru Nega, is listed among the top twenty richest Ethiopians. He is also the promoter of the Oromia International Bank (with headquarters in Dembel Mall) and the uncle of the former minister of finance and trade, Girma Birru, who also appears on the top twenty list.

The promises that Dembel Mall introduced early on was that of a completely new culture that signified urbanity and finesse. The system of symbols that it

initially crafted indeed brought in a spatial experience of modern city spaces with an emphasis of *flânerie* and strolling. And like the high-profile boutiques, such as La Bergerie from the imperial era, Dembel also conjured experiences of luxury and sensual delight for an elite that had amassed conspicuous wealth through corruption. Glittering mannequins, glossy advertisements by mall entrances, well-lit stores, and fancy cafés portrayed Dembel's interior spaces. However, Dembel also catered to an interesting class of clientele that was distinctly different from the imperial time. For this new elite, the fascination for the new and modern did not necessarily hew to the familiar brands that La Bergerie, La Petit Paris, and Moda Nova stocked, but to mass artifices that were excessively priced. Made in China, bought in Dubai, flown in via private suitcases to the shops in Dembel, these products were made in China for an African market as opposed to a Western market. For those enchanted with the material culture of capitalism, these objects served as dreamlike fetishes. Unaware of the historically specific context from which these objects emerged, the unwitting elite sated its desires with inferior products. In a boutique in Dembel, I [Elizabeth Giorgis] remember a sales lady telling me how fine her products were, that they were "100 percent polyester," as if polyester was the finest fabric bestowed on Ethiopia by China.



Fig. 21
Dembel Mall, Addis Ababa, 2015

It's significant to note is that clothing shops pre-Dembel and Dembel clothing shops today are still supplied through Ayer be Ayer channels. Clothes are either provisioned by air stewardesses or bought by store owners in places like Dubai and Bangkok, and then transported in suitcases to the shops. Major suppliers and stores from the West are not yet present, nor do they partner with Ethiopian store owners. Consequently, sizes, varieties, and styles are random.

As the first mall of its kind, Dembel had already been built in popular imaginations even before construction of its physical space began. New political conditions now replaced the political violence of the socialist state. In the years following the end of state socialism, the EPRDF redefined the nature of politics with new forms of economic, social, and institutional agendas, one of which was the lifting of travel restrictions. Mothers began to travel to the United States to see their sons and daughters who had fled the country to escape persecution and the tyranny of the military regime, and who had become political refugees in various geographies of the United States. And mothers came back to brag enthusiastically about the American mall spaces they had seen. The alluring and intense paraphernalia of goods in the malls were described to friends and families, and thus, the mall's imagined possibilities fashioned the dreaming of many. Fantasies on the spatial arrangement of the mall and its desires subsequently brought the standards of material culture into the popular imagination.

In spite of their poor quality, these products and their enclosed spaces of display revived a spirit of consumption that had been lost during the military regime. Though Dembel's romantic allure was confined to the elite, even despite the public nature of space it provided, it became a privatized space of mass artifice for the elite. Yet, its heterotopia of illusion was experienced by both the shoppers who frequented the space, and by those who desired to patronize it. The vast majority of the city's population did not cross the border of the mall: either they were intimidated by the crowds it attracted or found that this built environment did not accommodate their lifestyles. Though desired by many, Dembel in its early years clearly seemed and acted as an urban environment for those with large net worths, despite its cheap goods. But soon after its opening, the urban market outside was also flooded with second-rate Chinese products, many similar to those found inside Dembel. Clearly, the abstract and imaginative space of the mall coalesced with the city space, and Dembel began to lose its edge. In this context, the elite who wanted to combine their ability to consume according to the bourgeois norm and status in places like Dembel were paradoxically robbed of their imagination. Embodied hierarchies were dissolved and with inferior Chinese products everywhere—when elite consumption at Dembel became common and popular—a democratized form of consumption emerged.

This might have been the reason for the financial difficulties that Dembel Mall encountered after 2006. There is little information on Dembel's debt accumulation (approximately twenty-four million US dollars), and when and why the government intervened in its foreclosure procedure.³ Since then, different kinds of malls, both closed and open, have sprung up throughout the cityscape. By dressing up reality with similar cheap and glossy Chinese products, these malls cater to mass consumption. And once again, bourgeois culture reverts to Ayer be Ayer shopping, whereby the elite orders specific products to be purchased by stewardesses or by other travelers. In some cases, the commodity objects are purchased by the elite who themselves have become frequent global travelers.

Here Again

Inside Dembel we walk around. The ground floor hosts mostly banks and managerial offices, with people working behind closed doors. We walk up the stairs and stroll down the aisles. We pass by a furniture department, peak into a jewelry boutique, and study the display windows of a small electronics store. There is the occasional shopper, but most of the people seem to use the mall as a place to meet and mingle. An Asian family is having dessert at the ice cream parlor; a few young Ethiopians sit in the café, chatting and sipping on coffee and water; a couple strolls, hand in hand, down the aisles. We go upstairs. On the top floor there are travel agencies, language schools, and the headquarters of several banks. Again, there is the impression of being inside a spaceship that sustains the enclosure of the small universe and the promise of a departure soon to come. It is quiet. The air smells fresh and clean. There are no reminders of the thick and multilayered urban fabric that makes up the city outside of the building's glass front.

We gather in the basement in front of a café. Setargew Kenaw Fantaw, a philosopher from the University of Addis Ababa, shares his research on the mall with us. He recalls friends describing it as a black box, and muses over the relationship between architecture, movement, and social interaction.⁴ When he asks us how we perceive it, the waitress in the nearby café starts to set up a small table on the floor in front of us. She burns incense, fans the smoke, and starts brewing coffee. She walks around slowly, offering everybody a cup of coffee and a handful of popcorn. Encircling all of us, those from Addis Ababa and from abroad, students and teachers, male and female, her routine

3 "Public Library of US Diplomacy," *Wikileaks*, https://wikileaks.org/plusd/cables/07ADDISABABA3483_a.html.

4 Setargew Kenaw Fantaw, "Shopping Centers as Black Boxes: A Reflection in

Philosophy of Engineering Design," in *Proceedings of the 16th International Conference of Ethiopian Studies*, ed. Svein Ege et al. (Trondheim: NTNU, 2009), 984.



Fig. 22
Dembel Mall, Addis Ababa, 2015

turns into a performative act of emplacement. While we sip coffee and discuss the relationship between the different modalities of spatial organization, the nearby florists start to intrude into the space of the café, which at this point has been transformed into a discussion forum. Filling a large-scale wedding order, the florists now extend their space, embedding the café and its customers in an ocean of red and white roses. The smell of coffee and flowers blend as the boundaries of the stores swell to satisfy the needs of both shoppers and merchants. At this moment, when the arts of the Merkato take hold of the spatial order and spread their spirit of permeation, the mall manager arrives on the scene. He asks to see our study permit, and we hand him a piece of paper provided by the Alle School of Fine Art and Design. We continue our discussion.

Searching for what African cities possibly have in common, AbdouMaliq Simone concludes that what seems to be static at the crossroads of the colonial and the postcolonial is often actually “the highly intricate engineering of interactions among different events, actors, and situations.”⁵ In Addis Ababa, while the city fabric is ripped, fissured, and shoved, urban planning is forced to make what Achille Mbembe and Sarah Nuttall call “an encounter with indeterminacy, provisionality, and the contingent.”⁶ The redevelopment

plans for Merkato, just like the plans for Dembel Mall, rely on the premise that enclosure corresponds with a clear spatial order; however, social interactions at Dembel Mall suggest that even in the mall, movements spill over and borders leak. Here, too, the spatial order is permeated by improvisation and the convention of collaboration. It is what Michel de Certeau calls a “sieve” order, because in spite of a grand master plan and innumerable blueprints, planning still has to confront everyday life.⁷ In the everyday, models and simulations meet with shoppers and merchants who, having navigated different landscapes of repression and fantasy, know how to make do—and they make do in common. Because of this condition, any intervention in the city, aiming at commoning or uncommoning, is as unpredictable as a Saturday afternoon excursion to the mall.

5 AbdouMaliq Simone, “For the City Yet to Come: Remaking Urban Life in Africa” (lecture, Centre of Contemporary Culture of Barcelona, February 17, 2003).
6 Achille Mbembe and Sarah Nuttall, “Writing the World from an African

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7 Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984).

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Study as Commoning Bodies and Other Ghosts

A conversation composed of fragments from collective writings, e-mails, and discussions.

A: We have very different rhythms—in speaking, thinking, doing, taking breaks, responding, living. How do we deal with this?

B: How can we situate our “we”?

C: I am interested in the conception or phenomena of situations. To address or make situations I need to work with an expanded notion of performance, which I understand as a site of group coordination and organization (including myself, other people, and material actors) in different spaces and times at once. In this sense situations are spatiotemporal and embodied relationalities. There is only so much we can do to make a situation. It is always already there, as much as it is in the making and actually making me. The object-subject divide ties into this. Isn't that what lingers in the background of the study of/as commoning?

D: Looking back at our research process, I recall an ambitious start, with all of us meeting in one room, cooking together, sharing food and thoughts. A few

months later, we organized the summer school, which in my memory was amazing but also deeply exhaustive. I learned a lot but the school also put the spotlight on the deep rift between the theory of commoning, and our actual, stumbling attempt to come together. The ghost question in the room was: What do we have in common, do we want to come together, and why?

E: I guess I am missing the threshold moment where we remain loyal to the desires of commoning despite form and content. And I am concerned if we are working in a non-emergent mode of commoning that seems to likely lose its potential power to shift and contest the dominant.

F: Realistically, we can never assume that commoning will create a space for itself from scratch. It will always have to operate in spaces already regulated by market, state, and other forces; it will always be already situated. If we insist on commoning as a practice that is only possible through separation from what surrounds it, only possible in perfect conditions, it becomes a fantasy utopia: a fully conceivable ideal with no practice to bridge the imperfect now with the perfect future. We can dream it without building it, we can be unhappy about unfavorable conditions instead of slowly transforming them. And all the time we have to pretend not to see the conditions that brought us together, thus rendering them inoperable and inaccessible.

G: Doug Ashford from the art collective Group Material once said, “If you think of classes that were good, in many ways the object of study does not matter. It is more the moment in which people lose a sense of constraint in relationship to an object: that difference between me and an idea or me and the world.” Here I see a relation to what study group aspires to be and the pedagogical moment as envisioned by him as a threshold moment of commoning, even though its attainability is largely in question.

SH: There is also a tendency to think of study maybe too cerebrally, maybe too much as a detachment of the head from the body, too much of something that has to take place around the table. To me, this is part of what is at work in trying to elaborate study—to bring in what we haven't been able to think about, to bring in what thought might be brought back in contact with body and affect, with the question of silence, with forms of trying to understand in listening and hearing, not just mode of preparing a speech, not just mode of authoring oneself again.

H: It's visceral.

Members of the Spaces of Commoning research group (A, B, C, D, E, F, G, H) with Stefano Harney (SH).

Where Do You Come From A Question of Uncommoning?

Annette Krauss

Let me recall a particular everyday situation from a workshop session I held at a southern German secondary school a few years ago. In one way or another, this situation will certainly be familiar to many readers. It was at the beginning of the school year, and a boy whose family had just moved to Stuttgart had started his first day. During one of the breaks, I overheard a conversation between him and some of his newly made friends who repeatedly asked him where he came from. He asseverated again and again that he had been born in Germany, but the other boys did not want to believe him. The reason, I assumed, was because he was a person of color.

Although I had encountered similar situations before in public and together with friends, we belittled and dismissed these kinds of conversations as being elusively unpleasant, rather than developing vigilance against them. Doubtless, I did not understand the implications at the time, neither for myself nor for my work, of the seemingly innocent question, where do you come from? However, these situations stayed in my mind, and through a deeper involvement with the practices and theories of unlearning and the discourses connected to it, I slowly came to understand that this particular incident is at the core of what I have begun to regard as the challenge for an ethical encounter with the other: a radical reorientation of how we relate to each other, and, consequently, how we encounter each other on an everyday basis. I am specifically interested in questioning our intuitive and spontaneous reactions to each other, made on daily bases, which might determine the in- or exclusion of a community in a particular place. These reactions are imbued with normative conventions and their specific historicities that challenge a “being together.”

Attending to that slice of everyday conversation above is relevant because it gives insights into how processes of uncommoning work, and what the practice of unlearning could mean and do when it comes to normalized forms of behavior (habits of thinking and doing), inherent tensions and forms of othering that are hidden in the familiar commonplaces, played out on an individual, seemingly innocuous everyday, micropolitical basis. It emphasizes the laborious work of an ethical relationship with one another on an everyday basis. Silvia Federici has repeatedly insisted that commoning always starts with a small “c.” This means that practices of commoning are necessarily concerned with the everyday. She urges us to think and work through how we can overcome the divisions that separate us on a daily basis. I understand Federici’s claim that if we want to reflect on and practice commoning, we cannot focus exclusively on how to come together, but must also scrutinize the conditions

¹ Silvia Federici, “Women, Reproduction, and the Construction of Commons” (lecture, MAD, New York, April 18, 2013).

that prevent us from doing so. We need to ask: What is it that uncommons us? From this perspective, uncommoning starts with a small letter as well.

An Everyday Question and Its Implications

In the framework of the so-called migration pedagogy,² Paul Mecheril describes a conversation similar to the one I overheard in my workshop. The asker is Paul, sixteen years old and a student at a school in Bielefeld, Germany, where one of Mecheril's university students, Sebastian, is an intern. The setting is the schoolyard.

P: Where do you come from?

S: I am from Minden

P: But you are African?

S: No, I was born in Minden, and this is where I am from. Minden is not far away from Bielefeld. You've heard of it?

P: But you are not German.

S: Yes, I am.

P: But look, your skin color and hair.

S: And?

P: You are black. You are not German. Where do you really come from?

S: I really am from Germany.

P: And your mother and father, where do they come from?

S: My mother is from Germany and my father comes from Trinidad. That is in the Caribbean.

P: There you go.

Sociologist Santana Battaglia calls this sort of conversation *Herkunftsdialog* or the provenance dialogue.³ The dialogue invokes the myth of real belonging and must be placed in the context of identity construction. Mecheril warns of the fallacies of bringing together the notions of identity, provenance, and migration, which in many cases, results in forms of othering. The conversation starts with Paul wanting to know where Sebastian comes from. Clearly, Sebastian's first and second answers are not satisfying enough, since what his interlocutor sees (a person of color) does not match his expectations of what Germans look like. In *Strange Encounters* (2000), Sara Ahmed describes an encounter as an identification or reading process. In her elaborations on encounters, she argues that by facing others, we try to recognize who they are. We do this by "reading the signs of their bodies" and bringing these together with questions of identity.⁴ In the conversation above, the school student reads Sebastian's skin color and hair as characteristics that, in his opinion, cannot be related to being from Minden, and thus, to being German. The (repeated) questioning prompts the constitution of a "stranger, who is

recognized as 'out of place' in a given place."⁵ But this act of reading or identifying does not only constitute the respective person as an *other*, it also constitutes the subject in relation to the other. It places the subject as someone who is from here, whereas the other is identified as *not* being from here. The initial question is closely tied to a process of identification, since it implicitly asks, who are you? Following this argument, this particular question—where do you come from?—inspires a distinct process of othering. Here, othering is understood as a process in which people are conceived as being different and accordingly constructed as the Other. Homi K. Bhabha has provided a plausible description of othering as "the distancing of what is peripheral, marginal and incidental from a cultural norm."⁶

It is precisely here that the processes of identification and othering—both distinct and inconspicuous—correlate with processes of un/commoning. They surface in debates on commoning via the question to which extent practices of commoning depend on constituting an outside—or to use Ahmed's words, an "out of place." Most of these debates acknowledge the risks of constituting an outside and therefore, accommodating uncommoning. However, approaches to the status of the border between inside and outside differ tremendously. One group of authors considers this border as an undesirable but inevitable spin-off of commoning practices.⁷ Alternatively, the negotiation and dissolution of this very border is seen as a focal point through which a group of people establishes themselves as a temporal, porous, and fictive community. Such characteristics are then endorsed as core values of commoning itself.⁸

In the conversation above, it was not enough when Sebastian says that he was born in Minden. The interrogation process continues and identification is only achieved when Paul hears an answer that correlates to his expectations. Having one German parent was not enough. Paul was satisfied only when he could clearly identify and classify the person as being out of place. (The father

2 The term "migration pedagogy" was coined by migration theorist Paul Mecheril in 2004.

3 See Santana Battaglia, "Verhandeln über Identität: Kommunikativer Alltag von Menschen binationaler Abstammung," in *Wer ist fremd? Ethnische Herkunft, Familie und Gesellschaft*, ed. Ellen Friebe-Blum, Klaudia Jacobs, and Brigitte Wießmeier (Opladen: Leske + Budrich, 2000), 155–211.

4 Sara Ahmed, *Strange Encounters* (London: Routledge, 2000), 8.

5 *Ibid.*, 8–9.

6 Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (New York: Routledge, 1994), 74. See also

Stuart Hall, ed., "Spectacle of the Other," in *Representation: Cultural Representations and Signifying Practices* (Los Angeles: Sage, 1997), 223–91.

7 See, for example, An Architektur, "On the Commons: A Public Interview with Massimo De Angelis and Stavros Stavrides," *eFlux Journal*, no. 57 (June 2010), <http://www.e-flux.com/journal/on-the-commons-a-public-interview-with-massimo-de-angelis-and-stavros-stavrides/>.

8 See Stavros Stavrides in conversation with Mara Verlič, in this volume, 48–59.

is from Trinidad.) A double othering takes place. The result of this identification process legitimizes his entry question—where do you come from? By doing so, the school student implicitly connects Sebastian rather to the Trinidad of his father than to the Germany of his mother.

When examining the encounter between them, it's important to look closely into how the relation between the two students is constructed. Ahmed's investigation of an encounter between two entities is fruitful here. It is based on the twofold claim that on one side, the way entities relate to each other do not preexist their encounters,⁹ but emerge out of the very encounter itself. By focusing on how entities (in this case, both students) are marked in this specific encounter formulates another entry into analyzing this conversation. It forecloses that one may presuppose where "ethnicity" (respectively culture, race, gender, and class) starts or ends; and therefore prevents stereotyping in the very process of analysis itself. On the other hand, it is here that Ahmed also identifies the limits of prioritizing encounters over identity. She urges us to "pose the question of historicity," which is easily forgotten, by the focusing on "the encounter."¹⁰

Relating this back to the schoolyard conversation, I locate the question of historicity in the stated impossibility of being perceived to be from Germany, when being perceived as black. Consequently the othering process that takes place in this dialogue perpetuates a specific race construction that constitutes the person "from here" as "white," and the person "not from here" as "black." More specifically, it is the reading of the skin and hair color, brought in relationship to the nation-state Germany, and consequently its exclusion that becomes relevant here. It depreciates a person based on bodily appearance, and evokes a modern European understanding of humanness¹¹ that is reduced to the biologically grounded fiction of race.¹²

Unlearning a Question

At this point, I want to relate the question—where do you come from?—to Gayatri Spivak's deconstructive practice to make the critical acknowledgment that we all share the impulse to narrate and to think in terms of origins and ends. Dedicated to the work of French philosopher Jacques Derrida, Spivak has applied deconstructive strategies throughout her theoretical analyses. In conversation with Geoffrey Hawthorn, Ron Aronson, and John Dunn, Spivak describes deconstruction as a post-structuralist practice that insistently critiques the grand narratives of modernity, such as scientific rationality, progress, origins and the emancipation of humanity.¹³ As Spivak puts it, a deconstructive approach reminds us again and again that "when a narrative is constructed, something is left out."¹⁴ It is a practice that questions large pro-

grammatic solutions and excavates the limits of these narratives. However, a deconstructive approach is certainly *not* about wanting to stop narration as such. More importantly, Spivak states that a deconstructive approach is itself implicated in the impulse to narrate, and acknowledges that "we cannot but narrate."¹⁵ In the same way, Donna Landry and Gerald MacLean identify Spivak's relentless accusations against the narratives that we construct as the acknowledgement of the desire to narrate, while nevertheless uncompromisingly investigating its omissions and exclusions.¹⁶ Spivak herself describes the "deconstructive stance" as a stance in which one has to "persistently critique a structure that one cannot not (wish to) inhabit."¹⁷ In other words she urges us to acknowledge the desire to think in terms of origins and ends. We have to recognize that this desire finds multiple ways into theories and narratives. What is important here is to acknowledge that this is rather "a need than the way to truth."¹⁸

Since Spivak does not object to narration, I interpret her approach as a vigilance in and a critique of how we *relate* to the narratives we produce, inhabit, or are forced to be a part of. These narratives influence how we know of and act in the world; accordingly, they shape how we engage in social practices and encounters on an everyday basis. They are therefore ingrained in the existing modes of *relating* between ourselves and others. In this sense I understand Spivak's "unlearning your privilege" as a proposition for an intervention in the ways we narrate our relationships to each other.

According to Spivak, unlearning your privilege has been exposed to many misunderstandings. Spivak even distanced herself from the term when it seemed no longer workable.¹⁹ Working through one these misunderstandings, Laura Alcoff argues that unlearning your privilege should not be confused

9 Ahmed, *Strange Encounters*, 179.

10 Ibid., 9.

11 What I want to point out is the troubled relationship between debates on the commons, forms of othering, and the conditions of coloniality in Europe. Whereas the debates on the commons can be traced to a liberal discourse, only recently have these debates taken into consideration scholarship on the co-constitution of modernity and colonialism.

12 Achilles Mbembe, *Vernunft der Schwarzen Kritik* (Berlin: Suhrkamp, 2014), 13.

13 Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, *The Post-colonial Critic: Interviews, Strategies, Dialogues*, ed. Susan Harasym (London: Routledge, 1990), 17–35.

14 Ibid., 18.

15 Ibid., 19.

16 Donna Landry and Gerald MacLean, eds., *The Spivak Reader: Selected Works of Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak* (New York: Routledge, 1996), 1–15.

17 Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, *Outside in the Teaching Machine* (London: Routledge, 1993), 284.

18 Spivak, *Post-colonial Critic*, 20.

19 María do Mar Castro Varela states that in 2008, Spivak strongly distanced herself from "unlearning your privilege" in a lecture at Humboldt University, precisely because of the confusion the term provoked. See http://www.frauensolidaritaet.org/images/doku/fs_103mar_castro.pdf.

with stepping down from one's position of authority in the sense of abandoning a sociocultural position in the first place.²⁰ Spivak has reminded us that this act might even reinforce a certain privilege rather than disestablishing it.²¹ Maria do Mar Castro Varela argues along the same lines when interpreting unlearning as becoming aware of one's privileges and *using* these privileges to face and work on social injustice.²² Hence, with unlearning your privilege Spivak focuses on social, cultural, and economic positionings not by refraining from them, but by exposing their inseparability with privileges of identity, such as race, class, nationality, or gender.²³

In this sense, unlearning your privilege demands a working and thinking through of one's own history, prejudices, and assumptions.²⁴ It includes becoming aware of automatic reactions and responses that are learned and tied to one's privileges through identity and other social divisions, but taken for granted and deemed quasi natural. Bringing this together with a deconstructive approach means taking into account and investigating on multiple levels the structures of our own productions, especially the processes whereby we naturalize personal experiences and desires into generalized truths.

In this last part of the text, I want to bring together the two conversations above (the conversation I overheard, and the one from Mecheril's case study) and Spivak's unlearning your privilege. I want to specifically draw attention to the practice of listening,²⁵ and the complicity in forms of othering. As someone who overhears a specific conversation in a workshop situation with teenagers, but does not find it strange in the first place, I am certainly implicated in narrating and thinking of origins. Narrating and thinking of origins implies that it is not any origin that is imagined, but one that confirms and leaves intact the myth of one's own origin. Moreover, in the concrete examples that I address, unlearning your privilege should be read as an acknowledgment of our desire to determine who is regarded as German and who is not. Furthermore, I argue that the question—where do you come from?—and the affirmative listening from my side can be seen in this specific context as a form of othering. This process of othering entails that the student Sebastian as much as the student in Stuttgart are regarded as immigrants, although this in fact is not the case. By focusing on the specific situation of second-generation migrants (in Germany), I do not want to give the impression that the question—where do you come from?—is a form of othering only for second-generation migrants. In fact, this particular question is in my opinion in most cases a subtle reminder of “who is in place” and “who is out of place.” Depending on the specific situation, it needs further scrutiny in order to bring forward its specific politics, forms of domination, and forms of agency (see earlier elaboration from Ahmed). In fact what needs to be added here is that the question—where do you come from?—has been investigated and situated in this text in a distinctly European context. Its interpretation may differ tremendously in

another geographic area. Investigating second-generation migrants in France in particular, Abdelmalek Sayad elaborates on the process of othering and shows how it produces “‘immigrants’ who have not emigrated from anywhere.”²⁶ Sayad grounds these considerations in a profound discussion of the nation-state. He develops his thoughts around migration on the basis of Pierre Bourdieu's analysis of “state thought,” which he regards as one of the most obstinate cultural givens. State thought in relation to migration are the categories through which we think about migration—socially, politically, economically, culturally. According to Sayad, “It is a form of thought that reflects through its own (mental) structures the structures of the state.”²⁷ He describes how a national understanding becomes especially violent and fierce toward those “immigrants, who are not immigrants at all: the children of immigrants.”²⁸ They are not foreigners, since they usually have the national citizenship of the country they are living in. However, they are not regarded as “national beings,” which would mean being from here. He further explains what is so disturbing for many old-established citizens about the descendants of migrants: “They blur the borders of the national order, and therefore the symbolic value and pertinence of the criteria that found the hierarchy of groups and their classification.”²⁹ This also explains why the repeated questioning in the conversations above takes place. By identifying Sebastian as someone who is not from here, a difference between nationals and foreigners is established, and therefore recomposes the nation-state border in the form of a cultural given and internalized “inner border.” According to Sayad, this has

20 Laura Alcoff, “The Problem of Speaking for Others,” *Cultural Critique* 20 (Winter 1991/92): 5–32.

21 *Ibid.*, 22.

22 Maria do Mar Castro Varela, interview by Vina Yun, “Das Begehren neu ordnen: Autonome Wissensproduktion in postkolonialer Perspektive,” *Zeitschrift für Frauensolidarität*, no. 1 (2008): 10–11. http://www.frauensolidaritaet.org/zeitschrift/fs_103mar_castro.pdf.

23 I would argue that insisting on an interpretation of unlearning as “using your privilege” only makes sense when, in a second step or at the same time, it is brought together with a critical practice of redistribution, because otherwise unlearning your privilege remains in a state of limbo that is in danger of being instrumentalized as a self-reflexive endeavor all too easily trapped in an academic exercise.

24 Spivak, *Post-colonial Critic*, 60.

25 I want to thank my colleague Hong-Kai Wang for her insistence on and

occupation with listening as a critical practice through her own artistic practice, and for inserting it into the academic discourse in the PhD-in-Practice Program and our research group Spaces of Commoning.

26 In his book *The Suffering of the Immigrant*, Sayad examines international migration from the perspective of the “sending” and the “receiving” communities. He further explores the social, economic, cultural, and personal ramifications of migration. The original French title of Sayad's book, *La double absence*, reflects his investigations of the relationship of migrants and their descendants to the different nation states they are in connection with through their specific situation as migrants. Abdelmalek Sayad, *The Suffering of the Immigrant* (Cambridge, UK: Polity Press, 2004), 291.

27 *Ibid.*, 278.

28 *Ibid.*, 291.

29 *Ibid.*

significant consequences for the everyday lives of descendants of migrants. In other words, the question—where do you come from?—as it was described in its micro-dimensional context above, invokes the macro-political dimension of a state's borders. Thus, by posing this question, the inherent logics and hierarchies of a nation-state are maintained and strengthened.

In the case of the student Sebastian, it was his appearance (under other circumstances, it would be her or his name or accent) that challenged the inherent logic of the German nation-state, and caused the school student Paul to make a division between a "here" and "there," a "we" and "them." Moreover, I agree with Ahmed that the modern project of race is not external to the constitution of the modern European nation-states. "Rather, the identity of these nations became predicated on their relationship to the racialized others."³⁰ Bringing Sayad, Ahmed, and Spivak together makes it possible to address the project of unlearning in a threefold manner. I want to emphasize not only what *made* this encounter possible (within its historicity), but as well as what it makes possible. What futures might it enable?

Firstly, Sayad reconsiders the ethical relation to the other by challenging the segregation between nationals and nonnationals when he demands the delegitimization (and therefore unlearning) of what we take for granted—"our national being."³¹ This "national beingness" intersects with racial connotations. And this intersection is called into existence by the question, where do you come from? Secondly a "careful listening" to the conversation provides the opportunity of unlearning your privilege. It reveals a desire for a specific national self-understanding: a self-understanding that places one's own whiteness as the unmarked marker in determining who is a national and who is not. The transformation of desire—or as Spivak calls it, the "uncoercive rearrangement of desires"³²—is at the core of the unlearning project. It is the patient work of reading and listening and "suspending oneself into the text of the other—for which the first condition and effect is a suspension of the conviction that I am necessarily better, I am necessarily indispensable, I am necessarily the one to right wrongs."³³ Thirdly, to delegitimize what we take for granted means to accept a radical vulnerability in the encounter with the other and how we construct our own positioning in the world. It is this engagement in reading how our desires (for a specific national self-understanding) are articulated, and how they resonate with macro-political dimensions that provide possibilities in order to rethink, rework, or "rearrange" them. What is important to realize is that processes of *unlearning* might erupt at very unexpected moments, at the margins of one's attention. A careful and vigilant listening to and reading of the situation here might lead to the shift that makes the common everydayness of, for example, the question—where do you come from?—strange, and therefore could provide an entry into the project of unlearning this particular question.

Nevertheless, another question remains, namely, how to relate this back to the classroom where I overheard the conversation. Spivak provides some considerations on these issues. In an interview with Walter Adams, in which they elaborated on the problems of cultural self-representation, Spivak reminds us again that unlearning your privilege should not be confused with a refraining from one's position of authority. In the context of the interview she specifically points at a misconceived form of unlearning as de-skilling. She interprets de-skilling as a form of anti-intellectualism among academics to avoid seeming patronizing. Instead she demands "unlearning of one's privilege," including the privileged discourse with "unlearning one's privileged discourse."³⁴ This entails the responsibility of developing the capacity to translate this discourse into language that can be heard outside of academia. In the case of the conversation I overheard, this would mean developing a language that translates the considerations of this essay and its inherent discourse for the nonacademic situation of a secondary school classroom, or many other situations with the aim of reframing and reworking established relationships through the question, where do you come from? In this sense, the ethics of unlearning your privilege has to be (again and again) realized as a *call to relationships* in terms of *unlearning to relate in order to relate anew*.

30 Ahmed, *Strange Encounters*, 11. Also see fn. 10.

31 Sayad, *Suffering of the Immigrant*, 280.

32 Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, "Righting Wrongs," *South Atlantic Quarterly* 103, nos. 2-3 (Spring/Summer 2004): 532.

33 Ibid.

34 Spivak, *Post-colonial Critic*, 57.

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The Intimacies of Other Humanities

Lisa Lowe in Conversation with Hong-Kai Wang

The following conversation with Lisa Lowe, the US-based scholar on race, colonialism, and diaspora, was conducted in October 2015 as part of Hong-Kai Wang's research into the politics of reconstituting a radical historical commons known as the Erlin Sugarcane Workers' Revolt in 1925 in colonized Taiwan. The revolt was restored from obscurity by a group of Erlin historians more than a decade ago with local oral accounts. Wang's collaboration with a group of sugarcane planters in her hometown Yunlin, across the river from Erlin, takes as its point of departure the reimagining of a protest song thought to be pivotal in the mobilization of the revolt, and through a pedagogy of listening and singing as well as a complicating and renewing of perceived commons. The Erlin Sugarcane Workers Revolt is arguably the first class-conscious, anticolonial agrarian uprising in the recorded history of Taiwan.

Hong-Kai Wang: It is such a thrill to be reading your book *The Intimacies of Four Continents* as I am researching the radical history of an anticolonial sugar labor struggle in Taiwan. I found numerous moments in which our interests resonate, particularly your concluding words in the final chapter: "We are left with the project of visualizing, mourning, and thinking 'other humanities' within the received genealogy of 'the human.'"¹ I understood it as an inquiry into new modes of knowing and thus new understandings of relation and intimacy. Could you talk a bit about the idea of intimacy—what it means and where it is situated?

Lisa Lowe: In my book, I am trying to consider liberalism as more than exclusively a political economic framing of the modern. We are of course familiar with the classical liberal political economic philosophies of Adam Smith, Jeremy Bentham, John Stuart Mill, and others. But I'm suggesting that liberalism is also a way of knowing, and that it includes various disciplinary discourses for understanding the human, as in "the human sciences." It also prescribes and authorizes forms of personhood: the individual who possesses interiority, property, and domesticity. This liberal individual subject is expressed in culture through genres like the autobiography or the novel, and is supported by citizenship rights and historical narrative. By invoking "other humanities," I gesture toward other ways of considering humanity that aren't confined or restricted to liberalism's ways of identifying "the human." In effect, I argue that the *affirmation* of liberal forms of the human is linked to the forcible *forgetting* of the humanity of the peoples whose labors and resources create the conditions of possibility for Western European humanity. That's what I mean by visualizing,

¹ Lisa Lowe, *The Intimacies of Four Continents* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2015), 208.

mourning, and thinking other humanities. Intimacy is implied in this distinction, but in a way, it is a much broader frame for the study.

With intimacy, I am really trying to elaborate a variable and multiple concept, and to point especially to a kind of “division” of intimacy, which resonates with the liberal economy of affirmation and forgetting I trace as well. If we think about the common understanding of intimacy as the sentimental interiority of the liberal subject, we can appreciate how the affirmation of that particular kind of bourgeois individual intimacy is actually produced by what I am calling “the intimacies of four continents”—the links between Europe, Asia, Africa, and the Americas—even if those other intimacies are forgotten and disavowed. In other words, the notion of liberal individualism as affective intimacy within the domestic sphere is a very particular kind of Western construction that relies upon the labor and resources of the intimacies of four continents.

But I am also gesturing toward a third kind of intimacy, which is the intimacy among the laborers in these various colonized spaces who are



Fig. 23
Erlin Sugarcane Workers' Revolt monument, Erlin, Taiwan, 2015

brought together into community by colonialism, occupation, and imperial trades themselves. These are the sexual, intellectual, and political intimacies between Asian contract laborers and African slaves, mulatto workers and servants, and free people of color. And it is this third alternative intimacy I am thinking of in the last moment of the book—when we visualize, mourn, and imagine *other* humanities within the received genealogy of the human—I think this other intimacy is the most relevant way to situate the method I am following in the book. That is, in reading across different archives, canons, genres, and continents, I am bringing together into intimacy things that are customarily segregated by the formalism of liberal thought, including most evidently the formalism of nationalism that maintains separate national archives. So in a way, I am performing this third notion of intimacy and forging alternative intimacies, which also implies an alternative epistemology and practice of reading. I normally wouldn't think of the two together: intimacy and other humanities. But your question actually permits me to highlight this: that what I was trying to animate, is precisely a method for conceiving the past that privileges the idea of intimacy among other humanities.

HKW: When I was reading your book, I was thinking of the kind of intimacy that we hadn't known of and yet have lost. I am particularly interested in the politics of mourning as in “how loss is apprehended and history is named,” as quoted in your book.² The idea of mourning sometimes suggests “uttering mournfully.” My understanding is that when we mourn together, we are compelled to listen to one another, and within the engagement of listening—here I am drawing upon my upbringing with the tradition of public weeping in the mourning practices of rural Taiwan—the ensuing encounter of contemplation or thinking might be generated after the initial encounter of feelings of loss in a past conditional temporality. Do you think the subsequent encounter facilitated by listening—in whatever capacity it is organized—might be useful in contributing to the aforementioned political project?

LL: Yes, absolutely. The kind of public weeping you are talking about has analogues in many societies, in the many ways that people gather after a death to wail together, to listen to one another's grief. There is a very specific cruelty in the prohibition, denial, or criminalization of a people's mourning. Fred Moten, for example, writes about black mourning, and he discusses the example of the mother of Emmett Till, the young black boy brutally murdered by two white men who bludgeoned him to death

² David Eng and David Kazanjian, eds., *Loss: A Politics of Mourning* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002).

³ Fred Moten, *In the Break: The Aesthetics of Black Radical Tradition* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2003).

and then dumped his body into the river.³ When his corpse was brought back, he was so disfigured that he didn't look like the boy his mother would have recognized as the boy he had been. Upon encountering his body, Emmett's mother cried and howled as only she could. Langston Hughes, Elizabeth Alexander,⁴ and others have written about Mama Till's grieving. And that's the sound of mourning that Moten evokes. I absolutely appreciate your idea that public grieving not only heralds profound loss, but it powerfully calls something else into being, and I am very taken by your notion that what I'm calling the "past conditional temporality" might be a second visitation or a second encounter that can be inaugurated or initiated by mourning. Sound can be the medium of the recollection and the revisiting of the loss. I think that is a wonderful, wonderful idea. It is not something I had thought about before. I was thinking of past conditional temporality as a kind of multiple simultaneity of different times foreclosed to us by the imposed itinerary of liberal, progressive time. Your idea of mourning throwing us backward to the loss, and attaching us to the loss through sound is very illuminating.

HKW: While researching the sugarcane workers' revolt in Taiwan in the 1920s, it dawned on me that there were other kinds of intimacy that we didn't know we had lost; for instance, the possibility of intimacy between the exploited laborers who were descendants of Chinese settlers and the aboriginal Taiwanese. So this is bringing me to the third question. When a history is named very often another historical silence is being produced at the same time. You wrote that "the selection of a single historical actor may be precisely a modality of 'forgetting' these crucial connections" among the subjugated. So, we cannot resort to "the simple strategies of mere inclusion but require both a representation of the revolutionary events that have been forcibly forgotten within existing history and a radical critique of the historical form itself." Can you speak a bit about the condition of the historical form's making within the existing hegemonic philosophy of history? And what might have been rendered absent, unavailable, reduced, or unknown by that condition?

LL: What a great question. As you know, in my book I am doing a close reading of the British imperial archive, and observing especially the ways in which Western European philosophies of history enforce this notion of the development of a single people through time, and the forgetting of people in Africa, Asia, and the Middle East. My analysis is very particular to Anglo-American national histories, but this "ideal type" is, of course, spread globally through colonialism and other processes. We could extrapolate from that to think about how the national history of a single people will valorize the elite subject as a protagonist of history and erase the much more complex conditions out of which that elite class of people has emerged. Likewise, we might observe that even oppositional

histories may adopt this form, and the narrative that proposes a single revolutionary actor often renders other subaltern groups less legible.

In the case of Taiwan, the national history omits workers, women, and indigenous people from the narrative progress toward modernity.

HKW: And possibly migrant people of color forced into slavery by colonialism.

LL: It is not just the forgetting of people who contributed to the material condition for the emergence of the modern, but it is also a subjugation of knowledge about different kinds of people and modalities of existence and being, for example, indigenous knowledges, other concepts of collectivity, territoriality, or community, the simultaneous practice of life-worlds denied by linear progress. In my book, I refer to the "politics of our lack of knowledge." By this I mean that such knowledge is not merely forgotten in a neutral way; it is forcefully disavowed by this project of erecting a contemporary history that justifies those who rule in the present. We always need to ask, under what conditions and with what methods and in relation to what materials history is made. As Walter Benjamin says, history is the narrative of the victors.⁵ So history often reflects those who survive to tell the history of the past, and what we know as history is often this kind of retrospective projection of the contemporary condition of rule into a naturalized past.

HKW: For instance, there is a profound absence of women in the existing archive of the sugarcane workers' revolt. Looking at the court record of the trials, where the revolt protestors were prosecuted for assaulting law enforcement officers, I only came across two instances where "a few anonymous" women had been seen in the courtroom gallery.

LL: I apologize that I am not more familiar with the history of colonialism in Taiwan. But from what I understand, first Dutch and Spanish, and then Chinese and Japanese colonial formations emerged in Taiwan, in part, in the context of Western European colonialism worldwide. In this way, there may have been parts of Japanese colonial rule in Taiwan that represented a kind of emulation of particular European forms of colonial rule. Then there was of course the postwar period of nationalist martial law, and then profound US economic and diplomatic patronage

⁴ Elizabeth Alexander, "'Can You Be BLACK and Look at This?': Reading the Rodney King Video(s)," *Public Culture* 7, no. 1 (1994): 77-94.

⁵ Walter Benjamin, *Gesammelte Schriften* 1:2 (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1974).

of Taiwan during the Cold War. Thus, there is lots of forgetting, or absented knowledge, in the national records, including the political and social roles played by women, as well as the forgetting of intimacies between men and women of different groups.

What I found when I was reading in the British colonial archive, however, was that even though women were rarely represented, there are different ways of reading the absence of women in a productive way, because you can observe the particular instances in which women are mentioned, and where they are conspicuously avoided. For example, one of the things that I noticed in examining the papers on Chinese contract labor to the Americas was that there was a particular refrain that would evoke Chinese women. The documents would repeatedly say: "If we could import more Chinese women." That is, if we could import more Chinese women, then we could replace the slaves with a new laboring group; or if we could import more Chinese women, then we could encourage the Chinese in the West Indies to have families, and they would be very different from the black slaves. However, according to both the archives and secondary historical accounts, there were very few Chinese women who ever immigrated. Until the early twentieth century, migrants were predominantly men. So it was as if this figure of Chinese women was entirely a colonial fantasy.

HKW: So in terms of forgetting, in the case of the colonial labor regime comprising slaves and indentured and forced workers, would labor itself yield the condition of forgetting through the urgency of survival and desire? Is it possible that this condition in turn gives rise to the absence of a "contiguous other," as you impart in the book, among the subjugated peoples, even if they are mutually constitutive?

LL: Forced laborers, those subaltern groups from whom hard plantation labor is extracted, don't have the time to write their own history; they are busy surviving. As the Italian Marxist Antonio Gramsci has written, southern agrarian subaltern groups could not even really identify themselves as a class, because they were constantly working and the access to the formal means of representation was out of their reach.⁶ Gayatri Spivak famously built upon Gramsci's observations and insisted that the subaltern groups are by definition those who cannot be represented.⁷ Gramsci had explained that the subaltern was often represented by others, for example, by the nationalist bourgeois party who appropriated their struggles. Being represented by others means that much history and knowledge is lost: subaltern knowledge about conditions under which they labored and resisted, knowledge of the working people's relationship to lands and resources and other system of meanings, and

so on. I absolutely think that this loss of history and knowledge contributes to the absence of knowledge about the intimacies between different, contiguous laborers. Sometimes the urgency of one group's struggle is so intense—in the case of C. L. R. James's discussion of the revolution in Haiti,⁸ or W. E. B. Du Bois's discussion of the black workers in the US South⁹—that the connections with others may only be cursorily mentioned. That is, the force and necessity of recounting the narrative of one people (e.g., black people freeing themselves from slavery) is so powerful that relationship with other workers may be marginalized within the single teleological history.

HKW: In your book, you described the Chinese indentured labors as the liminal contiguous other.

LL: Yes, the Chinese workers are often cast as the contiguous other. For example, in Du Bois's *Black Reconstruction*, at the beginning and at the end, he powerfully evokes the importance of solidarity among that "dark and vast sea of human labor in China and India, the South Seas and all Africa, in the West Indies and Central America and in the United States," and he calls for "the emancipation of that basic majority of workers who are yellow, brown and black." He definitely conceives the "dark proletariat," as he calls it, as necessarily joining all of these different peoples, particularly blacks and Chinese. But the entirety of the history is focused on the black workers in the US South; it cannot even discuss blacks in Africa, or in other parts of the world. It is almost as if the historical narrative itself—in the way that both the liberal and even Marxist forms have established it—requires a single protagonist to develop in time. And so, the other connections to the side are lost, even if they "flash up" at both the beginning and the end.

HKW: Perhaps the idea of "fugitivity," as in the ways in which the Native American communities provided refuge for the black maroons who escaped from slavery in the Americas, could help reveal the other connections.

LL: Fugitivity offers a very powerful image of the connections among subaltern peoples. These intimacies are lost and unrecorded, and get

⁶ See Antonio Gramsci, *Selections from the Prison Notebooks*, ed. and trans. Quentin Hoare and Geoffrey Nowell Smith (New York: International Publishers, 1971).

⁷ Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture*, ed. Cary Nelson and Lawrence Grossberg (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1988).

⁸ C. L. R. James, *The Black Jacobins* (New York: Vintage Books, 1963).

⁹ W. E. B. Du Bois, *Black Reconstruction in America: An Essay Toward a History of the Part Which Black Folk Played in the Attempt to Reconstruct Democracy in America, 1860–1880* (New York: Harcourt Brace and Company, 1935).

subordinated to the dominant register of meaning: the louder story is a single melody drumming out these other fugitive voices.

HKW: In my opinion, there seems to be a significant lack of narratives of women of color from East Asia in the existing dominant discourse. For instance, the colonial experiences of women in Taiwan seem largely written off.

LL: I think you are exactly right. The scholar Achille Mbembe and Sarah Nuttall have talked about “Africa” as a heterogeneous continent, not a single people.¹⁰ Africa is enormously multiple and variegated in terms of culture, language, religion, region, and everything, and yet Africa is always subordinated to the logic of the one. There is a way in which one of the legacies of colonial discourse is the reduction of everything to the one, which of course disproportionately impacts women. Globally, I think we could say that the epistemology employed for the understanding of the global reduces everything to black and white. Asia itself (also so heterogeneous!) is so often marginalized and dismissed in such constructions. However, if we look at world history and world relations from the fifteenth to sixteenth centuries onward, Asia has been always crucial to the emergence of global contacts and relations. The Portuguese, the Spanish, the Dutch, the British, and the French did not have much contact with one another, but they all traded with China and the East Indies. Though little acknowledged, in a sense, Asia was the *locus* through which many global exchanges were conducted.

HKW: This brings me to the next question. While we acknowledge that “Europe is the silent referent in historical knowledge,” there is indeed an urgency in undoing the conception of history as an uninterrupted collective narrative. “The spaces of rupture”—I am quoting from your book—“marked by historical absence” that allow for the emergence of new and other types of knowing are therefore considered much needed. Do you think these potential ruptures need to be located and thus opened up in other conceptions of temporality, spatiality, and cosmology—all of which the modes of relation are contingent upon?

LL: I definitely think spaces of rupture can be prompted or inaugurated by dislocating and decentering European history. But I also think ruptures may be spontaneous, unanticipated, and unorchestrated. Spaces of rupture open up because contradictions occur and cannot be resolved, and there are different kinds of rupture: there is rupture that can be caused, and there is rupture that simply emerges and erupts. Central to this project of exploring other conceptions of temporality and spatiality is relocating history itself, so that we must both redefine what history

is and out of what materials it can be made. When doing so, we are also decentering Europe and repositioning other parts of the world. For example, your work considering Taiwan as a key location of different struggles and alternative ways of knowing, being, laboring, and struggling—this work is critical to this deconstruction of Europe as a silent referent of history. It means engaging with alternative conceptions of time and spatiality, not only in different geographical parts of the world, but also in terms of different scales. Part of the invisibility of Taiwan is that it is considered “small.” But evidently, we must shift the dominant scales of understanding to displace hierarchies of value that assume that “big” means important and “small” is unimportant.

HKW: In the current political economy, I do find that Taiwan is quite lost in contrast to Hong Kong and Singapore.

LL: It is possible that the higher profile of Hong Kong, Singapore, and South Korea vis-à-vis Taiwan may be partly due, again, to arbitrary concepts of scale, that is, to their numerically greater degree of incorporation into global capitalism, measured by GDP, and so forth. You must know Chen Kuan-Hsing’s work?

HKW: Yes he is the harbinger of postcolonial discourse in Taiwan.

LL: One of the things Chen argues is that it is critical for nations like South Korea, Hong Kong, Taiwan, and Singapore to not to forget their colonial pasts, and to resist assimilation to the US-led globalization or US-led capitalist development.¹¹ This is suggestive, for it means to recover and remember the colonial past (or in your terms, to mourn), and to affiliate Taiwan with the decolonizing world. He observes that one obstacle to that memory for Taiwanese is that Taiwan’s decolonization from Japanese colonialism was interrupted when the United States intervened with capitalist development. He suggests that decolonization is incomplete, that the memory of colonization has been foreshortened.

HKW: I’d argue that Chen’s vantage point comes from a specific historical narrative, which I do not feel entirely comfortable with. My discomfort is exactly part of the problem of the difficulty of the memory that he talks about,

¹⁰ Achille Mbembe and Sarah Nuttall, “Writing the World from an African Metropolis,” *Public Culture* 16, no. 3 (Fall 2004): 347–72.

¹¹ Kuan-Hsing Chen, *Asia as Method: Toward Deimperialization* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2010).

and this is precisely where the contradiction occurs and cannot be resolved. But I think this is also where the possibility of attending to a critical alliance or connection that *could have been, but was not, and this, not yet* can be found. Therefore, I find it necessary to interrogate the danger of being foreclosed by the determinations of a dominant narrative, paradigm, and order, and that this attending is informed by the coming of a critical alliance or connection and vice versa. As an emergent connection often cannot articulate itself and its own coming, do you think listening might have the potential to contribute to the constitution of a collective literacy? I think literacy could mean a poetic system that veils and reveals relationships, and that disrupts perspectives of distance and intimacy in history, especially in mourning.

LL: I definitely understand your suspicions, and appreciate that you are expressing the difficulty of articulating an emergent sociality without repeating and being captured by dominant terms and dominant modes of social organization. The problem is a difficult one, and it is not as simple as simply willing an alternative. Forging alternatives that are open, varied, and multiple, and not didactic, will serve better the project of "listening" to other emergent histories. What you are suggesting is such a beautiful and interesting project, which is to consider all of the different senses as also ways of apprehending, remembering, and forging connections. Sound, as you suggest, would be a kind of fugitive medium that holds out the possibility of escaping or of not being confined by dominant narratives or paradigms. Also, more than just being fleeting or escaping, it creates a new form of affiliation through listening, not only to words, but also to sound and silence. There is a pedagogy of listening that creates something authentically new and not yet articulated.

HKW: And maybe obscure even.

LL: Exactly. It can be ongoing beneath words and unknown or unnoticed even as it is working, forging, and transgressing. Thank you so much for the opportunity to have this unique conversation.

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City of Commons

Stefan Gruber and Vladimir Miller

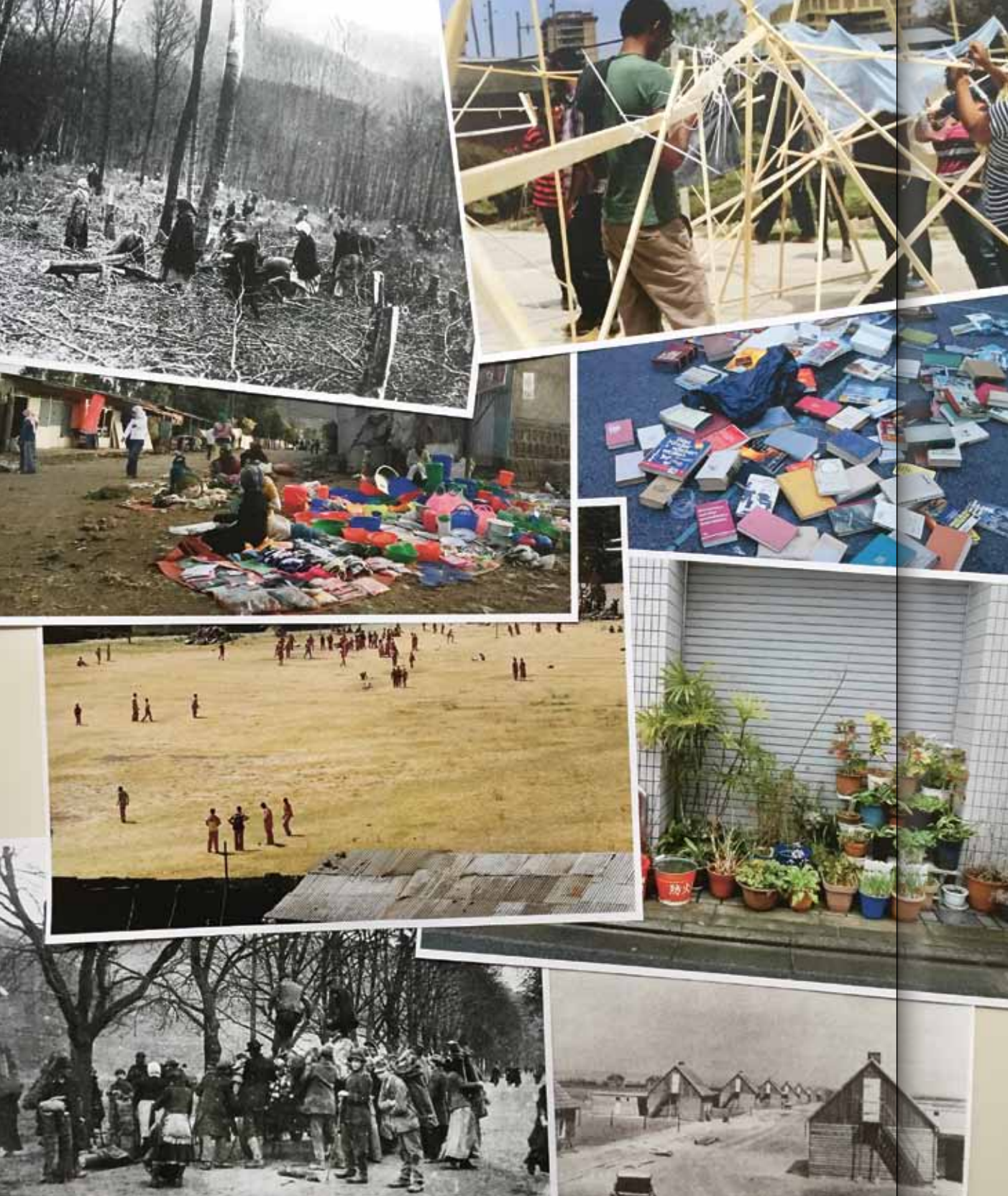


Fig. 24
Stefan Gruber and Vladimir Miller, *City of Commons*, collage, 2016

The city of commons is ephemeral. The city of commons will never be, but will always remain in the making. To the alien eye, it is barely possible to tell demolition from construction. Bulldozers and cranes engage in a frantic dance, except that most work is done by hand. Here, promises of alternate futures are the ruins of tomorrow, or is it the other way around? In any case, every bit of material will trickle through a resilient chain of up- or downcycling until it takes on another life. The city is made of giant monoliths clad in intricate eucalyptus scaffolds puncturing the endless patchwork of low-rise settlements. Yet what holds the city together are its loose interstitial spaces, the “in-between” the fences: too large for streets, too narrow to settle; a land, once rolling hills of pastures, forests, and hot springs belonging to a long gone king, has now become the often unnoticed ground for negotiating life in common. It is here that the ephemeral qualities of the city are no longer a distant vision of the grand master plan, but instead the minor gestures of claiming the city: a rolled out blanket, the filigree outlines of a future shelter, the meticulously arranged flower pots squatting the sidewalk, faded paint lines on asphalt providing an elusive support structure for the Saturday flea market, the brewing of coffee and shoe shining, clotheslines weaving connections among neighbors across narrow alleys. It is here that day in, day out, the city of commons is being unglamorously but collectively reproduced.

The Forest

In the beginning, they went to the edge of the city to gather wood for heating and building supplies. But the looming ecological ruin of the city’s forest (one that even alerted the *National Geographic*) pushed the authorities to bow to their demands: instead of bread, they gave them land and bricks. Could their self-determined life have originated from a scene perfectly illustrating Gerrit Hardin’s (yet to be written) tragedy of the commons? Did the city’s rhizomatic cooperative structures really begin with a handful of women collecting wood, or is this just another of its many founding myths? In effect, like any settlement, this city also was not built on a tabula rasa. Instead, the settlers drew energies from the power vacuum left by a collapsed empire as much as their small inheritance of a few existing grassroots institutions paired with a few old socialists with political savvy. The settlers sought to fuse the best of all worlds: city and country, bottom-up empowerment and top-down efficiency, individual autonomy through self-sufficiency, and economies of scale through collective management. Naturally, such a balancing act was subject to fierce dispute, continuous contestation, and reappropriation.

The city has a border—sometimes this border is not like other borders, sometimes it is running right in the middle of everything. This border is between

what is common and what is not, or maybe slightly more complicated than that, it is also between what is common but regulated by a higher form of organization, and what is common and just available for everyone to use.

Back then, this border separated the forest from the city. This border was also around every park in the city, or to be more precise around every single tree, because you could use the forest and the park as a forest and a park but not as land or wood. So one could walk up to a tree, one could touch a tree, and one would be walking inside that border, on common land. But one could not cut that tree down, not plant anything in the ground around it. So the border was not really at the tree, but inside oneself, a border between two actions, a border between doing and not doing.

But that one winter the cold had gotten so bad, and the people of the city were so poor that somehow this border became more porous bit by bit, and when one was close to some particular trees it began to disappear completely. At first those were the trees that had fallen down, or were already sick somehow, or were a bit deeper in the forest or in an unused corner of the park. Those trees were less and less trees and more and more firewood that was just standing around. All it took was to take them, and for that taking to be repeated. All it took was to take while no one was looking and then for that taking to be seen. Somehow a new rule was made in the process of breaking the old one. And the new rule was that if it is cold enough the trees could become firewood.

One could not keep doing this just by oneself for long. It was much easier to cut down trees when one had help. When one was organized. It was much easier to unsee the border together. It was also much easier to overcome the uneasiness in taking something that was losing its border, to unmake this border through taking. And the more people unsaw, the more they unmade, the easier it became for all. Until the tree was really real wood, until it was sawed down.

As the trees gradually disappeared from the forest, did “forest” disappear from the ground, leaving “land” in its place, ground becoming new land where forest was claimed as wood? Surely, they thought, now that forest has become land, no one would object to us using it. There is land now, all around the city, and we have nowhere to go. It has our doing already written all over it, we have written “land” here, and we keep reading a “we” every time we stand on it. We could build something there—it is not that different from taking, they thought, and others might do it too. Building here will make it ours, how could it be otherwise? Maybe not everyone will see it like that, but in time they might.

Construction

They build, they build, and they build. There are three simple rules: do not talk while building, unbuilding is also building, and an end will find itself. Except that in this city an end has not yet found itself. A break, a pause, a collapse, momentary boredom, some disengagement, some destruction on purpose, some watching on the sidelines, yes, but an end, an end-end? No.

There are no architects in this city; such a profession does not exist. Materials connect with each other very easily but the structures rarely rise to a second level. That would require a level of expertise not many have, that would require passing on and building from knowledge, an education—a break from building. But the building rarely stops, and so the knowledge is not really knowledge at all, just an engagement. Local styles emerge here and there as some groups like to build things slightly different than others, but since all buildings are interconnected, their styles rather flow.

Any number of additional rules makes structures more complex and organizations more branched out, specialized, and hierarchical. In such cases, the structures are built more efficiently with more precision and are used longer. But inevitably they also get reused and appropriated, taken apart completely or in part, annexed, or turned into a pile of material again. And then the three rules are there to start from again. Unused structures often collapse, becoming material again. Having lost their support, neglected or forgotten, their collapse leaves the more useful or needed structures standing. The way attention and support travel from building site to building site, casting a vote through doing and not doing, does it make way for democracy of building?

But how does it happen that this city can take building as a kind of game? Don't they have anything better to do? Are there not children to mind, food to grow, buy, and cook, dishes to wash, stories and complaints to listen to, older people to care for, politics to discuss, groups to organize, trash to collect? Yes, only if building is this kind of work, if it is part of all this work. If building is done because the kids need a place, food needs a place, a kitchen needs a place, a bench needs a place, an older person needs a quiet room. Is it not a politics to build for a need?

It wasn't really a matter of choice. Initially, they had no other option but to embrace fragility. Once you are no longer alone with it, however, fragility begins to change. Being fragile in common no longer necessarily implies vulnerability. Being fragile in common opens you to a modality of embracing being dispossessed, to be possessed by others, to be affected. It marks the humble

beginnings of another possible world. Some call it the "undercommons." Looking back, it seemed as if they had just pretended until now: pretended to engage, pretended to come together, pretended to build a future. Meanwhile, they kept reproducing the present, reinforcing the status quo, cementing all that they already knew and letting it dry. But as they began coming to terms with their inabilities, missteps, and failures, they also began recognizing their common fragility as the most precious thing they ever had. How would they now hold onto it, nurture it, keep it warm and alive?

Things grow stronger with size: trees, people, countries, economies. But then there is always a tipping point, a phase transition in which a quantitative leap induces fundamental qualitative changes. And just as crystals of ice melt into drops of water and evaporate into particles of steam, fragility also transforms when it moves from an individual to a group to an entire population. Its qualities shift from bringing a threat to bringing solidarity, then back again to being a threat since, intrinsically, fragility can never prevail.

Now this insight confronted them with a profound dilemma: Would they ever be able to build an entire city, an entire world based on their treasured fragility in common? Would they ever move beyond alternative islands of fragility and trust amid a sea of greedy competition for the survival of the fittest? Were all their efforts, ambitions, and hopes for a sustainable instability or a resilient fragility mere word games? One big utopian farce?

On the Meadow

This is how we play, they say, this is how we come together and play in the big field. Teams arrive in the morning and also supporters, and those who might be one or the other. And then a game begins somewhere; some lines are drawn in the sand. It is never in exactly the same places, never exactly the same teams, never exactly the same rules.

Some teams are there all the time, some teams come every Friday, some just come together when they see each other. The ket field and its audience grandstand are only there as long as the game of ket is played. Some watch the games, some watch the players, some watch each other, exchanging nods and sometimes little gifts, from time to time passing a folded envelope around. Some ket players play another game on the side, and some actually play that other game while only appearing to play ket. Mostly it is the older ones.

Today one player just didn't stop running as she reached the pass that was sent to her, she kept running until she joined another game on the field. She

played that one for a bit, exchanging greetings with friends, whispering something into someone's ear, and smiling, and then she was off again, running after a pass and only stopping when she was in yet another team's field, changing her speed, changing her whole demeanor, using her hands again more than her feet, slowing down, her steps becoming measured and dancelike.

Sometimes a small game just between two people would begin in front of someone who is already sitting and looking in one direction, but watching nothing in particular yet. After a while, another person would suddenly join in and the game would change, now a circle of dares and jumps, oblivious to everything but itself. A ket player would run through them, casually avoiding body contact, quickly unbalancing herself, and swaying this way and the other to run through their midst.

It did happen that all games broke down, that people were disoriented for a while, not finding any group or partner to play with. It did happen that no one wanted to explain the rules to a new player: you had to have been there, we've played this way for weeks now. It did happen that someone came and wanted to keep score, it did happen that two teams kept coming every day for ket, to play in the same corner, in front of the same audience, which grew from day to day until the match was the only thing that happened and no other games were played or allowed or wanted. It did happen that tickets were sold for the good spots around the field, it did happen that some songs sung at the end of the match attracted some attention, and this attention got people worried. It did happen that fruits dried on the edge of the field, it did happen that some did not play but looked after children instead. But never did anything really last, never longer than some days, some weeks or some years.

Today there was a group there that was never there before. They dug a trench in the field, played war and hide-and-go-seek in it. In the evening, the trench was used as a hiding place for a very special ceremony, and in the morning some audiences used the new little hill next to the trench as a tribune, a game of ket, and then another one was played in front of it. Later that day, the younger kids used the new tribune to play a concert, chasing each other's acts off the stage, laughing and whistling.

The trench incident reminded them that outside threats would never go away, just like there would always be an outside. There would always be outsiders joining in, newcomers challenging and redefining the game. Their ability to remain open and include newcomers, their ability to dwell and inhabit the threshold between closed community and porous common space was what defined their collective inventiveness, the effervescence of their life-in-common. And

yet the ambiguous notions of in- and outside were loaded with contentious contradictions—latent conflicts waiting to fork them apart. On the one hand, they had been exposed to the perpetual mantra that there is no longer an outside, just as “there is no alternative.” On the other hand, they had witnessed a system whose success depended on a creative externalizing of costs. How can we externalize if there is no outside? Maybe the question is rather what and who and how many are inside and what and who and how many are outside? And who are they and we here anyway?

If we are all in it together, they said, and yet can never overcome the we and the they, the in- and the outside, then at least let's take turns. Thus they began disregarding either or, the either we or they, the either in- or outside, and began putting all their concerns, energies, and resources into the tension: The tension of constituting the threshold. The tension of keeping that threshold porous. The tension of trying to linger, dwell, even inhabit that threshold because or in spite of its porosity. Of course every now and then someone, an individual or even an entire group, would lose balance and fall onto one side or the other. But everyone understood that this was just a transitory state, a fleeting moment, before taking up turns again, before moving on and shifting perspective. Some feared that the perpetual movement might exhaust them; that sooner or later and maybe with age, they would want to rest, to settle down, and would resist moving again. But over time the very notion, the very nature of movement changed. Today people in the city rarely go linearly from A to B. For there is no straight path and there is no endpoint. Instead people waver, move back and forth along, over and across invisible lines. These are the very lines that were once barriers to movement, literally inhibiting people to move in and out of place. Today in perpetuum mobile, as these lines emerge they stipulate movement and the movement in turn erodes the lines, making sure they don't solidify into borders.

A Library

It is very hard nowadays to borrow a book from the base of the political science pile without disturbing the whole fragile structure. So mostly only the recent additions, the ones on the outside of the huge book pyramid, are lent out by citizens. Even so, from time to time an avalanche of books comes down, if someone is not being careful enough, which makes a new pile at the foot of the big one. This pile is not really sorted, and books from different subsections are thrown rather randomly together like this, but some appreciate the chance connections between topics. Not many people would dare to dig for books closer to the ground and center of the big political science pile, afraid of being made responsible for the mess and the clean up should the whole big pile tumble down because of their search.

To borrow books from public piles, one simply takes the book one is able to reach or is willing to reach for. Some piles are very small: the pile on Intelligent Sea Life has only just appeared next to the big Marine Life pile after someone finally managed to borrow a book on clams. A portion of Marine Biology came tumbling down and had to be rebuilt. In the process, some readers realized that those fourteen books on Intelligent Sea Life could make up their own pile close by. This new pile is currently quite often rearranged as readers repeatedly try to get to the more foundational books on this newly piled subject. Intelligent Sea Life is not likely to grow fast or big, the city being quite removed from the coast and research opportunities being scarce.

Some piles consist of just one book. It takes a careful look to recognize them for the foundational stones they are meant to be. They are easily mistaken for books that fell off a larger pile or were displaced when returned. It becomes certainly easier when another volume gets added to the first one, or when someone sees a connection between two separate volumes on a similar topic and puts them together. That moment is quite a magnetic one—very quickly, much faster than the step from one to two, a pair becomes a pile of three and continues to grow with increasing speed.

Some piles have become quite structured over the years. Many readers kept coming back to them, and finally a group came together to build a pile where almost all books remain accessible, even if they carry structural weight. Some piles grew into caves, with roaming corridors giving access to their inner cavities. Some piles have been restructured in the form of buildings, with second floors and staircases made entirely out of books. In fact there are all kinds of shapes, the word “pile” referring more to the process of how these accumulations grow than to the actual shape of that area of knowledge. There is a beautiful middle-sized pile not far from Modalities, for example, that has the shape of an upside-down pyramid. All the weight of this pile is resting on a single book, thus keeping it forever shut. Forever, that is, until someone comes and dares to rearrange the whole thing again.

Study as Commoning Commoning as Horizon

A conversation composed of fragments
from collective writings, e-mails, and discussions.

A: Who actually started to talk about commoning as a horizon?

B: I think it was Stavros, wasn't it him?

C: At the summer school?

D: I don't think so because when I did the interview with him, I asked him but he said no.

E: So maybe he talks about it in the *AnArchitecture* article?

F: I checked it was not there.

G: I feel it is absurd to sit here and talk about spaces of commoning while thousands of people are seeking refuge just down the street. I think we should go to the Hauptbahnhof and offer our ...

H: What do you mean, we *should* do something? Most of us *are* doing something!

A: But it is different if we do something individually as opposed to if we do something together. We as the Spaces of Commoning group.

B: Shouldn't we first check on the website of Train of Hope and see if they actually need helpers today?

C: It seems like they are fine—what about tomorrow?

D: I have to leave Vienna tomorrow evening.

E: Also, what about the mid-term report? It's due at the end of the week.

F: We could to go there outside of our common week ...

G: Can we just see how much we get done of the stuff we need to do?

FM: I believe in the world and want to be in it. I want to be in it all the way to the end of it because I believe in another world in the world and I want to be in that. And I plan to stay a believer, like Curtis Mayfield. But that's beyond me, and even beyond me and Stefano, and out into the world, the other thing, the other world, the joyful noise of the scattered, scatted eschaton, the undercommon refusal of the academy of misery.

A: Another ghost in the room that has been haunting me is exactly this: What is it that I am struggling to change here and now, and why?

B: I identify strongly with the ghost you describes haunting the room—the question of what kind of struggle we engage in, and maybe engage in together. It occured to me now that maybe this is also where commoning with a small "c," or commoning in the gaps, might come in.

C: Yes commoning in the gaps or identifying/finding the gaps, without being able to articulate the gaps just yet.

JA: What if [...] we understand utopia as a continuous process of becoming in which we participate? That is, instead of viewing the future as an end, a goal we should attain in an ever-delayed "some day" is that we actualize it in the present, perform it in the everyday?

A: We should not give in. Let's not come together. Let's fall apart.

B: My experience is that as such a highly homogenous working group, our tie to an institution inevitably gives rise to the condition of privileging specific modality of subjectification, and that we seem a bit too readily accepting of the given paradigms without examining deeply enough how we know, how we think, and how we feel, all of which pertains to the question of epistemology and knowledge (re)production and study itself. Hence, there might be a risk involving affirmations overriding complexities, and participations or consensus being confused as commoning.

Members of the Spaces of Commoning research group (A, B, C, D, E, F, G, H) with Fred Moten (FM), and citation of a press text by Judit Angel (JA) for an exhibition at transit, Bratislava ("The Need for Practice," May 2014).

**Dear Border,
Berhanu Ashagrie Deribew and Participants
of the Commoning Seminar, European Forum
Alpbach 2015**

Fig. 1
Participants of the Commoning Seminar,
European Forum Alpbach 2015, *Dear
Border*,. Poster. Courtesy of the artists.

**Allmeinde
Anette Baldauf**

Fig. 2
Alpine cottage, Nenzinger Himmel, 2015.
Photo: Pat Blashill. Courtesy of the artist.

**Negotiating Addis Ababa's Spatial
Transformations
Brook Teklehaimanot in Conversation with
Stefan Gruber and Vladimir Miller**

Fig. 3
Helawi Sewnet, map of Addis Ababa in
1912, 2014. Courtesy of the artist.

**Designing Commoning Institutions
The Dilemma of the Vienna Settlers,
the Commoner, and the Architect
Stefan Gruber**

Fig. 4
Otto Neurath, *Wurzelstock eines
Siedlerhauses (Roots of a Settlement
House)*, 1925. Otto and Marie Neurath
Isotype collection, Department of
Typography & Graphic Communication,
University of Reading, archive number
5/19-20 T198b.

**Study across Time: Glancing Back at Vienna's
Settlers' Movement
Baldauf, Gruber, Hille, Krauss, Miller, Verlič,
Wang, and Wiegner**

Fig. 5
Spaces of Commoning research group,
collective walk and reading, Rosenhügel
settlement, Vienna, 2014. Photo: Spaces
of Commoning research group.
Courtesy of the artists.
Figs. 6a, 6b
Spaces of Commoning research group,
pages from *Zettlement Zine*. Photo: Spaces
of Commoning research group.
Courtesy of the artists.

Fig. 7
Shortage of firewood leads to citizens'
deforestation of Wienerwald. *Notwinter 1918*:

*Der Mangel an Brennholz zwingt zur
Selbstversorgung im Wienerwald*. Kreisky-
Archiv, Inventory of Renner-Institut,
Signature 14/509. Vienna Museum,
inventory number 49342.

Fig. 8
Pioneers of the Rosenhügel, Klaus Novy
and Günther Uhlig, *Die Wiener
Siedlerbewegung 1918-1934*, exhibition
catalogue supplement to *Arch+* 55,
Aachen, 1983. Courtesy of Günther Uhlig.

Fig. 9
Spaces of Commoning research group,
Der Siedler editorial meeting, 2015.
Photo: Stefan Gruber. Courtesy of the
artists.

Fig. 10
Spaces of Commoning research group,
future editorial letter of *The Unsettled
newspaper*, 2021, 2016. Courtesy of the
artists.

**Always Forward: Hermann Neubacher and
the Commons
Anette Baldauf, Maria Mesner, and Mara Verlič**

Fig. 11
Hermann Neubacher at the opening of
the Werkbundsiedlung, Vienna, 1932.
ÖNB/Rübelt 026_32_011_06_058_D_1A_00a.

Fig. 12
Hermann Neubacher discussing the plan
of Vienna, 1938. Dokumentationsarchiv
des Österreichischen Widerstandes,
<http://www.doew.at/erkennen/ausstellung/1938/nationalsozialistische-architektur-und-stadtplanung/wien-an-der-donau>.
Accessed February 1, 2016.

Fig. 13
Hermann Neubacher pointing at Addis
Ababa's master plan, 1954. Bairu Tafla:
*Ethiopia and Austria: A History of Their
Relations*. Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 1994
(*Aethiopistische Forschungen*, 35), 205.
Courtesy of the author.

**Site for Unlearning (Art Organization)
Team at Casco—Office for Art, Design and
Theory and Annette Krauss**

Fig. 14
Team at Casco—Office for Art, Design
and Theory, and Annette Krauss.
Site for Unlearning (Art Organization),
series of unlearning exercises, 2014-
ongoing. Courtesy of the authors.

**Study across Borders: Addis Ababa—Vienna
Baldauf, Bekele Beri, Gruber, Kebede, Hille,
Krauss, Miller, Verlič, Wang, and Wieger**

Fig. 15
School of Commoning, Alle School of Fine Arts and Design, Addis Ababa, 2015.
Photo: Spaces of Commoning research group. Courtesy of the artists.

Fig. 16
School of Commoning, Jemo Condominium Site III, Addis Ababa, 2015.
Photo: Spaces of Commoning research group. Courtesy of the artists.

Fig. 17
School of Commoning, Jemo Condominium Site III, Addis Ababa, 2015.
Photo: Spaces of Commoning research group. Courtesy of the artists.

Fig. 18
Tesfaye Bekele Beri, "Wax and Gold" project, Addis Ababa, 2013. Photo: Tesfaye Bekele Beri. Courtesy of the artist.

Fig. 19
Mihret Kebele, *Untitled*, 2016. Spaces of Commoning publication. Courtesy of the artist.

Merkato and the Mall: A Short History of Modernization

Anette Baldauf and Elizabeth Giorgis

Fig. 20
Merkato, Addis Ababa. 2015. Photo: Spaces of Commoning research group. Courtesy of the artists.

Fig. 21
Dembel Mall, Addis Ababa, 2015. Photo: Spaces of Commoning research group. Courtesy of the artists.

Fig. 22
Dembel Mall, Addis Ababa. 2015. Photo: Spaces of Commoning research group. Courtesy of the artists.

The Intimacies of Other Humanities

Lisa Lowe in Conversation with Hong-Kai Wang

Fig. 23
Erlin Sugarcane Workers' Revolt monument, Erlin, Taiwan, 2015. Photo: Hong-Kai Wang, 2015. Courtesy of the artist.

City of Commons

Stefan Gruber, Vladimir Miller

Fig. 24
Stefan Gruber and Vladimir Miller, *City of Commons*, 2016. Collage. Photo: Vladimir Miller. Courtesy of the artists. Image sources (from top left to right): *Notwinter 1918: Der Mangel an Brennholz zwingt zur Selbstversorgung im Wienerwald*. Kreisky-Archive, Inventory of Renner-Institute, Signature 14/509. Vienna Museum, inventory number 49342; Stefan Gruber, *Stick Exercise, Alle School of Fine Arts Addis Ababa*, 2015. Courtesy of the artist; Vladimir Miller, *Flat Supermarket*, 2015. Courtesy of the artist; Stefan Gruber, *Naschmarkt*, 2015; *Meda Arat Kilo Addis Ababa*, 2014; *Tokyo Sidewalks*, 2010. Courtesy of the artist; *Holz sammeln im Wienerwald 1919*. Kreisky-Archive, Inventory of Renner-Institute, Signature 14/342, Vienna Museum, inventory number 49342; *80 Häuschen bei Leopoldau sind bis auf den Innenputz fertig (Gesamtansicht Siedlung Leopoldau)* from *Der Kuckuck* of March 23, 1933, p. 12, Kreisky-Archive, Inventory of Renner-Institute, Signature 14/183.

Berhanu Ashagrie Deribew is a visual artist and lecturer at the Alle School of Fine Arts and Design at Addis Ababa University. Since 2010, he has served as director of the school, realizing multiple joint educational and professional projects in international platforms. He is also engaged in various artistic projects in and outside the studio and exhibited throughout Ethiopia and abroad.

Anette Baldauf is a professor at the Academy of Fine Arts Vienna, Austria, where she coordinates the PhD in Practice program together with Renate Lorenz. In her work she explores questions of artistic research methodologies, focusing on the intersection of the city, contemporary art and pedagogy. She has published numerous books, her upcoming publication is called *Shopping Town. Designing the City in Suburban America* (Minnesota Press, 2017), and she has made several documentary films, including *The Gruen Effect: Victor Gruen and the Shopping Mall* (2010, with Katharina Weingartner).

Tesfaye Bekele Beri, born in 1982, grew up in Addis Ababa. He teaches at the Alle School of Fine Arts and Design and participates regularly in exhibitions and activities in his country and abroad. Bekele's multimedia art explores different kinds of everyday people. His works are intimately linked to his personal experiences with his own body and movement. The most important point for him, he says, is creating connections with and starting a conversation with the physical space and expressing it through an art form.

Aluminé Cabrera is an activist and writer for *Dawn News* and *Marcha.org* based in San Cristóbal de las Casas, Mexico.

Casco—Office for Art, Design and Theory in Utrecht is an open and public space for artistic research and experiments that are cross-disciplinary, open to collaboration, and process-driven. Casco considers artistic practice as a way of engaging the world in which we live in and as an investigative, imaginative, and inventive practice. <http://www.cascoprojects.org>

Silvia Federici is an Italian-American activist and the author of many works, including *Revolution at Point Zero: Housework, Reproduction, and Feminist Struggle* (2012), *Caliban and the Witch: Women, the Body and Primitive Accumulation* (2004) and *Enduring Western Civilization: The Construction of the Concept of Western Civilization and Its "Others"* (1995). She was cofounder of the International Feminist Collective, an organizer with the Wages for Housework Campaign, and was involved with the Midnight Notes Collective. Currently she is Emerita Professor at Hofstra University (US).

Elizabeth Giorgis studied History of Art and Visual Studies at Cornell University and Museum Studies at New York University. She served as director of the Institute of Ethiopian Studies and dean of the College of Performing and Visual Arts at Addis Ababa University. She is currently professor of theory and criticism at the College of Performing and Visual Art and the director of the Modern Art Museum: Gebre Kristos Desta Center at Addis Ababa University. She is the editor and author of several publications. She has curated several exhibitions, most recently, an exhibition of Olafur Eliasson's works titled "Time-Sensitive Activity" in 2015. Giorgis is currently finalizing a book project on Ethiopian modern art history.

Stefan Gruber is an architect and founder of STUDIOGRUBER working at the intersection of architectural design and urbanism with a specific interest in the negotiation between top-down and bottom-up transformations. He is an assistant professor for Urban Design at Carnegie Mellon University in Pittsburgh and the co-track chair for the graduate program in urban design. From 2005 to 2015 he was a professor at the Academy of Fine Arts Vienna, directing the Platform for Geography, Landscape and Cities. Recent publications include *The Report* (MAK, 2015, with STEALTH. unlimited and Paul Currión); *Big! Bad? Modern: Four Megabuildings in Vienna* (Park Books, 2015, with Antje Lehn, Angelika Schnell et al.); and *Vienna: Slow Capital* (Academy of Fine Arts Vienna, 2011, with Lisa Schmidt-Colinet).

Stefano Harney is a professor of strategic management at Singapore Management University. He was professor of strategy and deputy director of the school of business and management at Queen Mary University of London from 2009 to 2011. He is coauthor, with Fred Moten, of *The Undercommons: Fugitive Planning and Black Study* (Minor Compositions/Autonomea, 2013), cofounder with Emma Dowling of Immeasure, a pro bono organizational development consultancy working with movement organizations, and cofounder with Tonika Sealy Thompson of Ground Provisions, a curatorial collective.

Moira Hille is an artist and researcher based in Vienna. She is a university assistant at the Institute of Art Theory and Cultural Studies and a PhD in Practice candidate, both at the Academy of Fine Arts Vienna. Her work is informed by artistic research and queer methodologies. From 2010 to 2012, she was part of the artistic research project "Model House—Mapping Transcultural Modernisms."

Mihret Kebede is an artist and poet based in Addis Ababa. Since 2008 she has been working in several local and on international art projects, including public art performances, videos, and installations. She is the founding manager of the renowned poetry and jazz monthly event in Addis, and the founding director of Netsa Art Village. She has published a book on her public walking performance project "Slow Marathon" between Scotland and Ethiopia in 2012. Her poems have been published in various magazines, online media, and newspapers. She has released a DVD and an audio CD publication on a collaborative poetry and music project with Studio Olafur Eliasson in 2014. Kebede is now finishing a masters at the Alle School of Fine arts in Addis.

Annette Krauss works as an artist. Her work revolves around informal knowledge and (institutionalized) normalization processes that shape our bodies, the way we use objects, engage in social practices, and how these influence the way we know and act in the world. Krauss has (co-)initiated various long-term collaborative practices ("Hidden Curriculum," "Read-In," "Read

the Masks. Tradition Is Not Given," and "Sites for Unlearning").

Maria Mesner teaches history and gender studies at the University of Vienna. She is director of the Kreisky Archives and member of the editing committee of *Österreichische Zeitschrift für Geschichtswissenschaften (Austrian Journal of Historical Studies)*. Her main research interests include the history of gender relations and of political culture during the twentieth century in Austria and the United States as well as denazification in Austria.

Vladimir Miller is an artist, researcher, and scenographer based in Vienna. He investigates the role architectural stability plays in shaping institutional environments and workspace politics. His work questions normative relationships between collectives and architectural spaces by using fragility as a building principle. Miller is associated program curator at a.pass, Brussels, Belgium, and a PhD in Practice candidate at the Academy of Fine Arts Vienna. In 2013 Miller was fellow at the Institut für Raumexperimente, Berlin, and in 2015 a fellow at Akademie Schloss Solitude in Stuttgart.

Lisa Lowe is Professor of English and American Studies at Tufts University in Boston, and a member of the consortium of studies in race, colonialism, and diaspora. Her work has focused on literature and cultures of encounter that emerge from histories of colonialism, immigration, and globalization. She is the author of *The Intimacies of Four Continents* (Duke University Press, 2015), *Immigrant Acts: On Asian American Cultural Politics* (Duke University Press, 1996), and *Critical Terrains: French and British Orientalisms* (Cornell University Press, 1991). She is coeditor of *The Politics of Culture in the Shadow of Capital* (Duke University Press, 1997).

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Pelin Tan is a sociologist, art historian, and currently an associate professor at the Architecture Faculty, Mardin Artuklu University, Turkey. Tan has published and curated widely on contemporary art, architecture, and urbanism. She is coeditor of *The Silent University* (Sternberg Press, 2016) and *Autonomous Archiving (dpr-barcelona, 2016)*, editor of *Situations/Co-existences/Commons (dpr-barcelona, 2016)*, author of *Unconditional Hospitality and Threshold Architecture (dpr-barcelona, 2016)*, and director of the 2084 film episodes with Anton Vidokle (2012–15).

Brook Teklehaimanot holds the chair of Architecture and Design I at the Addis Ababa University, EIABC, where he has been teaching for the past ten years. He is the founder and director of protoLAB, a digital prototyping and design workshop. He recently published *Making*, a textbook for teaching design prototyping. Teklehaimanot is also a practicing architect and urbanist based in Addis Ababa, who has won numerous design competitions for public and private buildings. He studied architecture at Addis Ababa University and the ETH Zurich. In 2015 he held a research and teaching position at the TU Delft Global Housing studio.

Ultra-red, the sound art collective, studies, develops, and tests procedures for collective listening that contribute directly to political struggles. Ultra-red invites communities to listen to the acoustics of contested spaces, their own and others' demands and desires, the echoes of historical memories of struggle, and their own self-organizing activities. Founded in 1994 in Los Angeles by two AIDS activists, Ultra-red conducts sound-based investigations in collaboration with constituencies involved in a range of social justice-related struggles concerning HIV/AIDS, antiracism, migration, gentrification, and poverty in locations across Europe, North America, and South Africa. They draw on the

traditions of musique concrète, Conceptualism, popular education, and militant inquiry in their development of protocols for organized listening.

Mara Verlič is an urban sociologist based in Vienna. In her research and work she engages with questions of housing justice, gentrification, vacant space, and the right to the city. Currently, she is a researcher at the Academy of Fine Arts Vienna with the research project "Spaces of Commoning," and as an external lecturer at the Department of Spatial Planning at the Vienna University of Technology. In her PhD project she addresses the topic of housing commons.

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