Louis Volont,
Thijs Lijster &
Pascal Gielen (eds.)

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THE RISE OF THE COMMON CITY

ON THE CULTURE OF COMMONING

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Keizerslaan 34
1000 Brussel
Tel. +32 (0)2 289 26 56
Fax +32 (0)2 289 26 59
E-mail info@aspeditions.be
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TABLE OF CONTENT

PREFACE

COMMONING CULTURES BETWEEN MARKET AND STATE

Pascal Gielen, Thijs Lijster & Louis Volont

During the 21st century the city became a cultural factory. The urban environment acts as a magnet for artists, creative professionals and cognitive workers. The city not only offers them inspiration but also more professional opportunities for work and assignments. The high density of cultural institutions, cafés, creative hubs, and other 'places to be' provide freelancing creatives with the necessary networking opportunities to stay on the job. It was sociologist Richard Florida who at the turn of the millennium pointed to a new social segment of creative workers as a driving engine for economic growth. Cities who manage to attract the creative, artistic, bohemian type, one reads in *The Rise of the Creative Class*, will thrive economically. The link with deliberately gentrified 'cultural quarters' becomes significant.

However, this urban working environment also means that the boundaries between private and public life, friends and colleagues, leisure time and work become particularly cloudy. Moreover, the capitalisation of culture generates cutting competition between creative professionals and friends, between artists and lovers. In other words, the creative city is also a crabs' basket that threatens sustainable creativity and thus the dynamics of a culture. The consequences are now well-known. From burnout on an individual level to gentrification that makes the city unaffordable for creatives: the creative engine starts to sputter. Today, the creative city appears to be biting its own tail.

Hence this volume's rationale: in direct contrast with Florida's rise of the creative class, we explore the rise of the common city. Following from the research project *Sustainable Creativity in the Post-Fordist City*, carried out by the Culture Commons Quest Office (CCQO, Antwerp Research Institute for the Arts, University of Antwerp – FWO-Odysseus) between 2016 and 2021, we investigate in this book whether culture can play a role other than an economic one. We do this, among other things, by declaring culture as common again, as an initially and fundamentally shared good, that in fact can be used and made by everyone for free. Inspired by Elinor Ostrom, Michael Hardt, Antonio Negri, Stavros Stavrides, Silvia Frederici, Margaret Kohn and Massimo De Angelis, we explore the value of commoning practices for culture and the city. In doing

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so, we are guided by the hypothesis that a common culture offers better guarantees of sustainability than a purely market- or government-driven culture. Better formulated: when commoning practices are given their own place alongside the market and the government, they can guarantee greater sustainability together with that market and government. After all, cultural dynamics are only possible by sharing. In this book, we understand culture in a broad anthropological sense as a socially shared sign and meaning system, with which people can give meaning to their (urban) environment and their own lives. Creative work and art keep these cultural dynamics alive by consciously intervening in such processes of meaning. They can, for example, question, redraw or simply confirm meaning-making processes, habits, values and norms. In other words, creatives not only decorate our urban environment and not only entertain our leisure time, they also deeply affect our lives and our being, including the identity and quality of life in a city. That is why culture is too important to be left to the market and the government alone. Culture belongs to everyone. In the first place, this is the civil community that supports and nurtures processes of meaning-making.

In this book, however, we do not only approach culture as a resource, we also look at how cultural practices are used by civil societies to generate and maintain the commons. In other words, we not only examine the value of commoning practices for culture but also the value of culture for commoning practices. What is the culture of the commons? What cultural strategies, norms and rituals do commoners use to define a common space between government and market? To put it in classical Marxist terms: we see culture not only as a superstructure that reflects the relations in the substructure. In contrast, we understand culture in the tradition of Antonio Gramsci, namely as a force actively intervening in social power relations. *The Rise of the Common City* highlights this power of culture from three perspectives. 1) What is the role of culture in defining and appropriating urban space for the commons? 2) What are cultural building blocks for commoning practices? And 3) how do cultural actors mediate the commons *vis-à-vis* governments and market players?

In the first part, *Spaces of Commoning*, we open with these three perspectives in our introductory chapter *Cultural Commoning in the City*. Thijs Lijster, Louis Volont and Pascal Gielen discuss the problem of culture in the creative city and examine how commons can play a role in this setting. We also point to some pitfalls for urban commoning strategies. However, cultural players generate a very specific space between the private and the public domain which can ground commoning practices. We call those bases semi-public spaces that provide trust and urban intimacy, enabling civil action and the development of commoning practices. In *The Activist Commons and How it Changes the City*, Gideon Boie then describes how culture functions in the city of Brussels in generating commoning space on three levels: as accommodation for the creative industry, as urban gardening and in spontaneous citizen movements. According to Boie, the street ultimately forms 'the real locus of the battle for the commons'. In *The Tendency Towards Enclosure,* Iolanda Bianchi examines this situation for Barcelona.

She understands the space of the commons as an inherently dynamic game between openness and closure. However, cultural organisations have the quality to manage such a porous space. To conclude the first part, Tian Shi and Ching Lin Pang analyse how square dancing generates common space in urban China. What is particularly striking about their contribution *Intercultural Conviviality and Cultural Commoning* is how the basis for commoning can also be laid with almost a-political or with limited activist intentions. That may be the most important conclusion of the first part: through semi-public and porous spaces, artists and cultural organisations create a social atmosphere of trust, conviviality and urban intimacy from which the commons can emerge.

With the contribution *Reinventing Community through Commoning*, Stavros Stavrides opens the second part of the book: *Cultural Building Blocks for the Commons*. Stavrides points to the importance of a collective culture of sharing based on the power of creativity, in which aspects such as playfulness, ceremonial acts and 'mistica rituals' play a crucial role in enabling 'being in common'. Inspired by the philosopher Spinoza, Gökhan Kodalak continues this cultural line. In *Urban Commonality and Architectural Singularity*, Kodalak emphasises the importance of bottom-up work, 'singular potential', 'cultural formations' and 'confluent rhythms' to arrive at a 'wild dance of unlikely alliances'. Kodalak contrasts this form of commonality with generic classifications such as community within the nation-state. A culture and architecture of the commons is based on singular modes of life and commonalities in which the boundaries between culture and nature, people and things are lifted. Lara García Díaz ends this more theoretical second part with *Problematising Feminist Literature on Reproductive Labor and Care Ethics for Cultural Commoning*. Both the ethics of care and feminist theory mainly build on Eurocentric, middle-class values. García Díaz articulates this as a 'cultural imaginary' in which the portrayal of reproductive commoning relies heavily on 'women's family-oriented care'. According to her, we can learn a lot from intersectional theory in which at least gender, social class and ethnic origin are related to each other, in order to rectify this cultural bias of the commons. Part 2 teaches us that the commons must always relate to specific cultural values, customs and traditions of thinking, doing and being. However, these can both underpin and undermine commoning processes. That is why the careful study of commoning cultures is important.

Finally, the third part *Cultural Intersections between Market, Government and Commons* examines how cultural commoners relate to the market and the state. In *Artists as Organisers*, Lara van Meeteren and Bart Wissink illuminate the counter-hegemonic potential of art and culture in Thailand. In their relationship with the state and the market, artists can reproduce as well as disarticulate the given hegemony. Van Meeteren & Wissink conclude that cultural commoning can indeed 'load' civil society action but immediately specify that 'the direction of that action and its position *vis-à-vis* hegemony and the related inclusiveness of social practices varies. In other words, the common is an ideologically flexible concept'. However, commons, market and government do not always have to live at odds. With *Interlocking Value Cycles in Music*

Organisations, Arne Herman and Walter van Andel demonstrate that artists can also deal with different systems pragmatically. According to them, the interaction between traditional government-subsidised orchestras and innovative market or commons-oriented music organisations even form the precondition for a sustainable creative system at the macro-level. On the basis of her analysis of European cultural policy, Maria Francesca De Tullio reaches in *Cultural Spaces as Drivers for Participation* a similar conclusion. A government can also support cultural and creative commons through a Homes of Commons certificate. However, to counter the threats of a so-called 'common fix' (De Angelis) and of 'common washing', a commons policy must be inclusive and bottom-up. De Tullio takes inspiration from Participatory Guarantee Systems of agroecological movements to develop such a policy. Mutual aid and peer-review instead of external (governmental) control form the basis for the success of such a commons policy. In *For a Co-Imaginative Politics*, Giuliana Ciancio examines how such a policy could be developed for the Creative Europe Programme. The collective imagination of EU officials and cultural actors plays an important role in mediating between top-down policies and bottom-up initiatives. Like van Meeteren and Wissink, Ciancio emphasises the role of emotions in such a commons politics. To conclude part 3, Hanka Otte and Pascal Gielen analyse the relationship between cultural commoners and urban authorities. In *Captured in Fiction?* they argue that the success of these negotiations depends on the interplay between the stakeholders and the forms of participation they represent. But even more important, success depends on the local government accepting and recognising deliberative and agonistic forms of participation, rather than just the model of a traditional representative democracy. The main take-away of part 3 is that the sphere of cultural commoning is never a purely autonomous one. Invariably, the cultural commoner interacts with at least two other institutions of social life – the market and the state – in configurations that may range from friendly cooperation to agonistic opposition.

Through the cross-fertilisation between political philosophical insights, cultural theory and concrete empirical examples, *The Rise of the Common City* emphasises the importance of culture for urban commoners. Culture is not the superstructure but the substructure of commoning practices. After all, commoners rely in the first place on the giving of meaning and especially on the potential of re-articulating forms of society, economic systems and political decision-making processes. Words, signs, images, sounds and colours are more than symbolism and more than ornaments for a city. They can also push against the world efficiently and intervene in the urban fabric. That is why they are indispensable for the rise of a common city. As the commodification of the urban commonwealth continues apace, we sincerely hope that this book may serve as a signpost for activists, artists, commoners and academics, as they pave the road towards a more just and equitable urban society.

It remains for us to thank a few organisations and people that have made this book possible. That is in the first place our patron, the Flanders Scientific Research Fund (FWO), who generously supported the CCQO's quest. Furthermore, we have great respect for the Antwerp Research Institute for the Arts (ARIA) and the University of Antwerp, who not only welcomed our research team with open arms and accommodated us beautifully – they also followed our research with great enthusiasm. Given the project's interdisciplinary and, admittedly, sometimes unconventional character, such support is not always obvious nor evident for an institution of higher education. We also want to thank our publisher, ASP Editions, as well as the reviewers, for realising this book. Finally, we would like to express our great respect to the artists, authors, creative professionals and policy makers who sometimes 'served' as a case study or as 'research object', but also reflected together with us and above all, inspired us enormously. They only increased our belief in the importance of cultural commons. To put it succinctly, the future of culture will be common or there will be no culture at all.

Pascal Gielen, Thijs Lijster & Louis Volont

PART 1

SPACES OF COMMONING

CHAPTER 1

CULTURAL COMMONING IN THE CITY

Thijs Lijster, Louis Volont & Pascal Gielen

In recent years, an extensive number of works have appeared in the field of urban studies that investigate the city as a commons (see e.g. Borch & Kornberger, 2015; Dellenbaugh et al., 2015; Harvey, 2012; Kirwan et al., 2015). We build on that discussion but will particularly emphasise the *cultural* dimension of such commons, where we understand culture both in the narrow sense as artistic production and in the broad sense as the shared sources, practices, and experiences of meaning-making. We could also say: the urban commons, for us, primarily signify a specific *mode and site* of culture.

In this way, we connect the discussion on the urban commons to discussions on commoning in artistic practices, and on so called 'cultural commoning' (e.g., Borchi, 2018; Dockx & Gielen, 2018; Gielen & Lijster, 2015; Mollona, 2021). We presume that, in principle, commoning always has such a cultural dimension, since, in Hardt & Negri's words (2009: 139), the commons are "not only the earth we share but also the languages we create, the social practices we establish, the modes of sociality that define our relationships, and so forth". Moreover, in order for commoning practices to emerge one also has to understand and experience something *as* commons.

Reversely, one could argue that any cultural or artistic practice has a 'commoning' dimension, in the sense that culture is always the result of practices of sharing, handing over (e.g., to a next generation), remixing, appropriation, reinterpretation, etc. Even the most 'autonomous' artists use forms or languages that were passed over to them. However, while this implies indeed that any form of cultural production is also a form of 'commoning', we are particularly interested in those artistic practices and cultural organisations that not only originate, but also result in the recreation and sustenance of commons, rather than, for instance, producing commodities in the service of the cultural and creative industries.

In this introductory essay, we will first lay out what we mean by cultural commoning practices and why they are so relevant in our contemporary capitalist world. Next, we will argue how these practices are particularly significant in cities. We will then describe cultural commoning in terms of the creation of what sociologist Alan Blum (2001) called "urban intimacy". Finally, we will point to some pitfalls and threats of

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contemporary cultural commoning practices. These will also be the subject of several of the contributions in this volume, which identify and analyse the different forces that threaten the contemporary common city, and explore possible strategies to counter these threats, as well as the agents of such strategies.

FROM CREATIVE CAPITALISM TO CULTURAL COMMONING

Many sociologists and philosophers have observed and analysed a shift in the capitalist modes of production occurring since the 1970s, evolving into what is alternately referred to as post-industrial, post-Fordist, or cognitive capitalism. As has been first and most extensively described by Italian *post-operaismo* thinkers (e.g., Tronti, Virno, Negri, and Berardi) capitalist production and labour have become increasingly governed by 'immaterial', 'performative', or 'biopolitical' processes, meaning that they find their fulfilment not in some concrete end product but rather originate in, and revolve around, intangible sources like knowledges, information, affects and signs. This is not to say that there are no longer any material processes and products involved; obviously, capitalism continues to produce an abundance of material commodities, especially in non-western countries, which moreover are often produced under the most mind-numbing Fordist conditions. However, the point is that these processes are moved and governed by ideas, knowledges, information, etc., while the material end-products gain most of their value through immaterial (symbolic) factors like status and storytelling (well-known examples are the iPhone or the Nike-sneaker). At the same time, labour, especially in the western world, revolves increasingly around language and communication. Job growth, also low-skilled and low-paid jobs, occurs mostly in the service industries. As Paolo Virno (2004) once observed, while chatter used to be prohibited on the work floor, today chattering *is* our work.

One consequence of this shift has been that *creativity* has become one of the most important values of the contemporary work ethic. Urban sociologist Richard Florida famously described the 'rise of the creative class', while the 'creative industries' became the spearhead of many governmental economic programmes and policies in the western world. More importantly, the 'discourse' of creativity became dominant, or what one of us has called an ideology of 'creativism' (Gielen, 2013). Creativity was no longer considered to be a unique and rare quality of the artistic genius (a romantic fantasy that obviously had its own problems), since now each and every one of us has the potential to be or become creative, from the manager and teacher, to the 'barista' and the 'sandwich artist'. Stronger still, there is even an imperative to be creative, one *needs* to be creative in order to realise one's value. Or as Oli Mould (2018: 12) has stated: "Being creative today means seeing the world around you as a resource to fuel your inner entrepreneur. Creativity is a distinctly neoliberal trait because it feeds the notion that the world and everything in it can be monetised. The language of creativity has been subsumed by capitalism".

The immaterial sources as well as outcomes of contemporary production are dependent on sharing practices and free circulation. 'Information wants to be free', as Stewart Brand's famous phrasing goes, which is precisely the reason why a lot of our contemporary labour time is spent on meetings, presentations, and communications. It even flows over and continues within informal settings, dinners and parties and at home (after all, one never knows when one gets a good idea, or encounters the next project). Work, even more than in earlier times, is always a form of cooperation, even though that cooperation sometimes happens in isolation, from behind one's laptop. As Hardt and Negri (2017: 93) write: "The one never produces. We only produce together, socially". In other words, contemporary production relies on what Hardt and Negri call the *common*, i.e., a shared resource of wealth. Not only are phenomena like language, information and culture principally shared and owned by all, but in contrast to 'natural' phenomena (like forests, drinking water) these 'artificial' commons depend in their very being on sharing and circulation. A language or an idea that is not shared is not only worthless but also meaningless. In this, however, lies precisely the fundamental contradiction of contemporary capitalism, since it constantly needs to reify, individualise, and enclose the products of common labour in order to monetise it. While Steve Jobs is put on a pedestal as the exemplary creative entrepreneur, and while Apple is aggressively defending its patents in court, their most successful innovations would not have been possible without the publicly funded research of anonymous scientists, designers and engineers (cf. Mazzucato, 2018). The question is whether this contradiction implies that this form of capitalist production is fundamentally unsustainable and must eventually collapse (as Hardt and Negri seem to suggest), or that it is rather the key to its success, as it continually creates the conditions for the sharing practices that it feeds from. We will return to this issue later.

As, among others, Massimo De Angelis (2014) and David Harvey (2012) have argued, the 'commons' should not be considered in terms of a particular type of resource or 'goods' but rather as a social relation and as an activity. In other words, one should speak about commons as a verb rather than as a noun, of *commoning* rather than of commons. What this also implies is that there are no objects or goods that *in principle* are either private property, or commons. Rather, this depends fundamentally on the way we relate to these objects or phenomena. 'Commoning' then is a process of sharing and opening up some object or activity, retracting it from capitalist exchange, and which runs counter to opposing forces one could call 'enclosure', 'commodification', or 'privatisation' (although, as we will see, not all forms of de-privatisation are necessarily forms of commoning).[1]

1 This also means that speaking in terms of 'reclaiming' the 'expropriated' commons (as for instance Naomi Klein does, 2001) is not without problems. After all, this implies that certain goods once were the rightful property of someone else, namely of an original community, and 'essentially' belong to that community. Not only does such a conception of the commons hold on to the idea that possession is more fundamental than practice and activity; moreover, there is something reactive, if not to say romantic, in this discourse. It implies a kind of return to a harmonious state of nature, and a rather rosy picture of an original community that probably never existed in the first place; not least because such original communities, as for instance Sylvia Federici (2019) points out, were often organised patriarchally and thus do not necessarily deserve to be romanticised.

This leads us to the point of the aforementioned focus on *cultural* commoning. In an earlier publication, Gielen & Lijster (2015: 20) have defined culture in the broad, anthropological sense as "a socially shared reservoir or repertoire of signs", in which we emphasised that 'signs' does not refer to a mere semiotic game but to the act of *assigning meaning*. In other words: culture revolves around practices in which meaning is given to our lives and to our (urban) environment. The relationship to 'commoning' is obvious, since giving meaning or cultural significance is something that one can never do in solitude; it depends on sharing meaning, on interpretation, or as we earlier wrote: "Culture is kept alive by people – by repetition, adaptation, actualisation, interpretation and criticism – and is therefore continuously in development" (Gielen & Lijster, 2015: 21). In that regard, one could say that culture necessarily consists in commoning practices. Reversely, one could argue that each form of commoning has a cultural dimension, in the sense that commoning is not only the sharing and governing of some resource but also depends on the understanding and seeing something *as* a common. In other words, in the practice of commoning there is always an intangible, imaginary or aesthetic moment, in which we sense and make sense of the world in a particular way.

Apart from this broad understanding of 'cultural commoning', we can of course also talk about it in a somewhat more restricted way, namely as commoning practices taking place within the sphere of arts and culture. Further on in this chapter we will zoom in to some of such practices in the cultural sphere. In particular, we will look at cultural commoning in an urban environment, since, as we will argue below, the city is an important arena where commoning practices meet and often clash, with opposing forces of commodification and enclosure.

URBAN ENCLOSURES

We live in an era during which for the first time in history more people live in urban areas than in rural ones, which brings along all kinds of demographic, architectural, cultural, and ecological challenges. Against this background, the city has become a particularly pressing issue and topic of interest for contemporary scholars of the commons (Harvey, 2012; Stavrides, 2016). What is the place of the commons in the city, and what is its relation to culture?

The history of the modern city has of course been closely intertwined with that of capitalism. The city has been an engine of capital accumulation in modernity: metropolises like London and Paris arose out of industrial capitalism, which expropriated the peasants who moved to the cities, ending up as wage workers in factories. Moreover, in contemporary 'cognitive' or biopolitical capitalism, which is all the more dependent for its production on communication, creativity, and the exchange of knowledge, ideas, and cultural expressions, the urban environment itself has become the primary motor

of production, a site for both extraction (rent, real estate) and exploitation (labour). What the factory was to the industrial proletariat, Hardt and Negri argue, the city is to today's workers: "The metropolis itself is an enormous factory of social production and reproduction, or more precisely, it is a space produced in common (looking backward) that serves (looking forward) as the means of production and reproduction for future instances of the common" (Hardt & Negri, 2017: 149).

A city is more than the built environment. It is also what one might call a 'social medium', a platform that conditions forms of life, and which is, conversely, shaped by collective ways of life. In his book *Building and Dwelling*, sociologist Richard Sennett (2019) distinguishes between *ville* and *cité*: the first term refers to the built space, i.e., the city as a configuration of bricks, concrete, glass and steel, and of buildings, streets, squares and parks; the second term refers to how the city is experienced and lived, how and where people dwell, work and relax. As already indicated, these two dimensions of the city – *ville* and *cité* – have a strong influence on each other: how a city is built, organised and designed, strongly determines how one experiences it, who is going to live there, and what kinds of activities are likely to take place. If, for example, living, working and leisure in a city are functionally separated from each other, you will not see (or hear) a lot of children on the street in the business district and no partygoers in the residential areas. This also makes a city an arena of different and sometimes conflicting interests: accessibility for wheelchairs or pushchairs versus extra places on the terrace; parking space for cars versus parks and trees; a music festival versus Sunday rest; walking and playing safely versus being able to get from A to B quickly. Each of those choices is based on a political consideration, whereby some interests – and the population groups that have them – take precedence over others. In short, the city signifies a particular way of living *in common*, with all the problems that go along with that.

However, just as the digital 'social media' are now dominated by a handful of monopolists who determine what we get to see and experience online, so the city and urban life is threatened by enclosure and privatisation. In his book *Capital City*, urban geographer Samuel Stein (2019) even speaks of the 'real estate state', a state that is governed by, and for, real estate investors and entrepreneurs. That is "a political formation in which real estate capital has an inordinate influence on the shape of our cities, the parameters of our politics, and the lives we lead" (Stein, 2019: 5). This influence of capital on our living environment is clear enough: house prices and rent are driven up, neighbourhood populations are changed by gentrification, and the look and feel of cities are ruined by tourism and advertising.

An often-made mistake is to consider these processes as some kind of natural order of things, a tragic but ultimately unstoppable process. Film maker Spike Lee, who himself grew up in Brooklyn, once said that gentrification is not something that happens but something that is done to people. Indeed, at the basis of gentrification processes lie conscious political choices and planning policies, made in the interest of capital in order to make cities profitable. In this process of the 'financialisation' of the city, houses

are first and foremost treated as investment objects in a global real estate market. Sometimes they are not even inhabited anymore, just used for speculation; a city like London has tens of thousands of empty houses belonging to the superrich (Sassen, 2014).

Wherever value is produced in common, extraction and exploitation lurk. These can take place in various ways, and do not only involve the built environment, the *ville* in Sennett's terms, but also life in the city, the *cité*. Value in cities is created not only by bricks and concrete, but also by connections to public transport and other public facilities (schools, parks), the presence of cultural venues, entertainment, bars and restaurants, and finally also by rather intangible things like the 'atmosphere' or 'vibe' in a city or neighbourhood. That atmosphere, however, is again determined by the people who live there, what they do, by life on the streets and in squares, and so on. In short, a city and its value is made by its population, but just as tech giants make a profit from the information and attention the users generate, real estate entrepreneurs skim the profits from the lives that the residents lead, the vibes they are generating. We now know this to be an unsustainable, self-defeating process: a neighbourhood that is socially and culturally diverse and valued for its lively atmosphere becomes attractive to real estate and to new, wealthy residents, causing housing and rent prices to skyrocket, so that the 'original' residents are driven away and with them precisely the socio-cultural diversity and vibrant atmosphere that started the process in the first place.[2]

As already indicated, in addition to the real estate entrepreneurs, the tourist industry is also reaping the benefits of shared urban life. Again, it is often precisely the 'atmosphere' of a city or neighbourhood that is packaged and sold as a commodity by the tourist industry, while they themselves have not contributed to the creation of that value. On the contrary: the industry often contributes to the destruction of that atmosphere. This too, is a phenomenon that has since been much described and researched, and which manifests itself alternately as a form of 'Disneyfication' or a form of 'musealisation'. And again, the process is self-defeating: while the tourist is looking for the 'authentic' experience, that experience is blocked to him precisely because it is sold as a standardised and derivative product.

In all of these cases we recognise the same kind of dynamic as described in our first section with regard to the commons, namely that capital, through enclosure, commodification and privatisation, destroys the very source that generates its value, at the expense of the commons. This is the contradiction at the heart of these processes but again it would be a mistake to consider this as some kind of natural law or tragic fate of the city. Earlier, we referred to Hardt and Negri's analogy of the city to the factory,

2 See also Margaret Kohn: "The city should be understood as a form of common-wealth, a concentration of value created by past generations and current residents. When people lose access to the urban commons, they are effectively dispossessed of something to which they have a rightful claim" (2016: 2).

as the central site of contemporary capitalist production. They take this analogy one step further. In the days of industrial capitalism, the factory was, after all, also the place where the proletariat developed its 'class consciousness': where workers began to organise themselves, started to plan strikes and the place they could occupy in order to put pressure on their class enemy by hitting them where it hurt: in the wallet. Similarly, today the city is both arena and stakes of political struggle. It is not without reason that the most prominent political movements today are involved in occupying urban public spaces, not only the so-called movements of the squares but more recently also Extinction Rebellion and other climate protesters blocking the streets of several cities worldwide. In the recent past, such uprisings were often ignited by the enclosure of communal spaces and facilities, such as was the case in Gezi Park, where an uprising started with a protest against plans to turn a public park and square into a shopping centre, and in Brazil, where political unrest arose in several cities when the prices of public transport were increased (as a result of the costs of the World Cup). Ultimately, such protests often transcend the issue or location that started it, that specific square or park, and are more generally about dissatisfaction with the corruption and self-enrichment of a political and economic elite that thinks it can do whatever it wants with the city. It is, in the words of Henri Lefebvre (1974/1991), about the 'right to the city', a principle that is increasingly apparent in various forms of urban activism, sometimes targeting tourism or air pollution, sometimes against gentrification or rent extraction.

In what follows, we would like to consider ways to claim back the 'right to the city' through cultural commoning.

COMMON SPACES

Traditionally western societies have made a rather strict distinction between public spaces and private spaces, a distinction closely connected to property: public space is owned and governed by the state or a local authority, private space is owned by a private person or company. In cities, this distinction seems, at first sight, quite clear-cut: as long as you are in your home, you are in a private space and as soon as you cross the threshold of your house and go onto the streets, you enter public space. Different rules apply there; in your home you are allowed to do things that are not permitted in public spaces.

In practice, however, the distinction is not as clear as it first seems, and there is in fact a lot of 'porosity' (as Walter Benjamin called it in reference to the city of Naples) between private and public space. Several philosophers, sociologists and urban geographers have therefore pointed to a third category, next to public and private space, that has been forgotten and obscured in western history, namely that of common space, a realm owned and governed neither by the state nor by private individuals or companies. A space that is owned by no one but available to all, that is, all who contribute to the

perpetuation, reproduction, and governance of this space; it is a collectively generated and governed source of wealth and a necessary condition for social reproduction.

Common space in a city functions somewhat differently than the more traditional, natural commons or Common Pool Resources (CPR) that were studied and discussed by Elinor Ostrom (1990) in her landmark study *Governing the commons*. To start, while the natural commons are devalued by increased use, of urban commons it is regularly claimed that a particular increase in use rather adds value. Ebenezer Howard (1898/1965), in his classic *Garden Cities of To-morrow*, argued that a city derives its value and gains its attraction precisely from the fact that many people live close together – people with different knowledge, skills, cultural backgrounds, etc. In such an environment the whole is greater than the sum of its parts. For this reason, cities have historically been engines of scientific and artistic revolutions, because new ideas could easily spread and mix with diverse traditions.

However, from a purely legal perspective, commons are extremely rare nowadays in most western cities. A number of communal gardens and parks, or collectively maintained playgrounds are the exception to the rule. On the other hand, based on what has been said in the previous sections, one could also argue that the city as a whole is a common, namely a collectively created and shared source of value, that needs the input of all its citizens for its continuation.

The question then is whether urban commons are simply a CPR located in a city, or that there is something particularly 'urban' about these commons. Chan (2019: 151-152) mentions that there are at least four ways in which the urban commons differ from a CPR: 1) a difference in scale, which requires more extensive sharing and communication in comparison to the smaller-scale cases of fisheries or meadows discussed by Ostrom, 2) a difference of interests and desires among the people living in the city, which is more likely to lead to conflict (for instance, between sufficient parking spaces, playgrounds, and parks), 3) a difference in the roles and responsibilities of the 'commoners' or 'communities', which in traditional CPRs will be relatively stable, while in the case of the urban commons will alternately change between contributor, manager, user, and guest, and finally 4) the difference in the extent to which these urban commons are subtractable and/or non-excludable, precisely because of their often permeable and hard-to-define borders but also because of their often immaterial qualities (for instance: financial value of real estate).

On the basis of such significant differences, one might even question whether urban CPRs even exist, which would mean that we are dealing with an entirely different category of the commons. This is where our cultural focus again comes in: to distinguish between common space on the one hand and private or public space on the other, legal and economic perspectives fall short. We need to take into account the way such spaces are *understood* and *experienced*, the meaning ascribed to them and the significance

attached to them. According to Stavros Stavrides (2016), this ambiguity is precisely what makes urban commons so interesting and unique. He calls urban commons 'threshold spaces', since they are located on the border between inside and outside, public and private, or between different parts or neighbourhoods of the city.

Stavrides (2016: 106) distinguishes common space from public space, which, as mentioned, is always owned and managed by the government and is therefore always governed by some form of (top-down) exercise of power. He writes: "Common space is shared space. Whereas public space, as a space marked by the presence of a prevailing authority, is space 'given' to people according to certain terms, common space is space 'taken' by the people". This sharing of space, however, needs to be sufficiently open, and although the 'threshold' is also a boundary marker, it is less strict and closed off than that of the enclave. Would that not be the case, urban commons would easily become homogeneous and homogenising, i.e., contributing solely to a particular, enclosed community. We know this, for instance, in the shape of so-called 'gated communities'. There are notorious examples of cities that have turned into fragmented landscapes of homogeneous enclaves, such as São Paolo where the borders between different neighbourhoods are closed off with gates and fences, and are strictly policed and surveilled. But even where borders are not that tangible, they can be quite present, for instance, through the glare of people that give you the feeling that you're not supposed to be there or that you are unsafe there.[3]

While the walls that surrounded the cities in the Middle Ages have gradually disappeared, new walls, both real and imagined, have been erected that run right across it. The stricter such borders become, the less 'common' a space becomes also. However, the creation of common space does not necessarily imply the complete erasure of borders. Just like with a musical instrument, such as a violin or guitar, there must be a right degree of openness and closedness, in other words a certain degree of porosity, in order to be able to produce sound at all, and thus to be able to play. Precisely where different parts or elements touch, are in contact with each other, a dialogue can arise, between the strange and the familiar. This can make the strange appear familiar but also, conversely, can make the familiar seem strange. This is where art and culture (in the stricter sense) come in.

CULTURAL COMMONING

What is the role of artists and cultural organisations in the process of cultural commoning in the city? This role is ambiguous, because artists, albeit unconsciously and unintentionally, have often also played a key role in gentrification processes. The revival of life in major cities in the 1990s (after the urban crisis and suburbanisation

3 See also Leslie Kern, *Feminist City*: "The constant, low-grade threat of violence mixed with daily harassment shapes women's urban lives in countless conscious and unconscious ways. […] And even though we like to believe society has evolved beyond the strict confines of things like gender roles, women and other marginalised groups continue to find their lives limited by the kinds of social norms that have been built into our cities" (2020: 9).

that happened during the 1970s and 1980s) went hand in hand with the aforementioned eulogy of the 'creative class' by urban geographers such as Richard Florida. The key to the 'creative city', according to Florida, was that you should no longer attract companies to your city, after which labour would follow; rather, the point was to attract young, creative workers to your city, and then the economic boom would follow naturally. To do that, it was important that a city was attractive, that there was enough art and culture, entertainment, a lively LGBTQ+ scene, and so on. Districts that needed to be developed or 'regenerated' – old working-class neighbourhoods or industrial areas – were (temporarily) made available to artists, young creative professionals, and students. Urban architect Winy Maas once aptly called these 'bait-hipsters' ('Lokhipsters'), because they were meant to make the neighbourhood attractive and lure more wealthy residents. In the meantime, even Florida himself admits that this form of urban development has gotten out of hand, that it is unsustainable, and that it has created what he calls a 'new urban crisis': a growing inequality between cities, some of which are extremely successful while others are struggling, shrinking and decaying; a working and lower middle class for whom city life has become unaffordable; an increasing segregation and inequality within cities, and a growing mistrust between city and 'hinterland' (Florida, 2018).

Art and culture acted, in other words, as an engine for gentrification, and thus paradoxically enough lead to homogenisation and loss of 'common space'. But can art also act as a counterforce? Sociologist Richard Sennett and urban designer Pablo Sendra (2020) recently argued, in line with the aforementioned theories, that a city benefits from openness, incompleteness, and porosity, and a certain degree of disorder. Only in this way can a city really be by everyone and for everyone, instead of just meeting the needs of a certain segment of the population. They write: "When the city operates as an open system – incorporating the principles of porosity of territory, incomplete form, and nonlinear development – it becomes democratic not in the legal sense, but as a tactile experience" (2020: 35). Democracy, for them, is not only hidden in laws and regulations, in our political systems and institutions but just as much in our built space and living environment and the way in which we experience them.

However, this brings them to the paradox that is hidden in the title of their book *Designing Disorder*, because how can one *design* disorder, when design is almost necessarily accompanied by order? Instead of implementing their plans in a rigid, top-down way, the authors argue, architects, designers, and urban planners should create structures and systems that leave enough room for manoeuvre for people to use them in unexpected ways, and for them to create "innovative forms of communal life" (2020: 53). Stavrides would agree: his 'common space' is not something you can create (as an individual) but something that has to happen, as a collective practice, and for which you can at most create conditions.[4]

4 See also the following lines from Stavrides: "Common space may potentially come into existence only when people actively shape it and are shaped by it and only when they keep on creating sharing practices in it and through it. Common space is more a kind of spatiality that may emerge through sharing, than a container which will shape a wished-for community. Common spaces, which either force this community to come into existence or produce spatial

The same would count for commoning practices by artists and cultural organisations: they tilt our experience of urban space, they create space for the unexpected and thus offer the possibility to resist the 'invisible hand' of the planners, the real estate entrepreneurs, and the city-marketeers. In doing so, they do not so much create meaning but rather open up space so that meaning is not (yet) fixed, because they are sufficiently open and porous to enter into a dialogue with the experience and interpretation of the passer-by or participant. In short: an invitation or incentive to rediscover, redesign, and reclaim urban space.

URBAN INTIMACY, THE PRECONDITION FOR COMMONING SPACE

As noted earlier with Stavrides, common space is not only a legal and economic matter but also a matter of culture. Not only does the subjective experience of urban space play a role in this but also the imagination and sometimes utopian projections that city dwellers make about their working and living environment. In previous publications, we discussed the importance of imagination and aesthetic experiences for civil action and commoning practices (Dietachmair & Gielen, 2017; Dockx & Gielen, 2018). After all, common space presupposes a common atmosphere, a sphere that is emotionally charged with energy, a space where the right 'ambience' is created, where imagination is shared and where dreams are converted into action. Until now, this atmosphere has hardly come into the focus of critical theory and urban studies, perhaps because it is difficult to observe or to measure empirically. After all, how do you observe a 'political climate', how do you measure the temperature of a group of people, potential activists or commoners? It is perhaps one of the reasons why social scientists mainly focus on (communications and interactions in) the public space such as public squares and (social) media when studying protest or civil action. However, entering public space, claiming 'the right to the city' or enforcing common space requires guts or daring, it requires a time span and space in which a small group or a multitude is 'charged' before taking to the streets. In other words, it encompasses a momentum and locus that precede political action and public space. Our thesis is now that both culture and urban cultural infrastructure such as theatres, concert halls, cultural clubs, festivals or museums play a constitutive role in the emergence of civil action and commoning practices. For example, it is a well-known anecdote from Belgian history that Belgian independence was proclaimed in 1830 by a crowd that stormed out of the Brussels Muntschouwburg (Munt Theatre) after seeing the opera 'The Mute Girl of Portici'. Commoning space may have a less impressive revolutionary character, but it is just as much about civil and political action that requires guts, for example, to go against

boundaries to such an emerging community, are bound to new forms of enclosure. Inventive architectural solutions can contribute invaluably to the dynamics of common space creation. But architecture alone cannot guarantee that designed spaces will become commoned spaces, spaces of commoning and spaces-as-commons." (2016: 120)

real estate or a government. The constitution of common space, a third space between market and government, therefore requires this so-called third *atmosphere*. This is a sphere where people in confidence dare to share interests and passions outside the private sphere, where they also confess their views and dreams to strangers outside the intimate circle of family and friends. It is about a space where there is sufficient confidence to test and collectivise opinions but also possible actions before entering the public space.

However, we are not so much interested in the many meetings or assemblies where public action is prepared in accordance with a deliberative democracy (Gielen, 2020) with rational arguments and strategic calculations. Our interest goes to the less measurable atmosphere in which courage and energy are released, that determine the steps towards that public action or a commoning practice. For example, both Chantal Mouffe (2014) and Manuel Castells (2015) point out that not so much rational communication (Habermas, 1981), but affects 'set in motion' political and civil action.

After all, it is not so much rational arguments or empirically proven facts that activate and move citizens but the impression that images, drama, ways of speaking and movement leave on them (Gielen & Lijster, 2017). Not only what is said but also how something is conveyed determines people's drives. In short, art and cultural expressions can be constitutive of political action. This is not only the case because they can convince, seduce (sometimes mislead), move and enrapture better than rational arguments or scientific facts. They are convincing because they create a specific space and atmosphere for that purpose. For example, they enforce certain codes of conduct such as remaining quiet in order to listen to what someone is saying or playing on stage. Even if artists play or sing in the street, they still impose a relationship of reciprocity. A minimum of attention and concentration is required from those who want to listen and look at her, him or them. The same goes for visual art in the public space. If you want to experience something of it, you need at least to stop and look at it for a while. The very same cultural codes of conduct are institutionalised in actual, physical theatres and concert halls. After all, entering them requires specific access rituals and codes. Even though these institutions are often still called 'public', such as a public museum or a public library, they are de facto partly shielded from that public space. Like the urban commons, they are neither public nor private, at the same time open and closed. We therefore called them 'semi-public' elsewhere (De Munck & Gielen, 2021). With their symbolic and social filters, they form a third space of porosity (Benjamin) and ambiguity between private and public space. Such cultural spaces, where people temporarily and physically come together for the sake of a shared interest, make it possible for the intimacy of the private sphere to touch upon the anonymity of the public sphere. A semi-public space generates the conditions through which you can feel part of a collective that simultaneously carries nearness and distance. You can become part of a colourful collection of people, most of whom you don't know and will never

get to know but with whom you still feel connected for a while. That's because a semi-public sphere allows you to share passions, interests, and enthusiasm with strangers, feelings that you normally only dare to confess to family or close friends. That is why semi-public spaces are also ritual places of collective confession. We admit that despite our differences, we share something in common, a passion or at least an interest. In order for Sennett's *cité* to flourish, a city not only needs public spaces. It is precisely in semi-public hybrid places, where one dares to expose oneself for a moment to complete strangers, that a city celebrates itself as more than a shared collection of buildings, streets and squares. Within the semi-public space, a city therefore transcends its functionality. In those locations and at those moments we notice that the *ville* is also a *cité* where people live, breathe, sweat, argue and love, that a city has a soul of its own. And it is precisely this feeling that 'charges' citizens politically and makes them engaged towards a specific city. In other words, the specific atmosphere of collective meaning recognition provides the energy that is able to turn residents into active citizens and to transform consumers into commoners.

Therefore, in contrast to a closed community that manages a CPR à la Ostrom, commoning practices presuppose relative openness to and also trust in the Other, in those who are not yet known. It requires a proper climate that extends the confession of affection, passion or horror among intimates to strangers. According to the sociologist Alan Blum, this possibility is based on a special form of urban intimacy (Blum, 2001). It is precisely the semi-public cultural spaces outlined – whether they are temporarily enforced by an artist on the street or whether they are more structurally institutionalised in a cultural building – that make such intimacy possible. This involves a different intimacy than that experienced with close friends or family. After all, familiarity in cultural spaces takes on a much more ephemeral and also superficial form. It involves a sense of temporary connection, without people having to like or even know each other. The ground of intimacy lies in the recognition and acknowledgment of a common culture (the street musician you listen together to for a while, the theatre performance to which you visit a theatre building together), which offers the contours within which you can, and dare, to express your feelings, interest and enthusiasm. Something that moves you also seems to touch the other and we dare to confess that to each other for a moment, in each other's physical proximity. This creates a silent bond and mutual understanding without having to speak to each other, even without fully sharing each other's world views or beliefs, or without having to love each other. In our view, this difficult-to-measure sense of togetherness between intimacy and anonymity is a precondition for commoning practices. After all, without collective meaning outside the private sphere of intimates, political action is impossible. In our view, therein lies a core value of the cultural common. It loads the semi-public sphere with collective energy and the mutual trust that is needed to enter and mould the public space. But this precondition of urban intimacy and physical proximity also has its limitations, something we dive into in the next section.

FROM POSSIBILITIES TO PITFALLS

We once described cultural commoning ('commonism') as a "self-conscious ideology" (Dockx & Gielen, 2018: 56). With such a notion we argue that rather than being plagued by a false consciousness, cultural commoners partake in joint endeavours of conscious meaning-making. Building further on this idea, our final thesis will be this: to engage in a self-conscious ideology also means to critically approach one's own belief system. Therefore, after cultural commoning's possibilities: its pitfalls. Along the way, we highlight how cultural commoning may be undermined in a spatial, temporal and conceptual manner.

Spatially, first, it is safe to assert that sustainable commoning is limited in scale. As seen before, cultural commoning constitutes an 'urban-intimate' practice: a collective gesture steered by a common cause. But locality may easily degrade into localism. After all: as cultural commoning unfolds in a specified locale, how does one retain the possibility to zoom-out to overarching, fundamental discussions on social and spatial justice? Think of it like this: once *your* theatre is successfully squatted, how do you forge ties with vulnerable institutions elsewhere? Once *your* street is refreshed through a commons-based art project, how do you establish liaisons with other neglected areas? Once *your* neighbourhood is home to a mutual support network, how do you include those sections of the population that don't have the time, skills and energy to engage in the unremunerated labour that commoning still is? Hence, to speak with Srnicek & Williams (2016: 9), the threat of localism may strip commoning of its ability "to scale up, create lasting change or expand beyond particular interests". French philosopher Jacques Rancière made a similar statement, arguing that proper political action entails the capacity to *universalise* particular interests, namely by mobilising one's particular project as a stand-in for a universalising message of equality (Rancière & Panagia, 2000: 125). For instance, once your local school is finally obtained, how do you connect your struggle to debates concerning universal state provision and education? (Baeten, 2009). In order to arrive at universalisation, one could mobilise one's commoning project as a learning endeavour, the discoveries of which could be distributed through blogging, lecturing, campaigning and socialising, in order to expand existing debates on housing (Huron, 2015), autonomy (Pithouse, 2014), open-source cultural production (Kodalak, 2015), and the like.

Temporally, second, cultural commoning may be said to suffer from a limited existence in time. On the one hand, the potency of cultural commoning lies precisely in the avoidance of instituted power differentials and taxonomic role divisions. Think, for instance, of role rotations when a room must be cleaned after an assembly or when food must be made for a collective meal. Stavrides (2015) captured such entropic forms of life through the concept of the 'threshold', not only denoting a porous perimeter of entrance and exit but equally a porous state of existence: constant change, non-definition. However, can one live in a state of pure liminality? Can one survive *on the threshold*? Rudi Laermans (2018) provides us with a tangible example from the realm of artistic

commoning. Take, for instance, a commons-based dance ensemble, one characterised by collective experimentation and mutual support. In such a collective, the joint exploration of a performance's multiple variations is a quotidian reality. Everyone's voice is heard, the group must work together to get the performance right. However, at a certain moment, closure must and shall appear. As Laermans (2018: 144) has it: "a long intensive phase of movement creation and exploration in which the working relations are (relatively) equal is followed by a shorter, often much-less symmetrical one during which the principal choreographer makes the final selections and weaves them together into a singular composition".

Third, we argue that commoning's conceptual potency – with which we mean: what can be conceived (thought) during the practice – is subject to foreclosure. This pitfall's rationale is found in an increasing number of municipal governments that continue to this day to incorporate the possibility of commoning within policy frameworks. Ghent, Bologna, Naples, as well as the UK's Localism Act, foresee the possibility that groups of activists, artists and citizens establish a pact of collaboration with their municipal government, in order to become directly involved in the governance of urban CPRs such as deserted factories, streets, squares, neighbourhoods, and so forth. Undoubtedly, such devolution of power proffers immense opportunities for learning and self-organisation but one should equally dare to argue that in the process, commoners' ideational capacities get channelled, regulated, demarcated, hence: institutionalised. In the slipstream thereof, commoning becomes a third realm standing 'next to' rather than 'in opposition to' the regulative channels of public governance, as such reproducing the latter realm as the principal determinant of spatial development.

Correspondingly, we are willing to state that commoning's conceptual foreclosure sheds a new light on the possibility of critique – say: critical commoning – altogether. On one hand, it is bon ton to state that commoners' efforts are generally captured – incorporated – at the top (namely by the interrelated realms of urban politics and urban marketing). One might think of how the 'vibes', 'moods' and 'scenes' created by cultural commoners exert a gentrification effect; an effect to be capitalised on by developers, planners and politicians. In all: *first* the commoning at the base, *then* the incorporation at the top. However, as the institutionalisation of commoning marches on, something else seems to be at play. *Even before* commoning commences, the regulative channels through which to do so are pre-given, pre-defined. Municipal governments, more often than not led by financial interests, allow their citizenry to take care of the commons, albeit through predefined, non-harmful and therefore non-emancipatory channels. Do you want to transform an old factory into a theatre rehearsal space? You can, but the organisational channels through which to do so are *a priori* constituted. Do you want to set up a neighbourhood art project? Love it! But don't forget to sign the lease. In memory of culture critic Mark Fisher (2009: 9), we should thus not speak of an *in*corporation of commoners' critique but of a *pre*corporation thereof, entailing the "pre-emptive formatting and shaping of desires, aspirations and hopes by capitalist culture".

CODA

With this opening chapter, we have made the case for an exploration of commoning's *cultural* dimension. On the one hand, we currently dispose of an extensive body of research concerning specifically 'urban' commoning (see e.g., Borch & Kornberger, 2015; Dellenbaugh et al., 2015; Kirwan et al., 2015), the main insight of which is that the built environment is subject to a dialectic of commodification and *common*-ification. Qua commodification, we know that urban development dynamics thrive on the perpetual privatisation of joint goods: land, housing, infrastructure, affects, vibes and symbols. Qua commonification, urbanites strive in both formal and informal ways to restore the city to common ownership, be it through cooperative housing, time banks, anti-gentrification campaigns, squatting or square occupations. As Hardt & Negri once argued: "despite the fact that the common wealth of the city is constantly being expropriated and privatised in real estate markets and speculation, the common still lives on there as a specter" (Hardt & Negri, 2009: 156). However, much less attention has gone to how the concept of culture infiltrates within these experiments. It's the very reason why we focus on culture.

As argued throughout the chapter, we envisage culture to constitute the substructure – say: the driving force – of collective urban life. In both its broad and its narrow sense, we advocate that it is culture, not capital, which underlies the different realms of collective city life. In the broad sense, it is safe to say that collective meaning-making drives joint action; in the narrow sense, artistic practices can set collective meaning-making effectively in motion. One might think of how NASA's first photo of the full Earth in 1972 ('The Blue Marble') constituted an image of collective significance, completely changing the meaning of the Earth for its inhabitants; after all, out of this meaningful image emerged a series of countercultures (environmentalism, the Whole Earth Catalog) which started to approach the Earth not as an infinite resource but as a common for which we all bear responsibility. Of this same mechanism, urban referents present themselves: practices of design, community art, grassroots activism, policy advocacy and urban intimacy play a pivotal part in igniting urban social action.

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CHAPTER 2

THE ACTIVIST COMMONS AND HOW IT CHANGES THE CITY (CASES FROM BRUSSELS)

Gideon Boie

The commons is the new kid in town, introducing a third agency in the classic choreography filled with actors that steer urban developments by defending their public or private self-interest. The commons is about the loose relationship of different actors pulling together in the defence of common resources available in the city and aiming to enrich the future of the city through common action (De Angelis, 2014; Hardt & Negri, 2009; Harvey, 2012; Petrescu, 2005). This chapter describes the use and disadvantage of practices of commoning in the urban context of Brussels, trying to understand how they relate to the powers that be and in what way they change the identity of the city. In the first analysis we show how the classic tale on the contradiction of the urban commons and real estate developments misses out on the fact that the two agencies often complement each other. Call it the practices of advanced commoning, such as temporary use, in which the real estate market not only parasites on the creative activities but also instigates them. A problematic feature in these practices of commoning is that it might present itself as a third agent but still strongly depends on the permission of the big boys in the city. The second analysis deals with practices of commoning in terms of urban gardening, part of the occupation of vacant sites and aiming at the preservation of open land, against real estate developments. The big dream of urban gardening is to initiate settings where people can experiment with self-management and thus contribute to the city's resilience facing the big urgencies of our times. Although the opposition against joint public private forces doesn't make it easy for alternatives to flourish, still the commons qua urban gardening run the danger of self-imposed irrelevance. Finally, in the third analysis, we shift focus onto the role of citizen movements for the production of the commons in an urban context, thus introducing the spirit of activism. Citizen movements can be understood as commoning in so far as their spontaneous interventions cross through vested interests and defend the existing natural and cultural resources of the city. Citizen movements show how urban developments can be successfully impacted by building up a symbolical power that only exists in the loose relationship of people sharing the same needs and desires.

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THE STRANGE CASE OF ADVANCED COMMONING

The commons is often identified with practices of temporary use in which creative individuals and/or different non-profit organisations take residence in abandoned buildings and their lively activities introduce a vibrant dynamic to the sleepy neighbourhood. Interestingly, the initial enthusiasm about the dynamics of the commons generated within a certain urban context is usually accompanied by lamentations about possible negative side effects. Start talking about the commons and immediately you will hear (self-)critical reflections about its perverse function as a lubricant for real estate developments that cause gentrification and consolidate the needs of the middle-class. Michael Hardt and Toni Negri (2009: 153-159) point to the parasitic role of the real estate market and the imminent danger of hollowing out the commons, turning the initial dynamic into what they call the 'specter of the commons'. Real estate operators tap into the surplus value generated through the activities of the commons by using it as an externality for top end housing commodities and thus introduce a new type of resident. The newly introduced class however cannot live up to the lively atmosphere, at least not on their own, while the commoners cannot afford anymore to live in the neighbourhood and are forced to move on. The process therefore results in the phantom like existence of the commons, a product one can buy into, an experience to consume, an identity to foster but certainly not a lived reality. The initial commoners now forced into a nomadic existence search for an area that can provide affordable living conditions and thus allow them to re-establish what Hardt and Negri (2009: 154) have described as a circular process. Commoning is a circle of three moments that feed upon each other: the commons is not only inspired by the commons; it also enriches the commons and the added value is then offered back to the commons. Hardt and Negri's fear for the circle breakdown is not unjustified but leaves the question unanswered as to what extent the commoners are engaged in the process of gentrification and speculation. The classic tale of the commons neglects the entanglement of practices of commoning and real estate developments said to put a fetter on the joyful activities of the commoners.

Temporary use should be labelled as advanced commoning, i.e., practices in which the real estate market could well be the parasite, tapping into the surplus value but not without acting at the same time as a sponsor, facilitator and even instigator of the process of commoning. The best example is perhaps the temporary use of abandoned buildings by non-profit organisations and individual artists, upon invitation, by real estate operators. The idea is to create a win-win, in bridging the period of vacancy and doing something useful for a change. In Brussels, for example, this concerns Allee du Kaai, a multi-year programme run by the socio-cultural non-profit organisation, occupying abandoned warehouses at the canal of Brussels and organising sociocultural activities for youngsters (Toestand, 2018). There is no question about the good intentions of Toestand and certainly not a single moment of doubt about the need for infrastructure providing a place for youngsters in Brussels. Toestand and its twin

brother Communa joined forces in setting up the project on the enormous amount of vacant spaces in Brussels: St-Vide-Leegbeek, the 20th Municipality of Brussels and claim it to become common good (Van den Panhuyzen, 2019). And yet, at the same time, the activities of Toestand are a central feature in the development plan for the Canal Zone with high stakes for the property developers active in the area. The same complex figure can be found in other agencies in the city of Brussels, such as the temporary use at the abandoned WTC towers at Brussels North Station. Artists had been using the 25th floor for years, upon invitation from the project developer Befimmo, after it acquired the high-rise tower complex and was awaiting definitive plans for its renovation (Boie, 2019). In the period between September 2018 until January 2020 the temporary use was enlarged with the stay of architectural offices Architecture Workroom Brussels and 51N4E, also the KU Leuven Faculty of Architecture and other young independent architects and creatives. All these parties were invited by Befimmo to engage in a wonderful period of commoning the abandoned WTC tower floors and thus demonstrate the place making of an area that is known as the epitome of a monofunctional business location in Brussels. For years the WTC towers stood as a symbol to the urbicide wrought on the North Quarter by project developers in the 1970s: a popular neighbourhood was simply erased, to permit the construction of the so-called Manhattan plan. In recent years the WTC towers also became a symbol for the transmigrant issue, after illegal refugees set up informal tent settlements in the adjacent Maximillian Park. The unique mixture of festive activities and intellectual programmes, such as architecture exhibitions part of the International Architecture Biennial Rotterdam (an interesting programme on the future of cities facing climate urgencies) and university programmes, were meant to turn the non-place into the place-to-be. No wonder the formula of temporary use has by now been commercialised by companies like Entrakt, who temporarily hosted 'Level 5' in the former Actiris office building at the central Beursplein in Brusssels, bringing architects, artists and creatives together, while contractually not publicly discussing the specific conditions of the temporary stay (Vanrenterghem & Grumiau, 2019).

In these cases, the real estate market has been operating as parasite and life-line at the same time, providing cheap work space and a platform for creative activities that allow them to tap into the dynamics generated in the supposedly self-organising activity. It allows us to redefine the idea of a spectre of the commons insofar as the authentic process of self-organised commoning is co-organised by the real estate party. While the real estate party is well aware of its own limitations in generating an urban dynamic and the need to support independent creative actors, at least temporarily, the participating actors keep up the appearance of being a self-organising and autonomous force of urban change. Moreover, the case of the temporary use of the WTC tower in Brussels has shown a second reason why the parasitic relationship was less one-dimensional and binary than Hardt and Negri suggest (Boie, 2019: 161-184). Most temporary occupants were provided with a rental contract, beneficial but still paying for the essential costs of electricity, elevators, insurance, water, toilets, etc. Other actors, such as 51N4E

(architect office collaborating in the redesign of the tower) and AWB (curating the 'You are Here' exhibition as part of the International Architecture Biennale Rotterdam) were presented with an advantageous service contract, with free rent in exchange for services, primarily to attract people to the area. The point is that the real estate operator cannot organise the dynamics of place-making by itself, as an eventual invitation to the public would immediately be considered in the context of consumer relations. It is a world of difference to be invited in the context of an architecture biennial (that deals with the many challenges the climate regime poses to future urban development), while enjoying time with your friends at a rooftop party. Crucial to the whole setting is that somehow everyone is a parasite feeding upon each other: the real estate market may well act as a parasite on the activities of the temporary users, the point is the temporary users were equally parasitic to each other.

THE DANGER OF SELF-ENCLOSURE

Another manifestation of commons in an urban context is the occupation of vacant land and having the site open for urban farming and urban gardening, welcoming people from the neighbourhood to enjoy green space, fight against its urbanisation and contributing to local organic food production. The practices work in the great tradition of the Green Guerrilla's activist actions in the 1970s and community gardens in New York City in the 1980s (Petrescu, 2005). "The actions started with illegal planting, continued with the occupation of land, and then grew into community protest actions to preserve the created gardens against private or public expansionist policies of development," writes Doina Petrescu (2005). "Gardening became a tactic for both occupying and preserving spaces, resisting pressure for development and experimenting with methods of urban management that allow a more democratic access to decision-making, creation and use." Of course, Agrocité, part of the R-urban initiative by Doina Petrescu's Atelier d'Architecture Autogerée in the Parisian suburb of Colombes, is the best example of how this tradition is translated into the discourse of the commons (Petrescu, Petcou & Awan, 2011: 136-171). At the same time Agrocité also shows the weakness of these practices of commoning, as the heroic stance against urban development easily leads to political antagonisms that leave no space for compromises and makes the commons vulnerable to revenge (Boie, 2017). In effect, R-Urban was forced to close down in Colombes after the local council decided to turn the land into a car park, an appeal in court was made to no avail, and finally the project had to be moved to the neighbouring commune of Gennevilliers. On the positive side: in the move, Agrocité showed itself to be a Deleuzian plateau, a common ground for action by the collective subject whose enthusiasm and resilience could easily be transmitted elsewhere, somehow proving its rhizomatic nature. The struggle for Agrocité embodies less a struggle for a specific location and more the powerful claiming of the right to organise a productive residential and urban space in self-management.

Radical opposition however, is not always helpful in promoting the commons, especially when it lacks the flexibility of moving elsewhere and stubbornly sticks to the location, even if the political constellation turns against it. The process of commoning may be authentic and full of good intentions, but the local community lacks interest, it finds no political impact, it has zero gentrifying effect and real estate parties are not even willing to tap into the dynamic.. In Brussels, the Commons Josaphat initiative was launched around 2008 under the promising slogan 'In case of emergency, make your own city!' (Candry, 2014; De Cauter, 2018; Van Reusel, 2019). On the abandoned railway yard, the regional development agency had planned a large-scale project development, designed by MSA. The future plans were nonetheless kept on-hold as there was also speculation about using the railway yard as a possible expansion area for the offices to be used by the European Commission. The unclear destination ensured that the building development was only a pipe dream and the site was left abandoned for decades, only featuring as a storage area for the remains of a circus. Commons Josaphat explicitly beckoned to Tempelhofer Feld in Berlin to claim the great potential for temporary use at the abandoned railway yard. Now 13 years and many name changes later – first Commons Josaphat, later Josaph'aire, now Sauvons la Friche – no city of its own has been created. The government was never really keen on the spontaneous use of the site by the group of commoners, referring to its use as storage for an abandoned circus, the danger of the unprotected railway track and the works that would start anytime soon. The presence of the commoners on the site was nonetheless tolerated and they organised a tiny vegetable garden and held some activities in the barracks but never managed to disclose the site fully. The slogan 'to make your own city' was just a speculative dream by the commoners, just as much as the shiny urban development plans in the hands of the real estate market. The tiny vegetable garden with barracks thus easily figure as 'specter of the commons' in its own right, the spectre emerging from the movement itself, symbol for the utopia of the commons that never became real or concrete.

The real tragedy of the commons is the self-imposed irrelevance. Commons Josaphat was limited not because of its all too political profile (issuing statements on making your own city) but rather due to not being political enough (not able to embed their alternative dream in the future policy plans.) At least one internal reason for failure was present from the beginning: the commoners entertained an antagonistic relationship with the regional government, not believing that anything good could come from the government's side. Other group members were strategic as they were active in the Community Land Trust Brussels, a non-profit organisation that had just received subsidies, so logically they wanted to maintain a good relationship with the government. Later the biodiversity on the site provided the narrative for the enclosure of the site, after the Sauvons la Friche movement took over its control, this time imposed by the commoners, presenting its eventual use as a potential danger for the fauna and flora (Van Garsse, 2021). The message of Sauvons la Friche is certainly admirable in these days of climate heating but at the same time cynical: the biodiversity

on the railway site is the surrealist result of the standstill. Years of apathy on the part of the regional authorities mirrors the incapacity of the commoners to disclose the site and the Commons Josaphat community somehow folding back in upon itself. Saving biodiversity therefore became the poetic embrace of one's own incapacity. Finally, the urban development company SAU, owned by the regional government, took over the language of temporary use and advertised the site for temporary use under the banner of 'Josaphat Summer'. Again, the initiatives of the Brussels development company were rejected by the people of Sauvons la Friche, dismissing it as opportunist greenwashing and not even willing to give it the benefit of the doubt.

Another case of urban farming in Brussels shows how a more pragmatic relationship with the government allowed the realisation of the dream of making your own city and opening up industrial wastelands through a process of commoning: Parckfarm, located in the multicultural commune of Laeken. Although Parckfarm was first set up on the former railway infrastructure as a site for the 2014 Parckdesign Biennial organised by the Brussels Institute for the Environment, it was later made permanent as a park. Parckfarm was curated by Petra Pferdmenges (Alive Architecture) and Thierry Kandjee (Taktyk) and involved installations by several other architects, artists, students and inhabitants (Pferdmenges, 2018). As the park combines ecological awareness, short chains, a local meeting place for residents around food, ideally mixing different classes and cultures, it functions as a node for ecological resilience in the threefold meaning of Félix Guattari – ecology standing for organic, short-chain, local agriculture in an urban context as well as new forms of community building and individual empowerment (Guattari, 1989/2008). The opening up of new common spaces confronts the difficult questions of how to maintain openness in the city, as it bypasses the usual demarcations between public and private and thus challenges the legal responsibilities of ownership that come with it. This is especially the case in a city like Brussels, which is built on the closed block model, with its easily identifiable thresholds between public terrain and the private defensible space. Therefore, disclosure is a fundamental gesture of the urban commons, as Lieven De Cauter (2021: 84-91) has argued: it forces communities to get together and negotiate how the common space or land will be managed. Part of the management of the commons is not just the very practical reproduction – keeping the site clean and safe – but also about finding the permissions and financial means to turn the initial temporal modality into a permanent one (De Cauter, 2021; Petrescu, 2005; Pferdmenges, 2018). A huge success, Parckfarm became permanent and was integrated into the new public park at Thurn & Taxis, part of the new fancy real estate developments in public-private partnership at the site of the age-old postal industries. In this sense Parckfarm was rightly labelled by Lieven De Cauter (2014) as a 'concrete utopia', not only realising small-size the dream of making your own city, but also marking life-size the difference between the commons and the real estate market logics it wanted to criticise. The architectures of commoning equally transform the discipline of the architect from the (masculine) architect-author into what Doina Petrescu (2005; 2011) has called the (feminine) architect-curator – or, perhaps better, architect-mediator.

THE ACTIVIST CORE OF THE COMMONS

In discussing how the commons change the identity of cities we should also include the tradition of citizen movements in Brussels, engaging with urban development through direct interventions. The activist perspective allows us to understand why David Harvey (2012: 133 & 138) connects the commons with the right to the city and next stresses how it should be considered "not as a right that already exists, but as a right to redraw and recreate the city in a completely different image". Clearly David Harvey (2012: 138) has the movements in mind that operated under the slogan of 'reclaim the city' and thus directly links the appearance of the commons with moments of democracy. The commons thus mark the moments in which those who are not recognised among the usual suspects of urban development, those who are not entitled as shareholder or stakeholder, manage to have their voice heard and redefine the future plans (Rancière, 1995/1999; BAVO, 2007). Moreover, citizen movements have the commons as their object as they defend the common resources, such as green space or clean air, but also cultural commons such as road safety and child friendly spaces. On top of that the modes of commoning by citizen movements tap into the vast resources of cultural activism, now introducing it into the everyday politics of the street (BAVO, 2010). Even more it seems as if the citizen movements are engaged in what Boris Groys (2007) called the struggle for 'equal aesthetics right' over the design of the city, far more than any artist is prepared to do. The resources and tactics applied by citizen movements simply don't fit the typical choreography of urban development, filled with parties that use property to defend all sorts of public or private interests and politics trying to find compromises between the conflicting interests. In terms of agency, the citizen movements act as the "unstable and malleable social relationship" Harvey (2012: 37) is hinting at , call it a different third modus of an impersonal and loose relation (it is certainly not a closed community or identity) that is all the more committed to fight the good cause or simply do the right thing.

Different citizen movements in Brussels have managed to fundamentally redraw the layout and identity of the city through the commoning of perhaps the most common space of all: the street. The ownership of street is state monopoly, no doubt but still it is generally considered common in the meaning that we all use it and nobody takes care of it, resulting in the pejorative meanings of the street as 'mean' space (De Cauter, 2018). In contrast it is a sort of novelty nowadays that different citizen movements in Brussels started to 'common' the streets for different reasons, taking the street not just as a platform for action but also as an object of desire (Butler, 2015: 66-98). Talking about the occupation of Tahrir Square in 2011, Judith Butler (2015) argues that the roundabout did not just function as a platform for political action but also started to become the object of the action. Although Butler clearly discusses the revolutionary upheaval in the Arab Spring, we see the same process in the rather peaceful actions of civil disobedience by citizen movements in Brussels. In the context of Brussels, the first example is Pic Nic the Streets, the movement of young people in 2012 that answered the

call of philosopher Philippe Van Parijs (2012) to occupy the central avenues of Brussels until they are made car-free. The idea of Pic Nic the Streets was to give a final push to the long-awaited makeover of the Place de la Bourse and Place de Brouckère – two squares that were at that time cut by the main artery (4/5 lanes and 2 parking lanes) running from North to South and leading an endless traffic stream right through the heart of the City (Boie, 2017). An important strategic element in Pic Nic the Streets was the festive, family friendly atmosphere, the traditional protest attributes such as slogans and posters were not allowed, which made it possible for all sort of people to join in the movement. The use of the festive street blockades, on a few consecutive Sunday mornings throughout the summer, have proven to be a powerful tool to fight for the redistribution of public space in the car-dominated city of Brussels. The actions presented the authorities with what Roger Hallam (2019) called a response dilemma, present already in the very moment of the first announcement at social media: the local government could negate the activists or support them, but in either case they could not win. After people started to massively confirm their presence using the Facebook event page, the sniffy rejection by the Former Mayor Freddy Thielemans (PS) went viral. He claimed the City was working hard on the makeover of the city centre and suggested there were better locations to find for having a picnic. In no time thousands of people confirmed their presence through Facebook. The picnic's continued until the new mayor Yvan Mayeur gave in and promised to do exactly what the festive protestors were demanding: making the Central Boulevards of Brussels car free without further delay (Nijs, 2018). Eventually this led to the biggest pedestrian zone in Europe.

The picnic's brought the classic strategy of occupation to the next level, not so much self-organising an abandoned building or vacant site but pitching a certain issue on the political agenda by disrupting the distribution channels of the city, even in short moments. Although the Pic Nic the Streets movement was abandoned soon after success, the picnic's were spreading as a joyful weapon for urban activism, for instance in the demand to limit the property development at Port de Ninove and turn the junk space into a park. Years later citizen movements in Brussels have used similar operational tactics in dealing with urgencies within the city, acting as a force that's free from the traditional civil society and gathering people from diverse backgrounds. We think of the school gate protest movement Filter Café Filtré, started by concerned parents of primary school children from the Maria Boodschap primary school in the heart of Brussels. After an alarming study about air quality in school environments, featuring Maria Boodschap as a case study, the engaged parents started to block the streets at the entrance of the primary school every Friday morning. The spontaneous school gate protest started to circulate in the media and soon the movement spread to other primary schools in Brussels and other cities in Belgium (Vermeersch & Desloover, 2018). The main political demand was to reduce car traffic in cities, starting with car-free streets around schools at peak hour. Car dominated streets are not only a source of daily traffic congestion in living areas but also cause social disruption and ecological contamination. The Friday morning school gate protests lasted for months and reached

their peak in national manifestations, such as several bicycle rides on the A12 highway from Antwerp to Brussels, the march on Sainctelette Square at the Brussels small ring and the blockade at the main artery Boulevard Charles Quint in Brussels. Filter Café Filtré smartly linked the issue of urban activism with political activism as the movement had the explicit ambition to put the issue of mobility and air quality on the agenda of political parties in the wake of the local elections (2018) and regional/federal elections (2019).

Around the same time the citizen movement 1030/0 – referring to the zip code of Schaarbeek (Brussels) added with the ambition of 0 traffic casualties – started to common the streets. After a deadly car accident at Chaussee d'Haecht in Schaarbeek the citizen movement called upon the local government to implement a general zone 30 km/ph speed limit and blocked the main artery to highlight the urgency. The demand was swiftly followed by the local council. The movement started answering every new car accident with unannounced street blockades, e.g., at the mid-ring road Boulevard Lambermont (a dangerous motorway with three lanes in each direction cutting through residential areas), Chaussee d'Helmet, Avenue Rogier and other arteries. The idea was to create political pressure by flooding the newspapers with mediagenic actions. The battle of images has always been a vital part of political activism, the best historical reference is perhaps the famous sit-in's organised by the Civil Right Movements in the sixties at local lunch bars (King, 1967). These were highly staged acts, well prepared, and disciplined, performed in order to obtain the visual documentation of the everyday abuse and insult Afro-American's had to endure in those days, and have it published in the leading papers. In the same mediagenic fashion, the spontaneous refusal to go with the flow in the streets of Brussels, even though it is a short intervention, creates an immediate crisis for the urban system, causing huge traffic jams and chain effects on public transport. The guts needed to block a street – first with human chains, later by lying down on the asphalt or having a dance on a crossing – has immense appeal to the popular imagination. The movement therefore urged the regional government to use its political power for an active policy on road safety, not just organising campaigns but also actively intervening in road infrastructure, increasing police control, pressuring the automobile industry, etc. Local government were demanded to immediately close streets, for instance after an action in which parking places at Avenue Van Vollenhoven, running

IMAGE 1 Action by 1030/0 at Van Vollenhovenlaan, Schaarbeek, Brussels (Image by Sien Verstraeten).

straight through the Josaphat park, were repainted as a hopscotch, running track and maze and making plain that playground games should not be mistaken for car parking (Boie, 2020). Again, the inclusive and still extremely loose character of the movement, having no formal structure and using only social media as its organising tool, can be seen as part of its success. As 1030/0 had no links to any political party nor traditional civil society, people easily identified with the cause of traffic safety and often passers-by spontaneously started to join the street actions. The movement spread over Brussels region, creating local chapters in other communes (1082/0, 1210/0, 1080/0, …) and the creation of a supporting association Heroes for Zero Brussels.

CONCLUSION

Temporary use has been helpful to reintroduce the notion of the commons in urban development, especially when it comes to accommodating creatives industries and yet they tend to repress other traditions of commoning from the scene. Lamenting the corruption of the commons is in that case somehow redundant, in so far as it deliberately operates in the context of the real estate market and even draws on its support. No wonder the process of commoning is overdetermined by the land owner who facilitates the process, aims to defend interests and arrives to harvest it at the right moment. The corruption of the commons by real estate thus urges us to recognise, with David Harvey (2012: 77), that the process of commoning is fundamentally marked by a "continuous process of production and enclosure". Therefore, the discussion should focus not so much on the 'natural' tendency to hollow out the commons as it nurtures the illusion of pure commons but rather discuss the constant and renewed disclosure of the commons. In weighing the commons with real estate, the fundamental question is how to make the commons permanent and available for the enjoyment of all. Practices of urban gardening continue upon another strong tradition of the commons in cities, offering the possibility for people to get together in an experimental setting for self-management. In these cases, the problematic is not so much collaboration but rather the opposite: the commons are endangered by the tendency of self-enclosure as a result of the unwillingness to engage with the public government and/or real estate interests. And still the oppositional modus unwittingly draws on the magic moment that the regional development company and their private real estate partners magically withdraw and the site is generously handed over to the commoners who start to make their own city. Against this sort of hocus-pocus scenario – as if the real estate market melts into thin air – the challenge lies in finding ways to embed the commons in the official plans for urban development and make it a permanent part of the urban landscape.

Talking about the commons in the terms of spontaneous citizen movements helps to return heavyweight claims back to the level of everyday experience and also provides direct relevance for urban politics. After all it is quite easy to dream about occupations of empty buildings before first asking the land owner for permission. Equally it is quite

easy to dream about remaking the city while sitting in an abandoned brownfield. The real struggle of the commons happens when people fight – symbolically – for every square inch of road infrastructure passing their front door, trying to keep it safe, healthy and convivial. In this perspective the activist commons is not so much about countering urban developments nor offering alternatives but to hold the public powers accountable and have them respect their own policies – call it moments of hyper idealist overidentification (BAVO, 2007b). Even though the redistribution of public space is part of most political programmes and policy plans, this is not something that will happen naturally, it needs common action to turn it into reality. The activist commons pays off, that is what the above examples show. No wonder we saw different variations of the reclaim slogan appearing in Brussels, even under the corona lockdown, such as the 'Reclaim the Park' in relation to the Bois de la Cambre. Although part of the Foret des Soignes and functioning as an immense green urban lung, the Bois de la Cambre was de facto functioning as an urban highway used as a shortcut for cars entering Brussels from the south. During the pandemic the 'Reclaim the Park' movement successfully demanded the immediate closure of the park for cars and opening of the streets for leisure and play. The case is not closed and currently contested before court, decisions made were partially turned back on later, still the actions should be considered successful in cutting through the ideological fundamentals supporting the predominance of cars in the design of public space. The cases show how the street appears as perhaps the best anchorage point for the right to the city, as it allows people to rethink the public space that starts at their front door and therefore make the long-awaited redistribution of public space a living reality, if only for a moment. In that light the street is the real locus of the battle for the commons, building up momentum for urban change in the joyful activity of blocking the city traffic with neighbours and other strangers.

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CHAPTER 3

THE TENDENCY TOWARDS ENCLOSURE: AN INHERENT AND MARKET/STATE-SHAPED DYNAMIC OF THE URBAN COMMONS. INSIGHTS FROM BARCELONA

Iolanda Bianchi

Over recent decades, and especially since the implementation of the neo-liberal project, the commons have received ever-increasing scholarly attention in published Marxist literature due to their emancipatory potential. This politicised understanding of the commons is distinct from the neo-institutionalist version set out by Ostrom (1990), for whom the commons are collectively managed resources/services. Conversely, for Marxist scholars, the commons are best understood as self-governing social practices, operating through principles of use-value, reciprocity and participatory democracy that could counter the new wave of enclosure, i.e. the privatisation and the commodification of collective goods and resources being carried out by market and state actors (De Angelis, 2017). However, commons do not only represent forms of resistance, but are also the "prefigurations of an emancipated society" (Stavrides, 2016: 40) as they embody the "seeds and the embryonic form of an alternative mode of production in the making" (Federici & Caffentzis, 2013).

Nevertheless, the emancipatory capacity of the commons should not be taken for granted. Marxist authors themselves have sounded a note of caution about this. One of the chief points they make concerns the open or closed tendency of the commons. Scholars recognise that if the commons are to represent an instrument for developing emancipatory political action, they must be permeable social practices, whose communities are open to encounters, exchanges and otherness. Otherwise they run the risk of becoming an additional form of enclosure, creating segregation by class, ethnicity and political identity (De Angelis, 2017; Harvey, 2012; Stavrides, 2016). Such an enclosure, instead of opening up pathways of emancipation from capitalism, may exacerbate the social, economic and territorial inequalities on which it is based. However, the theorisations of the majority of Marxist authors do not go much further than merely acknowledging this risk. They tend to adopt a theoretical-normative

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perspective (Varvarousis, 2020), mentioning how the commons must be configured so as to avoid becoming simply another form of enclosure. The empirical analyses presented tend to display successful cases, i.e. cases in which the commons are managed in an open and permeable manner (Stavrides, 2016); however, this does not facilitate a full understanding of the essence of the open/closed issue.

This contribution aims to enrich and stimulate discussion on the question of the open/closed tendency of the commons by introducing to the debate the ambiguities and contradictions of actual existing commons, located in the urban context. In the post-Fordist era, the urban environment can indeed be a space that favours the openness of the commons by allowing the intermingling of people and the encounter of different subjectivities (Huron, 2018); however, it can also be a place that favours commons closing in on themselves, especially when they have to protect themselves from privatisation and commodification processes that are typical of the urban context, such as gentrification, touristification, and real estate speculation (Hodkinson, 2012). This chapter uses two case studies of cultural urban commons located in the city of Barcelona –the Can Batlló cultural centre and the Escocesa art centre– as representative and explicative of the arguments I intend to put forward: 1) That the tendency towards enclosure is an inherent dynamic of the urban commons, which can be better understood in relation to the differentiated way through which they pursue their openness with respect to what is public; 2) That this dynamic can change over time, depending on the external market-state threats the community faces, and so it must be understood in the processual urban neoliberal context in which it is set. This is why I suggest here that the tendency towards enclosure of the urban commons can only be navigated through, and as far as possible, governed by commons themselves, which can establish rules in order to limit this tendency or by a deliberate interaction of commons and local state institution's rule-making, when this is politically possible. This chapter begins by introducing how the open/closed question is treated in the Marxist literature pertaining to the commons; it then continues by presenting and discussing the two case studies. It concludes by calling for a more empirically-based and nuanced understanding of the open/closed question.

COMMONS: FROM CHALLENGING NEOLIBERAL ENCLOSURE TO POTENTIAL ENCLOSED SPACES

Marxist scholars' interest in the political potential of the commons stems from analysing the history of the development of capitalism: specifically, so-called enclosures. According to classical Marxist theory, enclosures were the means by which the very first process of accumulation took place; i.e., it was the process by which the people of the time were deprived of the means of production: the arable land. Between the 15th and 16th centuries, the land became reassigned as the property of capitalists. This process led to the creation of an army of labour power made up of individuals who

were later forced to sell this power to the market (Marx, 1867). In addition to Marx, other authors, such as Polanyi, have also referred to this phenomenon to illustrate how capitalism did not arise from the entrepreneurial skills of a few ingenious people, but instead, from a violent and vicious process of robbery of a resource, arable land, which was previously treated as a commons (Polanyi, 1944). As described in classical Marxist theory, this practise of enclosing land initiated at the precise moment in history that corresponded with the birth of capitalism and ended once the capitalist system had been established and was fully functional.

The implementation of the neo-liberal capitalist project has seen a series of new privatisations and commodifications of the commons, carried out by alliances between states and markets both in the Global North (especially regarding public goods and services) and in the Global South (especially concerning land cultivated by local communities). This has led many Marxist authors to question the process of enclosures, de-contextualising and de-historicising the phenomenon. Authors such as Caffentzis, De Angelis and Federici have illustrated how enclosures are not a process that can be identified with a specific time, ending with the development of capitalism but are a discontinuous and constant mechanism underlying the whole history of capitalism, through which this system reproduces itself (De Angelis, 2017; Federici & Caffentzis, 2013). With the implementation of the neo-liberal project, this mechanism has been reactivated in a particularly aggressive way, giving rise to what have been called new enclosures (Midnight Notes Collective, 2001); i.e. new forms of privatisation and commodification. Similarly, Harvey defines "accumulation by dispossession" as a process through which new privatisations and commodifications have been put into play with the aim of releasing sets of assets at a very low (or zero) cost, so that capitalists can seize them and turn them into profit (Harvey, 2010).

In other words, the concept of enclosure and the recent updating of it have allowed Marxist authors to understand how the capitalist system is based on and constituted according to the privatisation and commodification of the commons; i.e. those goods belonging *de facto* to local communities (such as arable land), national communities (such as public goods and services), and global communities (such as water and the seas), people that are nevertheless not considered the *de jure* owners of those goods. From this conceptualisation, the commons emerged as an alternative and opposite paradigm to enclosure and to the development of capitalism (Bianchi, 2018). In recent history in fact, the same Marxist authors who updated the concept of enclosure are those who have identified the commons as a new instrument for allowing oppressed and exploited people to define a new pathway towards emancipation. Forms of production and management of common goods and services, such as urban gardens, squatted spaces, such as social, cultural and art centres, housing cooperatives, workers' cooperatives, consumer groups, time banks etc. are examples of commons that Marxist scholars consider have the potential to create alternatives to capitalism in the here and now.

Therefore, the concept of enclosure highlights the social and political transformative potential of the commons. However, enclosures are also one of the processes that most threaten the commons' transformative capacity. The commons are based on collective management, i.e., of a defined community, of a good or a resource, and as such, risk becoming transformed into yet another form of enclosure. As argued by De Angelis, collective management can become a limitation if the community behind it becomes exclusionary of the "other" in ethnic, class, or cultural terms (De Angelis, 2017). Similarly, Harvey reminds us that even some of the most progressive commons, such as the Soviets in Russia or the *Case del Popolo* in Italy, allowed limited and therefore exclusionary access to them. Harvey is not necessarily condemning all commons; he says "creating de-commodified spaces in a capitalist context is always a good thing"; instead, he is drawing attention to the inherent contradictory aspects of the commons, such as their elitism (Harvey, 2012). This elitism, instead of helping to expand and sustain social and political transformation, can represent a perfect neoliberal strategy whereby class privileges and power are reproduced. The approach of these authors, however, does not go far beyond acknowledging this 'problem' suffered by the commons. Generally speaking, they tend to adopt a normative approach, simply suggesting the commons should avoid closing in on themselves, and should instead be open to establishing relationships with the other communities and commons around them (De Angelis, 2017; Harvey, 2012).

A step forward here pertains to the issue of the open/closed tendency of the commons as elucidated in the work of Stavrides (2016), who is a compelling advocate for the socio-political transformative capacity of the commons. Nevertheless, he argues that, for this capacity to materialise, the commons cannot be totally isolated autonomous spaces: they cannot be liberated enclaves of emancipation overrun by a hostile capitalist environment. Isolated commons would feed the spatial order of the capitalist city, which consists of many discrete, segregated spaces. For the commons to truly represent an alternative to the capitalist space, they need to be open and porous to the other and where necessary, overspill the boundaries of their own communities. To better understand this openness and porosity, Stavrides proposes the metaphor of the "threshold". According to him, the threshold could be considered a boundary that divides the inside from the outside. However, these boundaries also represent an act of separation that is at the same time an act of connection. In this way, threshold spaces would serve as material and mental constructs with porous boundaries. By crossing a threshold, people typically perceive that they are leaving behind a familiar place, for a place that is 'other'. Thus, crossing a threshold means approaching that 'otherness' and being open to an encounter between different social groups and experiences. He thus argues that to be truly emancipatory, commons must serve as threshold spaces.

In support of his thesis, he highlights some representative cases of this conceptualisation of the commons. An example offered of a threshold space is the *Alexandras complex* social housing block, built on the outskirts of Athens to house refugees from the

Middle East. In this space, despite the hostile environment, refugees have started to transform outdoor areas into playgrounds and meeting places where small celebrations and everyday encounters between neighbours can take place. Another example is the squatted *Navarinou Park* in Athens (a parking lot that a neighbourhood initiative has converted into a lively urban square and garden). In this case, children from a nearby primary school were involved in the park's activities, not simply as users, but also as participants: they grew plants and participated in building outdoor furniture and organising small events. Stavrides' contribution is extremely important in elucidating this context, because theorising grounded in empirical evidence allows us to go beyond the theoretical-normative approach set out by some Marxist scholars. The examples given help us to understand the practical ways in which the risk of the commons becoming new enclosures can be overcome. However, showing mainly successful cases does not illuminate the more ambiguous and contradictory aspects of the issue. To further illustrate the topic, I present two cases of cultural urban commons located in Barcelona: the Can Batlló cultural centre and the Escocesa art centre. These cases will be used in an explanatory-representative way to support the two main arguments set out in this chapter.

THE TENDENCY TOWARDS ENCLOSURE, AS AN INHERENT DYNAMIC OF THE URBAN COMMONS

The first point I would like to discuss here is that the tendency towards enclosure is an inherent dynamic of the urban commons. This can be better understood in relation to the differentiated way through which they pursue their openness with respect to what is public. This dynamic arises not only in the most visible cases of urban commons, that adopt an exclusionary approach towards the other but also in the ones that could be included among the successful cases or what Stavrides terms, threshold spaces. The case of Can Batlló is representative of this. Can Batlló is a cultural centre that emerged in 2011 in Barcelona following a decade-long claim involving residents of the former industrial neighbourhood of Sants-La Bordeta. This neighbourhood lacked adequate public spaces and facilities and an excellent opportunity to provide them appeared to be to make use of the Can Batlló textile factory, which covered an area of about 14 hectares and had been in disuse since 1964. The administration had stated in the 1976 general plan for the city that the area would become a shared space for public services and facilities (such as green areas and social housing). However, the project had not been implemented, and the Can Batlló factory remained closed and inaccessible until the residents themselves decided to mobilise (Soler, 2014).

This mobilisation started in 2009 when the Sants-La Bordeta residents set up the 'Can Batlló és pel barri' (Can Batlló is for the neighbourhood) Platform (henceforth, the CB Platform). They were soon joined by many activists who were the motor of urban mobilisations, anticipating the 'Indignados' movement (also known as the 15M

movement), and with the aim of putting pressure on the municipal administration to carry out the promised urban transformation. They launched a campaign, the Tic-Tac campaign, and threatening to occupy the factory if work had not started by 11 June 2011. Thus, initially, the CB Platform was not demanding the creation of a self-managed space but was merely asking the municipal administration to fulfil its promises and create the public spaces and facilities that had been outlined by the planners. However, relatively rapidly, the demands to begin the redevelopment process evolved into a bid for self-management. As these were turbulent political times (the municipal elections were approaching), the administration decided to hand over one of the warehouses for the neighbours to self-manage. This resulted in the birth of the Can Batlló cultural centre. Within one year, Can Batlló had been transformed into a cultural space, self-managed by citizens, with a library, bar, auditorium and many other spaces for community use. It organised activities such as debates, screenings, and workshops (Rossini & Bianchi, 2020).

The peculiarity of the Can Batlló cultural centre is that it emerged from a demand for a public space, with the bid for self-management only occurring later. It thus maintained an aspiration to serve as a public space, with all the characteristics this implies; i.e., open, accessible and free for the inhabitants of the Sants-La Bordeta neighbourhood and of Barcelona in general to use. This aspiration is summed up in this statement in the Can Batlló statutes:

> *[The Can Batlló cultural centre] is a neighbourhood space, self-managed in the form of direct democracy by the 'Can Batlló is for the Neighbourhood' Platform. This space, […], is a municipal property, but it has been transferred to the neighbours of Sants. It is not, therefore, a municipal facility, but a public facility, in the neighbourhood and for the neighbourhood.*
> *(Plataforma Can Batlló es por el Barri, 2012)*

Can Batlló's members are committed to create an open and accessible space: they do their utmost to ensure it is not an exclusionary cultural space, with activities organised for a limited niche but one that can effectively accommodate the diversity and plurality of lifestyles of the city's inhabitants. Nevertheless, despite the CB Platform's aim of guaranteeing open access and the widespread use of the facilities, not everyone feels free to access and use them. This is well explained in the words of a professional who confessed to feeling uncomfortable when he went into the Can Batlló library; he had the impression that the eyes of the Can Batlló community were upon him and that he did not belong there. In his words:

> *[…] when you go into the Vapor Vell library [a City Council-run library located in the same neighbourhood] no one looks at you: you go into a library that is a public service and no one is going to ask you if you are from the neighbourhood or not. You pick up your books and do whatever you'd do if you went into the Lesseps, for example one [a public*

library in the Gracia neighbourhood]. If you go into Can Batlló library, and I did two or three times, they turn around and look at you. Who's this? Wearing a suit? Because it's a community library and you don't belong to that community, and therefore there's a fundamental difference.
(interview/professional)

This quote of course needs to be seen as the subjective perception of one professional. It could be contested by the many users of Can Batlló who have repeatedly praised the inclusiveness of the cultural centre. However, it shows that although the Can Batlló community has made many efforts to ensure that Can Batlló is an open and accessible space, i.e., a threshold space, its porosity cannot be achieved completely, as not everyone feels welcome to go into the centre and use it, since they do not feel they belong to that community. However, beyond the question of one's personal feelings of exclusion, which are subjective, this urban commons has also run the risk of provoking objective exclusion. Over the years, the Can Batlló cultural centre has promoted a series of much more ambitious projects to be located in the same area, such as the Borda housing cooperative. This project intended to use an adjacent area designated for the construction of social housing by the general metropolitan plan, in order to found a cooperative housing project composed mainly of members/users of the Can Batlló cultural centre. This would have meant infringing on the rights of those waiting to be allocated a council house in order to favour the project of a small group of individuals who, although motivated by ideals of cooperation and horizontality, did not necessarily have the same urgent need for housing. To compensate for this exclusionary element, the project's proponents worked together with the municipality to implement the project while at the same time respecting the accessibility rules as established by the social housing law. It was eventually decided that the City Council would cede the land for the construction of the cooperative housing project to a group of people for a duration of 75 years (the land thus remains in public hands) but on the condition that the people who are part of the project fulfil the income criteria set by the regional government for access to social housing. The Borda has now been built and is one of the first housing cooperatives in Barcelona and part of the Can Batlló cultural centre project.

The case of Can Batlló is an example of how the tendency towards enclosure is an inherent tendency of the urban commons that cannot be fully supressed – not even by urban commons that have a solid political commitment to keep their project as open as possible. This tendency stems from the way they seek to open up to the outside, in a different and at least apparently, less effective way from what is public. The commons seek to open up towards the outside *from below,* through the self-creation of laws and norms, using direct democracy, while what is public seeks to open up towards the outside *from above,* through the creation of laws and norms, using representative democracy. This difference seems to allow the state to be more capable of guaranteeing free and universal access to spaces and services. However, many studies have shown that what is public is not always freer and more accessible than what is common. The

public sphere is not fully free and accessible, because it is based on the exclusion of multiple voices, namely those of the most marginalised groups (Fraser, 1990); neither is Keynesian welfare fully free and accessible because it is based on the exclusion of non-workers (unpaid carers) and non-citizens (undocumented migrants) (Huws, 2020); nor is the public space fully free and accessible, because it is based on the exclusion of the marginalised and the poor through policing activities (Delgado, 2011). In other words, both the common and the public suffer from a tendency to exclusion, albeit in different ways. For this reason, as shown by the case of Can Batlló, and specifically that of the Borda, if commons are to be maintained as threshold spaces, it is desirable that their members work as much as possible to establish norms and rules that facilitate this opening up to occur; whenever possible they should negotiate such rules by interacting with local public institutions that can represent a way of enhancing and guaranteeing this openness. However, as shall be seen in the following case, it is not always possible for the members of the commons to self-regulate effectively or to co-produce rules with local public institutions.

THE TENDENCY TOWARDS ENCLOSURE, AS A MARKET/STATE-SHAPED DYNAMIC OF THE URBAN COMMONS

The second point to be discussed is that the tendency towards enclosure is not only an inherent characteristic of the urban commons but is one that evolves according to the market-state threats the community faces and as such, needs to be understood in the processual neoliberal urban context within which it is set. The case of the Escocesa art centre is illustrative in this regard. The Escocesa emerged at the end of the 1990s in the Poblenou neighbourhood, a former industrial district of Barcelona, which was then in decline. At that time, many artists squatted or rented the derelict warehouses in the neighbourhood at affordable prices, and set up different art centres. The academic literature refers to this phenomenon as the "Poblenou creative milieu" (Martí-Costa & Pradel i Miquel, 2012). One of these centres was the Escocesa.

Initially, the Escocesa was occupied by 15 artists, but due to the abundance of space available, their numbers soon grew to 75; these included painters, sculptors, photographers, circus performers, etc. The Escocesa was founded with the intention of providing young and low-income artists with access to affordable spaces in which to work. Thus, its main mission was not to create events and activities that would be open to the public, although through organising open days and parties and participating in neighbourhood events, the Escocesa maintained a certain degree of porosity with the outside world. Everything went relatively smoothly until the Poblenou neighbourhood became the target of regeneration policies developed by Barcelona City Council: the 22@ plan. This plan aimed to transform Poblenou into a high-tech knowledge hub, favouring urban redevelopment projects and aiming to attract creative industries. Within this vision, artistic spaces, such as the Escocesa, were not considered productive

spaces but instead, were seen only as further demonstrating the economic decay of the district. Therefore, under the speculative pressure triggered by the 22@ plan, many of these projects began to disappear, moving out of the area little by little, mainly towards other undervalued former industrial towns in the Barcelona Metropolitan Area, such as Hospitalet de Llobregat.

The Escocesa also found itself under threat as part of an urban transformation project that would transform its factories into high-rises containing flats and loft spaces. Initially, all the artists opposed this transformation but little by little many accepted the compensation payments offered by the real estate company to leave their spaces and only a small number of artists (about fifteen), decided to stay and continue the mobilisation. They were unable though to stop the project going ahead. However, like many other construction activities in the city, development was brought to a halt by the financial crisis of 2008. This led the City Council to acquire part of the property, transforming it into a municipal arts centre to be included in the recently created *Fábricas de Creación* (Art Factories) programme; this was a programme that aimed to offer affordable spaces to artists and creative professionals through the provision of a network of public art factories, each with different artistic specialisations (Ayuntamiento de Barcelona, 2006). In this way, the Escocesa became part of this programme, with its management entrusted to the group of artists who had fought to save the building from speculation and who now joined forces to form the EMA association. However, according to the agreement, the concession to grant the space to the EMA association was to be temporary, ending once the City Council were able to embark on the planned rehabilitation work. At this point, the cession and management would be subject to a public call for tender, in which various artistic associations would be able to participate, including the EMA.

Under the EMA's management, the Escocesa was gradually transformed into a public art centre, self-managed by an association which, in line with the directives of the *Fábricas de Creación*, endeavoured to create events that were open to the public (such as workshops, seminars, and exhibitions) and to maintain several artistic spaces open to public bids (8 places), while 15 places were held by the artists who belonged to the EMA association. However, neither the number of public activities, nor the ratio of places open to public bidding compared to those for members of the association, pleased the City Council, who demanded that the association develop more public activities and provide more places for public bids (thus reducing the number of original members who fought to save the Escocesa from speculation). This dissatisfaction would have led the City Council to dismiss the EMA association from managing the Escocesa but since it had not yet undertaken the renovation work, it was unable to do so. Instead, it created conditions that placed the association under increasing pressure, requiring it to carry out more and more activities, while providing very little financial help, so encouraging by default the EMA members to leave. However, the members of the association remained in the Escocesa, and continued to manage it, not offering many public activities and retaining the majority of the available places for themselves.

The attitude of artists who are members of EMA could be understood as the closed position of a group seeking to maintain their privileges (an affordable space to work in the Poblenou area), reducing the scope for other users and artists to take part in the urban commons and be included in a project which is actually also promoted by the public institutions. However, the closure of the urban commons must not simply be read from a simplistic, negative perspective but must be understood in its complex context and as a reaction to the threats posed to the commons by both market and state actors. In this case, the first threatening dynamic is represented by the expulsion of many artists from the relatively central, ex-industrial district of Poblenou to the cities of the Barcelona Metropolitan Area due to the regeneration process initiated by the local government's planning changes for the 22@ technological hub and the resulting real estate speculation process. In this context, the Escocesa was saved thanks to the intervention of the City Council itself; however, the council also represented a new threat as it imposed its own rules for managing the commons (without negotiating them with the community) to favour free and inclusive access according to public criteria. These rules required the Escocesa's members to give up places in their arts centre in the name of this free and open access. However, if the artists had left the Escocesa, they would have found it practically impossible to find another working space in Poblenou, considering the economic revaluation of the neighbourhood following the implementation of the 22@ plan. Therefore, they would have most probably had to relocate entirely, to one of the cities in the Barcelona Metropolitan Area, as many other groups of artists have done. Therefore, the closed tendency of this group has to be understood in the context of the neoliberal urban dynamic, whereby the closure of the commons is a form of resistance to defend a space created and fought for collectively. This explanation does not serve to justify the closed behaviour of the community, which could have been mitigated by planning more activities open to the public and favouring a rotation of artists by carefully managing the spaces. However, it does allow us to understand the different rationales behind the tendencies towards enclosure that evolve as responses to the market/state-led threats that impinge on the urban commons.

CONCLUSION

The issue of enclosure has been crucial for developing the concept of the commons from the Marxist perspective, which highlights their potential to produce social transformation and serve as pathways of emancipation from capitalism. However, because of the types of self-management carried out by communities, the commons itself can risk becoming another form of enclosure, whereby the social group that manages it excludes the other from accessing the resource. To avoid this degeneration, Marxists are very clear: the commons must be maintained as open and permeable spaces or in the words of Stavrides (2016), "as threshold spaces; that is, as spaces that permit exchange and encounters between different subjectivities". However, this theoretical-normative approach taken by the Marxist authors does not allow for a

thorough understanding of the contradictions and ambiguities of the question of the open/closed tendency of the commons, which deserve to be analysed in more depth. Here, this analysis has been carried out in the urban context of Barcelona, where two cases of urban cultural commons – the Can Batlló cultural centre and the Escocesa art centre – have been explored.

The cases have been used to support two arguments: firstly, that the urban commons' tendency towards enclosure is an inherent dynamic which no commons can escape fully. As the case study of the Can Batlló cultural centre shows, this tendency can even affect urban commons whose members are committed to creating and maintaining a porous space, a threshold space. Such a tendency can be both subjective and objective, i.e., can be either the result of one's perception of not feeling included and at ease in a space that belongs to a specific community and/or it can be the result of a process of appropriation of a space that allows for the inclusion of only a limited number of self-selecting participants, as in the case of the Borda housing cooperative. Both tendencies towards enclosure are justified by the very nature of the urban commons which, however horizontal, participatory and transformative they may be, seek to open up towards the outside in a different way from what is public: the commons seek this openness through bottom-up rule-making, while public entities achieve it through top-down rule-making. This does not mean that when openness is pursued from above, it is necessarily fairer and more equitable than when it is pursued from below (there are many studies demonstrating such limits). However, understanding how what is public and what is common strive for this openness in different ways can help us to understand the limits of each and why, when it is politically possible, it is desirable to integrate through both ways. This is what happened in the case of Can Batlló and its sub-project, the Borda housing cooperative, when the tendency towards enclosure of the urban commons was mitigated in a reasonable way, precisely through the deliberate interaction between the rules established by the members of the commons and those established by local public institutions.

This interaction though, is not always politically possible, especially when a local government imposes (rather than negotiates) public rule-making over commons' rule-making. This is the case of the Escocesa, which serves to support the second argument of this contribution, i.e., that the tendency towards enclosure, as well as being embodied in the urban commons, can become transformed over time in response to external market-state threats faced by the community, and therefore, must be understood in the urban neoliberal context in which it is set. The case of the Escocesa shows, in fact, how the closure of artists in this art centre, despite the way it might be criticised by a superficial observer (since it prevents other artists and users benefitting from the space), should be understood in light of the fact that if they were to open up to the outside (according to imposed and unnegotiated public criteria), it would mean that some artists would lose their work space at the Escocesa and would have to move to a more peripheral city, suffering the same state-led and real-estate speculation-driven

expulsion as other artists working in Poblenou. Therefore, in this case, as effective interaction with the local public institutions' rule-making was not possible, the members of the urban commons themselves should have reflected upon how to facilitate this opening as much as possible.

Moving towards our conclusions, I can affirm that acknowledging that a tendency towards enclosure is an inherent and market/state-shaped dynamic of the urban commons does not mean questioning the Marxist theory that perceives commons as a means to trigger emancipatory social change. Instead, it requires an acknowledgment of the differentiated and limited degree of inclusiveness that urban commons can promote, especially when compared to what is public. Urban commons can continue to represent a form of struggle and a model for building an alternative society to the capitalist model. Nevertheless, I suggest that the open/closed question needs to be thoroughly studied by the academic community through empirical research, so that it can be understood in its multiple and processual nuances. Furthermore, the same question needs to be addressed by the communities that manage the urban commons, to navigate their ambiguities and contradictions and define strategies, norms and practices to govern potential enclosures in the best possible way. When the right political conditions are in place, interacting with local state institutions should also be taken into consideration. This does not necessarily mean collaborating with them but instead, negotiating rules with them while maintaining the urban commons' transformative principles. In this way, urban commons could come as close as possible to the Marxist ideal, that is, becoming threshold spaces, albeit always imperfectly constructed ones.

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CHAPTER 4

INTERCULTURAL CONVIVIALITY AND CULTURAL COMMONING: SQUARE DANCING AND THE CREATION OF INCLUSIVE PUBLIC SPACE BY 'DAMA' OR ELDERLY FEMALE PERFORMERS IN POST-REFORM URBAN CHINA

Tian Shi & Ching Lin Pang

It would be an interesting exercise to ponder the first impression of Italy's most reputed traveller and explorer, Marco Polo, if he had the chance to visit Lanzhou City now. Lanzhou, located in the north-western part of China, occupies a strategic location along the Silk Road and has acted as a battlefield throughout ancient history. Cultures created by Sogdians, Persians, Tocharians, Uighurs, Mongolians, Tibetans and other nomads intricately connected and flowed to other regions beyond the Silk Road (see Hansen, 2012). The cultural legacy of the Silk Road involves tangible and intangible resources of cultural reproduction and prosperity.

As anthropologists, we are professionally inclined to investigate vernacular cultural forms in the commons. This heightened attentiveness toward the everyday translates into the following questions. What kind of cultural commons creates the cultural infrastructure in which ordinary people can engage? How do ordinary people navigate various cultures in an urban or rural context? How do they reinscribe and project themselves in the sociocultural environment at the local scale and beyond? How do they perform interculturalism in daily practices?

We decided to begin our research in a square, which allows us not only to measure cultural commoning in an urban space but also to perform sensorial walking and a visual reading and rendering of the space that is in constant change. In this interactional process, we adopt picturing as a process of both capturing and narrating ordinary practices of the city from a sociocultural (artistic), interventional perspective.

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We explore how analytic pictures serving as spatiotemporal matrices can reconcile mutualisms such as urban and rural or global and local. In so doing, we seek ways to understand how various forms of social life, condition and shape the city as both a built environment and a social medium, the blending of the "ville" with the "cité" (Sennett, 2019).

This research on the exchange of lived culture along the Silk Road is part of the larger research programme *Interexchange of Aesthetic Culture on the Silk Road* at Lanzhou University. It is conducted on the basis of collaborative research with the authors as the main principal investigators and supported by a junior scholar from Yunnan Agricultural University, Ph.D. candidates, master's students from Lanzhou and Yunnan Agricultural University, and Hans Roels, a Belgian art photographer. In addition to academic articles, a photo exhibition is part of the programme, constituting the outcome and deliverables of this research project. Several research trips were made to Lanzhou, notably in April and August 2018, April 2019 and October 2019. Hans Roels joined the team in April and October 2019.

In this chapter, we investigate how conviviality can be created, fostered and sustained in a multifunctional and purposed space from above but nonetheless used and appropriated by multiple ordinary "practitioners of the city" for purposes related to work and leisure. The study of *dama* (lit. *big mama* or elderly ladies) and other ordinary practitioners of the city has led us to larger questions of belonging, participation and allegiance in a diverse and convivial urban society. In particular, we explore whether vernacular activities of the *dama* and other groups in the city can be inscribed in the changing urban fabric of the Chinese city at the neighbourhood level. These *dama*s, mostly female retirees aged between fifty and sixty, are generally presented as belonging to the lower social strata and lacking cultural capital. They are caricatured as having limited mobility between the kitchen and the TV room. Their public dancing in nearby parks or public squares has elicited a series of conflicts and criticisms over noise pollution (Kirkpatrick, 2019; Seeto & Zou, 2016; Xiao & Hilton, 2019; Yang, 2015) and neglect of their social and gendered responsibilities.

Ethnographic observation and participation allow for a social and cultural reading of how bodies interact with the city in a dynamic reciprocal relation in which users appropriate and project themselves in the urban space, in this case, the square. In turn, this square generates and reflects the interests and aspirations of its users. This mutuality gains even more salience in the context of the reconfiguration of China's urban landscape as the result of historical intercultural exchange.

This chapter is divided into five parts. The first part introduces the historical and contemporary setting of the city of Lanzhou. The second part elaborates on transcultural conviviality and commoning as valuable conceptual tools. In the third and fourth parts,

empirical data concerning the *damas*' square dancing and street dance aligned with pop/rock music are examined through the lens of intercultural conviviality and cultural commoning. In the last part, we rearticulate our principal arguments while suggesting future research topics and directions with regard to the nexus between intercultural conviviality and cultural commoning.

INTERCULTURAL CONVIVIALITY AND CULTURAL COMMONING AS ANALYTICAL TOOLS

Residents of cities need to socially acquire a wide range of linguistic, cultural and other repertoires to embed into various spaces of the city. This real-time social overlapping is articulated by Paul Gilroy's notion of a convivial multi-culture:

> *Conviviality is a social pattern in which different metropolitan groups dwell in close proximity but where their racial, linguistic and religious particularities do not… add up to discontinuities of experience or insurmountable problems of communication. In these conditions, a degree of differentiation can be combined with large amounts of overlapping*
> *(2006: 40; rf. Hall, 2012: 18-19).*

Although Gilroy launched the concept of conviviality, we follow the model of intercultural conviviality developed by Martha Radice (2016), who studied conviviality in multi-ethnic streets through four constituent layers to grasp both the practical and discursive modes of emplaced social activities and exchanges. These four components include microplaces, codes of sociability, perceived intergroup relations and place image. A "microplace" refers to

> *publicly accessible places that can be explored on foot like streets, parks or plaza….(it) offer(s) resources for convivial social relations when they are accessible, heterogeneous and flexible. This means that different kinds of people can use the place in different ways, enabling social interactions of variable purpose, intensity and duration*
> *(Radice, 2016: 434).*

Although closely related to microplaces, codes of sociability are another practice that constitutes the verbal and nonverbal norms of interaction endorsed by the users of a place to generate light social ties and comfort subjects within the immediate confines of time and space. If these embodied practices (Wise &Velayutham, 2014) are sustained, this generates "inconsequential intimacy" (Radice, 2016: 344) among familiar strangers. The third and last layers are situated at the discursive level and imply, respectively, how the members themselves view the place and how the critical infrastructure (Zukin, 1991), such as the media, depicts the place in celebratory or disapproving ways.

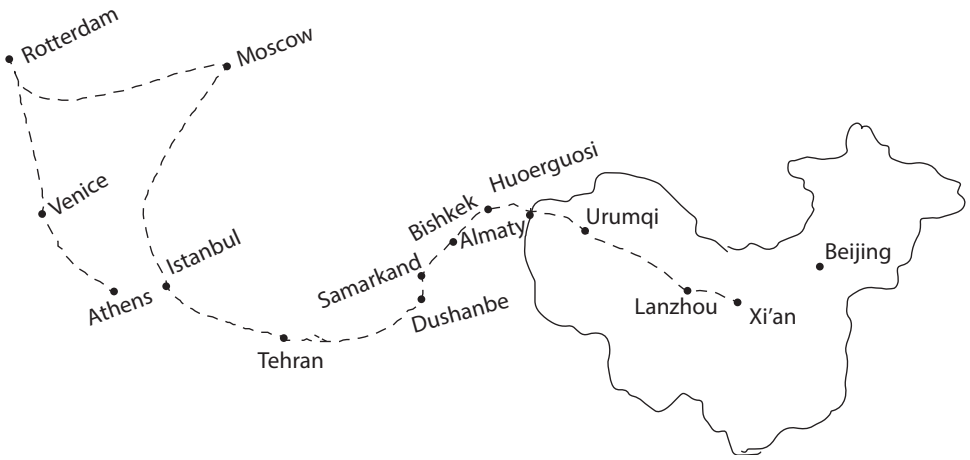
While Radice links intercultural conviviality with everyday cosmopolitanism, we argue that it is more meaningful to probe the intersection between conviviality and cultural commoning (Stravides, 2016; Volont, 2019; Yveson, 2013). The foremost feature of cultural commoning is the notion of "openness" and "accessibility" to all users, local inhabitants, visitors and outsiders; it is "the right to be included" and "a space for collective use". It denotes a space with the "right" atmosphere or ambiance, where imaginations are shared and aspirations are converted in reality. Following Volont (2019), commonism (or, more precisely, DIY-urbanism) is characterised by the notion of a spatial threshold acting as an "open container" for its users, value and legitimacy. Value refers to the repurposing of the city space from the exchange value of a market-driven economy to use value. Legitimacy emphatically endorses the social acceptance of users that may or may not align with local government policy and position.

At the intersection of "intercultural conviviality" and "cultural commoning", we examine the embodiment of the urban milieu and cultural legacy on a pedestrian scale (Friedman, 2010; Radice, 2016). Performance in public spaces is a bodily form of defining and re(de)fining who we are with respect to the self, others and the immediate environment beyond the neoliberal logic of commodification, prioritising exchange value over intrinsic use value. Therefore, the "East is Red Square" (ERS) provides a promising empirical beginning. As a square located in the urban centre of Lanzhou, it allows for a contextualised lens through which we can observe and understand the local performance of social interaction, encounters, gathering and (potential) conflict in the face of urbanisation. While the name of the square is an overt reference to the emblematic national(istic) song *"the East is Red"*, it is also the setting of the neoliberal cityscape of high-rise architecture ranging from cultural centres to its west to corporate buildings to its north. Historically, records state that the ERS is a comparatively higher cultural area. While we acknowledge at the outset that conviviality and conflict are part of plural societies, our focus is on the practices of collective gatherings with the aim of scrutinising how diversely situated, punctured and bounded entities (both individual actors and social groups) interact and in so doing, create a sort of "inconsequential intimacy" within the ERS.

HISTORICAL AND PRESENT-DAY LANZHOU: THE EAST-WEST JUNCTION ALONG THE SILK ROAD AND A PLACE OF INTERCULTURAL ENCOUNTERS

The research site, the (ERS), is situated in the centre of Lanzhou City, Gansu Province, China. The fame of Lanzhou City, which is located along the Silk Road, as "the connection point of cultures" should not come as a surprise. The *Silk Road* refers to multiple historical routes that connect the cities of Xi'an, Lanzhou, Dunhuang, Urumqi, Almaty, Bishkek, Samarkand and Istanbul (Hansen, 2012: 22-24). Various cultures have emerged, flourished and vanished along these roads, which stretch from

the margins of the Eurasian supercontinent to business centres in ancient Asia. As a result of intercultural encounters in Lanzhou, cultural commons encourage residents to navigate numerous activities in identity performance and cultural prosperity.



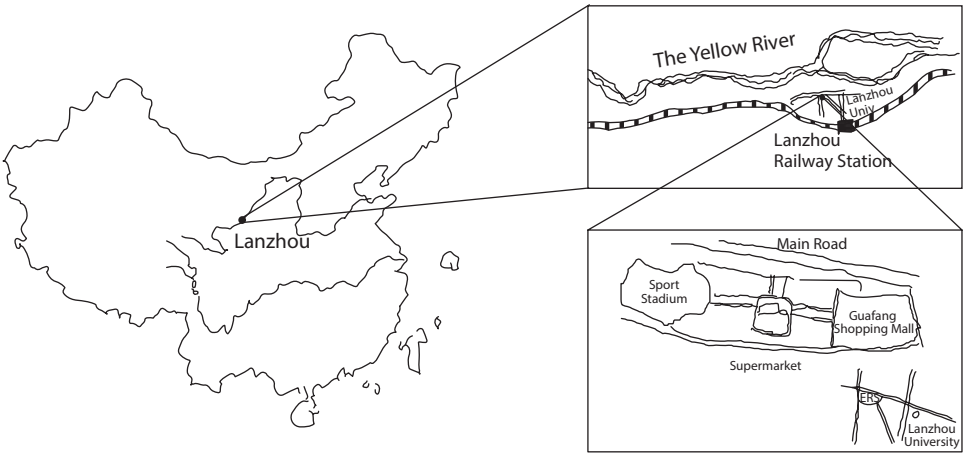
MAP I the location of Lanzhou and the Silk Road

In the mid-17th century, Lanzhou was appointed the capital city of Gansu Province to manage the vast area of western China. After the fall of the Qing Dynasty, the administration area of Lanzhou City included several counties and districts from 1911 to 1949. Later, the territory of Lanzhou changed several times during the Great Leap Forward and Cultural Revolution periods. In 1985, the administrative area annexed another three counties/districts that more or less correspond with the area of present-day Lanzhou city (Lanzhou Chorography, 1999). The straightforward grid system and infrastructure create an intersectional urban space where city dwellers exchange private space for business, public and hectic spaces. The sounds, expressions, and human interactions, such as the track sounds of buses and cars, the hurried footsteps of office workers rushing to their workplaces, the street cries of retailers hawking their wares on the pavement, and the bargaining in open-air markets, mark its strong capacity for "urban intimacy" (Blum, 2001) and "cultural intimacy" (Herzfeld, 2005: 3).

Several waves of immigrants have settled in cities for varying reasons. During the Sino-Japanese War, Lanzhou occupied a crucial position to connect the frontier and the settlements of resistance forces (Lanzhou Chorography, 1999: 142). The ambition of the Communists after 1949 converted this ancient city into an industrial giant in the north-western part of the country. Migrant labourers have toiled in oil refineries, fertiliser, synthetic rubber and thermal power plants, and mining and coal mills along the Yellow River (Lanzhou Chorography, 1999: 170–179). Migrants from other regions have found their way to this city, lured by the West Development Program in the first decade of the 21st century. The figures in the Lanzhou Yearbook (2019) indisputably

indicate the velocity of change in terms of urbanisation and diversification. Seventy percent of Lanzhou people have urban resident registration. Among ethnic minorities, 95% comprise five primary groups: Hui, Manchu, Tibetan, Dongxiang, and Mongolian (Lanzhou Chorography, 2007: 9). These figures can be explained by the combined impact of the contemporary and historic national endeavours of pre-1949 China as well as the new period of this city after 1949. Currently, its three million inhabitants have sprawled out in this post-reform city.

Before its transformation into a business space, the ERS was a public square built in 1968. The reconstruction in 1981 added some rockeries, plants, flowers and fountains to the site. In 1993, another construction project enlarged its surface to include an underground business and entertainment area. The last reconstruction project in 1999 turned it into an urban square with a shopping mall and leisure and entertainment areas. In the western part of the ERS, there is an indoor stadium, while an Expo centre is located on the eastern side. Business buildings occupy the northern side, but the surrounding area consists of apartments whose residents have to find space for entertainment activities.



MAP 2 the location of Lanzhou and the ERS

For newcomers to Lanzhou, the first impression of the ERS is the conflation of time and space and the lively vernacular street theatre animated by different modalities of urban practices and performed by different actors who work, play and/or live in the area. During the daytime, above the entrance of the Guofang Shopping Mall, the logos of global luxury brand names Gucci, LV, and Armani as well as Chinese IT companies such as Huawei testify to the neoliberal reach of the global economy. The hustle and bustle of entrepreneurial activities is abruptly truncated by the monolithic, prefabricated forms of the glitzy shopping mall. On holidays, crowds of customers form a veritable army of shoppers inside the mall, while others stand at the corner to wait for family or friends.

Like most shopping malls, the dense and linear assemblage of small shop spaces inside the building has a clean look, standardised design and depersonalised ambiance. However, when evening falls, aging, elderly women – and a handful of men – start dancing in the ERS. On the other side of this square, some teens practice street dance and break dance, while at yet another part of the square, street artists perform pop/rock songs. All these modalities of urban activities transform the high-end commercial place into a convivial space.

Our time spent in the ERS as both visitors and researchers revealed the social and cultural formations of a highly diverse city within the mutual terrain of the square. As Lidia Errante (2020) noted, accessibility is one of the key factors in assessing urban commons in urban space. The shopping mall on the eastern side of the ERS also functions as the junction of multiple bus routes from South and North Lanzhou into the centre of the city. Residents carry out their quotidian practices, such as business, shopping, cultural performance, leisure activities or just roaming around this public space. The cultural legacy of the Silk Road provides cultural resources for residents to mobilise historical identity, cultural closeness and intercultural conviviality.

EMBODYING AND PERFORMING INTERCULTURALISM IN URBAN MICROSPACE

Dama, elderly Chinese women aged between fifty and sixty, are mostly retirees who are generally portrayed as having limited mobility confined to the space between the kitchen and the TV room. However, *dama* have been actively engaged in organising square dancing since the beginning of the 21st century (Martin and Chen, 2020: 16-17). These dance performances have been met with criticism by other citizens as being too noisy and spatially expansive. Some scholars argue that the social mobility of *damas,* exemplified in their breaking away from the stereotype of female retirees, has ignited new ideological conflicts on the usage of "public space" in China (Zhou, 2014).

As elaborated in the previous section, we take a different approach by investigating the different performances on the ERS square through the lens of intercultural conviviality in the cultural commons. Although the ERS has been top-down designated as a residential area, the neighbourhood has also been shaped by interventions of the various inhabitants and users of the space. The shopping mall is part of the development policies pursued in the late 1990s. Tracing the development records from the 1950s to 1980s, north-westerners and ethnic minorities found their way to Lanzhou not only as working migrants but also as owners of shops, both on the street and in the shopping mall. The variegated pattern of migrant occupations in Lanzhou is highly significant for our exploration of cultural adaptation and social diversity. Can we argue that more variegated cultural flows emerge in a heterogeneous and diverse context? How do dwellers with various cultural, linguistic, religious and historical backgrounds create

intercultural conviviality? In other words, what and how are the codes of sociability forged in this microplace? How do the involved actors perceive themselves and, as a consequence, how is the ERS square as physical space and as microplace perceived and represented by outsiders?

According to *damas'* classification, there are three main types of ethnic dance that are performed on the square. The first is named for its region (Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region), abbreviated as Xinjiang dance. The other two are named for their ethnic minority background, Tibetan (bonfire) and Mongolian dances. Xinjiang dance actually includes various ethnic dance genres, of which Uyghur dance constitutes the main source. Tibetan bonfire dance and Mongolian ethnic dance are both performed among the ethnic community and cater to tourists in the post-Mao era (Hillman, 2003).

Every night, *damas* perform Tibetan dancing in front of the GuoFang Shopping Mall. The neon lights from the shopping mall provide an unintended theatrical background. Ironically, neon lights as hallmarks of hyper-commercialisation are hijacked on the ground by (middle) aged female (and some male) dancers. Young street dancers and singers of pop/rock music are also active in the nearby vicinity. The *dama* who perform Xinjiang dancing occupy the centre of the square.

IMAGE I Tibetan Bonfire Dance (credit: Hans Roels).

Dance groups are formed at the grassroots level in a spontaneous way with no intervention from above or encouragement by the government. Anyone can join, without specific qualifications or skills and learn from more experienced dancers by emulation. Because they lack deep ties based on blood, kin or acquaintance, they call each other "square friends" and are united as a temporary community during the dancing moments.

The reasons *damas* take up Xinjiang dancing are manifold.

> Dama 1:
> *I dance in the morning for two hours and over a period of 20 years. The main reason is to exercise and remain healthy. By staying healthy, I will not be a burden for my family.*

> Dama 2:
> *I can dance without giving up taking care of my family. In the morning, I first do food shopping in the local market and then I join the morning session. In the afternoon I can dance until 5 PM so that I can go home to cook for the family.*

Some dancers take the performance very seriously. They continue to practice because of their aim of livestreaming their performance on social media in the hope of gaining more visibility and recognition. They also join dance contests.

> Dama 3:
> *I mostly dance to keep fit. But sometimes our group also participates in dancing competitions. In that case, we would gather on a fixed area to prepare. Beside dancing competitions, we also participate in the marathon.*

> Dama 4:
> *I just want to enjoy. I don't have expectations.*

For the Uyghur people, *meshrep* (convening) is an artistic expression of identity and refers to the traditional performance of music, dance, songs and poems (Gilliam, 2016: 107). *Meshrep* gatherings emphasise the lively spirit of people who are joyous and creative in a social context. Regarding their activity, the leader of the Xinjiang dancing group said,

> *I'm retired now and living next to this square. We are Uyghur and dancing is very important for us. Every night we are here to dance. We have been organising Xinjiang dance for many years. We also taught our granddaughter how to dance. Most of the dancers are Han, mostly females but there are also some men. They are of different ages and varied educational backgrounds. There is even a famous retired neurology professor in our group. We also provide typical Uyghur dress for our members. They love the dress. By wearing these clothes, they dance better and feel more 'authentic'.*

Despite their testimony that dancing is primarily a way to remain fit and healthy, most of them see dancing as a way to express and communicate their aspirations and perhaps to imagine a new beginning. In so doing, they want to become visible again as retirees with energy, colour and vitality. We were told that Xinjiang dance always revolves around attraction and romance. Facial and bodily gestures become the language of communication among strangers. Strangers become temporary lovers. Said differently,

the dancers engage in free and fleeting courtship between men and women but also between women and women, between Han and Uyghur and possibly in many other combinations. In so doing, individuality in collectivity is forged and strengthened, affording potentialities and perspectives.

This became all the more apparent when we made preparations for a photo shoot for a group picture with the photographer Hans Roels in 2019. His artistic take on group photos is that everyone in the group matters. To gain trust and cooperation during the frequent visits to the *damas,* lengthy negotiations were required. The reception by the *damas* ranged from curiosity, to prudent cooperation, to great enthusiasm. In addition to providing many explanations, some researchers engaged in dancing with the *damas*. This proved to be highly effective. Additionally, body language, genuine interest and laughter served as universal language. This tactic was successfully adopted by the Belgian photographer, who did not speak Mandarin Chinese. In the end, we managed to gain the trust of most dancers, who were eager to pose for the group picture.

IMAGE 2-3 Interaction between researchers with *dama's* (creditis respectively by Ching Lin Pang and Hans Roels)

Some dance genres, repertories, styles and forms are shared by ethnic groups in the same region (Pegg, 2001: 8) as part of a strategy to communicate their own identity through performance. For ethnic groups such as Mongolians, these dances and songs connect them with their homeland, ancestors and history. Through performances, they search for the "means of identification" (Pegg, 2001: 18). However, for *damas*, as contemporary informal dancers, their performances align with local social history, personal experience, gender, and urbanisation in China and thus provide alternative ways of cultural cohesion and personal exploration.

State-sponsored minority dance in the early PRC (1949–1954) was established to engage citizens in the newly established multi-ethnic China in order to foster cohesion and unity. Beyond the ambitious objective of solidarity and harmony, the state-sponsored

strategy transformed ethnic minority dance and incorporated it into "Chinese folk dance" (Wilcox, 2016) to demonstrate colourful and multiple cultures in its territory. Square dance has been an unintended outcome of this policy since the late 20th century. However, the *damas*' motivation for square dancing is situated at the more personal level: to enjoy, to experience freedom, to express oneself and to communicate with others in playful and at times, romance-driven ways.

Music also plays a prime role in their performance. An elderly man attracts complete attention when dancing. Some audience members told us that "that man is dancing truly well; his moves hit the beat and rhythm of the background music".

We suggest that square dancing is a type of grassroots-level representation of intercultural conviviality performed by different social groups that have settled in the city for many years and incorporated various historical events, movements and cultures into their performance.

SONIC ASPIRATION OF STREET DANCE AND POP/ROCK SINGERS

Street dance, which is rooted in the hip-hop culture of the 1970s, is intrinsically intertwined with African American soul and funk music, rapping, breaking, popping, and locking (Gogerly, 2012: 4). Since its introduction in China, street dance, along with other forms of popular culture, has had a great appeal to youth and teens as a way of expressing their self-identity (Qian, 2018).

Although not famed for its hip-hop scene, Lanzhou City has numerous teens who perform street dance, breaking, locking, and popping. Every night, these teens show their skills in front of the shopping mall in the immediate vicinity of the Tibetan dancing group performing the Tibetan bonfire dance. Street dancers sometimes have battles to claim space in front of the GuoFang Shopping Mall. Sometimes they also venture into square dancing. Nearby is a pop/rock band performing shows.

In the contemporary history of rock and roll music in China, Lanzhou City has gained fame because some rappers and rock bands in Lanzhou combine traditional folk music with rock. For example, the Low Wormwood Band is one of the most famous rock bands from Lanzhou. Their song "*Lanzhou, Lanzhou*" evokes landmarks of Lanzhou and nostalgic emotions.

(Lyrics of "Lanzhou, Lanzhou")

When you left
Did not take away the portrait of the Monkey King
You said you wanted to leave him on Mount Huaguo
Only empty glasses and video games in your bag
The golden sandy sunlight outside the door reflected all over the ground
No longer see the boy leaning down
The hem of his plaid shirt is tilting up
From now on the white tower alone
The rain falls quietly in the back of the mountain tonight
The Yellow River water that has not yet gone eastward
With a momentary ripple
Thousands of miles away from you on the high building
Staying awake all night
Lanzhou
Always go out in the early morning
Lanzhou
The warm drunkenness of the night
Lanzhou
The inexhaustible flow of the Yellow River towards the east
The end of the road is the entrance to the sea

During our observations, the pop rock band performed this nostalgic pop rock song several times. The lyrics of "*Lanzhou, Lanzhou*" reflect the daily experiences of migrant residents narrating their own life trajectories. Migrants come in and out of the city. People stop and watch these performances in which their personal migrant experience is expressed and enacted through popular music in a state that oscillates between amazement and amusement.

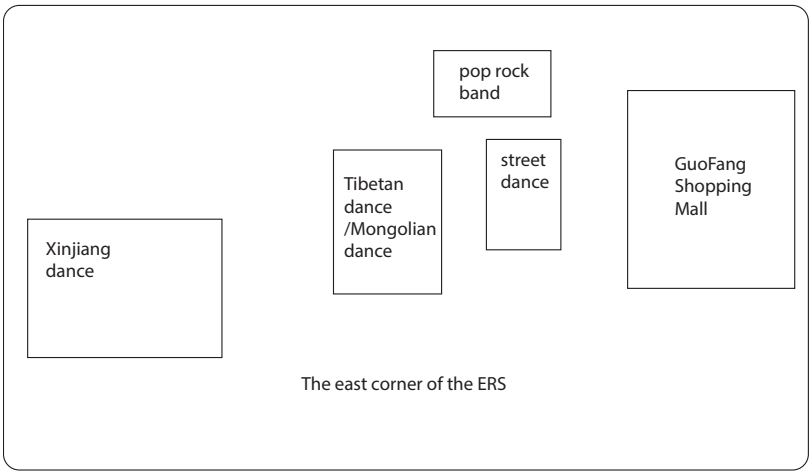
In this microplace, the different processes that create the cultural commons are embodied by actors of different ages, ranging from teens to seniors. This allows for a juxtaposition of encounters and gatherings that easily allow openings for self-expression and personal and group aspirations.

In the field, our sensorial exposure included not only the highly subjective connotations of shared terrains evoked through talking, walking, touch and sight but also the invisible stimulation of nostalgia, homesickness, and similar sentiments. All these sensations in different configurations create a thick atmosphere of colourful, well-lit and sonic togetherness in motion. It is precisely in the local enactment of personal identity in choreographed dances that individual, group and national identities gain contours, materiality and substance set in motion by practice and experience. The

social significance of mutuality evidences how individuals and groups interact and in so doing create cultural commons on the square.

DISCUSSION: EMBODYING CONVIVIALITY, ENVISIONING CULTURAL COMMONS

These activities in the ERS have morphed the commercial space into easily accessed microplaces where various cultures interact. Their performances transform the urban space into embodied conviviality.



GRAPH I Spatial division of various performance groups at the ERS

Our ethnographic undertaking and exploration of the quotidian activities and interactions of different actors in a multi-ethnic intercultural square reveals the processes of urban intimacy and cultural commoning. A question for the current urban space is what kinds of daily activities entailing public encounters are tolerated, supported and communicated in urban transformation. The patterns of the cultural commons within Lanzhou or post-reform China have created openings for convergence. This is not to say that divisions do not exist but that the formations of boundaries that allows for increased social contact merit more analytical scrutiny.

The ERS in Lanzhou is a microplace anchored in the dominant and prestigious landscape of the "industrial" city, deviating from the top-down policy narrative. Contemporary urban spaces are shaped by what Anoop Nayak (2017) has acutely conceptualised as the (in)formative "embodied encounters" of history, cultures and spaces. In this process, intercultural conviviality arises. In the ERS, these embodied encounters are merged by processes of urbanisation and consumption, the West Development Program and large-scale urban development, and deindustrialisation. However, it would be a mistake to

frame or relegate these terrains simply as urbanisation or conflicts of public space. Rather, the ERS is the microplace where cultures and divisions of class, gender, age and ethnicity are densely (re)inscribed along with the aspirations, imagination and innovations based on (implicit) codes of sociability. As a result, intercultural conviviality in the commons emerges.

The alignment of multi-layered histories with the daily individual process of enculturation is reflected in the mutual spaces of regular human contact. Conformity and intention facilitate self-conscious interactions that are potentially removed by more enjoyable activities. Crucially, we argue that these prosaic public areas are not simply terrains of encounter but of engaging, and they require a level of individual embodied investment to sustain membership. Local worlds in a microplace within the city are spaces where much is at stake since these are the places in which the less mobile, the elderly, teens, the marginalised and newcomers are deeply invested. The embodied encounters in formal public spaces allowing for informal memberships are therefore primary to the formation of the commons.

What the ERS offers is a microplace that not only acts as the beating heart of the city but also extends the past and present, linking places and people. An urban space situates and connects, both focusing and expanding the possibilities for interaction and encounters among various individuals and groups. The ERS is supported by a large number of residents living within a short walking distance of the square as well as a broader group of people who reach the square and the shopping mall by transportation. Some moves are part of the daily or weekly routines of commuting that are common to Lanzhou people. Other movements to the ERS involve a distinctive break from the daily designation, regularity and comfort of a familiar world; these are migratory transgressions from one class to another by many actors and require individuals to traverse great physical, cultural and emotional distances.

Based on the empirical data, this chapter argues that the *damas,* through their everyday dancing activities, are actively engaged in constructing subjectivity by way of self-entertainment, while negotiating new meanings of (inter)cultural and gender identities, enacting new social relations and transforming the public space from a highly commercialised space with marketed entertainment for a fee to an open and inclusive urban neighbourhood (Chen, 2010; Orum, et al. 2009; Pang, 2019; Qian, 2014) where processes of conviviality and cultural commoning are at play.

In sum, the *damas* and the other dancers have appropriated the public space and transformed it into a space of porosity between the private and the public realms, albeit on a temporary basis—in short, producing the cultural commons.

Let us return to the opening sentence of this chapter. Do you think Marco Polo would like to join the square dancing if he had the chance to visit present-day Lanzhou?

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PART 2

CULTURAL BUILDING BLOCKS FOR THE COMMONS

CHAPTER 5

REINVENTING COMMUNITY THROUGH COMMONING

Stavros Stavrides

Commoning is usually considered as a form of goods distribution that is based on rules of sharing rather than on practices of individual appropriation or profit-oriented transactions. In such a prospect, conditions of power arrangement and collective choices related to culture are expected to shape commoning, since they will directly influence the priorities and the scopes of sharing.

If, however, commoning is to become a process that directly challenges the logic of social organisation which characterises contemporary capitalism, then relevant practices are expected to produce emergent forms of an alternative social organisation. Alternative forms of goods and services distribution are merely one part of an overall process of the rearrangement of power relations.

Could we then possibly attempt to trace one of the fundamental aspects of such a rearrangement, the re-invention of community in the prospect of sustaining a potentially emancipating project? As this chapter will try to show, the re-invention of community through commoning will be the result of a collective culture of sharing, based on the power of collective creativity unleashed in the context of the project of autonomy.

Creativity will be explored as a collective process that challenges the limits of the possible which are crafted by dominant values and norms. The art of rule-making will be considered as a crucial part of this process that establishes autonomous open communities. Culture is the contested terrain on which such inventiveness potentially flourishes. That is why a critical reassessment of modernity is needed in order to open current urban imaginaries to different visions of the relationship between land and community. If community is a tender rather than the owner of territory and community rituals are means to establish bonds of sharing and equalitarian conviviality, then commoning becomes both a material force and a value establishing process that creates common worlds. As the chapter concludes, cultural commoning may become a crucial shaping factor for the re-invention of communities characterised by equality and solidarity.

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AUTONOMY AS COMMUNITY AUTOPOIESIS

One way to understand the project of autonomy is to compare it to what has been known as the autopoietic process which according to certain biologists characterises living beings. Autopoiesis actually attempts to describe a certain level of autonomy that characterises the unfolding of life: Tracing a path between the opposing views that either overemphasise the role of environment in shaping life or the role of inherent characteristics that simply develop, this theory suggests that autopoietic systems are at the same time open to their environments and "operationally closed" (Maturana & Varela, 1980; Varela, 1997). This means that interaction with the environment takes place under certain structural conditions that characterise the living entity which is opened to such a relational condition. Autonomy in such a context does not describe an organism able to reproduce itself no matter what its environment is constituted of. Autonomy refers to a constitutive nucleus that responds to changes in the environment in ways that tend to reproduce the organism's mode of interaction.

As Varela explicitly specifies, an autopoietic system is a "minimal living organisation", that "continuously produces the components that specify it, while at the same time realising it (the system) as a concrete unity in space and time which makes the network of production of components possible" (1997: 75; Maturana & Varela, 1980).

Two important propositions are crucial for this approach to life, to the 'living'. First, autopoiesis is a process that constitutes the organism's identity, "a unitary quality, a coherence of some kind" which, however, "is not meant as a static structural description" but as an ongoing process within the boundaries of an "operational closure" (Maturana & Varela, 1987; Varela, 1997: 73). Second, "reproduction is not intrinsic to the minimal logic of the living… Reproduction is essential for the long-term viability of the living, but only when there is an identity, can a unit reproduce." (Varela, 1997: 76).

One thing we may agree upon is that by considering an organised human community as a living organism we employ a kind of analogical thinking that we need to consider with a certain caution. Bearing this in mind the central question arising from a need to explore autonomy as a project of social emancipation is this: which relations and what elements of community life are to become the anchors of a community's autopoietic self-creation if this community is to liberate itself from the dominating power of a social environment that actively aims at controlling community life?

By accepting the fact that inside a community, antagonisms of different kinds exist, we already partially question the validity of the autopoietic metaphor. Changes may occur not only through the community's interaction with its outside but essentially because community itself includes forces and actions which develop towards opposing scopes. The "living organism" in this case is potentially torn apart from inside. There is however a kind of force that may retain a community's "coherence" without equating it (as Varela

rightly suggests in his model) to an identity. This force necessarily re-invents community as a process of negotiation that limit the opportunities of power accumulation by some of its members while aiming at an equalitarian future. We may recognise this force in practices of commoning that support equality and mutual support without eliminating differences (Stavrides, 2016, 2019). To be more exact, this kind of transformative force will develop through negotiations that will create a common ground between different perspectives, provided that these perspectives want to sustain this common ground as a shared guarantee of equality. For some non-western cultures this kind of common ground may be defined as an area of complementarity and harmonious co-existence. It is not by chance that such a possible common life-world is described by some of these cultures as *buen vivir* (living well) rather than *vivir* (living). Living well directly challenges the limits of a model aimed at understanding the "living".

By critically employing the autopoietic principles to community's claim for self-reproduction, we may actually distinguish between two possible opposing projects. The one tends to barricade a community from outside influences by emphasising the community's power to preserve intact its integrity, while the other tends to see community as a collective entity that claims its right to change in ways and directions collectively chosen, produced and supervised. In the last case, the autopoietic structure is not a condition inherently connected to community's reproduction but a collective choice made in the direction of the collective emancipation project.

In other words, autonomy is in a constant struggle to develop itself in confrontation with powers that tend to control the community's life. It is not always external powers, what Castoriadis describes as the forces of heteronomy (Castoriadis, 1987). Forces developed within the community may also tend to block any change; forces we might call conservative. Autopoietic autonomy should then be clearly connected to a change that aims at transcending community's reflexes for self-preservation.

Esposito (2013) introduces the term *immunisation* to describe the process through which communities develop these self-preservation tactics. Interestingly, for him the same process is employed to protect the individual members of the community from the very obligations that bind them to all the others.

Esposito locates a constitutive contradiction in immunitary dynamics: "that which protects the body (the individual body, the social body, and the body politic) is at the same time that which impedes its development" (2013: 85). The way out of this contradiction lies in a kind of compromise: immunisation needs to be effectively controlled so that it will not reach a point which will threaten the community coherence itself. And this may only be accomplished, according to Esposito, if community members struggle to ensure the expansion and maintenance of the common (2013: 89). Here lies "the possibility of a positive, communitarian reconversion of the… immunitary *dispositif*" (2006: 54, author's italics).

In this approach, the common lies at the heart of community's reproduction. Offering an etymology of the word community that supports his claim, Esposito sees *munus* at the word's root. *Munus* means duty, post and gift. "What predominates in the *munus* is… reciprocity or 'mutuality'… of giving that assigns the one to the other in an obligation" (2010: 6). Thus, community, "isn't the subject's expansion or multiplication but its exposure to what interrupts the closing" (ibid.: 8). Community, is constituted by the obligation to give and to assume responsibilities (ibid.: 5). Opening oneself to others through offering essentially means sacrificing the individual safety that immunisation promises. Immunity encloses, community tends to open individual or shared enclosures towards the proliferation of the common.

Of course, the immunity metaphor that directly connects to a biological mechanism of protection which is part of an organism's defence against recurrent outside threats, as every metaphor, has its limits. When applied to societies in general or to particular communities specifically, the metaphor of immunity needs to be nuanced and related to the historical context. How do specific organised groups of people collectively recognise threats to their collective existence? In what cases do perceived or imaginary threats cause splits in the corresponding communities? How is openness experienced and practiced as a force that expands obligations and offerings in different arrangements of power relations?

AUTONOMY AS COLLECTIVE CREATIVITY

For Esteva in "genuinely democratic politics", "the art of the possible consists of extending it: the art of making the impossible possible" (2015a: 140). In what seems at first glance a poetic reaffirmation of hope for changing society is in reality a clever statement regarding the limits of social order. Reversing the well-known motto, Esteva seems to suggest that instead of developing the art of finding solutions within the framework of a given society (and democracy allegedly is meant to provide us with this capacity), we need to develop the art to transcend such a framework. Thus, inventiveness and creativity will not be used in order to adapt to the defined social reality but to challenge it, to extend it and to go beyond it. The possible should be disentangled from the dominant framework of imaginaries and behaviours that tend to circumscribe it.

Rancière (2010) understands politics in a similar way. For him, politics emerges when the dominant framework, the order of the sensible, is challenged by those who were not meant to have the right to speak, think and express themselves within this framework. Re-staging and thus re-arranging the distribution of the sensible opens the road to emancipation for the dominated ones.

Interestingly, Rancière also talks about art connecting it with the power of politics to transcend the limits of dominant reality. However, he chooses to put an emphasis on the "aesthetic experience" that refers to the specific condition under which art "produces a

gap with regard to ordinary forms of experience" (Rancière interviewed in Batista, 2017: 251). Distancing himself explicitly from didactic, pedagogic and self-proclaimed critical forms of art, Rancière (2006) supports artistic acts and works that open up possibilities of experiences not already included in the field of the possible defined by the dominant ones.

However, the opening up of the field of possibilities develops, according to Rancière, not only because creativity expands and transcends the limits of the sensible, but also because those who "receive" the artworks are equally creative (2009). The "emancipated spectator" is the one who uses artworks to express, narrate and depict his or her own stories. Emancipation in this prospect has to do with the opportunity to integrate the creativity of others (producers, artists) to the creativity of one's own life that acquires, thus, the power to transcend the limits of the possible.

Comparing the two approaches we may conclude that art (literally, as an instituted form of practice or generally, as the capacity to invent and to create) may be used to explore the possible, without even accepting the limits within which the possible is defined according to the dominant forms of the sensible. Either viewed from the perspective of the creative producer or that of the creative receiver, art may *potentialize* experience, as well as the means we have to give meaning and value to experience. As collective creativity unfolds, the distinction between production and reception as well as that between active creators and passive interpreters is decisively challenged.

Under different lines of reasoning but following similar paths sustained by emancipatory aspirations, Esteva and Rancière use the notion of autonomy in close connection to practices of individual and collective creativity. Esteva explicitly relates autonomy to the creative power of the collective unleashed by the democratic self-government. In contrast to "ontonomy" which is "the regulatory system based on a cultural tradition itself" (2015a: 143 note 15), autonomy "appears when the members of the current generation modify existing rules or create new ones" (ibid.). In autonomy, thus, collective creativity expands the limits of the possible.

Rancière talks about "aesthetic autonomy" as "what makes the work available to anyone and thus no longer the expression or signature of its creator" (Rancière interviewed in Batista, 2017: 250). Autonomy, in this context, frees the work, the product of someone's creativity, from the burden of its creator's intentions.

Couldn't this approach to creativity also be applied to the art of rulemaking? Not connected to a prevailing authority that gives them form and determines their jurisdiction, rules become part of a process of an ongoing creativity. But if rulemaking may be compared to the art of autonomous creation, could it be also related to Agamben's suggestion that "[o]ne day humanity will play with law just as children play with disused objects, not in order to restore them to their canonical use but to free them from it for good" (Agamben, 2005: 64)? This is a possibility based on Agamben's

idea about the "coming community" in which "singularities form a community without affirming an identity" and "humans co-belong without any representable condition of belonging (even in the form of a simple presupposition)" (Agamben, 1993: 86). As Mills rightly points out (2008), Agamben's coming community is directly related to the play with law through which the constitutive experience of historicity is made possible. By playing, humans truly experience human time, the time of *Kairos*, the time of contingency, as they are freed from the burdens of sacred time that prescribes the future and interprets the past. Such an experience is meant to give "onto a new communism, in which nothing is shared except the power and possibility of life itself, and life escapes the caesuras and impotence to which law has relegated it" (ibid.: 26).

Creativity lies, in this prospect, not in the power to collectively explore possibilities of devising new rules that would re-define the common but in the unleashing of the pure, unrestricted and indeterminate potentiality of life itself that will characterise the acts of the "whatever singularities". Playing with rules is just part of this essential playfulness of life that unfolds against the restrictions imposed by law.

Deactivated rules, rules having lost the power to direct and punish behaviour, may possibly become toys in the hands of a self-liberating humanity, even in the form of a revealing joyous play of obsolete roles (more like children playing pirate adventure games). Such a capacity to inventively play with rules may indeed enhance collective creativity. After all, since antagonistic societies teach their members how to always be fighters by offering them a series of war-games, why should not egalitarian societies play with past laws, in this way enriching shared imaginaries of collective emancipation? However, to play with the deactivated products of history that used to explicitly aim at controlling the future (as the laws do by prescribing what should not be done) should not be equated with the romanticised potentiality of "whatever" singularities "sharing nothing except the being-thus of happy life, in which all belong without any claim to belong" (Mills, 2008: 26). As opposed to Agamben's formulation, collective rulemaking creativity needs to be developed in a constant and reflexive redefinition of a mutually imagined and produced common ground.

In line with Rancière's suggestion who proposes that we need to suspend or rather, to transcend the distinction between producers and receivers, we may understand autonomy as a process in which the power to create rules belongs to those who try to collectively define a shared future while being both co-producers and individual interpreters of these rules. Sovereign laws are meant to last and to control the future by banishing certain acts. But rulemaking, understood as an act of commoning, opens the potentiality of change by opening the process itself to a community that keeps on inventing itself.

Esteva insists that autonomy is not the grand project of a political proposal aspiring to have a universal validity. "In the barrios and pueblos of the world, in Africa and Asia as in Latin America, spaces of freedom have been spawning where autonomy and the art of

living are being exercised more fully" (Esteva et. al., 2013: 140). Autonomy seems to be emerging according to this logic in the context of everyday survival efforts of populations living in the peripheries and poor neighbourhoods of metropolises. But, people on the margins (in many cases forming the majority of the relevant megacity population, as for example in Mumbai) do not live in conditions of autonomy simply because the state has no interest in imposing its laws and providing its services to those vast "neglected" urban areas. Struggles to preserve "autonomous ways of living" (ibid.: 136) emerge in such places against invading 'development projects' or harsh militarised interventions to control the 'dangerous classes'. There is a positive potentially emancipatory element in the autonomy of the marginalised populations. And this, according to Esteva but also to other thinkers and activists, can be described as the emergence of "the new commons" (ibid.: 136). As Esteva describes them: "They are contemporary ways of life, sound spaces for comfortable living, sociological novelties that activate traditions and reappraise modernity" (ibid.: 142).

Collective creativity, directly or indirectly related to art, redefines, extends and develops the common. Both the immunitary dynamics and the autopoietic hypothesis though, not only offer the means to explain an organism's (be it a living being or a community) self-reproduction but also suggest ways to understand interaction between organisms. Communities may employ collective creativity to explore and develop relations with what lies outside: the common may thus become the fertile meeting ground of different collectivities. Potentialising experience, challenging the limits of the possible and questioning dominant reality will in this prospect become not only forces that make communities change but also practices that open communities and build bridges towards what used to be considered as outside, "other", alien or even hostile.

BEYOND TRADITION AND MODERNITY?

Emancipatory potentialities are being produced in urban life through a constant cross-influence of two main sources: tradition and modernity. Tradition may be activated by reference to past experiences or collective memories that certain urban populations carry from their recent rural past. Interestingly such traditions cannot be transferred wholesale to the urban context: urban space and urban networks as well as the prevailing neoliberal ethos privilege individuality instead of community, alienation instead of a feeling of belonging. Such populations, therefore, have to re-invent community and to readjust habits of collaboration and sharing. Above all, they have to deal with extensive and unpredictable forms of differences instead of taking for granted a homogeneous body of dwellers sharing familiar and slowly changing (if at all) living environments. Autonomy in such a context would mean the potentialising of traditions (and not of 'tradition') in order to collectively craft a common ground of negotiations.

According to Virno's (2004, 2008) and Hardt and Negri's (2005, 2009) analysis (among others) the city has become a vast and polymorphous site of capitalist production. The

production process itself (still centrally depended upon the exploitation of labour) has been expanding to even include private house spaces (as in the case of tele-work).

Reappraising modernity in such a context would mean carefully exploring the new conditions of exploitation and the spatiality's that they give rise to, as well as the mutations of the modernist imaginary. Benjamin was one of those first to call for this re-appraisal, claiming that an inherent emancipatory potential had to be reclaimed in an effort to redeem the modernist project. In his reading of urban modernity, large cities are not simply symptoms of the modernity's hopes and failures but, crucially, shaping factors of modernity's reality. That is why he searched in large cities to locate the potentialities of the modernist project that were blocked or perverted by the capitalist command of the modernisation process (1983, 1999).

Reappraising modernity needs not be limited to those who have been accustomed to modernity's dominant, hegemonic normality. Different collective life traditions had to face the invasion of urbanised modernisation to their communities. Resistances, especially developed by colonised indigenous populations, were never simply obstinate struggles to preserve their traditions intact. Zapatista communities, to take a highly indicative example, distanced themselves from a possible Maya fundamentalism while at the same time embracing emancipatory ideas coming from the West. The result was (and this is still a work in progress) a kind of re-invention of community that struggles for autonomy neither with the aim of preserving an absolute otherness nor with the scope of establishing borderlines demarcating an 'outside' and an 'inside'.

Zapatista territory is territory connected to specific self-governed communities that take care of it and protect it from the 'bad government', as they call it. Such a renewed understanding of Mayan territoriality contributes to the re-invention of indigenous communities by the Zapatista movement. What shocks most of the visitors from outside is that the territory of an emancipatory rebellion that clashes with the Mexican state's policies and control mechanisms cannot really be defined by a borderline to be drawn on a map as well as on the ground. Appropriation of feudal land and the use of existing road networks are forms of expanding the territory of autonomy and developing a network of autonomous settlements in cooperation.

Another interesting treatment of tradition in the prospect of community re-invention can be found in the renewed momentum the Buen Vivir indigenous culture has acquired. Buen Vivir (living well) is a view of life in which the indigenous Andean peoples express a harmonious respectful coexistence of human communities with Nature. Buen Vivir includes an understanding of community's commonwealth as the result of relations of cooperation between its members based on solidarity and complementarity. Cooperation is supported by an ethos that permeates both the human relations as well as the relation of the community with Nature. "Production and work is done with respect for and in harmony with nature" (Prada, 2013: 146). Since,

however, nature is not considered as a resource but as a sacred entity, as the mother who provides and must be taken care of, "pacts with it are renewed through ritual" (ibid.). For Andean people the ritual reaffirmation of Buen Vivir relations is a way of establishing such relations of mutual care between community and nature.

Community, thus, is not the collective owner of natural resources (including land) that are to be found in this territory. Community is more like a tender of its territory, attached as it is to it, not only out of need to dwell and survive but also through links that relate community to its past and its future, its ancestors and its collective aspirations. Commoning in this case is more like an extensive participation in exchanges within and through nature that aim to be just, sustainable and based on mutual care.

Buen Vivir principles were in a way integrated to the Constitution of two Andean countries, Ecuador (in 2008) and Bolivia (in 2009). The Ecuadorian Constitution explicitly states "We hereby decide to build a new form of public coexistence, in diversity and in harmony with nature, to achieve the good way of living [buen vivir]." In Bolivia, indigenous people form the majority of the population. In Ecuador the presence of indigenous population is less dominant in terms of numbers but equally powerful in terms of culture. But, as Prada explains, the adoption of Buen Vivir "as a state and government objective" (ibid.: 147) rather attempts to create a meeting place, an area of agreements based on the ethics of pursuing harmony through complementarity. Cooperation thus is elevated to a governance model that will lead to a "plurinational state" which is meant to guarantee and protect an inclusive and equalitarian pluralistic society.

In many efforts to implement this new legal condition, Buen Vivir principles clashed with extremely strong elite interests as well as with taken for granted hopes in 'progress' through 'development'. True, rural communities in these countries had the opportunity to protect their established customs of collective care for land and their ritual and practical ways of expressing a bond with nature that explicitly clashes with the predominant *extractivist* ethos (Acosta, 2013; De Sousa Santos & Meneses, 2020). Urban communities also have the opportunity to use the same legal guarantees to protect their neighbourhoods and shared spaces from an advancing urban extractivism (including gentrification, urban expansion, public land grabbing, aggressive 'touristification' etc.). The integration of the Buen Vivir approach into constitutional legislation has performative effects in practices that reinvent both urban and rural communities in the context of de-centralisation, horizontality and plurality of social organisation forms. However, progressive governments in both countries did not choose to confront fundamental inequalities and to limit existing power asymmetries. Without attacking the development model based on extractivism they also became complicit with a governance ethos that gave no room to movements and to organised communities so as to act as organised contesters of developmentalist priorities. There seems to be no way to reinvent communities of commoning that is not based on the power of communities to reinvent themselves.

SPACE COMMONING AND AUTONOMOUS COMMUNITY BUILDING

In certain indigenous languages in Mexico the word for community and territory is the same. In Tzotsil and other Maya languages the word used is *jlumaltik* (Baschet, 2018). However, this does not indicate an attitude of possession. Land is the common ground to be shared by all. *Pacha Mama*, Mother Earth, does not belong to anybody. To say therefore that community and territory are the same thing means that there can be no community without a land to which it is embedded.

This somehow reveals the powerful connection an indigenous community has to its territory, not only as a means to sustain itself but also as a constitutive element of the operational relations this community has with its surrounding environment (both "natural" and "social"). Escobar suggests that a community's territory is to be understood as "a system of relations whose continuous re-enactment re-creates the community in question" (2018: 173).

And if in rural communities these relations are developed through practices of cultivation, farming, raising livestock etc., in urban communities these relations are developed by producing the city in its everyday uses and rituals.

Community's relation to space is multifaceted. It activates practices of care and exchange, processes of production and social reproduction as well as the construction of shared world views. Those shared world views explicitly construct community bonds either by strengthening inherited ones or by opening the field to re-arrangements in power geometries. In such a context, rituals contribute to the reproduction as well as to the re-construction of community and can be taken to consist of powerful means of community re-invention.

Byung-Chul Han explicitly connects the current diminishing importance of rituals (for him "the disappearance of rituals"), with the advance of neoliberalism. According to his approach, neoliberalism shapes a predominant "compulsion to produce" and an ethics of "communication without community" (2020: 1). Both those predominant tendencies destroy community bonds and develop individualism through a "narcissistic cult of authenticity" (ibid.: 21), "an obvious decay of the social" (ibid.: 18) and a "culture of interiority" in which the public expression gives way to "a pornographic exhibition of the private" (ibid.: 21). In place of this social condition, he proposes a rediscovery of play and ceremonial acts as forms that mediate and shape the social. "Rituals… bring people together and create an alliance, a wholeness, a community" (ibid.: 6).

Interestingly, Han connects rituals to a closure in space and time. The experience of closure he contrasts with a continuously escalating demand for developed performances, production, "extensivity" (ibid.: 7) and seriality ("serial habitus") all

of which characterise the neoliberal regime. However, closure, as he admits, is not "invariably positive", "given the possibility of violence associated with a fundamentalist closure of sites" (ibid.: 32).

Here lies a challenging potentiality of rituals rediscovered and reclaimed. How can ritual practices transcend the closure of a community as well as the closure of time (trapped in the eternal) in search of a creativity immersed in history? How can rituals support a rediscovery of history as a process of collective creativity in place of the dominant practices of consumption oriented exclusively towards the present? It seems paradoxical to ask for openness in processes essentially based on the production of repeated performances within a 'magic circle' (Bourdieu, 2000; Hastrup, 2004; Mauss, 2001). These are processes that seemingly employ a kind for temporality that refutes change (time that stands still in Han's description) and a kind of spatiality that epitomises spatial closure – a closure that ignores its outside.

Let us explore the possibility of rituals that play with closure, of rituals that develop through their performed closures the potentiality of open communities. Seen from a certain perspective the *mistica* ritual of the Brazilian Landless Rural Workers Movement (Movimento dos Trabahadores Rurais Sem Terra – MST) is an interesting example.

MST is a movement with a long tradition of struggles including, predominantly, land occupations. It is a very well organised movement and it has successfully established self-governed settlements, mostly close to large areas of collective cultivation that were in most cases recuperated *latifundios*.

MST "has been advocating an alternative way of life. It is a struggle that goes beyond land redistribution" (Issa, 2007: 85). So, MST is organised not only to develop the strategy and tactics of struggle but also to promote within its members a collective identity that makes them builders of a new kind of community. The occupation, the temporary camp, and the settlement become important areas of living together in which this emerging collective identity is being shaped. In such "interactive spaces" (Hammond, 2014: 383) MST militants share experiences and aspirations and learn from each other's stories. They become empowered and even raise the identity of the landless poor to a positive marker. Commenting on an activist's words who proudly proclaims "I am a Sem Terra with capital letters", Hammond notices that "not only does she invert the status of landless from pejorative to proudly acknowledged; she converts it from an attribute to a noun, from an incidental characteristic to the essence of *what she is*" (ibid., author's italics).

Mistica rituals play a very important role in the formation of this emerging identity, which actually radiates as a kind of call to action and participation to all those who will potentially join MST. Mistica rituals are not merely identity performances, however. Comprising of expressive acts as diverse as theatrical pieces, flag waving, collective singing, organised sceneries for assemblies, poem reading, commemoration of movement's struggles and

heroes, symbolic arrangements of objects (seeds, candles , rural worker's tools etc.), mistica rituals actually lack strict formal rules. Nevertheless, they are recognised by MST members as important empowering experiences that give them the strength to continue in struggles that are difficult, dangerous and not always successful.

Interestingly, one of the movement's leaders, João Pedro Stedile, declares that MST is open to "all truths, not a single truth" (quoted in Hammond, 2014: 375 and in Issa, 2007: 128). Such an approach clearly differentiates MST's cultural and ideological formation from other explicitly Marxist, anarchist or populist movements. Without being a religious movement, it has managed to appropriate both Catholic ritualism as well as Indigenous and African religiosity producing an almost animistic amalgam of belief in the "sacredness of nature" (Issa, ibid.).

Ritualistic behaviour is therefore meant not only to become instrumental in raising members' self-esteem and morals. It is meant to create, albeit on a symbolic level, the condition of a different social context and a different set of social relationships leading to new forms of social organisation. Community building becomes the process of building autonomy not only by commoning the means of a community's existence but also by reproducing on a ritual level the shared values that constitute a common world. And as has probably become evident throughout this chapter, no commoning practices and performances can unfold without literally taking place. Shared land, common ground, common space. These are the concrete material as well as the symbolic ways in which space commoning becomes a shaping factor of communities re-invented through commoning.

A POLITICS OF BEING-IN-COMMON?

Establishing community bonds through autonomy that is grounded on a relation of mutual definition with the land on which the autonomy project flourishes, challenges both the Arendtian tradition that considers public space as the space of appearances" as well as Nancy's ontological grounding of "being-in-common" in a space of mutual exposure.

According to Arendt's approach, the space of appearances becomes the locus of politics since it is constituted by individuals acting together in the presence of others. "Wherever people gather together [the space of appearances] is potentially there, but only potentially, not necessarily and not forever" (1958: 199). Arendt's distinction between the social, the private, and the political, attributes to public space a potentiality that is activated when people do not act under the pressure of needs or particularistic motives. Public space is inaugurated as a pure space of freedom produced by the creativity freedom engenders in pluralistic societies. Space, thus, is more like a scaffold of potential political activities rather than a shaping factor of the relations a community builds within itself and with its outside.

Buen Vivir communities for which there is no actual outside but only expanding relations between partners (including what the West would call non-humans) actually re-produce themselves as they co-produce their living environment with forces, entities and agents that are deeply interrelated. In such an approach a clear-cut distinction between nature and culture is not accepted. Arendt's view ignores the inherent connection between the social and the political considered as the multifaceted engagement with community's governance.

Buen vivir principles transverse all areas of common life and thus define community as an extensive field of relations between living beings. Complementarity rather than antithesis is at the root of this *cosmovision*. A re-invention of community inspired by such principles can develop out of practices of expanding commoning that depart from the capitalist plundering of resources and the ruthless exploitation of humans and non-humans alike. A relevant politics of community autonomy, thus, establishes forms of living together that are based on mutuality, collaboration and on respectful and balanced relations with nature. In search for a politics for community building, it is better to look at the potentialities of the social rather at the exceptional presence of the political, understood as a demarcated area of common life (as in Arendts's hypothesis). The social with all its latent or potential resistances is where a politics of commoning emerges as a force to reclaim what should be discovered and sustained as the source of the common.

Nancy, let us recall, understands the "being-in-common" as constitutive of the existence of humans. For him, being-with-others should be understood with an emphasis on the constitutive "with" (2000). It is here that his problematisation of the political is grounded: "The political is the place where the community as such is brought into play… the place of a specific existence, the existence of being in common…" (1991: xxxvii). Being in common does not mean for Nancy being similar. Quite the contrary: being in common is the condition in which singularities may co-exist and expose themselves to each other by sharing a common ground, a "stage", the "space of a co-appearing" (2000: 66-7). As in Arendt, the space of co-appearing is more like a receiver of action rather than a concrete shaping element of action, a perceptible, reflexively made meaningful, and often ritually established and reproduced constituent of action in the context of community.

Putting an emphasis on the openness and contingency of shared spaces is a prime concern of both Nancy and Arendt, as Dikeç rightly suggests (2015). What however, both fail to notice is that a "we" is being crafted in the materiality of concrete relations with land as well as with those with whom this land is shared (views that also challenge western dominant ideologies from within the context of today's multicultural mega-cities). Public spaces as well as spaces developed through commoning (common spaces) are spaces performed and performative. They participate in the construction of social bonds and shared world views as they support all aspects of social life. Being-in-common is a spatiotemporal set of performances. To re-invent community through commoning might then mean to explore a possible politics of being-in-common.

In Buenos Aires, during the days of 2001 uprising, neighbourhood assemblies have become "space[s] of experimentation on the possibilities of producing popular and autonomous forms of administration" (Colectivo Situaciones, 2002: 170). Thus, "in the assemblies people put forward practical hypotheses of re-appropriation – no matter how partial – of the living conditions" (ibid.: 168).

Isn't this a well stated synopsis of what it means to collectively re-invent communities by exploring the very core of commoning? For this potential community re-invention, which is to distance itself from enclosed (including self-enclosed) communities as well as from state controlled or market developed community simulations, it is not enough to re-appropriate what must be and has been the commons. Emergent communities have to rethink the commons, to re-evaluate forms of defining what it is to be shared and how, and to, therefore, reinvent commoning by re-inventing open communities of equality and mutual support. Autonomy describes the practices and the ethics of such communities and it should not be confused with "self-sufficiency" (Escobar, 2017). Rather, it is about constructing an "archipelago of conviviality" (a term of A. Gorz to which Esteva, 2015b refers) that may be described in condensed form by the motto of the National Indigenous Congress of Mexico: "We are a web when we are separated and an assembly when we are together" (in Esteva, 2015b: 86).

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CHAPTER 6

URBAN COMMONALITY AND ARCHITECTURAL SINGULARITY: A SPINOZIST FRAMEWORK

Gökhan Kodalak

Spinoza was the earliest modern philosopher to develop a full-blown philosophical conception of "commonality" (*notio communis*). He argued that commonality has two dimensions. The first is ontological: commonality corresponds to the underlying continuum of being, through which all modalities—planets, cities, buildings, humans, animals, plants, tornadoes—come and persevere to exist. That is, beneath our individual differences and distinct material compositions of flesh and bone, cellulose and chlorophyll, rock and lava, brick and concrete, silicon and metal, there is a common plane of existence. From the conjunctive viewpoint of this cosmic commonality, Being is *one*: an infinite ocean of potentiality that constitutes our continuity with everything there is; from the disjunctive viewpoint of our individual existence, beings are *many*: we are all finite waves actualising different gradations of this infinite ocean of potentiality. A single ocean and a thousand waves; an unformed morphogenetic matrix and a myriad of forms; an infinite continuum of underlying potentials and finite actualisations of distinct individuals: such is, according to Spinoza, how singularity and commonality weave together the vibrant field of existence that is our cosmos.

The second dimension is ethical: commonality concurrently corresponds to a practice of *commoning*, an ethos of discovering and inventing reciprocally empowering interactions with other modalities of life. Ethical commonalities are relational operations with which we potentiate ourselves *not* at the expense of others, but by way of organising consonant rhythms and symbiotic alliances with their modes of existence. In commoning, we empower not just ourselves and other beings we interact with, we enrich the continuum of existence itself.

Spinoza conceives commonality not as a relation of property as is usually perceived in legal and political discourses, but as an ontological relationship with the cosmos coupled with an ethical interaction to other modalities of life. As the immanent coupling of ontological and ethical dimensions underlying Spinoza's concept of commonality has radical implications for every practical aspect of life, it is not a surprise that it has profoundly influenced wide-ranging figures including Enlightenment thinkers

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(Diderot, La Mettrie, Rousseau), Romantic philosophers (Novalis, Hölderlin, Schelling), revolutionary socialists and anarchists (Marx, Engels, Bakunin), post-war political theorists (Althusser, Negri & Hardt, Balibar), as well as contemporary urban activists.[5] Yet architectural and urban discourses have not yet fully explored the Spinoza connection in this formative lineage. What follows is an inaugural exploration to uncover the untapped potentials underlying Spinoza's concept of commonality with respect to the built environment.

GENERALITY

When Spinoza addressed the problem of association, that is, the problem of affiliating multiple modalities according to shared capacities or properties, there was already another conceptual approach that had dominated it for centuries. Spinoza knew that he had to deal with this rival concept, had to show its inadequate solutions and vulnerable presuppositions if his novel conception of commonality were to have any chance of impact. This rival paradigmatic concept Spinoza had to challenge was the Aristotelian concept of *generality* (*genus*).

Aristotle asserts that individual modalities are associated with one another under the same *genus*, by sharing the same universal, inherent *essence*. For Aristotle, your predefined essence of being a rational animal *already* situates you within the pre-classified general category of humanity *associating* you with *all* the other members of your own *kind*. This means, individual modalities—humans, buildings, and everything there is—come to life not only *predefined* (via essence), but also *pre-classified* (via genus).

Constructing a conceptual bridge between essence and genus leads to a top-down approach in not only defining but also associating modalities. Your essential properties that define you never become unique to you but always remain *generically shared* with your associated kind. As such, your generic associations ontologically precede any form of distinction or specification. In Aristotle's own words: "Genera (…) are always prior to species."[6] This top-down approach has immense consequences: your singular capabilities and characteristic differences become *irrelevant,* not only for your essential definition but also for your specific associations. Before your *singular* self is acknowledged—if it is acknowledged at all—you are first deemed an *instance* of a generic type, a *sample* of an associated kind, a *specimen* of a universal category.

5 For contemporary political discourses influenced by Spinoza with indirect and partial implications for the built environment, see: Negri & Hardt (2004, 189-229; 2017, 85-107), Balibar (2008, 25-76). For precedent discourses on urban commoning without direct Spinozist connections, see for starters: De Certeau (1988), Lefebvre (1991; 2000), Hakim Bey (1991), and Ostrom (1990). For recent discourses on urban commoning, see: Kodalak (2015), Gielen (2015), Stavrides (2016), and Dellenbaugh et al. (2020).

6 See Aristotle, *Categories* [14b24], or: (1995), 67.

Your unique being, in this top-down logic, is subsumed under generic associations. Instead of building your own affiliations immanent to your singular mode of life, you find yourself pre-classified by your inherent association with humankind; instead of constructing its own affiliations immanent to its unique mode of existence, Bucephalus finds itself pre-classified by its innate association with horse kind; instead of unfolding their own affiliations immanent to their peculiar modes of being, Le Corbusier's Villa Savoye (1928-31) and François Mansart's Château de Maisons (1630-51) find themselves pre-classified under "modernist" and "Baroque" architectural styles. This top-down approach creates the illusion that these singular modalities are derivative instances of their associated classifications, carbon copies moulded under generic universals, styles, types, models, and other forms of high-order categories. Through Aristotle's generic lens, we cannot construct or modify our associations that come to affect and even shape our lives: our associations are *given in advance*.

CRITIQUE OF GENERALITY

Spinoza declares outright that those who conceive life under generic associations and typological classifications "seem determined to go astray and contrive the most absurd fantasies" [CM II.7].[7] There can be no universal essence, according to Spinoza, identical in each particular instance which associates them all together under a generic kind, for universal essences and particular instances are confused modes of thinking constructed to reduce the complexity of life via simplified classifications [E IIP40S1]:

> *These terms arise from the fact that the human body, being limited, is capable of forming distinctly only a certain number of images at the same time…. But when the images in the body are completely confused, the mind also will imagine all the bodies confusedly, without any distinction, and comprehend them as if under one attribute…. These terms signify ideas that are confused in the highest degree. Those notions they call Universal, like Human, Horse, Dog, etc., have arisen from similar causes, viz. because so many images (e.g., of human) are formed at one time in the human body that they surpass the power of imagining—not entirely, of course, but still to the point where the mind can imagine neither slight differences of singular humans (…) nor their determinate number, and imagines distinctly only what they all agree in…. And the mind expresses this by the word "human," and predicates it of infinitely many singular individuals.*

Generic associations and typological classifications arise from the finitude of our own imagination, as a way to digest the intricate complexity of reality made of "infinitely many singular individuals."

7 See the list of abbreviations for Spinoza's primary sources at the end of the essay. Latin references are given to the original *Opera Posthuma* and Gebhardt's canonical update in *Spinoza Opera*. I have also reworked most of the translations by comparatively studying the Latin original with English translations by Shirley, Elwes, and Curley: Spinoza (1676; 1883; 1925; 2002; 2016).

This associative technique would not pose a problem, if we were aware that these typological categories are *imaginary*. The problem arises when we confuse our imagined categories with reality, when we believe that reality is primarily constituted by universal categories and fixed classes, from which individual modalities are secondarily derived [CM I.1]:

> *There are certain modes of thinking that serve to retain things more firmly and more easily…. To retain something that is quite new and impress it on the memory, we have recourse to another thing, familiar to us, that has something in common with it either in name or in actuality. Similarly, philosophers have arranged all natural things in fixed classes, to which they have recourse when they encounter something new. These classes they call genus, species, etc. (…) It is evident that these modes of thinking are not ideas of things and can in no way be classed as ideas. They also have no object [ideatum] that exists of necessity or that can exist. The reason why these modes of thinking are taken for ideas of things is that they originate and arise so immediately from real beings that they are easily confused with them by those who do not pay careful attention…. So, when Plato said that man is a featherless biped creature, he erred no more than those who said that man is a rational animal…. He referred man to a certain class so that, when he wanted to think about man, by having recourse to the class that was easy for him to remember, he could immediately come to think of man. Indeed, Aristotle was also gravely at fault, if he thought that he had adequately explained the human essence by that definition of his.*

Generic associations are illusions, confusions; they are imaginary modes of thinking covering over common affiliations among unique modes of existence. For Spinoza, this is a widespread error resulting from "judg[ing] things from words, not words from things" [CM I.1].

This confusion ironically leads to the forming of *universals*—that are supposed to be unanimously agreed upon and eternally true—in different ways by different people at different times. For the conceivers of these universals differ in opinion about which generic and essential properties to select and universalise [E IIP40S1]:

> *But it should be noted that these notions are not formed by all people in the same way, but vary from one to another, in accordance with what their body has more often been affected by, and what their mind imagines or recollects more easily. For example, those who have more often regarded men's stature with wonder will understand by the word, man, an animal of erect stature. But those who have been accustomed to consider something else, will form another common image of men—e.g., that man is an animal capable of laughter, or a featherless biped, or a rational animal. And similarly concerning the others—all will form universal images of things according to the disposition of their body. Hence it is not surprising that so many controversies have arisen among the philosophers, who have wished to explain natural things by mere images of things.*

This is a key passage, explicating the reason why there are so many divergent classifications grounded on universal essences. For, insofar as we associate modalities "by mere images of things," we remain at the level of *imagined* associations. We fail to recognise each modality's potencies of forming singular associations of its own. We cloak each modality's singular life under an overarching generality.

POLITICAL INSTRUMENTALISATION OF GENERALITY

There are dire political consequences of coupling generic associations with essentialist definitions. Countless modes of stereotyping individuals and collectives according to their genus, species, gender, ethnicity, class, or cultural formation have grounded themselves on this coupling. Spinoza was well aware of these political dangers [E IIIP46]:

> *If someone has been affected with joy or sorrow by someone of a class, or nation, different from one's own, and this joy or sorrow is accompanied by the idea of that person as its cause, under the universal name of the class or nation, one will love or hate, not only that person, but every one of the same class or nation.*

Imagining each singular individual as sharing the same essence "under the universal name" of its associated nation and class paves the way for nation- and class-based prejudices. For, rather than addressing our affective response to the *singular* individual who has affected us, we tend to address it to a whole *genus*, to the generic category of which, we presume, that individual is a stereotypical specimen.

Spinoza's critical objections to political instrumentalisation of generic associations are dispersed throughout his oeuvre. In *Theologico-Political Treatise*, he objects to nationalist associations [TTP 17.93]: "Surely Nature creates individuals, not nations; individuals are distinguished into nations only by differences of language, laws, and accepted customs." That is, people are not classified into nations by their modes of existence, but cultural formations. Envisioning people as stereotypical instances of their national genus is an imaginary construction.[8] There is no national essence shared by and associating all its individual citizens, just as there is no "Greek" or "Chinese" Architecture, endowing all its associated architectural modalities the same essence and nationalist fundamentals.

8 See the confluence of Benedict Anderson's arguments in *Imagined Communities* (1991: 5-7) with Spinoza's initial critique: "I propose the following definition of the nation: it is an imagined political community.… It is *imagined* because the members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow-members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion.… Ultimately it is this fraternity that makes it possible, over the past two centuries, for so many millions of people, not so much to kill, as willingly to die for such limited imaginings." Regarding Spinoza's critical analysis of affective networks underlying nationalism and patriotism, see also: Balibar (2008: 42-9).

In *Short Treatise*, Spinoza underlines that there is no generic religious and ethnic essence, either. People cannot be classified as stereotypical members of religious and ethnic formations [KV II, iii, 8]:

> *Hate also comes from mere report—as we see in the hate the Turks have against the Jews and the Christians, the Jews against the Turks and the Christians, and the Christians against the Jews and Turks, etc. For how ignorant most of these are of one another's religion and customs.*

That is, one of the primary reasons people of different cultures, ethnicities, and religions tend to direct their hatred towards each other is their generic classification of themselves and others in the first place, such that, their hatred is based on imaginary stereotypes covering over singular individuals and communities, whose real modes of life they are ignorant of.

In a seldom referred passage in *Ethics*, Spinoza hints at sexist consequences of coupling generic associations and essentialist definitions as well [E VP10S]:

> *So also, a man who has been badly received by a lover thinks of nothing but the inconstancy and deceptiveness of women, and their other, often sung vices. All of these, he immediately forgets as soon as his lover receives him again.*

The philosophical point underlying Spinoza's sarcastic remark on this everyday example is that, once we start thinking in terms of generic types and inherent essences, a simple encounter that can be easily deemed incompatible in relation to the affective enmeshment of two singular individuals tends to be rather explained by "a man," via "the inconstancy and deceptiveness" associated with *all* "women," or in essentialist terms, by *generic* vices supposedly inherent to *womanhood* as such. And the reason? Because essential properties of generic classifications can be easily manipulated to include anything for the benefit of actors who hold the very power to classify others—a man asserting that all women are deceptive *by nature*;[9] a colonial officer declaring that all oriental locals are irrational *by essence*;[10] a self-proclaimed Aryan asserting that all

9 See Judith Butler's *Gender Trouble* (2010b: 38) that argues against generic universality presumed by identity, sex, and gender, which she rather deems to be "imaginary" and "constructed": "Both masculine and feminine positions are thus instituted through prohibitive laws that produce culturally intelligible genders, but only through the production of an unconscious sexuality that reemerges in the domain of the imaginary." Butler (2006: 111-30) also wrote an interesting piece on Spinoza's ethics and politics. For emerging research on latent connections between Spinoza's philosophy, feminism, and gender theory by figures such as Luce Irigaray, Genevieve Lloyd, Moira Gatens, and Hasana Sharp see: Gatens (2009) and Sharp (2011: 117-85).

10 See Edward Said's seminal *Orientalism* (2003: 8) that argues, in line with Spinoza, that the very notion of "the Oriental" is an imaginary construction based on generic associations and essentialist definitions: "The imaginative examination of things Oriental was based more or less exclusively upon a sovereign Western consciousness out of whose unchallenged centrality an Oriental world emerged, first according to general ideas about who or what was an Oriental, then according to a detailed logic governed not simply by empirical reality but by a battery of desires, repressions, investments, and projections." The relationship between Spinoza's philosophy and post-colonial theory is largely underresearched. For a recently-published exception, see: Goetschel (2016: 39-54).

non-Aryan races are inferior *by blood*,[11] etc. With one sweeping *generalisation*, one can seemingly rationalise and create an excuse for the subordination and exclusion of billions. It is no wonder that in political history the coupling of essentialist definitions with generic associations has proved to be one of the most effective concepts at the service of hierarchical power apparatuses and exclusionary discourses.

COMMONALITY

For Spinoza, generic associations are inadequate notions misleading our conceptions of reality. To adequately address the problem of association, Spinoza develops an original conception of *commonality* (*notio communis*) [E IA4; E IIP38-40; E IVP29]. Commonality is an associative relationship constructed between modalities, insofar as they can resonate with each other's potentials and rhythms.[12] From the viewpoint of commonality, modalities of existence—humans, animals, buildings—are not associated with one another according to pre-set classifications or typological setups that operate *from top to bottom*; they associate with each other by building commonalities on the spot *from the bottom up*. When you first encounter the sea, you enfold certain dynamic potencies, implicate characteristic rhythms and affective capabilities of the water according to your modal composition. And then, if you *can* find an accordant commonality, an affective confluence, a rhythmic attunement with the waves and the sea, you can complicate these implicated relations, so as to explicate and unfold a new association, becoming an adaptive part of a continually changing interaction on the fly. That is, you can then swim and surf, rather than submerge and drown, forming an affective commonality with

11 See Achille Mbembe's recent *Critique of Black Reason* (2017: 55, 182) which argues that the very "principle of race" itself, grounded on generic associations that operate by dividing and excluding, inevitably leads to the stigmatisation of one "imagined" division by another: "We must understand the principle of race as a spectral form of division and human difference that can be mobilised to stigmatise and exclude, or as a process of segregation through which people seek to isolate, eliminate, or physically destroy a particular human group.… In such conditions we create borders, build walls and fences, divide, classify, and make hierarchies. We try to exclude—from humanity itself—those who have been degraded, those whom we look down on or who do not look like us, those with whom we imagine never being able to get along. But there is only one world. We are all part of it, and we all have a right to it. The world belongs to all of us, equally, and we are all its co-inheritors, even if our ways of living in it are not the same, hence the real pluralism of cultures and ways of being." For the secondary literature in race studies that engages with Spinoza's philosophy, see: Nails (2005: 57-73) and San Juan (2002).

12 Spinoza seems to have developed his notion of commonality, partially by following Francis Bacon's inductive reasoning that already challenged Aristotelian method a few decades before him. In *Novum Organum*, or *The New Organon* (1620), Bacon proposes that inductive reasoning is the proper method for studying nature, which ascends from careful and systematic observations of commonalities between singular things to more general ones, step by step, from the bottom up. We know that Spinoza was familiar with Bacon's work, for in his private letters, Spinoza directly mentions Bacon in relation to Descartes [Ep.2; Ep 37]. See for starters, Bacon's aphorism XIX in Book I (2003: 36): "There are, and can be, only two ways to investigate and discover truth. The one leaps from sense and particulars to the most general axioms, and from these principles and their settled truth, determines and discovers intermediate axioms; this is the currently accepted way. The other elicits axioms from sense and particulars, rising in a gradual and unbroken ascent to arrive at last at the most general axioms; this is the true way, but it has not been tried." Although Spinoza shares with Bacon a bottom-up approach in studying commonalities, Spinoza's topological association based on substantial potentials, is very different from Bacon's inductive method grounded on empirical connections, as Spinoza underlines in his early letter to Oldenburg [Ep.2].

aquatic forces.[13] Such is Spinoza's radical conception of association: we don't have to be listed under the same generic category or share the same essence with water to associate with it. Associations know no pre-set boundary. Affiliations recognise no predetermined classification. Insofar as we can construct an interactive commonality, there is no limit, we can associate with anything and everything.

Spinoza's commonality is constructive. We associate ourselves with other modalities by way of adapting our capabilities in relational acts. This rules out predetermined association of modalities according to imaginary universals such as genus, species, nationality, race, sex, type, style, etc. Instead, associations become constructed through asymmetrical alliance and dynamic consonance among divergent modalities. Associations are no longer grounded on generic sameness or essential similarities, but on "the agreement" [*convenire*] of singularities and differences. This means we are not doomed to a mode of life with inherent inclusions to and fixed exclusions from predetermined associations. We all come to develop our associations ourselves by way of seeking commonalities across differing milieus.

With the conception of commonality, Spinoza leaves behind perpetuating *typological factions* and moves on to exploring, what from today's perspective can be deemed as, *topological associations*. Topological, because associations are grounded on confluent potencies within a substantial continuum. That is, even when modalities no longer construct concrete commonalities between each other but are grouped together by an external agent like us, the association still needs to be made according to commonalities across their agentive potence (*potentia agendi*) or what they can do, rather than their generic essence or what they inherently are. To reiterate Gilles Deleuze's striking example (1988: 45-8; 123-4), from the topological viewpoint of Spinoza's commonality, a racehorse can be associated less with a plough horse, and more with a race car; just as a plough horse can be associated less with a racehorse, and more with an ox. For commonality has nothing to do with being classified under the generic category of horses, oxen, or cars, but operates by way of confluent capabilities and consonant rhythms.

Commonalities are formed from the bottom up, either as singular modalities actualise confluent potentials (racehorse and race car), or as they compose interactive commonalities in practice (swimmer and the sea). This opens up the radical possibility

13 See also the first chapter of Maurice Blanchot's philosophical fiction *Thomas the Obscure* (1988: 7-8), which gives a poetic account of becoming one with the sea: "Thomas sat down and looked at the sea…. It was then that the sea, driven by the wind, broke loose. The storm tossed it, scattered it into inaccessible regions; the squalls turned the sky upside down and, at the same time, there reigned a silence and a calm which gave the impression that everything was already destroyed. Thomas sought to free himself from the insipid flood which was invading him…. As he swam, he pursued a sort of revery in which he confused himself with the sea. The intoxication of leaving himself, of slipping into the void, of dispersing himself in the thought of water, made him forget every discomfort…. What escape was there? To struggle in order not to be carried away by the wave which was his aim? To go wider? To drown himself bitterly within himself? That would surely have been the moment to stop, but a hope remained; he went on swimming as if, deep within the restored core of his being, he had discovered a new possibility. He swam, a monster without fins. Under the giant microscope, he turned himself into an enterprising mass of cilia and vibrations."

of *any* two modalities associating with each other without *any* pre-set limit, insofar as they are capable of attuning into each other's potentiating rhythms. Machines, humans, animals, and buildings, regardless of their divergent potencies, regardless of their dissimilar form and content, regardless of their singular beings and different contexts, *can* and *do* trespass pre-set classifications, and associate with each other, in unexpected and surprising ways. Potencies of flesh, silicon, and stone are not alien to each other; commonalities are constantly constructed across organisms, machines, and buildings, insofar as they can find confluent rhythms with one another's modes of operation. This is indeed an eccentric thought, suggesting that some of us can associate less with other human beings, and more with buildings, computers, and landscapes, while some buildings can associate less with other buildings, and more with animals, machines, and tornadoes. Commonality, Spinoza's peculiar conceptual response to the problem of association, arises from a shared continuum, yet actualised only in unique interactions; it is imbued with a spark of madness, favouring a wild dance of unlikely alliances.

SPECIFICITY

Association cannot be addressed independently of the problem of *distinction*, which deals with distinguishing modalities from each other. In Aristotelian philosophy, individual modalities are distinguished by being *specified* under a generic association, as a derivative "species" (*species*) under a universal genus. Singular lives of individual modalities are distinguished, not in relation to their unique potencies but as secondary articulations of generic kinds from top to bottom. This is the reason Aristotle deems individual differences as secondary "accidents" that deviate the individual from its primary essence via trivial modifications. At this point, however, a tension arises within Aristotelian logic, the tension of rendering *individual differences* subservient to *specific similarities*. The fact that Spinoza as an individual had unique capabilities of his own, that he was interested in and practiced philosophy, that he led a singular mode of life peculiar to his own potencies and encounters, means *nothing* if you are making your distinction grounded on Aristotelian specification. For to make a specific distinction *à la* Aristotle, you need to start by determining what constitutes the genus of Spinoza, by way of abstracting the most generic properties he supposedly shares with other members of his kind, like asserting that Spinoza is an animal (genus), and then going one level of specificity below to conclude that he is a human (species).[14] Aristotle would not go any further and define all specific distinctions below the level of human species as irrelevant accidents but one may continue by making more refined specific distinctions, as has been done throughout history, and specify Spinoza further by way of what one believes to be his "essential" features, like that he was a man, a Jew, a Dutch citizen, and so on. Following

14 See Aristotle's *Categories* [2b7] or (1995: 29): "For if one is to say of the primary substance: what it is, it will be more informative and apt to give the species than the genus. For example, it would be more informative to say of the individual man that he is a man, than that he is an animal (since the one is more distinctive of the individual man while the other is more general); and more informative to say of the individual tree that it is a tree, than that it is a plant."

Aristotle's logic, it is *impossible* to reach what makes Spinoza unique, because specific distinctions have an invisible lower limit by design, which prevents them from reaching the individual level. In other words, *specificity* cannot sufficiently explain *singularity* and *uniqueness*, for it simply amounts to *less generality*. As we tend to distinguish individuals from each other through Aristotle's lens, we start our journey of distinction from high-level genera and inevitably find ourselves stuck at mid-level species, incapable of arriving at what makes each individual modality characteristically unique at their one-to-one scale. Yet then, the very essence that is supposed to constitute the definition of an individual and its particular distinction from others comes to transcend that individual's singular mode of life and refers only to categories of genus and species, or universal and specific kinds. Rather than distinguishing individual modalities from each other, we find ourselves unavailingly refining abstract classifications and umbrella terms.

CRITIQUE OF SPECIFICITY

Specific distinctions are inadequate abstractions for Spinoza as they are not tailored to fit singular individuals but always remain at least one size larger [TIE 93]:

> *So long as we are dealing with the investigation of things, we must never infer anything from abstractions, and we shall take very great care not to mix up the things that are only in the intellect with those that are real…. From universal axioms alone the intellect cannot descend to singularities.*

If we try to arrive at singularities by descending from universal axioms, we mix up the singular reality of each individual modality with top-down specifications that we project upon them in the first place [KV I.6-9]:

> *They maintain, then, that these Ideas are in God's intellect, as many of Plato's followers have said, viz. that these universal ideas (such as rational animal, etc.) have been created by God. And though Aristotle's followers say, of course, that these things are not actual but only beings of reason, nevertheless they very often regard them as things. For they have said clearly that [God's] providence does not extend to singularities but only to kinds. E.g., God has never exercised his providence over Bucephalus, but only over the whole genus, Horse. They also say that God has no knowledge of singular and corruptible things but only of universal, which in their opinion are incorruptible. But we have rightly regarded this as indicating their ignorance; for it is precisely the singular things, and they alone, that have a cause, and not the universals, because they are nothing…. We conclude then, by saying that Peter must agree with the Idea of Peter, as is necessary, and not with the Idea of Humanity …*

In this dense passage, Spinoza challenges the continental canon built upon Platonic and Aristotelian foundations, for both conceive universals as real entities from which they try

to arrive at singularities as secondary accidents or imitations. For Plato, universals exist on a transcendent dimension and individuals are mere shadow-like copies of these pure Ideals; for Aristotle, universals are substantial forms that constitute individuals' essences, insofar as they are members of a shared genus or species. For Spinoza, however, individual modalities like Peter and Bucephalus can be defined only by their *singular* potence, rather than by *generic* associations (animality) or *specific* distinctions (humanity and horseness). This means *singular* potencies of Peter and Bucephalus—their unique capacities that make them themselves and no other—are what *distinguish* them from everything else.

MORAL INSTRUMENTALISATION OF SPECIFICITY

But above all, what disturbs Spinoza the most, is that specific distinctions lead to top-down moral judgements. Those who conceive reality through typological lenses, as a result of confusing abstract categories with immanent lives of singular modalities, do not focus on what these modalities are really capable of, but utilise imagined universals as measuring sticks for judging them, for asserting what they are and how they shall act, for projecting upon them imagined negations and failures in accordance with their contingent distance from these ideal constructions [TP 1.1]:

> *[Philosophers] believe they perform a divine act and reach the pinnacle of wisdom when they've learned how to praise in many ways a human nature which doesn't exist anywhere and how to bewail the way humans really are. They conceive humans not as they are but as they want them to be. That's why for the most part, they are not authors of ethics but satire.*

That is, singular lives and distinct capabilities of modalities are not solely subsumed under top-down specifications but also disciplined, judged, and evaluated throughout their existence by their degree of compliance with related universal notions [Ep.19]:

> *This arises because we express all the singular things of a kind (e.g., all those which have, externally, the shape of man) by one and the same definition, and therefore we judge them all to be equally capable of the highest perfection which we can deduce from such a definition. When we find one whose acts are contrary to that perfection, we judge him to be deprived of it and to be deviating from his nature. We would not do this, if we had not brought him under such a definition and fictitiously ascribed such a nature to him.*

The coupling of top-down specific distinctions and essentialist definitions, therefore, pave the way for judging singular modalities in relation to transcendent measuring sticks, accusing each singular difference as an act of imperfection, deprivation and deviation. This forces us to conceive singular modes of life not as they *can be*, according to their immanent potentials but as they *should be,* with respect to imagined ideals. That is why Spinoza underlines that top-down moral impositions can be nothing but

"satire." Only from the bottom up, we can construct an immanent ethics, that no longer suppresses and disciplines but encourages us to experiment with our singular capacities and collective commonalities.

SINGULARITY

Spinoza introduces a new conception of distinction that does justice to singular capacities of each individual by acknowledging them from the bottom up, rather than overriding their irreducible differences under generic and specific abstractions from top to bottom [TIE 99]:

> *From this we can see that above all it is necessary for us always to deduce all our ideas from physical things or from the real beings, proceeding, as far as possible, according to the series of causes, from one real being to another real being, in such a way that we do not pass over to abstractions and universals …*

By leaving behind derivative specificities and universal generalities, Spinoza grounds the problem of distinction on *singular differences*.[15] Nothing is generic or specific but

15 Spinoza's criticism of Aristotelian "species" by way of developing his own conception of "singularity" does not necessarily mean that post-Aristotelian conceptions of "speciation" in contemporary biology cannot be reconceived through Spinoza's lens of singularity. See DeLanda and Zourabichvili for Spinozist attempts at reconciling singularity with speciation:
DeLanda (2006: 26-7): "Taxonomic essentialism (…) may be traced back to the work of the great philosopher Aristotle, who created a method for the classification of entities into a three-level hierarchy: the genus, the species and the individual…. Thus, it is at the level of species, or at the level of what modem philosophers call 'natural kinds', that we find the essence or very nature of entities. In evolutionary theory, of course, this line of argument would be rejected…. The properties of species are the result of evolutionary processes…. The enduring identity of a given species is accounted for in terms of the different forms of natural selection (predators, parasites, climate) that steer the accumulation of genetic materials in the direction of greater adaptability, as well as the process through which a reproductive community becomes separated into two progressively divergent communities until they cannot mate with one another. While the first process yields the diflerentiating properties of a species, the second one, called 'reproductive isolation', makes those properties more or less durable by closing its gene pool to external genetic flows…. [O]rganisms and species are also alike in that both are born and die: reproductive isolation marks the threshold of speciation, that is, the historical birth of a new species and extinction, defines its equally historical death. What this implies is that a biological species is an *individual entity*, as unique and singular as the organisms that compose it but larger in spatiotemporal scale. In other words, individual organisms are the component parts of a larger individual whole, not the particular members of a general category or natural kind."
Zourabichvili (2020: 220-1): "The status of essence in Spinoza is not immediately clear. On the one hand, essences are singular and not specific; on the other hand, there is the question of a human nature, of a nature of the human body, of the human mind, etc. (…) What about species? Species is, if not defined, at least treated in terms of agreement [*convenance*] and capacity to be affected. The difficulty is as follows: there are no specific essences but species nevertheless has a reality and has something to do with essence. There cannot be specific essences because God produces modes and not species; if the human being in general were produced as a mode, what would be the necessity for this mode to be repeated an infinite number of times? The species–individual relation runs aground on the principle of sufficient reason. And yet, modes are grouped into species, by virtue of an agreement that follows from their essence. Spinoza says 'agree *by nature*': the concept of agreement thus unfolds in the register of essence. Grouping modes into species is (…) ontologically grounded—and yet species is not an essence. It is a relational, *a posteriori* concept; species concerns the relations between essences, since the specific grouping presupposes the preliminary recognition of an agreement. Whence the criteria of capacity to be affected: the horse is distinguished from the human being from the point of view of the *libido procreandi*; certain of their libidos agree and are satisfied in similar ways (*gaudium, gaudere*), and others do not and are not. (E III, P57S)."

every modality is "singular," has a characteristic life of its own, expressing constant modification of its unique potencies (intrinsic difference), different from everything else (extrinsic difference).[16]

A modality's singular potentials are not derivative accidents, for Spinoza, but unique expressions captured from infinite capabilities of life. You and me, this and that building, we are all singular modalities of life. We are all *sui generis*, unique and *of our own kind*, while at the same time connected to other modalities by way of shared commonalities. The problem of distinction changes completely once we distinguish individual modalities in relation to their singular modes of being. Rather than a corrupted deviation from their so-called immutable essence or idealised specific category, each singular modality becomes a unique adventure. Georges Canguilhem (2008: 125-6), whose work focused on the intersection of philosophy of science and biology during the mid-twentieth century, explains in confluence with Spinoza, the difference between singular and specific distinctions from the viewpoint of biological life:

> *Only within a hypothesis that conceives the laws of nature to be generic eternal essences is the individual a provisional and regrettable irrationality. That hypothesis presents divergence as an "aberration" that human calculation cannot reduce to the strict identity of a simple formula; its explanation makes of divergence the error, failure, or prodigality of a nature considered at once intelligent enough to proceed in simple ways and too rich to resolve to conform to its own economy…. In short, individual singularity can be interpreted either as a failure or as an attempt, as a fault or as an adventure. In the latter hypothesis, the human mind makes no negative value judgment, precisely because, as attempts or adventures, living forms are considered not beings referable to a real, pre-established type but organisations whose validity (that is, value) must be referred to the eventual success of their life…. Here we find ourselves at the true antipodes of the Aristotelian theory (…) which is fixist…. Nothing can be lacking to a living being once we accept that there are a thousand and one different ways of living.*

Spinoza goes further and does not even limit our lens of distinction to acknowledge only the singularity of living beings as elaborated by Canguilhem, but acknowledges the singularity of each and every modality, be it living or non-living. Through Spinoza's

16 Spinoza seems to have followed Dun Scotus here but as I do not have archival connections to support this claim—there is no mention of Scotus anywhere in Spinoza's texts, letters, or library—I may better claim that Spinoza and Scotus addressed the same problematic field, and came up with confluent solutions. For Scotus was one of the first philosophers to argue that individuals are not singular merely because they are extrinsically different from others but because they have an intrinsic and positive difference peculiar to their own individual being. This is the "*haecceity*" or "thisness" of individuals, that is, their singularity that cannot be reduced to being a member of a general or specific category. With this claim, Dun Scotus remained a solitary exception in scholastic thought, which was largely dominated by Aristotelian doctrines, until Spinoza arrived on the scene four centuries later, and pushed this new logic of singularity to its radical limits. See, Scotus' *Ordinatio* II, D3, P1Q6, 170 (1973): "Therefore, beside the nature in this thing and in that, there are some primarily diverse things by which this thing and that thing differ (this in this thing and that in that thing); and these primarily diverse things cannot be negations (…); therefore they will be some positive entities *per se* determining nature." See also Deleuze (2001: 35-40) and Thacker (2010: 107-35) on Scotus as a forerunner of Spinoza.

lens, we, modalities of existence, are distinguished in a new way, by way of unfolding our unique potentials, by embodying and expressing our "singularity" (*singularis*) [E IP25C; E IID6; E IIP13S].

CRITIQUE OF URBAN GENERALITY AND ARCHITECTURAL SPECIFICITY

Generality and specificity are not abstract tools of onto-epistemological speculation, they are active infrastructures colouring our everyday actions and perceptions. We have instrumentalised generality and specificity as canonical apparatuses in shaping and conceiving our built environments—they are deeply entrenched in architectural discourses and practices. Top-down planning initiatives overlook singular potentials of various urban actors and override their decision-making agencies.[17] Widely used classification models such as types generalise architectural differences according to pre-set functions.[18] Styles generalise architectural variances according to prefigured formal orders.[19] The public-private binary encloses the commonalities of built and natural environments and hands them over to either the generic control of state apparatuses (top-down planning mechanisms coupled with bureaucratic zoning schemes), or the

17 I tackled the problem of top-down spatial agency in greater depth in an earlier essay: Kodalak (2015).

18 The conceptual precedents of architectural type traversed the treatises of Vitruvius, Alberti, Palladio, and Laugier under different classificatory titles but it was brought to prominence in architectural culture largely by Quatremère de Quincy. In *Essay on the Nature of Imitation*, de Quincy (1837 [1823]: 121, 204-5) argued that artists and architects need to transcend mere existents to discover their true "essences," transcend the singular life of artworks and buildings to reach their "universal" and "general" type. The concept of "type," and the emergent methodology devoted to it called "typology," have become immensely influential and instigated many admirers and followers in modern architectural culture. Aldo Rossi (1982 [1966], 40-1) was perhaps the most influential, who grounded his typological manifesto on de Quincy's earlier conception in his seminal book, *The Architecture of the City*. For further information about the influential postwar resurgence of "type" in architectural discourse and practice after Rossi's rejuvenating efforts during the 1950s and 60s, see also the discussions in architectural journals like *Casabella* and *Oppositions* during the 1970s-80s, by the likes of Vidler (1977a, 1977b), Monreo (1978), Ungers (1985), and De Carlo (1985).

19 See, for instance, Nikolaus Pevsner, one of the "official" historians of modernist architecture, structuring his list of contents in *An Outline of European Architecture* (1948: v) as a progressive narrative with succeeding styles such as "The Romanesque Style," "The Early and Classic Gothic Style," "The Baroque," and "Modern Movement." Today, it is still not a bygone tradition, for instance, to present Le Corbusier's Villa Savoye (1928-31) as a "modernist" building, sharing a modernist *essence* with other "modernist" buildings such as Gropius and Meyer's Fagus Factory (1911-13), Bruno Taut's House 19 (1927), and Mies van der Rohe's Farnsworth House (1945-51). This "modernist" essence is usually explained by a generic set of fundamental properties and universal principles such as clean-cut volumes and rejection of eclectic ornaments, flat roofs and use of standardised materials and construction techniques, orthogonal geometry and industrial aesthetics, to name but a few. Through a conceptual lens grounded on generic associations and inherent essences, in order to arrive at the singular life of an architectural modality such as Villa Savoye, we are forced to subsume its singular being and potencies under the generic category of "modernist architecture," which neutralises its unique differences from other buildings classified under the same genus, by rendering these differences accidental and secondary, in order to highlight their shared "modernist" kindred. Yet it takes only a moderately close examination to recognise that each of these buildings—Villa Savoye and House 19, Farnsworth House and Fagus Factory—has a unique mode of being that is very different from the others, irreducible to any imaginary "modernist" essence. Such reductive generic associations are partially the result of conflating different meanings of "modernism" and "modernity," as in mixing seemingly neutral temporal periods, art and architectural styles, and qualitative shifts in social experience—and that's the point, we easily mix up our *epistemic* categories with *ontological* realities. There have been, of course, significant exceptions to style-based historiography since the postwar period as well, as can be found in distinctive works of Manfredo Tafuri (1987), Reyner Banham (1969), Spiro Kostof (1985), and Hilde Heynen (1999).

specific dominion of private interests (profit-driven market dynamics allied with an impoverished form of architecture reduced to a banal average of star- and service-driven industries).[20] And the list goes on… Is there even a way out of top-down generalities that override urban commonalities, a way out of stereotypical specificities that cloak over architectural singularities?

URBAN COMMONALITY AND ARCHITECTURAL SINGULARITY

Spinoza warns us that if we conceive life through the deceptive lens of generic associations and specific distinctions, we categorise and judge, not only social but also built environments [E IVPref.]:

> *After men began to form universal ideas, and devise models of houses, buildings, towers, etc., and to prefer some models of things to others, it came about that each one called perfect, agreed with the universal idea one had formed of this kind of thing and imperfect, what one saw agreed less with the model one had conceived…. They are accustomed to form universal ideas of natural things as much as they do of artificial ones. They regard these universal ideas as models of things, and believe that nature (which they think does nothing except for the sake of some end) looks to them, and sets them before itself as models. So, when they see something happen in nature which does not agree with the model they have conceived of this kind of thing, they believe that Nature itself has failed or sinned, and left the thing imperfect…. Perfection and imperfection, therefore, are only modes of thinking, i.e., notions we are accustomed to feign because we compare individuals of the same species or genus to one another.*

Insofar as we cloak architectural modalities under generic associations and specific distinctions, and compare their immanent modes of life with top-down city plans, universalised architectural principles, ideal house designs, we cannot help but approach them as derivative instances of imaginary abstractions.[21] This means silencing them, forcing architectural modalities to conform to our imaginary projections, denying them the capacity to express their singular modes of existence.

20 For more elaboration, see: Kodalak (2015).

21 Historically, Spinoza's critique came immediately after an architectural past that witnessed the impactful resurgence of architectural treatises modeled on Vitruvius' and Alberti's assertions of universal orders and proportions for architecture, together with the proliferation of ideal city conceptions as in Filarete's Sforzinda (1461-3), St.Augustine's *The City of God* (1470), and Thomas More's *Utopia* (1516) in diverse fields. And his critique was superseded by an upcoming architectural future that was about to witness the rise of architectural doctrines and manifestoes promoting novel universal rules and teleological principles for the self-proclaimed modern age, together with the propagation of new ideal urban visions as would be seen in Ebenezer Howard's Garden Cities of To-morrow (1898), Le Corbusier's The City of Tomorrow (1929), and Frank Lloyd Wright's Broadacre City (1932-59), among many others. It is no wonder that Spinoza's critique of typological classifications, specific distinctions, universal essences, transcendent principles, and idealist evaluations was, during his own time, and has been, until today, passed over in silence by architectural discourse and practice.

For Spinoza, singularity and commonality are not opposed to each other; they are indissociable. The coupling of commonality and singularity makes it possible for modalities to open unexpected communication channels and associate with each other, while remaining unique and irreducible themselves. This way, architectural modalities can construct common attunements in singular frequencies and distinctive magnitudes, not only with other buildings, but also with a wide range of modalities—with winds and morning dews, computers and cybernetic systems, wandering kids and nomadic skateboarders, planetary movements and solar radiation, uninvited rats and inhabitant cats, well-kept rooftop trees as well as resolute weeds growing out of the cracks in the concrete. Through Spinoza's lens, bottom-up associations and one-of-a-kind distinctions flow together.[22] Every architectural modality is singular in its capacity to construct an infinity of commonalities.

Generality and specificity have embedded themselves so deep into our ordinary language and everyday habits that it was a major challenge for Spinoza back then and is still a key task for us today, to abandon utilising them for associating and distinguishing modalities. It is difficult to resist the urge—we find ourselves constantly using the terms *general* and *specific* in our everyday and professional life, as though these two were neutral and innocent logical categories, as though these two do not force us to conceive life as well as the built environment through a top-down lens reducing everything to relations of sameness and similarity. Spinoza's alternative opens up a new way of conceiving associations and distinctions by forging a bottom-up lens that is sensitive to asymmetrical commonalities and irreducible singularities. The reason we have not shown enough interest in Spinoza's alternatives might be that, despite their adequacy and explanatory power, they are labour-intensive operations. That is, they entail an upheaval in our modes of thinking and acting; they require a case-by-case explanation of each common association; they necessitate a tailor-made approach to each singular mode of being; they no longer allow us to take simplistic shortcuts, make wide-ranging generalisations, or propound reductive evaluations. Getting rid of overarching generalities and derivative specificities is much harder than it seems on paper.

Can we—architects, theorists, historians, everyday shapers and interactors of the built environment—leave behind our established habits of reducing architectural modalities

22 See how Balibar (2008: 107-8), the contemporary political theorist heavily influenced by Spinoza, unpacks political implications underlying the coupling of singularity and commonality: "[T]o say that all individuals are different (or, better, that they act and suffer in different ways) is not to say that they can be isolated from one another. The idea of such an isolation is simply another mystificatory abstraction. It is the relationship of each individual to other individualities and their reciprocal actions and passions which determine the form of the individual's desire and actuate its power. Singularity is a trans-individual function. It is a function of communication." See also how Nancy (2000: 32; 60) formulates his *Being Singular Plural* in relation to Spinoza: "Let us take up the matter again, then, not beginning from the Being of being and proceeding to being itself being with-one-another, but starting from being—and all of being—determined in its Being as being with-one-another. [This is the] singular plural in such a way that the singularity of each is indissociable from its being-with-many and because, in general, a singularity is indissociable from a plurality.… As such, then, God is not together with anything or anyone, but is—at least in Spinoza and Leibniz, although in different, but equally exemplary, ways—the togetherness or being-together of all that is."

to secondary accidents derived from high-order generalities? Can we abandon rendering architectural modalities local instances of generic types and specific styles, or stereotypical specimens of successive -isms (modernism, postmodernism, parametricism, etc.), or derivative representations of the *Zeitgeist* (the spirit of the age) and the *Genius Loci* (the spirit of the place)? Can we break with our long-established habits of perceiving urban spaces as binary compositions of public (generic) and private (specific) properties? Such dispositions would require a genuine paradigm shift in our accustomed approaches.

Only then can we approach architectural modalities from the viewpoint of their distinctive capacities and singular beings, rather than distinguishing them in relation to their imaginary species. Only then can we acknowledge the curious capacity of architectural modalities to construct commonalities with surprising allies—not only with humans, animals, and plants, but also with machines, rocks, and tornadoes—rather than restricting their associations to their fictitious genus. Only then can we evaluate architectural modalities and urban environments according to immanent modes of ethos developed at the intersection of their singular being and commoning practices, rather than judging them in relation to universal models and idealist measuring sticks, or encaging them under property dynamics. Such are the critical challenges and promising potentials Spinoza's alternative framework can bring forth. Urban commonalities and architectural singularities are not mutually exclusive but depend on each other's flourishing. Spinoza reminds us that we can avoid incarcerating urban spaces under top-down generalities and architectural modalities under reductive specificities, and come to recognise, instead, the symbiotic potentials of their singular modes of life and boundary-breaking commonalities.

ABBREVIATIONS

E *Ethics*; followed by Part number in roman numerals, followed by Proposition (or other) number in Arabic numerals using Curley's system: D = Definition; A = Axiom; P = Proposition; Dem. = Demonstration; C = Corollary; S = Scholium; Exp. = Explanation; L = Lemma; Post. = Postulate; Pref. = Preface; App. = Appendix; Def. Aff. = Part III 'Definitions of the Affects'.

TTP *Theological-Political Treatise*; followed by Chapter number and Gebhardt page reference.

TP *Political Treatise*; followed by Chapter and paragraph number.

TIE *Treatise on the Emendation of the Intellect*; followed by paragraph number.

Ep. *Letters*; followed by letter number.

KV *Short Treatise on God, Man, and his Wellbeing*; followed by Part number in Roman numerals and Chapter number in Arabic numerals.

PPC *Principles of Cartesian Philosophy*; followed by Part number in Roman numerals and Proposition number etc. in Arabic numerals, using the same abbreviation system as the Ethics (above).

CM *Metaphysical Thoughts*; followed by Part number (Roman) and Chapter number (Arabic).

CGH *Hebrew Grammar*; followed by Chapter number and Gebhardt page reference.

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CHAPTER 7

PROBLEMATISING FEMINIST LITERATURE ON REPRODUCTIVE LABOUR AND CARE ETHICS FOR CULTURAL COMMONING: INTERSECTIONALITY AS A STRATEGY

Lara García Díaz

Over the past decade, and through the lens of the cultural commons, new models of cultural production have appeared as an alternative to the entrepreneurial model and its structural and psychological effects (García Díaz & Gielen, 2018, 2020). The need to collectivise resources, space and wealth has led to the establishment of a myriad of cultural commons-based initiatives that try, in various ways, to respond to the productive and reproductive needs of their actors (García Díaz, 2020). In some cases, and definitely with more emphasis due to the consequences derived from the COVID-19 pandemic, terms like care or caring have taken a leading role in this kind of initiative as well as in the theorising of the commons (Boyce Kay & Wood, 2020). Placing at the forefront, the vulnerability of life and its interdependence, new models of social relation and labour organisation are being drawn today based on the rights and responsibilities that commoners have as care-givers and care-receivers.

However, it is important to recall here how the historical and cultural association of care and the female gender has been used to consolidate what it is still today an unequal distribution of labour. Although little mention has been so far made of it in cultural commons' theorising, the over-representation of women in all forms of care work has direct consequences on the possibilities women have to build up a career in the cultural sector (Pérez Ibáñez & López Aparicio, 2018). As social scientists Trudie Knijn and Monique Kremer (1997) stress, there can be dangerous consequences in merely framing care as an inherently positive practice, as that would obscure existing power relations in both provisioning and receiving care. For too long, social power asymmetries have been sustained by a cultural imaginary based on what I will address in this chapter as 'women's family-orientated care' (Land & Rose, 1985); that is, a form of care that is built from the gaze of white femininity and her kinship obligations. In the lines that

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follow, therefore, my goal is to question the current hyper-visibility of care discourse in commons theorisation by critically assessing the way in which these ones have been introduced and proposing intersectionality as a problematising strategy.

The first section of this chapter concentrates specifically on the framework produced by philosopher Silvia Federici, which has obtained great popularity in recent years due to her feminist approach to commons theorisation. Based on her prominent engagement and heritage in the 'domestic labour debate' from the 1970s, Federici lays claim on how, by sharing the responsibilities derived from the sphere of reproduction with 'a larger number of subjects than the nuclear family provides' (Federici, 2019: 163), we may be able to 'transform social relations and create an alternative to capitalism' (Caffentzis & Federici, 2014: 94). This promising statement has been extended in the theory of the commons under what Federici has come to name 'reproductive commoning' (2019). However, as I discuss, the tendency of Federici to crown women as the historical subject of the commons, compromises the collectivisation of reproductive labour by ultimately, once again, feminising it altogether.

As a consequence, I move my attention in the second section to another of the ways in which care has been used in the theory of the commons, that is, through the framework provided by ethics of care (Gilligan, 1977, 1982, 1993; Noddings, 1984, 1992, 2002, 2010; Ruddick, 1989; Tronto, 1993). Economists Vicente Moreno-Casas and Philipp Bagus (2021), for example, discuss how the ethics of care can serve as a moral guidance to improve commons governance as it leads to the emergence of rules and norms based on the responsibilities, we all have to each other's well-being. In that sense, they explore the benefits of the ethics of care to mobilise commons theorisation from rational thinking into a system of care-based moral judgements. Thus, care is used as a relational value, which allows us to think of commoning as a social practice of caring, based on the responsibility we all have to each other and what surrounds us (Elliott, 1997; Johnson, 2003). However, although the ethics of care has evolved since its inception in the 1980s, its theoretical scheme keeps strengthening the differential accountability of women/men regarding what constitutes effective caring, that is positioning the gender category at the centre of the discussion.

I therefore use the last part of this chapter to align my investigation with authors such as Olena Hankivsky (2014) in illuminating the need to decentralise the gender category from the analytical framework if we are to go beyond a 'women's family-orientated care' in commons theorisation and therefore, cultural commoning. To do so, I follow a number of authors whom have discussed the need to apply an intersectional approach both to feminist literature on reproductive labour and ethics of care (Collins, 1995; Hankivsky, 2014; Malatino, 2021; Raghuram, 2019). Dealing with care and praising its emancipatory potential in cultural commoning, I conclude, means challenging the forms of kinship that are invoked in much of the feminist literature on social reproductive labour and the ethics of care, as these are primarily based on a Eurocentric

gender system (Malatino, 2021; Hankivsky, 2014; Raghuram, 2019). Enhancing both frameworks by incorporating intersectionality as a strategy can help problematising mystified forms of femininity and, consequently, of care in the framework of cultural commoning.

FEMINIST LITERATURE ON REPRODUCTIVE LABOUR AND THE COMMONS

Authors such as Silvia Federici have taken much from the line initiated by Elinor Ostrom and her work on the commons, putting the emphasis nonetheless on how the commons cannot exist with a social system, i.e., without commoning (De Angelis, 2017; Linebaugh, 2008). For Federici, that is in which communally shared resources are continuously defined, obtained and produced through social interaction. Managing the commons therefore, presupposes for Federici the presence of commoners, who, by commoning, or through a social praxis of interactions and (self)-organisation, wish to share and manage material or immaterial wealth or resources (De Angelis, 2017: 119). In her own words, Federici's approach to commons' theorisation is established by paying attention "not [to] the material wealth shared but the sharing itself and the solidarity bonds produced in the processes. [Commoning] is the willingness to spend much time in the work of cooperation, discussing, negotiating, and learning to deal with conflicts and disagreements" (Federici, 2019: 94).

Emphasis is therefore laid on the social praxis constitutive of the commons. However, what differentiates Federici's work in the framework of the commons is in the attention that the author places on how the social praxis or systems of commoning could be able to face a patriarchal socio-economic structure that relegates the labour involved in sustaining life to the lower sectors of society. As she stresses, "the production of commons requires first a profound transformation in our everyday life in order to recombine what the social division of labour in capitalism has separated" (Federici, 2019: 109). For Federici, cooperation through commoning should therefore not only take productive work into consideration but also account for and include the realm and labour necessary to sustain life on a daily basis. To inform her analysis of empirical cases, Federici has been concentrating since the end of the 1980s on the study of communities that organise reproductive labour beyond the institution of the family, hence forms of cooperation that extent beyond family kinship. For Federici, kinship is endured by how reproductive labour is organised; and thus, Commoning, in her eyes, can give us a way out of certain normative kinship-forms by collectivising social reproductive labour altogether. She addresses such commoning forms under the label of "reproductive commoning" (2019).

'Reproductive commoning' draws inspiration from social subjects "whose work in fields, kitchens, bedrooms and streets, daily produces and reproduces the workforce

and with them a set of issues and struggles concerning the organisation of social reproduction" (Federici, 2019: 153). After spending some years in Nigeria documenting women's involvement in subsistence economies in the 1980s, Federici has since been strongly involved in gathering and articulating studies and fragments of struggles that are fought in rural contexts as well as in urban environments in the Third World. By doing so, Federici (2019: 107) announces how, "women are the main social force standing in the way of a complete commercialisation of nature, supporting a non-capitalist use of land and a subsistence-oriented agriculture".

Bringing these different practices forward, Federici looks into African feminist politics to trace the methodologies under which women have been able to struggle for their own rights through land privatisation movements.[23] By doing so, they ensure the survival of their families and closer communities. As she points out, "[b]y appropriating land, they are in fact voting for a different 'moral economy' from that promoted by the World Bank and other international developers […]. It is an economy built on a non-competitive, solidarity-centred mode of life" (Federici, 2019: 129).

Authors such as economists Maria Mies and Veronika Bennholdt-Thomsen have been also exploring subsistence economies in India and Latin America since the 1970s and have engaged in commons theorisation by proposing what they have coined as 'subsistence perspective' (1999). Such a perspective invites a reorientation of exchange-value to use-value, claiming to use the commons to re-open a collective struggle over social reproduction outside the logic of capital and the market (García Díaz, 2018; Mies & Bennholdt-Thomsen, 1999). Other authors such as ecofeminists Terisa Turner and Leigh Brownhill have bridged Mies and Bennholdt-Thomsen's 'subsistence perspective' and the practice of commoning, suggesting how 'subsistence commoning' is the "affirmation of social relations that realise all the requirements for life on the earth and the full development of human capacities" (1999: 22-23). Federici's 'reproductive commoning' has also taken much from Mies & Bennholdt-Thomsen 'subsistence perspective' in her concern to build the grounds for a new orientation in the politics of the commons. In both cases, 'subsistence perspective' and 'reproductive commoning', sustenance and the sustainability of life is placed at the centre of the claim for cooperative practices to re-appropriate the forms and resources that ensure our own subsistence on a daily basis.

What interests me to highlight at this point is how Federici uses the term 'reproductive commoning' to, as stated, "…place at the centre of [commons] political project the restructuring of reproduction as the crucial terrain for the transformation of social relations, thus subverting the value structure of capitalist organisation of work" (Federici, 2019: 167). As the author follows, 'reproductive commoning' attempts

23 Federici's interest relies here specifically on struggles that have placed the masculinisation of land at the centre of their claims, thus struggles for the gendered commons in Africa. One case is to be found in her analysis, for example, in the bulk of subsistence farmers who, mainly in urban contexts, have initiated urban farming in Kampala (Uganda).

"to break down the isolation that has characterised domestic work in capitalism, not in view of its reorganisation on an industrial scale but in view of creating more cooperative forms of care work" (Federici, 2019: 167). Scholars such as Massimo de Angelis, who represents an important figure in the current recovery of the theory of the commons, has proclaimed the revolutionary potential of Federici's framework. For him, 'reproductive commoning' struggles against the enslavement of life to capital and in his own words, "by delinking [itself] from capital, 'reproductive commoning' also facilitates a decoupling from its system of violence […]" (De Angelis, 2019: 219). From which it follows that, for De Angelis, "the strategy of 'reproductive commoning' has the potential to produce (and reproduce) relational values that are alternative to the ones synthesised in capital's bottom line of profit maximisation and cost externalisation onto waged and unwaged labour" (De Angelis, 2019: 220).

The question remains however how to precisely subvert the current socioeconomic organisation, and produce and reproduce new relational values, through the collectivisation of a form of labour that has been historically linked to the female gender to devalue and degrade it. This controversial relation, which is essential to this chapter, appears in Federici's 'reproductive commoning' instead as a potentiality. In her own words, "a feminist perspective on the commons is important. It begins with the realisation that, as the primary subjects of reproductive work, historically and in our time, women have depended on access to communal natural resources more than men and have been most penalised by their privatisation and most committed to their defence" (Federici, 2019: 107). Federici's impulse to narrow the grounds of 'reproductive commoning' to women's struggles around reproductive means and her centralisation of the gender category makes it difficult to suggest that she problematises such a relationship. On the contrary, she praises the role of women in sustaining such work. This makes me doubt the capacity of her framework in addressing reproductive labour as a task that we all must attend to, regardless of our social position. Even if illuminating on social systems that are breaking the isolation that characterises domestic work, she does not consider how her framework may enhance, contrary to what she claims, a 'women's family-orientated care' as the moral basis of her propositional analysis. That is, a form of care that, even if leaving the domestic sphere, is still based on family kindship and its moral reasoning (Land & Rose, 1985). It is Federici herself who discusses how "it remains to be clarified that assigning women this task of communing/collectivising reproduction is not to concede to a naturalistic conception of femininity" (Federici, 2019: 112).

ETHICS OF CARE AND THE COMMONS

The elaboration of a gender-specific imaginary in which both men and women were framed within a concrete subjectivation and sphere, was crucial in the social and economic restructuring after the Second World War and had major consequences on

how women are still depicted today, as sacrificing mother's and caregiver's. However, the relation of women with certain relational and moral values also served at the beginning of the 1980s to disturb the belief that men are morally superior to women. It is within this aim that the ethics of care appeared from the hand of authors such as philosopher and psychologist Carol Gilligan (1982), who use her investigation to primarily critique against the theory of moral development as advocated by psychologist Lawrence Kohlberg. Based on an ethics of justice, Kohlberg's thesis (1981) outlines a dualised moral development that differentiates a "masculine voice" that is described as rational, productive, logical and individualistic, and a "feminine voice" categorised as fragile, emotional and unstable. According to Kohlberg, women are scored as morally inferior to men, as they develop traits linked to weakness or frustration that prevent a more universal and rational moral development when compared to that of their male counterparts (Kohlberg, 1981). Gilligan however used her work to postulate that what was at stake was 'a different voice', one that instead of making decisions on the basis of duty or abstract principles of justice, is more inclined towards care and the responsibility to others (Gilligan, 1982). Placing her emphasis on "the restorative activity of care" (Gilligan, 1982: 30), Gilligan aimed at moving the predominance of an ethics of justice into the consideration of an ethics in which "the actors in the dilemma arrayed not as opponents in a contest of rights but as members of a network of relationships on whose continuation they all dependent" (Gilligan, 1993: 30). Like Gilligan, philosopher Nel Noddings emphasises how 'taking relation as ontologically basic, simply means that we recognise human encounter and affective response as a basic fact of human existence' (Noddings, 1984: 4). For Noddings, as well as for Gilligan, caring is the 'ultimate reality of life' (Noddings, 1992: 15) and should be enhanced and collectively maintained.

Resonating these last words with the claims exposed by Federici, it is within the aim to unseat the governance of the commons from rational thinking, that ethics of care has been used in commons theorisation (Elliott, 1997; L. Johnson, 2003; Moreno-Casas & Bagus, 2021). Agricultural and biological engineer Herschel Elliott (1997), for example, stresses that "tragic consequences can follow from practicing mistaken moral theories" (515) when governing the commons. For him, as well as for Moreno-Casas and Bagus (2021), the 'tragedy of the commons' contemplate ethical beings ruled by competitive and universal logics that do little to respond to the responsibility commoners have to each other and what surrounds them. In this sense, ethics of care has helped balancing the standards drawn from a western individualistic approach to another, that illuminates on the need to create social systems of commoning dedicated to protect vulnerable beings (Alliott, 1997). Although this approach responds primarily to the use of care ethics in commons theorisation by environmental studies, ethics of care has also been used by scholars who have been assessing the relation between power, politics, culture and commoning (Boyce Kay & Wood, 2020). In this case, ethics of care has also served to challenge the organisational values on which the cultural sector stands today by diverting transformative proposals informed by a sense of justice to one of care (Boyce Kay & Wood, 2020). In doing so, as Gilligan anticipates, ethics of care increases "an

awareness of the connection between people [that] gives rise to an acknowledgment of the responsibility of others, a perception of the need for response" (Gilligan, 1982).

Though, from one side, both Gilligan's and Noddings' work encourages feminist literature and commons theorisation to challenge the assumptions of moral theory based on an ethics of justice, from the other side, their framework can also , in my eyes, be quite problematic for the purpose of this chapter. Firstly, their theoretical scheme continues to be primarily based on the differential accountability of women/men regarding the construction of ethics and care. For example, its theoretical foundations are based on the analyses of a 'female voice', which somehow discards any form of care originating from a 'masculine voice'. Noddings, for example, used the term 'natural caring' (2002) as the basis of women's experience – "a form of caring that does not require an ethical effort to motivate it (although it may require considerable physical and mental effort in responding to needs)" (Noddings, 2002: 11). Under such a framework, as noted, masculine caring appears to be unnatural or abnormal. Secondly, Gilligan's ethics of care has been placed in affinity with right-wing maternalist discourses that aim at enforcing a specific model of family, femininity and motherhood (Ruddick, 1989). In this case, Noddings developed the concept of 'maternal instinct' (2010), which has been highly contested by feminist theorists for her apparent commitment to female biological essentialism. As she wrote, 'the mother-child relation, as the original condition, is the primary example of natural caring but unlike other relations of natural caring, it still has firm roots in instinct' (Noddings 2010: 58). Thirdly, and as a consequence, by constructing a feminine morality entirely based on the duty of caring for others, they ultimately entrapped women into the very specific role of carers. Framing care within such an essentialist vocabulary is what has fundamentally contributed to sustain 'women's family-orientated care' as a universal form of care.

Envisioning moral agents from a 'mother-child dyad' (Noddings, 2010; Ruddick, 1989) does little to challenge the mystification of such a concrete form of care provisioning. Aware of it, it is in the 1990s when authors such as political scientist Joan C. Tronto, who has come to be known as one of the main exponents of the second generation of care theorists,[24] used the framework of ethics of care to rethink some of her predecessors' blind spots: one being the consequences that framing care as a feminine virtue has had in the subjugation of women. To do so, Tronto has given special attention to divorce care from its previous feminisation by defining it primarily as a universal activity and a material moral foundation (Engster, 2005: 51). As Tronto argues, "care is […] a universal aspect of human life [as] all humans need to be cared for" (1993: 110).

24 Ethics of care has had two main stages of development. The first one, which can be categorised into the 'first' generations of care theorising (Hankivsky 2004) is mainly represented by the work of Carol Gilligan (1982), Nel Noddings (1984) and Sara Ruddik (1989), and was primarily linked to build on women's morality from the bases of nurturing experiences. The 'second generation', which began in the 1990s with authors such as Joan Tronto (1993) and Berenice Fisher (1996) aimed at transcending such conceptualisation to approach care and instead consider it as a 'universal' value and practice from which to rebuild society as a whole.

Although Tronto's framework aims at drawing new ways of thinking relationally as an ontological condition (Tronto, 1994), it keeps drawing primarily on women's caring role as the main bases for her thesis. For example, this can be traced in Tronto's notion of 'responsible caring' that builds in opposition to 'privileged irresponsibility', based the last one on how gender privileged builds 'passes' that exempt men from significant care responsibilities in the household. Although she does not deny the existence of male care, the concept of 'privileged irresponsibility' refers to the 'pass' granted to cisgender men to provide care typically associated with women. This reflects how her conception and analysis is based on the foundations of the Western family and the institutionalisation of gender inequalities that derives from it. In other words, the bases that support her theoretical framework do not escape the structure and ideology of the Western family and therefore Tronto's definition of care continues to be geopolitically coded (Raghuram, 2019: 8). Care roles and skills are ascribed differently in different parts of the world and social positions, something that Tronto does not contemplate in her expansive definition of care.

This has made scholars such as Olena Hankisvcky claim that when "care scholars consider factors beyond gender, they are inclined to add race and class rather than consider the ways in which these are co-constructed in multiple ways and with various effects" (Hankivsky, 2014: 252). Indeed, and even in the cases in which Tronto wants to deviate from the criticism drawn above, she keeps prioritising the category of gender: responsibility 'has different meanings depending upon one's perceived *gender roles*, and issues that arise out of class, family status, and culture, including cultural differences based on racial groupings' (Tronto, 1993: 133, emphasis added). Gender continues to lead the discussion on caring roles and subjectivities, which moves to Hankivsky to discuss how, 'this leads to missed opportunities for investigating the salience of other social locations and the interactive effects produced by a more expansive possibility of factors.' (Hankivsky, 2014: 252).

INTERSECTIONALITY TO PROBLEMATISE CARE IN CULTURAL COMMONING

It was in the late 1980s, a decade in which black women were finally able to access scholarly knowledge and academic structures, when the need to intersect the category of gender with that of class or race gave way to what has become known as intersectional theory. Though valuing, in many cases, the contributions of white feminist theorists in the understanding of gender in the sexual division of labour, authors such a Kimberlé Williams Crenshaw or Patricia Hill Collins concentrated primarily in capturing the interconnections of gender, class and race, while avoiding basing their analysis on one single theoretical category (Hill Collins, 1990; Williams Crenshaw, 1989). As Williams Crenshaw makes clear, 'not only are women of colour […] overlooked, but their exclusion is reinforced when *white* women speak for and as *women*' (Williams Crenshaw, 1989:

154, emphasis added). By examining the own category of woman, Crenshaw aimed at questioning all the analytical theories that had universalised the experiences of women, being these, in reality, solely based on the experience of white women.

What I would like to stress at this point of the chapter is how black feminist thought and knowledge fostered a major shift in feminist theoretical theory in the 1980s, bringing forward new tools of analyses by which to consider structural inequalities in the gender division of labour by illuminating on other constructions of femininity. It was in the 1990s, moreover, when intersectional theory moved feminist black thought "beyond single or typically favoured categories of analysis (e.g., gender, race, and class) to consider simultaneous interactions between different aspects of social identity […] as well as the impact of systems and processes of oppression and domination" (Hankivsky & Cormier 2009: 3). One of intersectionality's central tenets is to understand "what is created and experienced at the intersections of axes of oppression" (Hankivsky, 2014: 255) instead of a sum of diverse categories in which gender leads the equation.

As I have exposed at the end of the previous section, a hierarchy of categories is easily detectable in the framework drawn by Federici and those produced from current approaches to the ethics of care such as the one from Tronto. It is social policy theorist Fiona Williams who discusses how this proves "an uncritical assumption within the literature of the universality and desirability of heterosexual-family-network systems" (Williams, 1999: 669). It proves how only one way of care giving and care receiving have made it into legitimised theoretical discourses: those that obey to the homogenised 'we' that predominate in white feminism. As gender and women's studies scholar Breny Mendoza brings forward, intersectionality "illuminated ties between epistemic location and knowledge production, and offered analytic strategies that linked the material, the discursive and the structural" (Mendoza, 2016: 106).

The universalisation of white femininity on feminist literature, and specifically on reproductive labour and ethics of care, have been contested by intersectional frameworks since the 2000s. One of these most fruitful frameworks has been that provided by disability scholars. For Teppo Kröger (2009), both literature on reproductive labour and care ethics are unable to go beyond a conception of care detached from an 'able-bodied woman'. In his view, care theory keeps building on the passivity given to the supposed dependents, rather than including experiences of diversity and considering care as an active practice on both sides (Kröger, 2009). The recognition of the naturalisation of one dominant view in relation to caring has been likewise claimed by transgender scholars such as Sally Hines, who stresses how 'studies of caring practices need also to consider the meanings and experiences which transgender people bring to care" (Hines, 2007, p.483). By doing so, Hines introduces how care-giving and care-receiving takes another starting point in non-heterosexual families in which, for example, two fathers are those providing care. As trans scholar Hil Malatino (2021: 76) also indicates, "we try to begin not with the family but from the complex interconnected spaces and

places where care work is provided to trans and queer people". For Malatino, the terrain of what constitutes care, changes radically once such decentring occurs. The framework provided by Mike Fisher (1994) based on man-made care also helps, as Malatino suggests, to find in the attribution of 'caring for older people by themselves' a very valuable source of knowledge that can enhance that provided by the heteronormative family environment. Older male carers, in Fisher's analysis, bring about a form of 'spouse care' that challenges the debate about gender and caring as exposed in feminist theory and care ethics.

Another important source of experience-based knowledge of non-heterosexual care-giving and same-sex intimacy is that provided by the communities affected by the HIV/AIDS epidemic (Weeks et al, 2001). Such experiences have been paid scant attention in theoretical frameworks such as those from Federici or the ethics of care, although in themselves are sustained by forms of community care built beyond family kinship. Due to state abandonment and an over-stretched public health service, "ostracised groups of black people, women and haemophiliacs, as well as gay men, developed distinct practices of care, which fit with the notion of community as a site of identity and resistance" (Weeks et al., 2001, p.90). These experiences as well as those named above from trans, queer, elder or disability communities all materialise and are sustained within the capitalist mode of production and its state apparatus, and are configured beyond the state and the market (Malatino, 2021).

In the field of the commons, the term intersectionality and, more specifically, intersectional political awareness has been brought by the scholarly tendency moved by the framework of queer commons (Millner Larsen & Butt 2018). This framework presents an interesting dialogue between cultural studies, sexuality studies and political economy, all creating a "rich resource for imagining […] the improvisational infrastructure necessary for managing the unevenness of contemporary existence" (Millner-Larsen & Butt, 2018: 400). Such an approach is important for future commons theorisation. It stimulates demystifying the abstract subject that crowns today the male-dominated commons and allows turning the attention to "forms of lives otherwise marginalised by mainstream heteronormative society and mainstream LGBTQ politics" (Millner-Larsen & Butt, 2018: 399). As I have mentioned before, it is then possible to include and recognise forms of care-giving and care-receiving that are sustained already beyond the heteronormative family structure and that are occurring in that 'third space' of porosity between market and government.

Although feminist commons may be a good starting point to build on a care theory for the commons, there is a need for an enriched and updated articulation of existing discourses around care and social reproductive labour in order to frame it beyond a 'women's family-orientated care'. Even if being contextual specific theories, the limits of Federici's framework and that of ethics of care emerge when it is performed

through difference (Raghuram, 2019). As Raghuram remembers, "notions of care are imbricated in global patterns of power that [demands to] go beyond 'who cares' to '*how care is defined and validated*" (Raghuram, 2019: 11, emphasis added). Bringing "radically different notions of care" (Raghuram, 2019: 11) in commons theorisation is required if we are to unlink care of the normative structure that has made that value and practice a source of oppression for certain social groups and categories. As trans theorist Aren Aizura and Malatino (2019) suggest, it is urgent to "deviate the emphasis on the domestic and reproductive that has fuelled care theorising for so long and, instead, […] investigate the networks of mutual aid and emotional support […]", that have suffered from "multiple intertwined forms of institutional marginalisation and structural violence" (Aizura and Malatino, 2019).

That is the potential that an intersectional approach can bring into cultural commoning and what I have tried to stress throughout this chapter: it allows taking as a point of departure non-hegemonic experience-based knowledge of non-heterosexual care-giving and care-receiving. As a consequence, it opens spaces for critical thinking and struggle from which to grasp the regulatory mechanisms in the way care is being organised nowadays also within commoning frameworks and how it could be otherwise. Intersectionality, in this sense, allows for analysing structural oppression on the basis of analytical categories but it also encourages a constant rethinking and challenging of the basis of these very same categories. Putting the focus, for example, on the hegemonic cultural domain and therefore tracing the conception of care that dominates on a biographical level in a specific commoning practice, could resolve informing its members through intergenerational activities about other ways in which we ought to define ourselves and therefore care for each other.

What tools each practice of cultural commoning will use to adjust to such exploration is something that is hard to predict at this point as it will depend on the specificities of each practice, group and location. What can be agreed with what has been provided so far is that, by bringing an intersectional approach to the field of cultural commoning researchers may be able to question and problematise who the 'we' is when we use the statement "we need to take care of each other" (Ndikung, 2021) and how such care is defined and validated in each case (Raghuram, 2019).

CONCLUSION

The repeated use of white, middle-class women as the reference group to construe the variables that constitutes the integration of care today in commons theorisation is what this chapter has wanted to outline. To do so, I have introduced Federici's term 'reproductive commoning' to bring attention on how her tendency to place women at the centre of the analysis does not seem to promote the basis necessary to go beyond

a gender division of labour within the framework of the commons. On the contrary, I have stressed how assigning women the task of collectivising reproductive labour without a critical analysis on the values used to do so, creates a risk of promoting a 'women's family-oriented care' in commoning based on family kinship obligations.

Therefore, with an eye on how care obeys concrete moral foundation and subjectivations, I have placed my attention to another of the theoretical lines that have been used in commons theorisation such as the ethics of care. Here I have examined the extent to which the ethics of care problematises mystified forms of femininity by tracing the motives that gave rise to this moral theory in the first place. Doing that, and although scholars have acclaimed ethics of care has the potential to inform commons-based systems that flee from rational choice theory, I have exposed how it, however, fosters caring relations established on a 'mother-child dyad'. Highlighting how authors such as Noddings (2010) find the ultimate source of care in the 'maternal instinct', my aim has been to highlight how this theoretical approach also uses women as the central subject of its analysis. In this sense, it is also in authors such as Tronto (1993), who is recognised to pertain to the 'second generation' of care theorists, continue to prioritise the category of gender in her construction of an ethic of care. This brings ethics of care to the same blind spots as Federici's framework; i.e., an inability to conceive care outside of the domestic, family, or intimate spaces (Malatino, 2021), that is a 'women's family-orientated care'.

As a result, I have claimed for the potentiality of the insights of intersectionality to enrich both feminist literature on reproductive labour and the ethics of care when used to integrate care in the vocabulary and strategies of cultural commoning. Intersectionality allows us to unravel the hierarchy of social categories and its predetermined salience to consider these instead through its multiple interactions. This makes it possible to decentre the category of gender and open up the analytical spectrum to equally valuable forms of care-giving and care-receiving that arise as a result of the "intersections of difference and their relationship to power" (Hankivsky, 2014: 252). At this point I have named authors such as Kröger (2009), Hines (2007), Malatino (2021), Fischer (1994) and Williams (1999), who have brought experiences of care that emerges from outside the domestic environment and in relation to bodies and subjectivities outside the normative frameworks. By doing so, my goal has been to give evidence of other experiences of caring that are configured away from a 'women's family-orientated care' and beyond the state and the market (Malatino, 2021). Although it is difficult now to assess how exactly an intersectional-oriented thinking and engagement can help with deviating the theorising and practice of care from current normative frameworks in cultural commoning, I nonetheless hope this chapter has taken one step forward towards this.

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PART 3

CULTURAL INTERSECTIONS BETWEEN MARKET, GOVERNMENT AND COMMONS

CHAPTER 8

ARTISTS AS ORGANISERS: CULTURAL COMMONING AND HEGEMONY IN THAILAND

Lara van Meeteren & Bart Wissink

CULTURAL COMMONING: THE BATTLEGROUND OF OUR TIMES?

> *This year's Chiang Mai Design Week motto '**Connect, Restore and Move Forward Together**' clearly underlines the state's bright and cheerful worldview, aimed at lulling the people with smooth entertainment, and chic and chill end-of-year festivities. The launch of this festival without care for recurrent local problems is a scam to sedate people, and turn them away from political and social problems, wash themselves of the exhaustion and hardship of daily lives, and step into a fantasy world advertised by the state.*
> *(Artn't, 2021)*

These words from the *Anti-Design Design Week Manifesto* are written by *Artn't*, a Chiang Mai-based collective aiming to use art as a means to challenge the authoritarian powers that be in Thailand (see also: Prachatai, 2021). The manifesto accompanies various actions aimed at hijacking—or 'jamming' as they call it—the Chiang Mai Design Week in order to unveil its political function. The image accompanying the manifesto leaves little doubt about *Artn't*'s stance: superimposed on mash-ups of the Chiang Mai Design Week name—'Design Weak, Design't Week, Desire Weird'—a tagline states that 'this festival is for advertisement purposes only' (https://www.facebook.com/artntist). It is this tagline, in the official Design Week typeset and colours, that *Artn't* has brought to various locations around town, in order to photobomb shots with visiting dignitaries. Or, as the caption for two such photos on the group's Facebook page reads: "Thank you to the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Energy for taking a photo with our sign". *Artn't* similarly photobombed the official opening of the Design Week with an anti-'112' poster, which, as we will see, references Thailand's strict royal defamation law (Image 1).

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IMAGE I During the official opening of the Chiang Mai Design Week a member of *Artn't* stands on the first-floor gallery holding up a sign, in the official Design Week visual style, protesting the royal defamation law, known as Article 112 (Photo by Artn't, December 2021).

The Chiang Mai Design Week action is just one example of a rapidly growing list of—often ironic—political interventions by *Artn't* and other grassroots collectives in Thailand, aimed at criticising the views on art and culture of the Thai state and of Thai corporations. As we will see, with others, *Artn't* is highly critical of Thailand's formal contemporary art institutions, which in their view are at best quite irrelevant and at worst complicit to the functioning of states and corporations. Illustrating that in our times of radical appropriation the cultural domain has become a core battlefield for politics (Kupferman-Sutthavong et al., 2021), the collective instead aims to redirect contemporary art practices towards counter-hegemonic resistance. Following the first chapter to this book as well as a companion piece to this chapter elsewhere (Wissink & Van Meeteren, 2022), we suggest that the literature on the common(s) provides a useful lens for an analysis of these politics of contemporary art in Thailand.

As has been widely acknowledged, the literature on the common(s) consists of various strands, each with their own assumptions and critical potential (e.g., Dardot & Laval, 2019; Volont, 2020). In this chapter, we are especially interested in one relatively recent strand in this literature that presents commoning as a third way of social organising, next to the state and market and which highlights its potential to "reassert participatory control over the urban commonwealth" (Volont & Smets, 2022). In recent years, this literature has payed increased attention to 'cultural commoning' as well (e.g., Borchi, 2018; Dockx & Gielen, 2018; Mollona, 2021; Sollfrank et. al., 2020). Following Antonio Gramsci's rejection of the idea that culture as part of the 'superstructure' merely mirrors transformations in the economic 'base' (see also Dockx & Gielen, 2018; Lijster, 2017), this interest reflects the conviction that culture has become a core battlefield for social struggles over domination, and—crucially—a place where structural social change can be initiated (Mouffe, 2018; Nagle, 2017; Thompson, 2016). This chapter is firmly positioned within that literature.

THREE REMARKS ON CULTURAL COMMONING

The idea that cultural commoning is inherently political is also at the core of the first chapter to this book by Lijster, Volont & Gielen. The authors start from the observation that "in contrast to 'natural' phenomena (like forests, drinking water) [the] 'artificial' commons depend in their very being on sharing and circulation" (p. 17). However, they also stress that cultural commons are continuously enclosed and appropriated, in order to accommodate value extraction and exploitation. Fortunately, in their mind there is hope. Just like factory workers developed a 'class consciousness' and started to organise against industrial capitalism, today's citizens are also claiming their 'right to the city'. According to Lijster, Volont & Gielen, artists and cultural organisations within the more narrowly defined cultural domain play a crucial role in these counter-hegemonic mobilisations. For while they have been complicit in the production of the current urban crisis, they can also act as a counterforce. Public mobilisation takes guts and daring and groups need to be 'loaded' to take to the streets: "Our thesis is (...) that both culture and urban cultural infrastructure such as theatres, concert halls, culture clubs, festivals and museums play a constitutive role in the charging of civil action and commoning practices" (p. 25). In these cultural spaces diverse groups of strangers temporarily share experiences. The affective bonds that are thus created provide the energy that can turn residents into active citizens and transform consumers into commoners.

In this chapter, we aim to 'talk to' and contribute to this discussion on the importance of cultural commoning for political action, on the basis of three remarks. First, we argue that it is important to clarify the nature of society without state and market. Our position aligns with Mouffe, who takes issue with perspectives on the common—in her view present in many texts—that postulate "a conception of multiplicity that is free from negativity and antagonism" (Mouffe, 2018: 55). Similarly, for Berlant (2016) "[t]he recently 'resuscitated' fantasy of the commons articulates many desires for a social world unbound by structural antagonism". Hall (2020) meanwhile argues that "[c]ontrary to the impression sometimes given in writing on the commons, achieving a unity, harmony or 'oneness' is not what creating commons is actually about". Taking issue with views that "foreshadow a transparent society from which antagonisms have disappeared" (Laclau & Mouffe, 1985: 4), Mouffe argues that the public sphere will always be a "battlefield on which hegemonic projects confront one another, with no possibility of a final reconciliation" (Mouffe, 2018: 93). She adds that 'commoning' practices are important, as long as they are based on a political model that recognises that society is divided and that every order is hegemonically structured (ibid.: 69-70). While this antagonistic perspective acknowledges that the 'artificial' cultural common results from sharing and circulation—as was argued in the first chapter of this book—it also suggests there are boundaries to sharing and circulation relating to subcultures and cultural oppositions. And while some of these subcultures are characterised by openness and inclusion, others might be more exclusionary and de facto, function as 'clubs'. In short, the inclusivity of a common is an empirical question.

Secondly, and related, this means that the role of artists and cultural organisations has to be understood within this setting of hegemonic struggle. According to the first chapter to this book, various artists and cultural organisations are complicit to the emergence of our current urban crisis. However, they also stress that artists and cultural organisations can contribute to resistance to states and markets. In this context, Mouffe (2013) stresses that artistic practices can play an important role in counter-hegemonic struggles through their capacity to support the emergence of alternative subjectivities; and Staal (2017, 2019) pleads for a 'propaganda art' of the left as a basis for the assembly of a new 'us'. However, as Nagle (2017) shows in her analysis of online culture, leaderless mass movements can point in many directions, might not be inclusive, and could support the existing hegemony as well. As a consequence—and in contrast to the seemingly blanket belief in the role of culture and urban cultural infrastructure for the charging of civil action and commoning practices—we argue for the need to critically analyse the actual functioning of artists and cultural institutions like museums and their position vis-à-vis hegemony (McKee, 2017; Raicovich, 2021; Wright, 2013). We need to understand under which conditions, and in which ways they support counter-hegemonic action, as well as the nature of that counter-hegemony and the extent of its inclusivity. And we need to be aware that common cultural practices can support the existing hegemony as well.

A third issue relates to the precise mechanisms through which artistic practices can play a counter-hegemonic role. Elsewhere, following Mouffe (2013), we have stressed that critical artistic practices do not just work through the unveiling of a 'true reality' that is hidden by a false consciousness (Kupferman-Sutthavong et al., 2021). Not only is such 'unveiling' critical art often politically inconsequential; it can also be easily appropriated—as is for instance illustrated by the strategy of 'total curation' behind the corporate-organised Bangkok Art Biennale (Van Meeteren & Wissink, 2020). The first chapter to this book instead highlights the transformative role of affect, stressing the importance of mutual experiences amongst strangers in cultural institutions for the 'loading' of a public. In a different framing, Mouffe (2013) similarly points at the importance of affect for the counter-hegemonic agency of art. We now wonder if such affective agency is really located in all cultural institutions, and we question if affect is the only mechanism at work.

In answering these questions, one cue can be found in McKee's (2017: 26) argument that the transformative nature of artistic practice might not lay in "expressing a radical tendency within the established institutions of the art system (…) but rather when it takes on an 'organizing function' in the creation of a new collective assemblage of authorship, audience, and distribution networks embedded in political struggle". Following Graeber (2009), McKee (2017: 16) suggests that this compositional step takes the form of 'creative direct action', as "action undertaken autonomously without permission from any mediating power – such as a political party or an art institution – in which the ruling order is challenged even as a new world is 'prefigured' in the

action itself". Remarkably, such 'prefiguration' is at the core of much recent writing on the transformative potential of artistic practice (e.g., Hall, 2020; Lütticken, 2020; Van Heeswijk et al., 2021). In their discussion of commoning practices in the art field, García Díaz & Gielen (2018) stress that organising is an important element of prefiguration. Following these arguments, we suggest that affect plays an important role in artistic practices, but that only in some cases—often outside formal institutions—it contributes to counter-hegemonic political mobilisation; and in cases where it does, the 'organising function' of practitioners might play an important additional role.

CONTEMPORARY ART PRACTICES IN THAILAND

Starting from these observations, here we reflect on the counter-hegemonic potential of contemporary art practices in Thailand. These practices have developed in the context of a decades-long hegemonic struggle, that has resulted in repeated, often-bloody, street protests and recurrent coup d'états (Chotpradit, 2017; Van Meeteren & Wissink, 2020; Wissink & Van Meeteren, 2022). At the core of this hegemonic struggle are radically opposing views of the Thai nation (Chachavalpongpun, 2014; Ferrara, 2015; Montesano et al., 2012). The dominant or hegemonic view centres on three pillars: an imagined uniform Thai society, bound by ethnolinguistic homogeneity and 'Thainess' (Connors, 2005); a Buddhist religion; and a monarchy, protected by strict laws, like the '112' royal defamation law and the Computer Crime Act (Isager & Ivarsson, 2010). According to this view, it is the task of the state—heavily leaning on the bureaucracy, monarchy and army—to educate people and defend the imagined Thai unity against internal and external threats (Baker & Phongpaichit, 2017: 282-284). The institutions that have resulted from this hegemonic view have produced dramatic economic and political inequalities. This hegemony has been challenged from two sides. On the one hand, economic conglomerates have rapidly gained influence on the functioning of the state, while leaving the core-ideas of national unity, religion and the monarchy intact (Ibid.). On the other hand, situating sovereignty in the people rather than the palace, an egalitarian popular nationalism has challenged the heart of the existing hegemony. Embracing the nation's diversity, in this view the state should improve the well-being of all, and diminish the enormous political, social and economic inequalities (Ibid.: 282-284). Reflections on the role of the monarchy and resistance to regulations like '112' have become an important part of this counter-hegemonic agenda, and—as we will see—have been central in the political protests of recent years.

Contemporary art practices in Thailand operate within this context of hegemonic struggle (Van Meeteren & Wissink, 2020). This has translated into the emergence of three distinct strands of contemporary art practices (Van Meeteren & Wissink, 2020). For decades, the Thai state has perceived—first modern and later contemporary—art as a means to mould public culture in the 'right' way and to educate citizens (Teh, 2017). It developed institutions like Silpakorn University, National Exhibitions and National

Artists that were granted a monopoly on the signification and expression of Thai culture befitting the views of the dominant hegemony. Since the 1980s an alternative art scene has started to develop as well (Teh, 2018; Van Meeteren & Wissink, 2020). While newly instituted art schools—at Chiang Mai University and elsewhere—and study periods abroad brought students into conversation with alternatives to the state's views of art, new art spaces provided platforms for a variety of practices, supporting imaginations of another Thailand. According to Teh (2018), art was therefore increasingly wrested free from control by the 'Silpakorn system', the system of state centred institutions with Silpakorn University at its core, that had for long exercised an iron grip on all facets of Thai art practices. Meanwhile, the Thai corporate world has started to engage with contemporary art as well, on the back of the discovery of its potential for stimulating consumption and enriching real estate. This has coincided with the emergence of a new generation of contemporary art visitors, for whom consumerist imaginations of the 'good life' are aspirational.

IMAGE 2 Standing in front of the Democracy Monument in Bangkok, a protester holds the sign 'Rirkrit is not here', written in the recognisable style of Rirkrit Tiravanija, one of the most well-known Thai artists internationally, demonstrating the irrelevance of the formal Thai art world for the current protests (Photo by Natthapol Klaharn, March 2021).

In view of the embeddedness of these three strands of contemporary art production and presentation in the state, society and the corporate world respectively, we have suggested elsewhere that the literature on the common and its opposition to both state and

corporations is highly relevant for an analysis of the contemporary art field in Thailand (Wissink & Van Meeteren, 2022). After all, while the 'art of the state' aims to appropriate art as a means to educate citizens and teach the 'right' culture in line with hegemonic views of Thailand's existing power relations, the 'post-political' art of corporations aims to appropriate art for commercial gain. Critical of the 'unprofessional', 'old-fashioned' efforts of the art of the state, representatives of this corporate perspective present it as the only viable alternative (Poshyananda, 2021). However, while individual works in corporate-sponsored exhibitions can certainly have a critical edge, as for instance artistic director Poshyananda is happy to point out in the context of 'his' Bangkok Art Biennale, this is easily neutralised through curatorial strategies that prevent the emergence of any real discussion (Van Meeteren & Wissink, 2020). This post-political approach thereby ends up supporting the existing hegemony as well. Meanwhile, self-organised art initiatives seem to align with the idea of cultural commoning, as a sphere of social organisation distinct from both state and market. We have for instance analysed the Bangkok Biennial as an example of a commoning practice that deliberately took position against the usual top-down organisational model of the Thai contemporary art world, thus adding a patchwork of common art spaces as pockets of resistance to Bangkok's cultural landscape (see Wissink & Van Meeteren, 2022).

In line with our three remarks, the different attitudes vis-à-vis hegemony stemming from these three strands of art production and presentation confirm that it is crucial to acknowledge that only some contemporary art practices support the 'loading' of publics for counter-hegemonic action (Image 2). This observation becomes even more pertinent when taking a closer look at common art practices. Especially, we argue that while many common practices might support counter-hegemonic action—we will analyse three examples of this below—at the same time we should recognise that others might instead support state practices and the underlying hegemony. In other words, common art practices are 'ideologically flexible'. In this context, it is noteworthy that vigilante groups have played an important role in many of Thailand's most problematic historic political events in which anti-state protesters were forcefully repressed (Baker & Phongpaichit, 2017: 191-195). The underlying fragmentation of 'the public' also marks common organising. As a result, some common art practices might support the existing hegemony and function to 'load' a public to support repressive, rather than emancipatory, practices.

Art Lane is one example of a common contemporary art practice aligned with Thai hegemony (Chotpradit, 2017). It consisted of a collection of creative initiatives in public space, aiming to support the *Bangkok Shutdown* protest movement of 2013 and 2014 (Image 3). Organised by a network of artists and cultural workers, the common nature of *Art Lane* seems beyond doubt. However, the protest movement that it supported was organised by the *People's Democratic Reform Committee* (PDRC), and it aimed to replace the democratically elected Yingluck Shinawatra government by an unelected 'People's Council'.

IMAGE 3 Artist Sutee Kunavichayanont produces spray painted t-shirts and posters during *Art Lane*, an artist-led event in the PDRC-organised *Bangkok Shutdown* protests. These objects were later displayed as part of the installation *Thai Uprising* in the Gwangju Museum of Art (Photo anonymous, January 2014).

Art Lane not only supported this cause; it provided a platform to sell artworks and donate the resulting funds to the anti-democratic PDRC protests as well. Eventually, it thereby helped to instigate the May 2014 military coup, which resulted in an army-run government, a rewriting of the constitution, and a later formation of the current government, after highly problematic elections. It reminds us that repressive political practices in Thailand have considerable support in society; and that common art practices can have a repressive rather than emancipatory character as well. To add insult to injury, the installation *Thai Uprising* by Sutee Kunavichayanont, which comprised of t-shirts and posters with slogans of the PRDC protests from *Art Lane*, was later included in the exhibition *The Truth to Turn it Over* in the Gwangju Museum of Art in South Korea in 2016. Explicitly organised in commemoration of the popular Gwangju Uprising against military dictatorship in May 1980, this resulted in widespread condemnation in counter-hegemonic art circles in Thailand (ibid.). With this example firmly in mind, over the coming pages we aim to analyse three counter-hegemonic common practices. We will discuss the characteristics of counter-hegemonic cultural commoning in Thailand; and we will address the mechanisms through which the artists involved have tried to instigate change.

ARTN'T

Artn't is a collective of students and recent graduates in art, design and philosophy from Chiang Mai University in Northern Thailand. The group, which we have already encountered at the start of this chapter, was formed at the end of 2020. Starting with a handful of members, it has since grown organically, helped by an increased visibility in the media and on campus. The group's practice consists of a mix of performances in public space and what they call 'actions': unannounced interventions in the city, that aim to 'jam', 'bomb' or 'disrupt' the status quo. These actions target institutions and authorities that in their eyes are problematic, especially in relation to the (art) education system and the monarchy. One of their first actions is instructive for *Artn't*s approach. In January 2021, they printed the text of Section 112 of the Thai Criminal Code, the repressive royal defamation law, on toilet paper rolls which they used to 'bomb' public spaces in Chiang Mai. As one of the members explains, this action aimed

to "decrease the power of that official paper". The wish to repeal '112' and reform the monarchy—as we have seen two important demands in Thailand's recent protests—are recurring themes in the projects of the group. And while their actions often have an ironic, tongue-in-cheek character, they are certainly not without personal risk. Two of *Artn't*s founding members are facing serious legal charges for allegedly violating Section 112 because a well-known right-wing political activist and serial complaint-maker reported their works for a student exhibition at Chiang Mai University to the authorities.

As the name suggests, *Artn't* has an ambivalent attitude towards art and its formal institutions. While the members recognise the efficacy of the tools of artistic practices in communicating with a public, they also rail against certain aspects of the art system. In the authoritarian setting of Thailand, they want to unsettle conservative ideas that equate art with beauty. They use their work to resist power and to "reveal the problems in society". As one member suggest, *Artn't* doesn't want to make "friendly art" and it "doesn't really trust the old platform of art". To circumvent these obstacles, *Artn't* takes its performances to the streets, for example to Tha Pae gate in Chiang Mai's historic centre, which often functions as a stage for protests. Here they organise visceral, durational performances referencing both the dark pages of recent Thai history and current injustices. The public aspect of their practice is important, as it accommodates not having to compromise in the message. After all, "there are differences in the function of public space and formal art spaces, where you maybe have to join the system and then you cannot do the things that you want to do". But just as importantly, in public space they reach a wide variety of people and "expand the audience" beyond "the community of art": "[w]e have to push the message to the people who just bump up to us. I think that this is important because many people just work and go home, work and go home; they do not have time to go to an art centre." As such they use art and its affective qualities "to create another standard in the public consciousness, and to push the boundary" of what is deemed acceptable and what is up for discussion, in matters past, present and future.

Unsurprisingly, the actions of *Artn't* have attracted the attention of various authorities. In immediate dealings with the police, the ambiguity of their practice has its advantages and they can make strategic use of the idea of art as an autonomous practice, one plane removed from the everyday. This is a familiar tactic, often used by Thai artists treading the same political terrain and one that until now has worked reasonably well. But when the system in its entirety decides to strike back with arrests and charges, the consequences can be severe, illustrated by the remark—heard more often in the Thai art scene—that "our art is not talking with a curator, but talking with a lawyer". This makes it all the more remarkable that several members of *Artn't* walked willingly into a police station in early 2021 to press charges against the Dean of the Faculty of Fine Arts, when their works and those of other students in the above-mentioned exhibition at Chiang Mai University were destroyed and removed from campus at his orders. To some this

might reek of youthful hubris. However, in the authoritarian and hierarchical setting of Thailand, it is a potentially transformative and radical act to demand to be treated justly, bringing to mind Graeber's (2009: 203) idea of direct action as "the insistence, when faced with structures of unjust authority, on acting as if one is already free."

FREEARTS (ศิลปะปลดแอก)

FreeArts consists of a group of Thai cultural practitioners who have consciously embedded their practice in the Thai political protests of recent years. This network emerged in Bangkok in the summer of 2020, when a small group of initiators started to discuss how they could help the protests. Not impressed by the functioning of the 'boring' formal art world, which according to one of the initiators mainly caters to the rich and those with an art background, the group was critical of the role of artists. In their opinion those artists used the political situation in their work but at the same time rarely offered their skills to help protesters in the street. Tapping into their personal networks, the initiators wanted to change this. With a name that referenced similar initiatives in other sectors of Thai society at the time ('Free Youth', 'Free People', etc.), the resulting core group of practitioners started to offer their skills to support actions of protest groups. Their first project in September 2020 was 'Act สิ Art'—a one-day protest 'festival' in front of the Bangkok Art & Culture Centre (BACC) where the typical ingredients of Thai outdoor markets—music, food and stalls with knick-knacks—were mixed with protest activities organised by like-minded groups, including Speedy Grandma, Tokyo Hot and BBQ International Gallery. Other projects soon followed and more people offered to join. Soon, *FreeArts* consisted of 20-25 people, with diverse creative backgrounds, including music, visual art, theatre, and illustration.

For months on end, *FreeArts* organised a stream of projects. With protest activities around the clock, the group met virtually every day—and often after a long day of protesting. Each time they would start with the message that protest groups were planning to highlight and discuss how they could best support that message, eventually deciding their actions through votes. Importantly, they also had to see who would be available to execute the project, as there was no budget and everybody also had other commitments. As one member recounts, "it is really, really difficult (...) because (...) you feel very fucking tired. And you want to be left out. (...) But then you are also so, so angry about the injustice." Running on this emotion, *FreeArts* organised a wide variety of projects embedded in the protests, such as communal chalk drawing on the streets, paint ball throwing at images of government officials, silk screen printing, stencil spraying, festive markets, music events, and performances (https://www.facebook.com/FreeArtsTH).

One example of a more elaborate project is 'Free our Friends' (ปล่อยเพื่อนเรา), a concerted action focussed on liberating protest leaders—especially those who had

dared to speak out against the monarchy on stage—that had been arrested and refused bail. *FreeArts* produced a range of images, posters, stencils and stickers and organised related actions. Another example is the performance *#99dead* at Sanam Luang, the large field next to the royal palace and Thammasat University, the location of the massacre of 6 October 1976 (https://sanamratsadon.org/2021/08/11/99-dead/). *#99dead* commemorates the many deaths resulting from the April and May 2010 crackdown by the army, which ended Redshirt protests in Bangkok (Chotpradit, 2021). The words "someone died here" (ที่นี่มีคนตาย), shouted during the performance, referred to earlier public enactments of the massacre in 2014 and 2015. They also formed the basis for another project in April and May 2021 (Image 4; https://www.freearts.net/someonediedhere). However, by that time, many *FreeArts* members had been charged for participation in perceived unlawful activities. In combination with the downturn of protest activities due to COVID-19 and the resulting economic hardships this has meant that for now the group has taken a more backstage position.

IMAGE 4 For *FreeArts*' project 'Someone Died Here', over the course of the months April and May 2021, participants represented the many people killed by the military during the 2010 protests on the date, time and place of their deaths. The website *www.freearts.net/someonediedhere* tells their stories (Screengrab from the *FreeArts* Facebook page, April/May 2021).

FreeArts has deliberately embedded its practice in the anti-government movement. Partly, it has helped to make the protests more appealing—or less scary—by creating a 'good' atmosphere, thus attracting potential protesters. Partly, it used art as a tool to communicate the messages behind the protests and to engage protesters so that they take ownership and become an active part of the event and the messages involved. And partly, it staged various projects—including performances—that use affect to communicate these messages and 'load' the protesters, although always in a deliberate direction. Their position within this movement has also meant that the organisers have had to adjust their practice in important ways. In contrast to art projects in formal presentation spaces, they have had to be pragmatic in view of time-constraints and the

limited number of 'hands on deck'. They have also had to keep the potential risk for participants in mind, both in relation to the legality of their projects as well as potential police violence. They have also had to balance their own perceptions of quality with the efficacy of their projects. Or, as one of the members recalls, "when we are in a meeting, sometimes we think like 'yeah, this concept is good' (...) but then sometimes it is too complicated to work in the protest". Alternatively, members might think that a proposal "look[s] really clichéd (...) but then sometimes it works". In other words, the relationship between the artist as author and the audience as spectator is fundamentally changed, a point to which we will return in the conclusion.

WE TAKE CARE OF OURSELVES GROUP (กลุ่มคนดูแลกันเอง)

The *We Take Care of Ourselves Group* is one of several grass-roots volunteer groups established in response to the Thai government's ill-conceived COVID-19 lockdown (https://www.facebook.com/noonecaresbangkok/). Set up in early June 2021 by people with a creative background, at first sight the activities of the group do not have an 'art' component: there are no objects, no publics, no events. Instead, people are helping other people, namely construction workers—both Thai and migrants from neighbouring countries—who became entrapped for an initial thirty days under guard of the police and military, following the discovery of COVID-19 clusters in several of Bangkok's 600 worker camps. These temporary camps are customarily erected by real estate developers on empty plots of land to house construction site day-labourers and their families. After their lock-up, these workers were left without income, food, medication, and other necessities, as both real estate developers and the government refused to take responsibility.

The *We Take Care of Ourselves Group* was one of various community responses. Initiated by a handful of people, it started operating out of an artists' studio, supplying food to camps in its immediate vicinity and rallying for donations via social media. The initiative grew bigger when the group managed to obtain a list with locations of all Bangkok worker camps from the government (Image 5). Soon, an infrastructure was put in place to match donations and volunteers, with camps in need. When immediate food shortages were dealt with, attention shifted towards medical care. With authorities following a 'Thai first' attitude in response to its general failure to keep up with the rising number of COVID-19 cases, the volunteer group organised doctors available for tele-consults, matched them with COVID-19 patients in the worker camps and made deals with the government to be allowed to deliver scarce COVID-19 medication to the camps through motorbike couriers. Throughout, the group worked on a voluntary basis and where possible, they teamed up with organisations with a similar commons ethos, like the *Workers' Union* and the *Freedom Rider Union*. Later the group also expanded their medical support beyond the boundaries of the worker camps.

IMAGE 5 Graphics by the *We Take Care of Ourselves Group* accompanying their manifesto (Images by *We take Care of Ourselves Group*, July 2021).

While the actions of the *We Take Care of Ourselves Group* transformed from crisis management to more controlled operations, the group also started to stake political claims. Under the motto 'We Are All Workers', in July 2021 they released a manifesto, drawing attention to the authorities' neglect of workers in camps (Image 5). Acutely aware of the power of their actions to expose government failings, they pre-emptively deflected any potential commons-fix attitudes by the state, putting their recognisable logo on distributed goods and stressing in all of their communications that: "[i]n all this, we continue to insist that the public service we are providing here is the duty of the government; it should not impose the burden on the public to take care of themselves as it currently does" (see https://www.facebook.com/noonecaresbangkok/). In their communication with real estate developer-employed camp managers, the group also started to insist that they urge their employers to take responsibility; a transformative act in itself in a setting where demanding things of higher-ups is difficult. Some of the participants have also started to explore ways to translate the group's platform into broader political action.

Emerging from the fertile social grounds of art organising, the *We Take Care of Ourselves Group* have (through their actions), been making use of skills that were acquired in the self-organised part of the cultural sector, where budgets are always tight and everyone does everything from start to finish with the help of like-minded others. Meanwhile, due to contributions to the group being made next to other commitments, the time left for art commoning has been seriously restricted. Or, as one of the organisers explained regarding concurrent art events, "I just shut off, I felt just like: nope sorry… there is another thing that I want to care about more." At first sight, therefore, it seems logical to contrast the actions of this group to art organising. However, on second thoughts,

maybe both types of organising—art and social alike—are informed by the same anti-hierarchical attitude, propelled by a deep-held belief in a more just society in which more people can thrive. In remarkable similarity to *Artn't* and *FreeArts*, both the ethos and actions of this initiative are driven by the conviction that you don't have to ask or wait for permission, and that you can instil a sense of agency in people, empowering them to speak for themselves. Looking at it like this, the distinction between art and non-art might not be so important. While coming *from* the art field, this initiative does not function *in* the art field. It operates on what Wright (2013) calls a '1:1 scale', whereby focus shifts from spectatorship linked to autonomous art as representations in galleries, museums or other art contexts, towards usership without the need to 'perform' art competencies; an observation that brings us to our conclusion.

COUNTER-HEGEMONIC CONTEMPORARY ART PRACTICES IN THAILAND: ORGANISING THE 'NOT-YET'?

In Thailand's highly polarised social and political setting, contemporary art practices play an integral role in the hegemonic struggle over the role and organisation of the state in society. With their explicit or implicit support, state-led and corporate-led practices are part of the existing hegemony, functioning to maintain it. The potential of common art practices for counter-hegemonic action has therefore become the prime focus of this chapter. In view of the fragmented and polarised nature of civil society in Thailand, with our first two remarks we have stressed that these practices, developed separate from state and market, reflect Thailand's hegemonic struggle as well. In contrast to efforts to create a more inclusive society, some common art practices support the existing repressive hegemony, and we discussed *Art Lane* as an example of this. Mindful of Mouffe's (2018) plea for a 'new left populism' and Staal's (2017; 2019) insistence on the need for a left-wing propaganda art, our analysis illustrates that while contemporary art practices certainly function to 'load' publics in support of civil action, the direction of that action and its position vis-à-vis hegemony and the related inclusiveness of social practices varies: the common is 'ideologically flexible'.

Following this observation, we have discussed three common practices with counter-hegemonic intent. How do these practices support the emergence of the 'common city'; and what are the mechanisms at play in this process? In response to these questions, we draw two conclusions. First, the organisers discussed in this chapter are highly critical of formal art institutions. To be clear, as McKee (2017: 12) stresses, participation in such practices should in itself probably not be moralistically condemned. At the same time, McKee adds that in view of the constraints within the formal art system, it is questionable if these practices will have a counter-hegemonic effect. Instead, counter-hegemonic agency is more likely to be located elsewhere: on the one hand, in the

independent common art spaces, like those created by the Bangkok Biennial, which have contributed to a wider infrastructure of counter-hegemonic action (Wissink & Van Meeteren, 2022); and on the other hand, in the actions of practitioners with art competencies in social practices and social movements outside the art field. Stressing that autonomy has been an obstacle for art's potential to have consequences beyond the aesthetic realm, it's not surprising therefore that Wright (2013) observes that practitioners are leaving what he calls 'the sandbox of art': "Turning away from pursuing art's *aesthetic function*, many practitioners are redefining their engagements with art, less in terms of *authorship* than as users of artistic competence, insisting that art foster more robust use values and gain more bite in the real" (Wright, 2013: 1). According to Staal (2017: 10), in this role, cultural practitioners can "help formulate the new campaigns, the new symbols, and the popular poetry needed to bolster the emergence of a radical collective imaginary. In that process, [they] can also begin to devise the new infrastructures—the parallel parliaments, the stateless embassies, the transdemocratic unions—needed to establish the institutions that will make a new emancipatory governance a reality." The art organisers in this chapter clearly are part of this mobilisation of practitioners outside of the field of art.

Staal's argument, with its insistence on the creation of new infrastructures, begins to imagine the mechanisms through which change might become a reality as well. For while both ideas and affect certainly play a role in this process, as García Díaz & Gielen (2018: 176) rightly observe, "ideas alone cannot produce real social changes" and affect by itself will not change the world either. After all, as Staal (2021: 294) has argued elsewhere, "[e]galitarian life forms do not appear. They are trained, organised, and assembled for and through the common struggle that make collective worlds imaginable and possible". Next to ideas and affect, what is needed for this is a significant dose of organising. The organisers in this chapter have certainly started to be involved in the organisation of the 'not-yet' (Van Heeswijk et al., 2021). With their focus on the prefiguration of more a just world, and the organisation of practices and infrastructures that fit that bill, their practices have shifted from 'representing' struggles to 'becoming' a tool in the struggle (Wright, 2013). And it is in this context also, that it becomes increasingly questionable if the distinction between art and its outside is productive at all. In this light, the similarities between the practices of the *We Take Care of Ourselves Group* and the other art organisers is not at all surprising. They all employ their art competencies but perform them in different ways. Looking at it like this, maybe the prolonged and often invisible, unauthored work of practitioners as organisers of alternative possible worlds, rather than affect, should be at the forefront of attention when discussing counter-hegemonic cultural practices.

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CHAPTER 9

INTERLOCKING VALUE CYCLES IN MUSIC ORGANISATIONS: TOWARDS ORGANISATIONAL AND CREATIVE COMPLEMENTARITY

Arne Herman & Walter van Andel

For many decades, the symphony orchestra has been struggling with what looks like an existential crisis. An overview of some of the world's leading symphony orchestras sketches a general picture of increasing precariousness (Flanagan, 2012; Ramnarine, 2018), as the field has suffered severe blows from austerity measures. Most prominently, large-scale and small-scale organisations alike are trying to overcome drastic cutbacks in subsidies, reaching an alarming low in the years after the financial crisis of 2008 (Silerova, 2012). Apart from financial sorrows, other factors contribute to the precarious situation for the symphony orchestra as well: audience numbers are decreasing as fast as their average age is increasing, and since the concert house needs to be satisfied with a modest place among various others, often more muscular players in the creative industry, the cultural significance of a seemingly antiquated institution is being put into question. As a result, the limited financial resources, as well as the audiences, have to be divided among the various players, each of whom formulates its own answer to the question as to what place the orchestra should occupy within society and to what extent that society should support them financially. Accordingly, the demand for sustainability in the musical landscape is urgent: how can music organisations survive in the long run without compromising their artistic pertinence? This question exposes the main challenge for arts organisations: the alignment of seemingly conflicting values of aesthetic sustainability and organisational sustainability (Zembylas, 2004) is far from self-evident.

This chapter explores how the current landscape of music production as a whole can be strengthened in its quest for long-term sustainability and legitimacy by the introduction of new organisations to the field that take a different approach in their organisational choices. In particular, this chapter will introduce an analysis on the importance within the landscape of two alternatively structured music organisations that centralise different organisational design principles. These differing organisational design principles revolve around applying modularity and commoning in order to

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unlock room for artistic autonomy. The analysis highlights how such alternative design principles allow the organisations to withdraw from traditional value cycles, while at the same time providing an added value to the orchestra landscape as a whole.

THE ORCHESTRA CRISIS

The grim picture of the traditionally organised orchestra field that has been sketched above, illustrates that the obvious sore spots are merely derivative of a broader orchestra crisis that primarily revolves around legitimacy (Herman, 2019). In contrast to most American orchestras, the lion's share of European orchestras rely on government funding for the majority of their budgets (Flanagan, 2008). This grants the organisations considerable financial security, allowing them to have musicians and staff on payroll, with fixed labour contracts. Not depending on ticket sales, orchestras are able to organise their concert seasons well in advance and develop a long-term programming policy. At the same time, however, this secure situation results in pressure to legitimise the organisation's huge claim on taxpayers' money.

Research shows that when an organisation's legitimacy is pressurised, a logic of predictability is favoured over uncertainty (Kraatz & Block, 2008; Kremp, 2010; Zembylas, 2004). In the orchestra landscape, the consequences of that rule of thumb manifest themselves in two areas. Firstly, risk aversion results in organisational rigidity and isomorphism (Glynn, 2000; 2002). In terms of organisational structure, more specifically, risk aversion has led orchestras to organising themselves in an increasingly similar manner, as a survival strategy, whereby collective legitimacy is drawn from uniformity (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983). Secondly, the credo of certainty over uncertainty manifests itself on the artistic domain. The more the relevance of orchestras is questioned, the more they rally around the same safe core repertoire. This standard repertoire, also called musical canon, consists of those musical works that have survived historical processes of selection, such as the symphonies of Mozart, Beethoven, Tchaikovsky and Brahms (Weber, 2001; 2008). Studies convincingly show that programming the musical canon generates more audiences, more revenue and therefore, more legitimacy (Durand & Kremp, 2015; Kremp, 2010; Osborne, 1999). Moreover, the aesthetic value of the musical canon is hardly put into question. As this repertoire has been put to the test of generations of aesthetic preferences, it is often regarded as the most representative expression of the art form (Goehr, 2002; Holoman, 2012). This fact, too, generates legitimacy, especially towards political subsidising bodies. In short, the twofold strategy of isomorphism results in a low incentive to innovate, for at least as long as a certain amount of subsidy is granted.

The downsides of that overall strategy have become painfully clear. In terms of organisations, a far-reaching segmentation of the field has occurred. Traditionally organised and subsidised symphony orchestras predominantly focus on the musical

canon, while specialised ensembles have claimed those portions of the musical repertoire that do not belong to the standardised musical canon, notably the pre-1800 and post-1950 repertoire. As a result of this segmentation of the field, many organisations have turned into echo-chambers, rendering them unable to break open the stalemate between the experimental and the traditional. In the same vein, this situation has turned artistic development into a risky endeavour. Programming a musical work that takes a creative course deviating from the aesthetic norm embodied by the musical canon, poses a great risk to an orchestra seeking legitimacy (Bergeron & Bohlman, 1992), and the financial consequences that go with creative experimentation can often not be afforded by smaller ensembles. As such, legitimacy pressures have, paradoxically, led to the creative stagnation of the field as a whole. A strategic and pragmatic strategy has influenced and constrained the development and offer of musical repertoires (Herman, 2019).

In and of itself, the business models of the orchestras that follow the logics as described above can work well in the short run. Literature states that for a business model to function well, it needs to form a logical mechanism which enables the organisation to create, deliver and capture value (e.g. Casadesus-Masanell & Ricart, 2010; Osterwalder & Pigneur, 2010; Zott & Amit, 2010). Moreover, Casadesus-Masanell and Ricart (2010: 199) state that business models of successful organisations "generate virtuous cycles, feedback loops that strengthen some components of the model at every iteration." This means that the deliberate strategic choices made by the organisation lead to consequences, which in turn facilitate and strengthen earlier, as well as future choices. To exemplify how this works in the case of orchestras, Figure 1 shows the simplified virtuous cycle for traditional orchestras, following the methodology of Casadesus-Masanell and Ricart (Casadesus-Masanell & Ricart, 2010: 199) "where underlined elements are choices and non-underlined elements are consequences."[25] The cycle starts from the premise that these organisations structure the orchestra as a fixed ensemble, with most musicians employed under permanent labour contracts, allowing the orchestras to bind musicians, making it possible to organise the required collective rehearsals, to achieve a high quality of performance, and to develop a long-term artistic policy. An important consequence of this choice, from an organisational point of view, is the high fixed costs involved with running the organisation and as a further consequence, the need for large audiences to recover these costs. This in turn leads to a tendency to avoid large creative risks that might deter mass audiences, leading to an often-taken approach of playing time-tested canonical works, as explained earlier. Besides avoiding deterring mass audiences, the choice of playing canonical works contributes to the orchestra's public profile as a serious and well-engrained orchestra, leading to legitimacy in the field, which makes them eligible for public subsidies, a form of financing these orchestras are usually open for, when given the chance. Consequently, the subsidies allow for stable structuring of the organisation, and stipulate norms on the (artistic)

25 The figure is a simplified and generic representation of the virtuous cycles generated by the business model of traditional orchestras. Different orchestras in different settings will stress different parts of this generic model.

activities the orchestra engages in. Such organisational rigidity, finally, is best served by a fixed group of participants, which further enables the use of permanent contracts, completing one loop of the virtuous logic cycle which grows stronger in every iteration. As the cycle is strengthened only by iteration, an important consequence of this value loop is that it provides very little incentive to innovate.

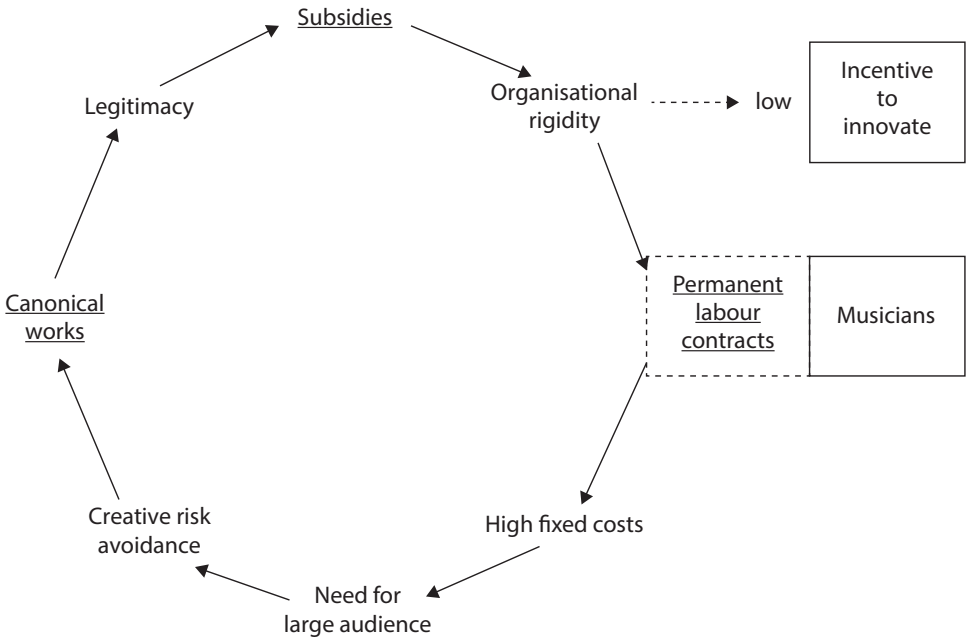

FIGURE 1 Traditional value cycle of an orchestra

This value cycle illustrates how traditional orchestras have put themselves in an organisationally secure but artistically, rather sterile position. As opportunities for artistic experimentation without harmful financial consequences have become scarce, new organisational models are being explored. This chapter explores two alternative organisations that have nested themselves within the landscape, to fill parts of the innovation void. Both alternatively governed organisations have survived the start-up phase and have attracted international attention from art organisations operating under pressure. As such, they can be argued to successfully challenge the field's dominant logic, in adopting a distinctive and novel approach towards organising and artistic programming.

The model of Splendor Amsterdam is based on an equal division of rights and responsibilities that resonates with commoning practices, while the Belgian orchestra Casco Phil draws on principles of complementarity and modularity to balance artistic urgency and financial feasibility without subsidies. Although the long-term impact

on the wider field and overall sustainability of these seminal initiatives remains to be demonstrated, an understanding of their novel approach to music production, programming, management and financing might help, firstly, to determine how these models ideally position themselves within the field and secondly, to understand how seemingly conflicting dynamics of organisational sustainability and artistic autonomy, may yet interlink.

CASCO PHIL

Since 2008, the Flanders-based orchestra Casco Phil unites freelance musicians in a modular orchestra that operates without subsidies. Casco Phil explicitly prioritises non-canonical repertoire, in order to be a valuable addition to the orchestra landscape in Flanders. To shape this bold artistic formula into an organisational form, Casco Phil made some specific choices regarding its business model. First of all, Casco Phil is a modular orchestra consisting exclusively of freelancers. Due to the fact that there are no fixed salaries and no expectations of musicians towards long-term employment, the orchestra can be booked in different line-ups. This choice has the dual advantage of allowing the programme to be tailored to the available budget, and of allowing a very broad repertoire, from chamber music to full-scale symphonic repertoire. Secondly, Casco Phil does not specifically aim for structural subsidies, although the organisation remains open to it. Anticipating a possible further demise of the subsidy system in Flanders, the orchestra explores alternative income streams. The lack of reporting obligations to the subsidiser also grants considerable freedom in terms of time allocation and no artistic or organisational compromises need to be made to the subsidiser. Finally, the orchestra takes advantage of its flexible structure, as it is able to realise projects at very short notice. The freelance nature of the musicians and management relieves the orchestra of the need to draw up a concert schedule far in advance. That way, unexpected opportunities can be scheduled at short notice, giving Casco Phil a competitive advantage over large orchestras that do rely on long-term programming. Casco Phil's distinctive model is primarily based on the principle of modularity, which allows the organisation to realise core values that deviate from the dominant logic, within a business model that has proven to be sustainable so far.

SPLENDOR AMSTERDAM

The second example of an alternative business model in the music sector concerns a concert hall in the city centre of Amsterdam. An organisation called Splendor Amsterdam provides 50 professional musicians from all backgrounds with a rehearsal, experimentation and concert space in an old bathhouse that has been transformed into a fully equipped music venue. What makes Splendor special is the fact that the building, as well as its entire governance, is both artistically and organisationally in the hands

of the 50 musicians themselves. Since all aspects of the organisation (from acquiring finances to musical programming) are shared among its 50 members, 'commoning' is an integral part of their model. Through their organisational decisions, Splendor is able to fully utilise the twofold character of a common good (De Angelis, 2017): on the one hand, Splendor exemplifies a use value for a plurality (by providing artistic freedom to all connected artists), and on the other hand, it requires a plurality claiming and sustaining the ownership of the common good. Together, these two elements form the core values of the Splendor model: a strive for complete artistic freedom and autonomy, and a collectively shared sense of ownership and responsibility.

In exchange for a start-up fee of €1,000, each musician received a key to the building, which is available to them at all times, schedule permitting. Above all else, Splendor wants to be a safe haven for musicians, where there are no obstacles to creation and no consequences to performance: there is no formal programming policy, and all kinds of repertoires are valued equally.

Through an organic process of trial and error, Splendor's core values have crystallised into specific business model choices. Because they enforce a strict no-programming policy, the Splendor musicians deliberately avoid the Dutch subsidy system which inevitably comes with conditions and responsibilities. Secondly, when new musicians are attracted, the diversity of musical backgrounds is always preserved. Experience taught them that jazz musicians, for example, tend to use the building in a different way than classical musicians, and composers again in a different way than pop musicians. Moreover, this heterogeneity ensures that there is an enormously broad artistic potential available. Creative and cross-over musical projects often emerge when various musicians happen to run into each other in the cafeteria. Finally, Splendor only engages musicians who have a fixed salary elsewhere. That way, Splendor minimises the need for market conformism in programming, thus developing a model in which experimentation remains more important than audience attendance.

ANALYSING THE ALTERNATIVE ORGANISATIONAL MODELS

Table 9.1 below shows an overview of the different components of the business models of both alternative cases. This table is structured by the dimensions of the business model concept as defined by Al-Debei and Avison (2010). These authors unified multiple viewpoints on the business model concept into four value dimensions which together make up the composition of a business model: 1) the value proposition ("A way that demonstrates the business logic of creating value for customers and/or to each party involved through offering products and services that satisfy the needs of their target segments"), 2) the value architecture ("An architecture for the organisation including its technological architecture and organisational infrastructure that allows the provisioning of products and services in addition to information flows"), 3) the value

network ("A way in which an organisation enables transactions through coordination and collaboration among parties and multiple companies"), and 4) value finance ("A way in which organisations manage issues related to costing, pricing, and revenue breakdown to sustain and improve its creation of revenue") (Al-Debei & Avison, 2010: 366).

		Casco Phil	Splendor
Value proposition	**Type**	**Orchestra**	**Venue**
	Core values	High Quality Artistic Experiment Accessibility	Artistic freedom High Quality Collaborative management
	Value proposition	To the **musicians:** – Artistic boundary pushing – Non-binding commitment To the **audience**: – Artistic experiments – Accessibility To the **organisers**: – On-demand formulas	To the **musicians:** – Complete artistic freedom – Key to the building – Diverse pool of musicians To the **audience**: – Artistic experiments – Affordable high-quality concerts – Interaction with musicians
Value architecture	Design principle	Modularity	Commons-based
	Decision making	Centralised	Decentralised
	Programming	Combination of canon + experimental	Open / unmoderated
Value finance	Income	'Stacked financing' – Ticketing – Corporate events	'Stacked financing' – Audience memberships – Ticketing – Hospitality
	Stance on subsidies	Open	Closed
Value network	Musicians	Flexible contracts, on-call	Closed group, no labour contract
	Audience	– Individual attendants – Corporate clients	– Members – Individual attendants

TABLE 1 Alternative Organisations Business Models

With regard to the value network, an interesting distinction can be made between both models. Whereas Casco Phil clearly benefits from, and even survives, by grace of a large network of musicians, sponsors and audiences, the Splendor model seems to be necessarily confined to its closed group of 50 partaking musicians. Low pressure for ticket incomes, which is an enormous asset from an artistic point of view, at the same time confines the

actual impact of the initiative, keeping it small-scale by necessity. This issue, intrinsic to the commons-based model, strongly resembles Elinor Ostrom's suggestion that commons-based practices indeed require a more or less closed-off community (Ostrom, 1990). In their isolation, both models seem to have their virtues and vices, making their interaction with their respective environments all the more relevant to look into (cf. infra).

Even though both organisations take on a widely different approach, similarities between both cases can also be distilled. To this effect, Figure 2 shows the simplified virtuous cycle for these alternative organisations. In this case, the logic starts from a decision not to hire musicians under permanent labour contracts, but rather remain flexible, leading to relatively low fixed costs. As a consequence, there is no permanent necessity for a large audience. This opens the possibility for artistic experiments that might not attract large crowds. Therefore, a notable option facilitated by this chain of consequences is the ability to play new repertoires. This, as a result, also grants the alternative organisations a form of legitimacy: legitimacy as an innovative organisation where artistic experimentation is possible. To further maximise the possibility for innovation, these organisations typically refrain from applying for subsidies as the stipulations that potentially come with this choice could push the organisations into a context of more institutionalisation, leaving less room for experimentation. As such, the organisations retain their flexibility, which makes the choice for flexible labour contracts even more logical. As is evident, an important consequence of this value loop therefore is that the choices and consequences within this virtuous cycle generate a high incentive to innovate.

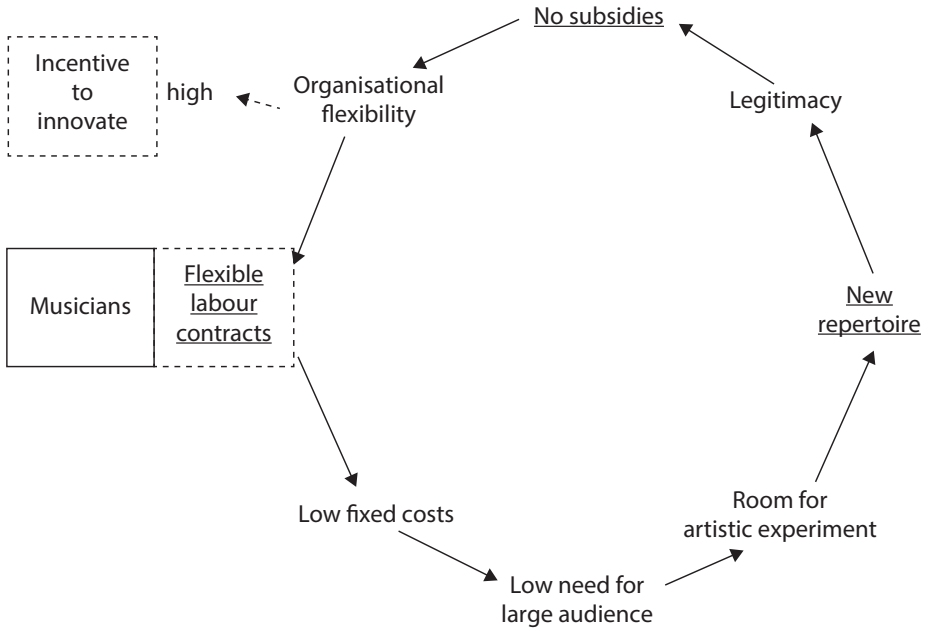

FIGURE 2 Innovative value cycle

INTERACTING VALUE LOOPS

As is evident, organisations do not operate in isolation of their surroundings, and inevitably interact with each other. The organisations as such are part of a larger landscape comprising different players, each with their own individual functioning. Often times, the different organisations that make up the landscape are in competition with each other on certain levels, be it for (scarce) resources such as high-level musicians, for audiences and corresponding income streams, for finite subsidies, or for a combination of aspects like these. In those cases, business models are often designed to strengthen one's own virtuous circle, while simultaneously weakening those of competitors. This makes one organisation's chances of long-term survival more robust, while making it more difficult for competitors to feed their own virtuous cycle.

Both virtuous value cycles that are exemplified above, of both the traditional and the alternative model, are effective in generating the desired effects and as they spin are able to continuously strengthen the components of the model in every iteration. As such, the long-term robustness of the business models seems to be nurtured. However, as Casadesus-Masanell and Ricart (2009: 5) indicate: "Once virtuous cycles get going, they take on a life of their own, … well-functioning virtuous cycles cannot be brought to a halt." This means that the models will continuously produce their virtues (respectively excellence in performing classical canonical works, and performing new repertoires), but will also continuously reaffirm their vices (respectively, stagnation of creativity and financial instability). Over time, the model's growing vices may overtake its virtues, creating a predominantly vicious cycle: "Vicious cycles are self-propagating complex chains of events with failures or negative consequences at one stage that generate increasingly serious failures or negative consequences at each subsequent stage" (Edgeman et al., 2020: 1,275).

The value cycles of both traditional orchestras and the innovative organisations contain a risk of transitioning from virtuous to vicious. In the case of the traditional orchestras, the virtuous value loop lacks an incentive to innovate, as playing recognised, canonical works reinforces their legitimacy. However, these ritualised practices have progressively alienated potential audiences from the art form and increasingly reinforce the pervasive anxiety that symphonic music has outlived its role. However, while slowly but surely diminishing the potential for artistic renewal within the industry, the virtuous value cycle does bring opportunities for stable employment and income for musicians in the industry. On the other hand, the value cycle of the innovative organisation also has an inherent and potentially more urgent potential for turning into a vice. While incentives to innovate are a predominant purpose of this cycle, a vice associated with it is that it has difficulties in providing long-term and stable employment and income possibilities for musicians, as large-scale commercialisation, as well as potential for being public funded, is limited and possibly unwanted.

Interestingly, the virtuous and vicious value outcomes seem to mirror and counterbalance each other. As such, both value systems are not in competition but rather nurture each

other to potentially form a healthy overall ecosystem. Figure 9.3 shows how both value cycles interlock to form a balanced larger music landscape in which the danger of each individual value cycle's vices is obviated.

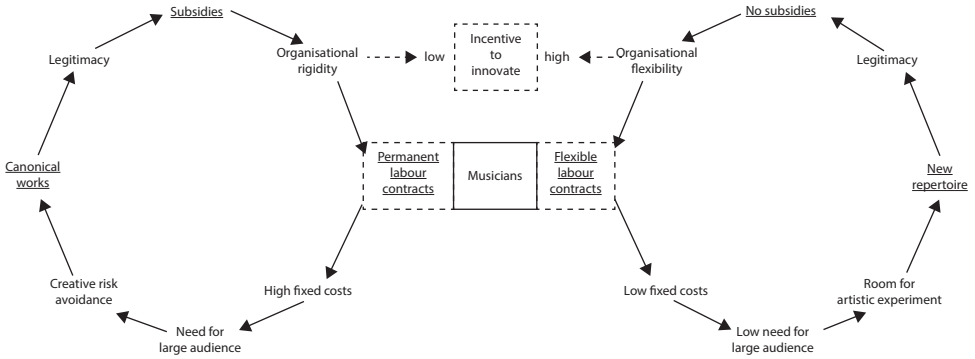

FIGURE 3 Interlocking value systems

CONCLUSION

The irony of the symphony orchestra's legitimacy crisis is that the dominant response has resulted in a vicious cycle of reinforcing crises, in the sense that petrification of organisational forms and stagnation of creativity have emerged. Apart from the fact that the artistic uniformity of organisations is an obvious argument for policy makers to support less of them by means of taxpayers' money, this situation has also reaffirmed existing field asymmetries. As separate organisations have each claimed segments of the orchestra's artistic terrain, closed value loops have been created that do not interact.

Recently, however, an increasing number of alternative models are taking shape that turn these dynamics around, to the benefit of the orchestral landscape as a whole. The cases of Casco Phil and Splendor Amsterdam exemplify, firstly, that diverging manners exist to achieve similar goals. While many traditional orchestras seem to adhere to (variations of) a 'dominant industry recipe' (Spender, 1989), the alternative organisations under study have shown how multiple organisational configurations can be equally effective in achieving 'success' (in this case: artistic experimentation), as captured in the concept of equifinality (Fiss, 2007).

Secondly, the analysis has shown that the overall sustainability of a single organisation depends to a great extent on the way the field is organised as a whole. For example, Casco Phil constantly speculates on the needs that the bigger orchestras cannot provide. Similarly, the Splendor system only works because the 50 musicians do not have to rely on the financial potential of the model, as they have stable jobs in bigger and financially more secure organisations. If Casco Phil or Splendor were to navigate

among various likewise structured orchestras, their models would be likely to collapse. Only in the vicinity of different models can Casco Phil and Splendor make use of their competitive advantage. As the analysis in this chapter focusses on the importance of interaction between different value systems for the survival of the landscape as a whole, we follow De Angelis' (2017) suggestion not to study alternatively organised systems (such as commons-based ones) as independent endogenous systems. Rather, the power embedded in such endeavours is dependent on and influenced by external, exogenous social forces that will affect it, and thus highlighting the importance of the interaction between state, market, and alternative systems.

Indeed, these cases illustrate that distinct value logics of separate types of organisations can interlink on a larger plane, providing added value to the field as a whole. Striving for complementarity in diverse approaches, Casco Phil and Splendor have managed to link organisational sustainability and creative autonomy. As such, it is important to highlight that the unique value creation through the complementary systems – as illustrated by the interlocking value systems – can only work through the human flow between both value systems. In that sense, this system of interlocking value cycles seems to bypass the potential degradation of locality into localism mentioned in the introductory essay by Lijster, Volont and Gielen: while the commons-based Splendor model seems to be a closed-off (local) organisation confined by its 50 partaking musicians, the model indirectly generates a much wider impact (thereby transcending the local): the same Splendor musicians are indeed also part of established institutions that are often unable to foster creative autonomy on account of their own organisational model. In the same way, Casco Phil musicians are active in organisations that lack organisational modularity and creative autonomy. While these alternative organisations, in their isolation, seem closed, their individual vices are compensated by the fact that they interact with other organisations, creating an open system supported by interacting value loops. In this way, the 'closed systems' do not 'enclose' the value creation and appropriation only within their own community but rather distribute it throughout the whole landscape.

In short, Casco Phil and Splendor may serve as examples of how symbiotic relationships between various organisations (with co-dependency, equifinality and complementarity as key properties) lead to a field in which experimentation is possible without severe financial consequences. The interlocking value cycles of these organisations illustrate that solutions to problems often arise in the intersection of seemingly conflicting interests. Small-scale and innovative organisations based on alternative organisational designs, such as principled by modularity and flexibility, or on principles of the commons, serve as a creative engine, from which the innovations, under optimal conditions, flow into the major institutions. Because these new and small-scale initiative are not burdened by the same organisational field dynamics and audience expectations as big institutions, they can surprisingly afford to be a creative safe haven even though their financial situation is fragile. It is indeed this fragility that urges them to be inventive and look for the creative blind spots that keep the art form alive. These innovations are indirectly

powered by major institutions, as they serve as a protective umbrella for the small-scale organisations. It is this symbiotic relation between organisations that serves as a precondition for macro-level sustainability, as it enables a transition from a segmented and sterile climate to a complementary and vibrant one where creativity can thrive[26].

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CHAPTER 10

CULTURAL SPACES AS DRIVERS FOR PARTICIPATION: TOWARDS A EUROPEAN PARTICIPATORY GUARANTEE SYSTEM FOR COMMONS

Maria Francesca De Tullio

This chapter focuses on how European Union (EU) cultural policies can support cultural and creative spaces as commons, to foster culture together with democracy and inclusion.

Culture and cultural spaces are gaining increasing relevance in urban policies because of their centrality in social innovation and urban regeneration. Indeed, as will be further illustrated in the text, they are asylums for culture – which is what gives meaning to our individual and collective lives – and are permanent laboratories where new forms of political participation and self-organisation are experimented with. For these reasons, these spaces are key in the effort to bridge the gap between policymakers and citizens as well as address the so-called 'Euroscepticism'. This situation is an incentive for institutions to fund but also to instrumentalise cultural spaces, since they tackle needs that should be taken in charge of by institutions themselves.

Such ambiguity can only be solved if EU policies value culture as a tool to give people – and particularly the disadvantaged ones – powers of expression and decision-making able to truly change everyone's living conditions. The most urgent question, then, is how concepts like participation, innovation, and co-creation can become more than mere 'buzz words' or instruments for authorities to gain consent. There is the need for the EU to provide a clear definition and legal framework for participation in cultural policies, consistent with purposes of equality, democracy, and social justice.

This chapter addresses this matter on the basis of the policy research made by the University of Antwerp, and namely the Culture Commons Quest Office, in the project

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Cultural and Creative Spaces and Cities[27] (CCSC). CCSC involved seven Urban Labs – i.e., different local experimentations of policy co-creation across Europe (Arreaga et al., 2020: 235-127) – studied by means of interviews, focus groups, co-creative events and field work, in collaboration with practitioners and policy officers. Data were analysed and made comparable through qualitative indicators, based on shared values. The partners – including the local coordinators of the Urban Labs – wrote a *Charter of principles* of the project consortium,[28] identifying the following basic values: 'Culture as a common good', 'Urban commons', 'Bottom-up processes' and 'A new basis for the legitimisation of the EU'. The final recommendations were further developed through two co-creation events, involving researchers, multilevel policymakers, and cultural actors.

This process allowed interdisciplinary research, joining together constitutional law, cultural policies, sociology, and practical knowledge on cultural and creative spaces. As Practice Theory did in International Relations (see Adler and Pouliot, 2011: 14 ff.; Cornut, 2017: 4 ff.; Neumann, 2002: 629), the research gave relevance to relatively small participatory practices. The underlying assumption is that these 'micro-policies' implemented in common cultural and creative spaces can be the first step for a more structural change, since they produce new forms of political self-organisation and self-determination by means of concrete experimentations, trials and errors, successes and pitfalls, of utopian aspirations (Latour, 1983: 164-165).

The results of such research are articulated here in four steps. Paragraph 2 connects the current 'crisis of representation' – the distrust in traditional representative structures – with the existing social and economic barriers to participation. In other terms, the article observes that concrete and material inequalities need to be addressed for participatory procedures to work in an effective and democratic way. Paragraph 3 observes the achievements and challenges of cultural commons – and particularly of cultural and creative spaces as commons – in current democracies, given the present cultural policy context. Finally, Paragraph 4 will elaborate a framework of recommendations concerning how EU cultural policies can serve commons by enabling bottom-up recognition and participation.

CRISIS OF REPRESENTATION AS A CRISIS OF SOCIAL INCLUSION

The hypothesis laid down here is that new participatory policies are needed to address the current crisis of representation, rooted in a contradiction between the abstract equality presumed by representative mechanisms – symbolised by the universal suffrage – and

27 See: www.spacesandcities.com. Further information on the methodology and the actors involved can be found in Torre 2020, 12-31.

28 See: https://www.spacesandcities.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/01/CCSC-Charter-of-Principles.pdf.

the concrete inequalities of modern societies. Even if citizens have equal voting rights, reality shows that participation is a costly activity, requiring time and capital, hardly affordable for some people. Therefore, the failure to recognise participation as a 'social' right – enforced by a material intervention of the public authority – is probably one of the main, open challenges.

In order to navigate the issue, a short general reflection on representation is in order. Representation is a mechanism – somehow a "fictional" one (Kelsen, 1924: 160) – allowing the "presence of those who are absent" (Denquin, 2013: 6; Pitkin, 1972: 8-9), i.e., 'the people' who do not participate directly but by means of someone else who is legitimised to decide. Then, to a certain extent, representation has an intrinsically "aristocratic" aspect (Manin, 1996: 189-190), since it legitimises representatives to exert decision-making powers with *erga omnes* effects (Leibholz, 1973: 70 ff.). However, in democratic regimes this imbalance should be compensated by the existence of a 'representative relationship': representatives are held politically accountable for their actions through the electoral renovation of representative charges.

This accountability mechanism has always been the critical point of representation, especially when the universal suffrage brought social conflicts in the representative arena. Multi-class democracies have challenged the concept of 'general interest': this one could not be taken as granted in an unequal and unpacified society but could only be the outcome of an institutional effort to intervene against social and territorial discriminations. Therefore, the advent of social State gave a new meaning to representation. Indeed, positions of power are not motivated by mere practical aims – the impossibility of gathering the whole constituency simultaneously – but needed to be justified by equality purposes: to avoid an unmediated confrontation between unequal particular interests, which could lead to a predominance of those who are endowed with greater economic, cognitive, social or organisational capital (Innerarity, 2015: 294).

These unresolved questions were clear in the latest elections of the EU Parliament, which showed a rise of populist and 'Eurosceptic' parties. The language of these political forces made it clear that the widespread "distrust" (Rosanvallon, 2006) of representative democracy was the outcome of a crisis of traditional parties and ideologies but is also connected to the inability of the current representative institutions to tackle social distress.

In this context, the EU also faces perplexities concerning its so-called 'democratic deficit': EU bodies are perceived as less accountable than the national ones. Not all of them are directly elected: while the European Parliament is voted for by constituents, the Council, the European Council and the Commission only enjoy an indirect legitimisation. As for their functioning, their decision-making is hardly accessible due to procedural complexity and supranational nature. Finally, and more

substantially, in the aftermath of the economic crisis, a sense of delusion accompanied the acknowledgement – especially in the most precarious categories – that the EU did not mitigate the hardest social backlashes.

On the other hand, the argument of the 'democratic deficit' is also a controversial one. Some authors insist on the existence of democratic guarantees in the EU system (Moravcsik, 2002: 611 ff.). Moreover, scholars have highlighted the existence of processes of 'informal governance' able to involve civil society actors in decision-making, thus compensating the reduced electoral legitimacy of EU institutions (Kleine, 2013: 3-7).

Therefore, given the weakness of representative mechanisms in the EU, the question arises, whether 'informal governance' could be a more effective complement if it was actively used to counterbalance social inequalities in democratic participation.

This last point is central since constitutional analyses usually interpret the direct involvement of private stakeholders as an ambiguous phenomenon, entailing threats and opportunities for democratic regimes. The reason is exactly the one mentioned above: representation is based on well-established mechanisms – however controversial they are – to address inequalities through the aggregation of weakest interests in parties and parliamentary groups, while similar mechanisms are yet to be elaborated in the field of participatory democracy.

In the context of the EU, a part of the literature highlights that the alleged inadequacy of representative institutions to manage economic development and new social demands (Crozier, Huntington & Watanuki, 1975: 12 ff.) was the alibi for the introduction of a new political and regulatory rationality in decision-making at both national and supranational level. Rather than political accountability, the market became the main instrument of interpretation and evaluation of existing rules (Weiss, 2000: 796 ff.). Even beyond the mere *laissez-faire* (Nahamowitz, 1992: 549), this pressure induced governments to regulate according to the needs of the market – i.e., 'to conceive the State as exponential of general and overall interests of capitalism' (Ferrara, 1979: 518) – and to compete between each other in creating the most welcoming environment for private investments.

After the crisis of 2008, it was even clearer that the market did not advocate for mere inaction and rather pressed for a complaisant action and regulation. For example, austerity required an analytic set of accounting rules that limited the power of States, especially in social expenditure, and pushed for the privatisation of public debt. Along with a similar *ratio*, EU decision-making was burdened by very specific requirements and procedures (Garben, 2018: 232) aiming at a 'better regulation'. The objective was exactly to avoid that various stakeholders, and especially small and medium-sized enterprises, might perceive the EU law-making as too distant and at the same time too intrusive.[29]

29 See: European Commission, European governance – A White Paper, COM/2001/0428 final, OJ 287, 12/10/2001.

This ideological and political turn is the framework under which private stakeholders have been involved as regulators and co-regulators through advanced legal mechanisms (Galgano, 2009: 76). These decision-making procedures were able to relate with plural and ever-changing forms of aggregation, articulating the involvement of different actors in different procedures with flexible modalities, able to change *ad hoc* and adjust to the circumstances. However, these processes – being rooted in the market-oriented framework described above – are directed to the involvement of the strongest and most influential private stakeholders.[30]

In conclusion, it is true that the direct involvement of stakeholders can improve democracy but this does not come as an automatic result. Rather, in the absence of a specific and overall regulation – attentive towards factual inclusion – participatory procedures can even exacerbate the 'democratic deficit'. Therefore, not only new forms of participation are needed but also a legal framework, clearly guiding these procedures towards purposes of social justice.

COMMONS IN CULTURAL SPACES AS DRIVERS FOR PARTICIPATION

Culture is central in the above issues. Namely, cultural commons can be valued by institutions as examples of grassroots practices of participation able to stimulate and make concrete proposals for inclusive participatory decision-making.

On the one hand, culture is emblematic of the same inequalities that also affect participation: the sector experiences a huge precarity of labour and marginalisation from market-oriented policies. This happens even though culture, given its social and political role, is inherently also a labour of democratic participation and care (D'Andrea & Micciarelli, 2020). On the other hand, culture itself has fostered the creation of innovative democratic responses.

In many parts of Europe, cultural and creative spaces (e.g., independent makerspaces and cultural centres, formerly occupied theatres, abandoned spaces re-appropriated by communities…) have embodied experiences of so-called emerging commons (Micciarelli, 2014: 67–69), i.e., commons defined not only by their nature and function, but also by their governing, shared between the public sector and people. These experiments generate both an indirect income – by lowering the costs for production, training, and other services – and a transparent and accessible self-government which allows the elaboration and proposition of policies for a more democratic government and fruition of culture, beyond the models of traditional institutions and neo-liberal market.

30 In the context of 'better regulation', see Alemanno, 2015: 11-12; more generally, Bunea, 2019: 127 ff.

Commoning subtracts material resources from real estate market pressure and makes immobile property socially accessible for producers, audiences and people in general. Therefore, the benefits of these resources are redistributed: commons become shared means of cultural production, hubs for collaborative learning and doing but also places for non-competitive forms of social relationships and resources for solidarity and social rights. As De Angelis (2013: 606) puts it "Commons are not just a 'third way' beyond state and market failures; they are a vehicle for claiming ownership in the conditions needed for life and its reproduction. The demands for greater democracy since the 1970s, now exploding worldwide in the face of the social and economic crisis, are really grassroots democratic demands to control the means of social reproduction".

An example was Teatro Valle (Valle Theatre): the Theatre was occupied by its workers as a protest against precarity and unequal distribution of resources but also to liberate a public space of expression through culture (Cirillo, 2014). Thus, the experience connected the struggle against precarity with the vindications of decision-making powers over the management of public property, as well as the vindication of the right to the city (Harvey, 2012).

In that sense, commons produce new participatory practices by constantly reflecting on their own governance. Hence, they become 'new institutions', able to ensure a more open and inclusive management of resources.

Commoners, despite undertaking a shared political action, do not hold uniformity in views and actions. The effect of entering a heterogeneous assembly, and building consensus in it, is that pre-existing opinions and ideologies have to be disarticulated and confronted with new questions and decisions, so that new political aggregations become possible.

This is not a paradigm of 'deliberative democracy' (Elster, 1998: 8), but a dialectic of values, ideas and political positions articulated in the commoning practices and struggles against the current power relations. So, the rational side is not the only relevant one, even for apparently technical choices. Moreover, as mentioned before, social conflict questions the possibility itself of a single position that can be shared by anyone because of its rational foundations. Then, consensus does not exclusively pursue reasonableness but care of relations and extirpation of dynamics of racism, sexism, bullying, and violence in political discussions. In that sense, 'openness' needs an active effort to identify possible causes of exclusion and tackle them in the most effective way possible in accordance with principles of anti-fascism, anti-sexism and anti-racism.

With these methods, commons also promote the elaboration of new urban and cultural policies at local level, based on collaboration instead of competition, sharing instead of private appropriation, participation instead of vertical administration, 'civic profitability' – i.e., social and cultural profitability – instead of exclusively economic

profitability, social intervention instead of privatisation and austerity. For example, in Naples, l'Asilo,[31] and other commons[32] the community developed a legal tool to manage commons – the urban civic and collective use – but also new institutional city bodies – an Observatory on Commons and a Council for Audit on Public resources and Debt – that involved the participation of commoners themselves and proposed new policies on the management and valorisation of public property as an alternative to sale and privatisation of public goods.[33]

In that way, emerging commons help local institutions respond to at least three basic challenges of local participation.

Firstly, emerging commons naturally adopt a need-based approach, while public administrations are often organised through a rigid bureaucratic structure which is highly formal and often sectoral.[34] This administrative approach can be a prejudice in the dialogue with grassroots movements, since social needs are inherently cross-sectorial, and therefore demand transversal responses from the Administration (Torre, 2021: 36-37).

For example, the Italian model of 'regulation on shared administration of commons' is a virtuous example of a framework allowing a civic regeneration of urban spaces. Nevertheless, it constitutes a discrete *corpus*, even separated from the general regulations on participation and management of public property as well as from local strategies on culture, urban planning and budget policies (*Rete Nazionale dei Beni Comuni Emergenti e a Uso Civico*, 2019).

Instead, emerging commons are intrinsically multi-level because they are the final point of impact of different measures and initiatives adopted by various authorities; therefore, they stimulate administrative responses more flexible and closer to needs themselves.

Secondly, emerging commons allow a direct interaction between institutions and inhabitants which makes participation less dependent on local political contingencies that can undermine the collaboration between citizens and local government or between the latter and the higher levels of government.

Participation requires a strong political engagement from the institution that should invest in transparent decision-making and for the implementation of people's will,

31 www.exasilofilangieri.it.

32 www.commonsnapoli.org.

33 www.commonsnapoli.org. See sections on 'New Institutions'.

34 Its limits are well analysed in O'Reilly 2010: 29 and following, even with some criticalities in the solutions proposed, that emphasised the need for a strong role of private parties, rather than a strong social intervention of the public sector.

especially when inhabitants raise topics that were not originally in the political agenda of the local government. The complexities of multi-level institutional dialogue can be an obstacle in that sense, even more when there are political conflicts between different levels of government.

Thirdly, and finally, emerging commons try to address the most structural challenge of social barriers that impede participation, like the lack of time, energy or specialist knowledge[35] (Iossifidis, 2020: 48). For example, the deliberative paradigm assumes that everyone is able to master public speaking and the use of a specific language, while participation needs different languages – even non-verbal and artistic ones – and a specific alphabetisation. Moreover, citizen initiatives struggle to keep the pace of administrations that decide and operate through remunerated staff and organised structures.[36]

These reasons make it clear that emerging commons are an important opportunity to tackle the precarity of the cultural sector together with the pending issues on democratic participation. In that sense, supporting cultural commons is a way to redistribute power (Swinnen & Bauwens, 2020) and resources while supporting the bottom-up development of new forms of participation and self-organisation.

COMMONS IN THE CONTEXT OF EU CULTURAL POLICIES FOR PARTICIPATION

Against the above backdrop, EU cultural policies can be analysed, focusing on how they address the issue of crisis of representation and democratic deficit of EU institutions.

The EU increasingly recognises local institutions as key interlocutors, given their geographical and political proximity to communities. This is a key enabler for cultural rights at local level, especially in areas where different forms of support – e.g., national and regional – are missing. However, there is the need to further elaborate on how EU institutions can really relate with people and cultural actors by going beyond an exclusive dialogue with local institutions and vested stakeholders.

The first step is to acknowledge the effects of EU intervention on representation and political accountability. EU cultural programmes – despite their formally non-binding nature – influence the local authorities' behaviour and decisions by means of economic incentives: since local institutions face a structural scarcity of resources, they are pushed to apply for EU funds and respect the EU agenda, criteria, and requirements.

35 Within the CCSC project, this was well explained in: Jacobson & Ershammar 2020: 4.
36 The data emerged from an interview with the coordinator of the Urban Lab Ambasada within the CCSC project.

This form of EU 'soft power' is hardly controllable by the local constituency. EU funding programmes are intrinsically opaquer because of the technical content of the decisions and their multi-level nature (Gouin & Magkou, 2020). Given the weakness of EU representative mechanisms (paragraph 2), the EU can only limit this democratic deficit by using its 'soft power'. Namely, it could enforce minimum standards of participation by providing the activation of effective participatory processes as a mandatory requirement in order to apply for funding.

At the moment this objective is far from being attained. While the latest work plans acknowledge culture as a vehicle for inclusion and multi-level governance, the broader framework does not provide for a consistent interpretation and implementation of these principles. Rather, participation is pursued together with other different and sometimes incompatible values – such as economic development – which result in them often prevailing (Iossifidis, 2020).

The clearest example is probably the European Capitals of Culture.[37] This programme requires "the involvement of local artists and cultural organisations in the conception and implementation of the cultural programme", as well as the "involvement" of civil society.[38] However, there are also other – and sometimes conflicting – provisions related to the sustainability of the project. For example, the requirement of a "strong political support and a sustainable commitment from the local, regional and national authorities" and of "the feasibility of the fund-raising strategy and proposed budget", or the need that "the candidate city has or will have an adequate and viable infrastructure to hold the title".[39]

In addition, there are requirements in EU funding programmes impeding *de facto* the participation of commons and grassroots organisations. The exclusion of informal organisations is a major formal barrier since many commons decide not to assume a legal personality. Moreover, small organisations struggle to ensure the guarantees of financial stability, the time and specialist knowledge needed for applications, as well as the accounting requirements imposed by EU calls (Acosta Alvarado, 2020).

In this direction, CCSC advocated for the introduction of stricter participatory requirements in EU programmes and the drastic reduction of barriers affecting the participation of small and informal realities to EU projects and decision-making procedures in the cultural field. Indeed, supporting commons could be a way for EU to regenerate its own democracy.

37 Decision (EU) 2017/1545 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 13 September 2017 amending Decision No 445/2014/EU establishing a Union action for the European Capitals of Culture for the years 2020 to 2033.

38 Decision No 445/2014/EU of the European Parliament and of the Council of 16 April 2014 establishing a Union action for the European Capitals of Culture for the years 2020 to 2033 and repealing Decision No 1622/2006/EC.

39 Ibidem.

PREMISES FOR THE RECOGNITION OF 'HOMES OF COMMONS'

To empower commons in the context of cultural policies, the project developed the idea of a 'Participatory Guarantee System for Homes of commons': a bottom-up mechanism allowing the EU to recognise commons and provide them with financial and non-financial support.

There are at least two forms of protection that commons need from the EU: funding and recognition. Concerning the latter,

> *within the CCSC project, we developed two main visions of 'recognition', tightly and necessarily interlinked. Firstly, we understand it as a deep self-understanding of the features and the work in progress of an organisation. […] What appears is a necessity to provide adequate tools for organisations to understand their features and work towards the alignment with the ideals of commons, to transform their work towards a sustainable, collaborative, and democratic one. […] A second yet fundamental side of recognition concerns the relation by the local authority.*
> *(Torre, 2021)*

At the same time, CCSC acknowledged that institutional recognition can entail at least two risks concerning the relationship between public authority and self-organised experiences.

The first risk is "commons fix" (De Angelis, 2013): the public and private sectors are tempted to support commons only insofar as they can be instrumentalised as a 'buffer' absorbing distress and avoiding social conflict. To counter this danger, it is essential for grassroots activists to acknowledge that commons are transformative when they are not satisfied with being islands of horizontality and cooperation but fight for everyone's rights. As for institutions, they should be aware of their social duties in the cultural field without delegating them to civil society.

This problem is connected to the insufficiency of the resources invested by the EU to guarantee culture. The European Commission itself recognised that – due to the scarcity of funds – "a large number of good applications are rejected" in cultural programmes,[40] even if – according to a study commissioned by the EU in 2016 – culture generated 5.3 per cent of EU Gross Domestic Product (GDP) (Austrian Institute for SME Research and VVA Europe, 2016). In that sense, a point of departure could be to follow the European Parliament's Culture Committee call for an increase in spending on culture, proposing the doubling of the Creative Europe budget from €1.4 bn to €2.8 bn.[41]

40 Report from the Commission to the European Parliament and the Council, Mid-term evaluation of the Creative Europe programme (2014-2020), COM(2018) 248 final, 30 April. 2018.

41 European Parliament legislative resolution of 28 March 2019 on the proposal for a regulation of the European Parliament and of the Council establishing the Creative Europe programme (2021 to 2027) and repealing Regulation (EU) No 1295/2013, COM(2018)0366 – C8-0237/2018 – 2018/0190(COD), 28 March 2019.

The second risk is the so-called "commons washing". Due to barriers – territorial as well as legal and procedural – that make commons invisible to EU institutions, it becomes hard for the EU to distinguish commons from other experiences that appear and name themselves as commons but are the outcome of a top-down decision – self-declared participatory – or are well-established organisations that work instead with corporate-like criteria (De Tullio & Torre, 2020: 72-73). The contribution of local communities, NGOs and social movements is essential to ensure an honest understanding of local organisations; therefore, EU institutions should never renounce to listen to these voices.

CERTIFYING 'HOMES OF COMMONS'. A LESSON FROM ECOLOGICAL FARMING

Considering the above risks, the research envisioned a "certification for Homes of Commons", to allow institutions to identify, finance and support commons while limiting possible arbitrary choices in recognising commons as such.

This idea had to face an important dilemma: by nature, commons cannot have a top-down definition and labelling. Indeed, they should be considered as a flexible concept, adaptable to community self-determination with a process of self-identification, also in relationship with different commons and societal actors. Moreover, recognition procedures need to be inclusive and bottom-up, thus avoiding the typical criticalities of traditional third-party certifications. External 'standards' and 'experts' are deemed to have an only apparent neutrality that hides, in reality, a political decision made by the authority – sometimes with private corporate consultants – rather than through a continuous peer-to-peer discussion on political values and points of view. Moreover, third-party certifications often produce a bureaucratisation that imposes further costs on applicants, making them sometimes inaccessible.

This problem was tackled by referring to existing grassroots practices. Namely, agroecological movements developed Participatory Guarantee Systems (PGSs) to certify organic food. These systems provide useful alternatives to traditional third-party systems, whose costs are unaffordable for many farmers and whose standards are defined top-down, often by private institutions connected to organised large-scale distribution (Caruso, 2018: 232 ff.; Lo Cascio, 2018: 7).

PGSs are systems of quality assurance "based on the active participation of farmers, consumers, rural advisors, local authorities: they come together to make decisions, visit farms, support each other and check that farmers are producing according to an Organic Standard" (FAO and IFOAM, 2018) established by the PGS networks themselves. The evaluation is also collective and happens through periodic visits done by groups of producers and, sometimes, consumers and technical persons (Lemeilleur

and Allaire, 2019: 17-18). Even if they are developed from bottom-up, they were also legally recognised in some States[42] (Boza Martinez, 2013: 24, 26).

This mechanism establishes a paradigm of mutual aid and peer review, rather than external control. First and foremost, the objective of the visits is not only to give a label – useful for the producer itself, other producers, consumers, and institutions – but also to empower producers in a broader sense by strengthening networks of peer-learning. Indeed, in case of non-compliance, exclusion is considered a last resort, while the first reaction is to put in place mechanisms of support in case of involuntary failures or objective difficulties. The certification is given to the overall attitude of the producer, rather than to the individual product.

> *The basis of each PGS studied is […] the continuous social control. What varies is the mechanisms through which this social control is systematised in order to generate trust and guarantee outside of the involved groups […]. Visits, that usually last a half-day or a full day, are centred around the review of the accomplishment of established norms and, especially, an exchange of knowledge and problematics, so that they are transformed in moments for learning, mutual awareness and exchange of experiences.*
> *(Cuellar Padilla, 2010)*

Moreover, PGSs lower barriers between 'experts', 'producers' and, 'commoners', thus allowing a negotiation of different positions and value informal realities as true local experts. Finally, procedures are established by the involved actors themselves; therefore, they are transparent, and not covered by non-disclosure obligations, as well as accessible, even for small and informal producers.

For these reasons, PGSs are an interesting model for commons, based upon principles of participation and mutual accountability, transparency, trust, pedagogical processes, and horizontality (Meirelles, 2007, quoted in Boza Martinez, 2013: 21-22). In that sense, the EU could support and recognise the creation of networks of commons, implementing such systems in order to foster more democratic cultural policies.

CONCLUSIONS

The above reflections show that culture and cultural commons are pivotal for equality and democratic participation. Namely, spontaneous collective engagement in activities of general interests – even in small-scale experiments – can represent a deep and widespread transformative force in local communities. Self-organisation is able to

42 See, for example, the Mexican Ley de Productos Orgánicos, Nueva Ley DOF 07-02-2006; the Legge Regionale n. 19/2014 of the Region Emilia Romagna; the Brazilian Decreto n° 6.323, de 27 de dezembro de 2007, implementing the Lei no 10.831, de 23 de dezembro de 2003.

create a new organisation of resources as well as legal tools and new institutions. Culture is the base of these initiatives, keeping open spaces of possibility and making new social and political imaginaries possible.

Therefore, the work focused on the role of EU cultural policies which are central, not mainly because of their legal force, but especially due to economic incentives that EU programmes entail for local institutions and grassroots organisations. In that sense, it is crucial to design policy and legal solutions allowing the EU to recognise and support cultural commoning through flexible and bottom-up means. Commons raise then the need to avoid top-down labels that can become exclusionary and misleading and be inspired by Participatory Guarantee Systems, as locally-based and bottom-up mechanism allowing a community-driven certification.

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CHAPTER 11

FOR A CO-IMAGINATIVE POLITICS: BETWEEN EMOTIONAL CLUSTERS AND POLITICAL DECISIONS. AN EMPIRICAL OBSERVATION OF THE CREATIVE EUROPE PROGRAMME

Giuliana Ciancio

Our lives always consist of personal events, traumas and joys which bring us to perceive the context around us in one or another way. While we fight with ourselves for finding our place in the world, sometimes we discover that most of our joys and pains belong to broader cultural and political spaces. We discover with surprise that our passions and desires can contribute to the creation of 'emotional clusters' among peers or, on the contrary, that these feelings can remain unexpressed among the four walls of our rooms, generating a sense of frustration and impotence. The way in which we decide (or we have the possibility) to play our game impacts on the creation of temporary or permanent social, cultural or political aggregates. The way in which we manage our emotions can influence the perception of our realities. The way in which we deal with our sense of displacement can indicate a possible path for personal recovery.

While in transit from one jail to another, Antonio Gramsci shared, in a letter dated 19th of February 1927, an event which could help us to gain insight regarding the relationship between reality and its perception. He mentioned in his letter: "In the jail an ultra-individualist anarchist was introducing me to another prisoner. Looking at me he said, 'Gramsci? Antonio?' and my answer was 'yes, Antonio.'" By continuing his story: "the prisoner displaced answered, it can't be, because Antonio Gramsci must be a 'giant' and not such a small man (…) the prisoner said nothing more, and he came back to his corner, like Mario on the ruins of Carthage, to meditate on his lost illusions". Later, the brigadier who was doing his ritual roll call, when it was the turn of Gramsci, posed the same question: "are you a relative of the famous parliamentarian?". Again, also the brigadier was demonstrating his delusion to learn that that prisoner was the famous deputy Gramsci. (…) "he told me that he had always imagined my person as cyclopean" Gramsci concludes.

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Gramsci's letter and the attached anecdote, offer a perfect example about the discrepancy between reality and its perception and all the contradictions that this dichotomy introduces in our societies. Often, we look at reality throughout our cultural angles: the prisoner and the brigadier who imagined Gramsci a 'giant' or a 'cyclopean figure'. Gramsci was a small and unhealthy man but the conception of 'hero' during the fascist regime was influenced by the notion of masculinity, of a well-trained, strong, and assertive man. Our way of seeing reality is often influenced by our emotions, which are in turn connected to our social backgrounds or to the forms of inequality to which we are exposed because of gender, skin colour or economic status.

Over the years, in the friction zone between reality and its perception, this cultural and civil participation have taken various shapes, such as populism, participatory or representative democracy, civil engagement and monolithic settings. Often, we have witnessed that culture has been the realm of experimentation for representing and consolidating emerging ideologies and where a variety of players have met, they have fought or have grown up together. In a way, unknown groupings have appeared on the scene by sharing emotional status which, in a long run, have influenced the development of political projects, policy paradigms, or counter-hegemonic struggles.

Nowadays, in the discrepancy between reality and its perception, we seem to be stuck in a status of "organic crisis" which, according to Gramsci, is a "comprehensive crisis", at once economic, political, social and ideological. This is a crisis of hegemony which leads to the rejection of established political parties, of economic policies and value systems. Yet, it does not necessarily determine the collapse of the dominant order. The organic crisis is characterised by interregna (liminal phases) where "the old is dying and the new cannot yet be born" and during such time "a great variety of morbid symptoms" can appear and coexist. This is the case of the diffuse "crisis of trust" between the citizens and their political representations (Bauman, 2019) which is cohabiting with the conscious or unconscious belief that neoliberalism is the only possibility for our democracies (Mouffe, 2018). This regards the forms of "projective disgust" toward any diversity (Nussbaum, 2013) which are performing while the protests globally spread starting from 2011 (Occupy, 99%, the Arab Spring, Indignados) are positioning participatory democracy as an alternative to centralised leadership (Hardt & Negri, 2017).

The EU cultural policy, a window onto its own epoch, has been crossed by these symptoms which have provoked the need for some cultural and policy actors to retrieve the promises of our democracies: understanding culture as cultures; active engagement in the decision-making on matters of public interest; accessibility to common resources; and the instalment of political (and juridical) parameters for guaranteeing these promises. In a few words, this has meant to be engaged in 'struggles over the quality of life' (Harvey, 2007), which have been at the same time an individual and collective need.

In the tension between the polarisation of global dynamics and the transversal political experimentations over the *quality of life*, in 2014 the Creative Europe (CE) programme began. Being the programme entirely devoted to the cultural and creative sector, it was born with the aim of answering to the needs of the heterogeneous ecosystem and hence to generate policy instruments for facing social challenges.

Therefore, this chapter intends to look at the reality and its perception from a specific angle, i.e. that of the tensions between top-down cultural policymaking and bottom-up cultural creation. My aim is to share a few insights on my intense empirical research conducted in the Creative Europe (CE) programme between 2014-2020. By taking advantage of my double entry here as a researcher and curator of EU cultural cooperation projects, I have taken as my background the implementation of the transversal priority Audience Development (AD) and the cultural participatory practices that since 2008 have re-apperead in the global debate. My journey has brought me to look at the cultural policy as the point of convergence of different interests, emotions, cultural values and national logics that have performed in such a multi-layered, transnational, highly bureaucratised decision-making context. The 'emotional clusters' which have risen here, are defined as the temporary groupings that originated in value-driven informal exchanges. Sometimes unknown in their configuration, they have taken the shape of temporary transversal alliances between top-down and the bottom-up realms in order to favour democratic pluralistic instalments. To some extent, this chapter will try to share how and where I have met this impalpable grouping. I will not be focused specifically on culture commons, but I will look at the immaterial space beyond political/policy endeavours.

THE MODEL

It is not easy to give back the intense atmosphere, the enthusiasm, the failures, the successes and the enormous societal challenges behind the development of the EU programme. In fact, for entering the field of enquiry I have adopted an empirical tool inspired by two previous models; the *Creative Biotope* (Gielen, 2010) and the *Civil Sequence* (Gielen & Lijster, 2017). The former has been the frame for analysing Creative Europe throughout the four domains coined by Gielen – domestic, peers, market and civil. Each of them has allowed me to grasp the attitudes of the players performing in the top-down and the bottom-up realms. The latter has provided me with an emotional 'sequence' through which I have explored the transformation of the emotional status of my interviewees. I have anchored at the centre of the *Creative Biotope* the three main '*transitions*' of the civil model, i.e., the rationalisation (transforming emotions from negative to positive), the communication (sharing and socialising the emotional status), and to act publicly (treating individual issues as part of broader phenomena). (Figure 1)

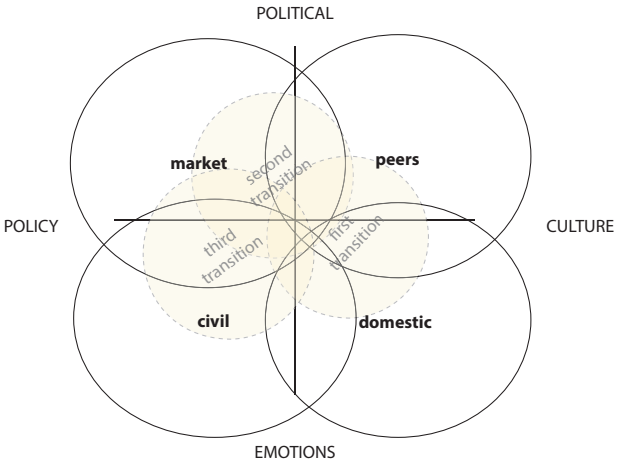

FIGURE 1 The empirical tool

This empirical tool has allowed me: 1) to frame in one context global and local phenomena as well as personal and collective attitudes; 2) to examine the EU programme in the light of the Gramscian hegemonic theory; 3) to explore the emotional attitudes I have met in my fieldwork.

My journey has been focused on the Culture Sub-programme. The players involved in cultural cooperation projects, EU networks and the policy officers in the DGs[43] of the EU Commission, have been my guides.

The four domains

The *domestic domain* has been approached as the professional space in which artists, civil servants, activists and cultural players at large, cultivate interests and passions but also displacement or loneliness. Here the first transition of the civil sequence begins. By rationalising the emotional status, we start looking at our place in the world. For an EU cultural cooperation project, this domain has been where the players experience the *clash* between their cultural perspectives; where they start to acquire a multifocal cultural lens; and where they translate initial ideas into concrete EU cooperative spaces. In a few words, the players begin to act in a state of interdependency by sharing financial, artistic and cultural responsibilities that could determine the success or failure of a project. So, first forms of co-creation, co-programming, co-management have been experimented across the EU space, generating intense debates. These have been efforts implying participatory democratic changes in the frame of the organisations and in the context they have performed. However, they have been also adopted as instruments for reinforcing the consensus around local hierarchies. Over the years, building an EU cooperative space and availing cultural and artistic experimentations have required

43 General Directorate.

cultural players to share values and passion and also elaborate on the 'empirical tools' for surfing among such a complex set of desires, skills, diversities and conflicts that make up the scenario of transnational cooperation.

Interviews with the policy officers in the DGEAC[44] of the EU Commission, have highlighted the specificities of their position in the EU chessboard. Compared to other DGs they act in a 'privileged condition' not being under the pressure of broader financial lobbies. Due to the characteristics of the cultural sector, they are closer to the players and experience 'proximity', which from their viewpoint has meant to learn from the implementation of cultural actions. Indeed, the word 'facilitator' has often emerged in many interviews referring to those who are in the middle of the process of communication between the cultural players and the complex EU apparatus. Being "the lobby for the cultural sector inside the EU institution" is how some interviewees see themselves, acquiring the strength to bring issues to higher levels in the Commission. From my observations, for some of these actors this has also meant an exposure to forms of stress caused by the lack of time and space to give prompt answers to specific expectations and to operate in the high-bureaucratised system influenced by neoliberal dynamics. In fact, according to some interviewees, this has determined "(…) a clash between your values and the system itself" (this was argued shyly by one of my interlocutors during an interview).

Within the *peers domain* I have observed the process of communication and professional sharing (Gielen & Lijster, 2017). My interest has been for the mechanisms of opinion formation and thus the constitution of informal or formal conformations based on common values. Interviews with the former head of the EACEA[45] (Ciancio, 2018) pointed out that, by following the transversal EU added value, relationships "with and within the sector" have been fostered over the years. This has been the case with connections: 1) between the beneficiaries (theatres, festivals, municipalities) and the Commission (or the Agency); 2) between the beneficiaries themselves across the EU space; 3) between the beneficiaries and their audiences which has been one of the novelties introduced by the programme. Accordingly, an impressive map of intersections has emerged among the variety of players busy in the implementation of the EU programme. Their high mobility has been a source of cross-fertilisation across EU arenas. In some cases, the cultural players have performed wearing different 'hats': members of EU networks, partners of cultural cooperation projects or individual participants in the board of EU networks or other EU initiatives. This mobility (being at the same time the character of the cultural field and also a dramatic expression of the precarity of its players) has often found a home in the EU networks, which have been a point of convergence of various players which have met, built alliances and advocated in favour of the sector.

44 Directorate General for Education and Culture.
45 European Education and Culture Agency.

As some interviewees have argued, the "EU networks are where to exercise democracy", meaning that they have a public function, with a bottom-up push, where informal exchanges are a source of knowledge. It is not the case that this exercise of democracy has also taken advantage throughout informal connections with the Units in the EU Commission, which have participated in meetings, debates and brainstorming sessions. This proximity has often started in the interaction with policy officers. According to some cultural players this has favoured a reciprocal knowledge. In the informal relations "trust" and "respect" have been gained which "you cannot get via hierarchical formal venues", one representative of a EU network has argued.

This diffusion of informal and formal exchanges across the EU has been a source for framing contents. It is here that the peculiarities of the cultural and artistic participatory experimentations in this extensive EU sharing have found clearer terminology, a collection of methodologies that have been progressively embraced in the annual calls of the Creative Europe programme.

Through my active participation in this field, I have noticed how this process has been possible thanks to the informal encounters between cultural and policy players in what someone labelled 'coffee tactics'. When the personal tension over the 'quality of life' has intervened, their professional trajectories have found points of encounter, and in some cases the 'emotional clusters' have had their starting point. Mainly value-driven, they have been moved by 1) the personal understanding of the meaning of democracy, art, civil cooperation, and therefore emotional but value-driven tension; 2) professional roles through which skills and competencies have influenced the professional connections; 3) the trust-building which has been conquered over time among the parties; 4) the passion for democratic instalments which has been the drive and the binding agent in the process of proximity. Therefore this progressive 'getting closer' has determined temporary alignments, which over the years have had concrete implications for the programme. The study 'Engage Audiences',[46] even though it is nowadays forgotten, has contributed to giving keywords, to map the context, and to bring the meaning of cultural democracy into the AD (Audience Development) experimentations. This has been the result of a long journey, composed of negotiations, informal exchanges, public statements, where the moment of the study has been the top of the iceberg, of a process shared between the Commission, the EU networks and the EU cooperation projects. Other cases have followed over the years in a way which presented a similar logic.

In the *market domain* I have placed the beginning of a third transition of the civil sequence: we leave the private sphere for acting publicly. In this domain I have examined the different souls in the EU programme and their influences on the life of many. In fact, I have approached this domain where the 'common sense', in Gramscian

46 http://engageaudiences.eu.

words, is built; where values, signs and symbols are expressions of the hegemony or of the disarticulation of hegemonic positions. According to some interlocutors, on the one hand the programme has had the merit to introduce the AD, to implement it in many ways, and to support radical projects; on the other hand, the output-oriented-logic has limited the effectiveness of those participatory experimentations often based on qualitative relations across the EU space. In a way, a kind of 'schizophrenia' has emerged since the beginning, due to the overlap of different policy paradigms. This has been the case of the 'cultural democratisation' which together with the policy paradigm of *excellence*, in different ways has implied a top-down approach where 'values', 'needs' or the 'artistic quality' have been according to a dominant 'taste'. To share in a few words, participation here seems to be decisive for evaluating the success or failure. The quantity of preferences reached, or the multiplier economic effects of specific actions are the parameters for evaluating quality or success. Over the years, the cultural democracy paradigm has progressively taken a more complex shape. This has been associated with cultural rights, and it has proposed an advanced version of cultural participation. It requires completely diverse parameters of evaluation based on a long-term observation where the social and political shift is at the centre. It is here that the notion of cultural commons has entered into the EU discourses by implying audience participation as empowerment.

Indeed, the study 'Engage Audiences' in 2017 has translated the AD priority as "a multifaced issue that has to do with different knowledge fields as democratisation, access, participation, co-creation, organisational innovation, leadership, policies." This analysis has brought to the surface the changes of the cultural participatory practices in the EU programme based on the interaction of various players who have experienced successes and failures, with more or less intensity and radicality. Many publications have followed coming from the EU experimetations which have promoted cultural participation as an instrument of change, therefore leaving a proper marketing attitude in favour of horizonal and experimental decision-making.

Evidently, different souls have often overlapped, and the different policy paradigms have also coexisted in the same organisation, cultural institutions, and EU cooperation projects, as well as in the EU policy (Bonet & Negrier, 2017). On one hand, this specific condition has created the coordinates for confirming the Gramscian hegemonic common sense. On the other, it has implied that the emotional clusters have risen for surfing among such various and, in some cases, divergent tendecies. These emotional clusters have been at the origins of campaigns, pleas and studies which have aimed to reframe policy parameters. To some extent, my analysis of the market domain pointed out that this was possible when some cultural and policy players are aware that they were acting in a status of interdependency. Conscious of their complementarity into the policy implementation, even if in asymmetrical positions, they have felt the need to frame new meanings, methodologies, economic parameters. Therefore, the implementation of the programme has been influenced by this interdependency

which, even though it occupies a tiny portion of a 'soft' conflict, has attributed to the programme a proper policy dynamism.

The *civil domain* has provided me with insights about the 'co-imaginative political' attitude. Here the third transition of the civil sequence ends, i.e., we officially decide to act politically. According to my analysis, by following different trajectories offered by Bauman, Harvey, Gielen, Mouffe, Nussbaum and, above all, by the Gramscian lesson, where they agree upon the fact that the impact of the neoliberalism – and, in the case of Gramsci, the pressure of liberalism – has caused the progressive fragmentation of the social, economic and political contexts. The financialisation of politics (Gielen, ibid., Harvey, ibid.), the forms of "projective disgust" (Nussbaum, ibid.), the interpretation of the "we/they relation" in the sense of enemies (Mouffe, 2005), and the extended mistrust (Bauman, ibid.) toward the political institutions have transversally been part of the political and the policy narratives. On the bases of these analyses, I have witnessed to a variety of attitudes and behaviours of cultural and policy players who, consciously or unconsciously, have performed to reconnect these segments. The emotional clusters here have taken a more complex dimension, becoming shared efforts for implementing the policy programme in the light of needs of common public interests. It is here that I have found the coordinates for defining the co-imaginative political attitude as an agent of change. This has brought some players to share a ground based on political values and to explore possibilities not yet experienced.

PLAYING WITH THE BIOTOPE: THE MARKET IMPLICATIONS

If we look at the market its predominance on the other domains has determined specific attitudes. For example, the economic dimension[47] of the Creative Europe programme has created a high level of competition to access it[48] by applying the same rules to the cultural and creative sector, which is by its nature very heterogenous. Organisations, that are different in scale and economic capacity (such as municipalities, foundations, small, medium and grassroots organisations) have competed against one another for the same calls. Already financed *consortia*, with a specific knowledge and set of practices, have competed against new project-proposals that still have to start with their experimentation. In a way, these appear to be the same condition for the new generation programme (2021-2028), which even though it has seen an increase in its budget and co-financing,[49] still carries loads from the past which limit its possibility to properly act.

47 In the first season (2014-2020) it has been devoted 0.15% of the EU budget.

48 The first-generation programme has co-financed almost 15% of the proposals submitted every year.

49 Three categories have arisen are in the culture sub-programme: 1) small-scale, the grants can cover 80% of the total eligible costs, up to a maximum of 200,000 euros. 2) medium-range cooperation, with 70% of co-funding with up to a maximum of 1,000,000 euros, while for large-scale cooperation the co-financing rate will be up to 60%, to a maximum of 2,000,000 euros.

The competition that the programme has fostered due to the combination of a scarcity of economic resources and an output oriented logic have also impacted personal and professional relations, limiting the capacity of the players "to think out of the box" as someone has said, to be creative, to cooperate, to build concrete actions based on common public interests. This has led some cultural players to perform mainly in favour of their own visibility, to create relations which, by being purely economic-driven, have been based on short-term tactics. Burnout, stress, displacement have been the conditions by some of the cultural and policy players who did not succeed in turning their initial emotions into a process of collectivisation and thus also of communication. Even if they have felt the need to bring about this shift, while trying to enhance actions in favour of the 'quality of life', they have seen themselves stuck in a kind of professional isolation. This can occur when the peer exchange takes place with discontinuity, or when we do not trust our 'partners in crime' or when we have difficulties in finding real allies with whom to build lasting cultural processes.

A similar logic could be seen in the implementation of the cultural participatory practices. Predominantly, the tendency here is to favour a hierarchical construction in a cultural organisation, or the prevalence of a specific target group that is easy to reach. The first need is to fulfil a critically first-hand policy regulation (local, national and European) which will give immediate (economic) recognition rather than the creation of a broader cultural pluralistic organism. It is here that a EU cooperative project (that is always an important achievement in the EU cultural space!) loses its radical push. The forms of co-creation or of co-programming find here reference in cultural democratisation or in excellence paradigms. In the name of flag-representations or of temporary policy interests, a cooperation project acts by reproducing a set of signs and symbols that are part of the hegemonic common sense.

According to some interviewees, the project-based logic seems to have intervened on the nature of the EU networks. "The Creative Europe programme has changed the EU network's linear role" a representative of a EU network has argued. While advocating for the different voices of the cultural sector, in some cases the EU networks need to compete with their members to get funded. With other additional nuances, small or grass-rooted organisations and institutions active in nationalistic and conservative environments have had (and still have) limited access, due to the difficulties to find co-financing and ways to support their long-term sustainability.

It is right at the heart of this tension that the Gramscian notion of *transformism* has intervened in the EU programme: in some cases, it has reduced the radical push of cultural and policy experimentations, which has remained stuck in a profound and unsolvable contradiction. Between the intentions, the values announced and the reconfirmation of already existing hegemonic positions, these experimentations have failed in posing key questions in terms of class reproduction, gender balance, economic redistribution of resources and sustainability. They do not provide an answer to key societal challenges.

THE INTERCONNECTION BETWEEN THE PEERS AND THE CIVIL DOMAINS

In my empirical journey, attention has been devoted to those players who are still convinced that struggles over the 'quality of life' are still needed. For some of them this has meant to treat the origins of personal discomforts as part of broader social phenomena, which has, in turn, been translated into the creation of a set of signs for the instalment of pluralistic democratic environments. These have been attitudes that I have encountered when the peers and the civil domains have, in a way, overlapped.

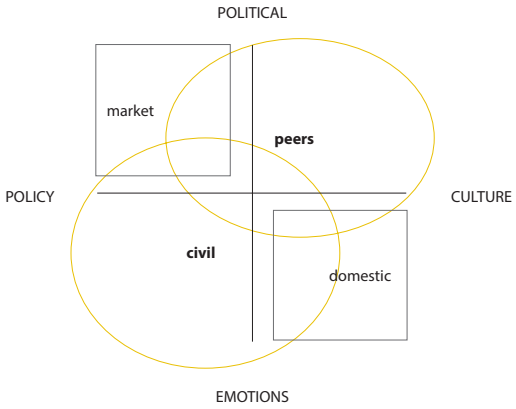

FIGURE 2 The interaction between the peers and the civil domains.

It is not by coincidence that transversal informal groupings (the *emotional clusters),* have been at the origins of efforts for counterbalancing forms of *transformism* and re-connecting the pieces of a fragmented reality. In the process of constant exchange that the EU programme has settled on, looking at the cultural field, the emotional clusters have enabled the construction of spaces in which the cultural players have learned to coexist, to grow, to experience conflict, to fail and to produce knowledge. It is in this light that we should comprehend some of the decisions that have been taken.

1) For some cultural programmers this has meant "not to give a space to a community, but to build with the communities new spaces where to recover together". According to one of my interviewees, this has stood for the need to move beyond a top-down concept, to address groups often mentioned under the generic umbrella of 'diversity'. These have been seen as the protagonists of forms of care and not only the beneficiaries in order to fulfil first-hand programme requirements. The policy paradigm of cultural democracy here has been translated by bringing a variety of social and cultural expressions to the centre of the dominant cultural narratives.

2) Over time, what I call a 'research-time' has appeared into the programme. For many cultural and policy interlocutors I have met this has been a response to the need for

evaluating and to re-asset the cultural actions implemented. This research-time has 'temporarily' been conquered by creating spaces where practice and theory have met. In some cases, the theoretical research has been linked to the artistic sphere via forms of action-research, or participatory action research, or by in-depth linear observation. All these temporary research spaces have in common to give name to the arising cultural and artistic models; to examine limits and opportunities; and in addition, they have brought to light the implications of the cultural participatory practices on democracy.

3) For the players who have consciously chosen to create cooperative environments, this has implied to perform according to a multicultural lens in the broader EU space; to conceive cooperation as the goal and not the market; hence to influence with their value-driven choices the networks in which they have been a part of. Therefore, connections with communities/citizens/civil society have been interpreted beyond the engagement *per se*, but as democratic tools. This has allowed them to provide the space for exercising compassion, (Nussbaum, ibid.), and emphasising a subjective viewpoint by bringing to light emotions and feelings of people or communities via worthwhile cultural civil actions (Gielen & Lijster, ibid.).

I have observed that the cultural players who have relied on this approach have in some cases been able to witness the longevity of their actions. They have achieved a certain visibility based on their credibility and reliability. This has allowed them to spread contents and to share political intentions; to grow, obtain funding funded and to influence international strategies by acting in the frame of networking conglomerates based on value-driven choices. This has been the condition of cultural institutions or organisations with stable economic conditions or a sound reputation. This has been also the case of cultural organisations active in regions where the cultural welfare has put in place financial instruments to support culture, its workers, and the means for favouring the legacy of the EU cooperation efforts. It has emerged that the more a cultural organisation is mainly economically independent to the revenues that it produces by its activities (by adopting a mix of funding), the more it has acquired the freedom to choose. In the seven-years-journey of the programme, some small-scale cultural organisations have developed their own path, their ways to (temporarily) tame the frenzied competitive market and to play between cooperative and competitive spaces. This approach has allowed them to develop economic and cultural strategies for overcoming the pressure of the project-based logic and to conquer those long-term strategies with more difficulty, but still evolving thanks to a constant peers-building process.

THE IMPACT OF THE CIVIL DOMAIN

Due to the high mobility fostered by the programme, my journey has revealed the evolution of different 'circles of exchanges': 1) at the local level various forms of cultural engagement have been experimented among the spectators/citizens, the artists and the

local cultural institutions/organisations; 2) in the trans-local dimension bottom-up EU cooperative strategies have been enhanced connecting local contexts in cultural cooperation projects, EU networks or informal aggregates; 3) a third level of interaction between the trans-local space and the EU policy dimension.

In the implemetation of their actions at local level, programmers, artistic directors, cultural managers, researchers or artists often have collaborated on the construction of trans-local realms. Hence, they have scaled-up in the third 'circle'. The mobility has also been of the policy officers and/or by those holding higher roles in the Commission. "Creative proximities" or "experiencing and incorporating the emotions that a specific context is able to solicit" have been expressions met in my interviews, which have disclosed the importance of the experience factor for connecting the cultural and the policy players as well as the local citizens. This has turned out to be a key conditon during EU meetings, events, brainstorming, festivals and conferences for the broader temporary international (and trans-local) community when in-transit in a physical space. In addition, the experience factor has been meaningful for sharing aims, values and opinions with policy delegates (from the Commission, for example,) who have experienced cultural events (and not only presenting themselves in opening speeches) taking place in the small 'local hubs' generated across the EU.

My fieldwork has revealed that the mobility between these three circles has generated a empirical process that I would call 'interrelated lobbying strategies'. The lobby process has been used by cultural operators active in the cooperation projects or the EU networks, as well as policy-officers who in their turn have continued this lobby effort in the frame of the EU institution, taking strength, for example, from advocacy campaigns. Therefore, two main directions have appeared: a bottom-up trajectory starting from the cultural field and a top-down direction which has brought back into the cultural field the results of the negotiations made.

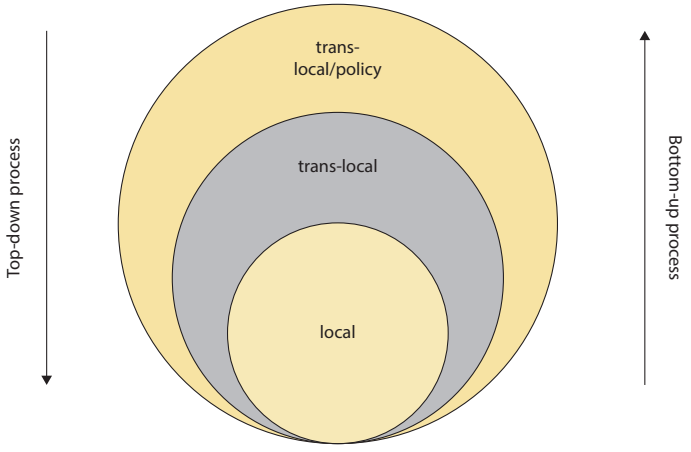

FIGURE 3 The process of interrelated lobbying strategies.

This has appeared as a very sensible procedure. When animated by struggles over 'the quality of life', slow and small changes have taken shape in favour of pluralistic instalments. So, the sensibility of individual will, together with the various emotional clusters, have attributed a porous nature to the policy process. This refers to when the top-down and bottom-up realms do not interrupt the progression of rising instances. On the contrary, they facilitate the process of exchange, transformation and adjustment of policy schemes. Hence, they take care of specific 'battles' which in same cases have required years to see the results. For that reason, this process has implied failures, un-responded to expectations, conflictual relations, as well as unexpected surprises. Co-imaginative politics have intervened here by outlining narratives and hence policy approaches beyond the irrational perception of reality but in the light of actual concrete political needs.

Over the years the results of these processes can be observed in the Annual Work Programme (i.e., the annual breakdown of the Multiannual Framework in which the Commission highlights the strategies and priorities that need to be implemented). In the case of the legal base of Creative Europe, changes were not applied, but annual priorities or actions were launched instead, in response to the social and political contextual situation. Since 2016, preparatory actions, new priorities or calls have been part of the Creative Europe programme (KEA, 2018). They have introduced changes to the understanding of the AD strategies (moving from marketing to the cultural democracy paradigm). The process of lobbying strategies has played a role in indicating needs, and in allocating resources (even if limited) for specific urgencies (integration of migrants, translation of participatory practices, and so on). Another case has been the Cross-Sectorial Strand, within which cultural and policy experimentations have been developed. Commons, bottom-up policy actions, and refugee emergencies have therefore been tackled in this arena. Their results have been, in some cases, embraced in further calls for applications.

Even if the spaces of policy experimentation have represented a small portion of the programme, they have been points of convergence where different players (top-down and bottom-up), each with their own cultural and social backgrounds, have given the birth to micropolitical contexts. In some fortunate cases, those have collaborated to the design of new funding schemes or priorities that have been embraced by the programme. This is the reason why I would qualify these transversal alliances as micropolitical realms. They have had in common that, by developing new procedures in small contexts, they have scaled-up into a far broader space. By surfing across the diverse policy paradigms, they have intervened in the EU multi-layered decision making cultural policy process. According to their specifics, they have influenced the life of many individuals and organisations when they have influenced new policy regulations, priorities or ways to evaluate the actions produced in the frame of the programme. Therefore, those micropolitical realms cannot be purely seen as top-down or bottom-up initiatives, but mainly as co-imaginative political efforts, especially when they have taken place throughout transversal collaborations and by fostering approaches beyond the pure monolithic interpretation of culture.

CONCLUSIONS

With this chapter I wanted to share a few insights gained with my extensive empirically-based research on the intersections between the cultural and policy spheres in moments when they are animated by struggles 'over the quality of life'. My journey in the Creative Europe setting and the translation of the AD priority has revealed that such struggles can acquire a meaningful role when they reduce the distance between the policy context on the one hand, and civil society on the other. This implies that the civil society does not necessarily reproduce the social hegemony. It can, however, contribute to the construction of common sense by addressing political issues. In this way it can create a friction in the cultural hegemonic representation. In a few words, for following the Gramscian lesson, civil and political societies cooperate in building narratives for representing the reality. Reality cannot be read in a black and white logic. For that reason, I suggest approaching the EU cultural policy process as 'porous'. By this, I mean facilitating spaces of experimentation between policy and cultural players and recognising the various micropolitical realms as the context within which to grasp the reality beyond its perception. To some extent when porosity is exercised, new cultural architectures can consciously surf in the schizophrenia generated by the 'organic crisis', characterised by the overlap and coexistence of such diverse attitudes. The epoch we are living in requires courage to make decisions and to introduce a shift in the way culture is understood and supported. This inevitably goes through the statements and advocacy strategies, by scrutinising the feelings, values, displacements of the actors in the EU chessboard, and therefore by taking advantage of the state of interdependency in which cultural and policy players operate. However, these interactions, even if stressful, are meaningful, when they are based on co-imaginative political efforts. They play their game between emotions and rational decisions, disregarded democratic promises and the players' faith in the fact that pluralistic democratic instalments need urgent and prompt answers. This approach appears crucial for surfing in times of paradigmatic changes.

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CHAPTER 12

CAPTURED IN FICTION? THE ART OF COMMONING URBAN SPACE

Hanka Otte & Pascal Gielen

Urban commons are often seen as one of the solutions to the problems major-minority cities are facing today. Sharing and managing common good like public space, on the basis of horizontality and reciprocity, that could provide for a much more equal participation in city life, is the idea. However, the huge challenge for urban commons lies exactly in the heterogeneity of urban populations. How to connect highly different actors to share, manage and reproduce common pool resources (CPR's), when one of the best-known scientists in the research of commons, Elinor Ostrom, empirically assessed that CPR's are best preserved by homogeneous societies?

> *Extensive norms (…) that narrowly define 'proper' behaviour (…) make it feasible for individuals to live in close interdependence on many fronts without excessive conflict. (…) None of these situations involves participants who vary greatly in regard to ownership of assets, skills, knowledge, ethnicity, race, or other variables that could strongly divide a group of individuals.*
> *(Ostrom, 1990: 88-89).*

For heterogeneous societies to be able to live and work together on an equal basis, bridges are needed to connect different shores without trying to change or adapt them. It is this kind of external social cohesion (Otte, 2019) that should prevent the commons from excluding humans (and non-human lives). Art as an expression of subjectification, is capable of providing for such bridges, because it can challenge one's perception of his or her reality and therefor open up to realities of the Other (Otte, 2019). However, to realise these bridges outside of the fictional space, the right balance between the autonomy of the art practice and its relation to the social environment is required. In three case studies, we explored whether practices of commoning art in an urban environment can provide for such a balance. We found that the success of these projects very much depended on the interplay between the commoning art project and its urban stakeholders, especially the local authorities as the owner and manager of public space. An interplay that is not evident, because of the different forms of democratic participation that both parties represent and perform. In the analysis of the studies,

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we detected three forms of participation that can be traced within political science and political philosophy. Before we explain how these forms supported (or worked against) the different goals of urban commoning the projects had in mind, we will first describe these three forms of democracy and their characteristics.

REPRESENTATION, DELIBERATION, AND AGONISM

In the scientific literature of the past two decades, three forms of democratic participation can be roughly distinguished. The first one is the well-known representative democracy as studied by scholars such as Alexis de Tocqueville (2011) and Max Weber (1988). This type of political participation occurred in still young nation states in the nineteenth century, together with the political emancipation of the bourgeois. It therefore fits well into the liberal philosophy that places the individual at its centre. This system is founded on the representation of the people through elections that are held every four or five years. In such a democratic order, a cultural policy on one hand serves to strengthen the identity and legitimacy of the nation state. It does so with national museums, theatres, libraries, and an official national language, statues and paintings of national heroes, and events that give the nation state historical foundation – in short, the national canon. On the other hand, the cultural policy serves the—individualistic—bourgeois culture. The civil struggle takes place here around the issue of suffrage, mainly for the lower social classes or for women. Culture is primarily seen as 'high' culture, or as the only good culture that leads to the edification of the masses and *Bildung*. This is why this culture is often promoted in top-down fashion through, for example, a national historical or art-historical canon. The postman should also be able to listen to Bach, is the idea behind the policy that assumes that there is only one good or legitimate culture (Bourdieu, 1974).

By the end of the 1960s, this notion had become contentious. Workers, artists, and students took to the streets to demand the democratisation of overly rigid and overly hierarchical state institutions and other institutes (parliament, university, museums). Debates, discussions, and negotiations were the basic ingredients of this second wave of participation, also referred to as deliberative democracy. Strongly influenced by Jürgen Habermas' 'communicative action' (Habermas, 1981) and his analysis of the origin of the public space (Habermas, 1962), this form of democracy assumes that consensus can be arrived at on the basis of debate and rational arguments. Whereas in a representative democracy the civil struggle focuses on the quantitative vote (the number of votes is what counts), in a deliberative democracy the struggle is about the quality of that vote (what counts is what one says). Thus, the attention shifts from political democracy to cultural democracy. Education, language, well-substantiated knowledge, and arguments determine the democratic clout of citizens. The civil struggle now revolves around cultural themes, such as the recognition of folk culture and other ethnic cultures. Additionally, the second feminist wave also claimed the right to an equal— cultural—

treatment of men and women in society, education and job opportunities. One could say that parallel to the interest of a deliberative democracy a so-called 'cultural turn' takes place. This is also expressed by the post-modernist debate, which, at least in theory, places high and low culture on equal footing. However, by its emphasis on empowerment, education, and expertise, this form of democracy has its own privileged class. This is no longer the bourgeois, but a white middle-class, which—thanks to the democratisation of education and to social mobility—defines both the political and cultural landscape. With regard to the latter this means that the various platforms and stages are primarily taken up by white middle-class art. From then on, cultural taste is not so much determined by the eccentric bourgeois and individualistic artist but by the teacher, the art mediator, or the art educator (Bourdieu, 1979). In other words, just like a representative democracy, a deliberative democracy also has its exclusion mechanisms.

The riots with so-called 'random violence' that broke out in American and European cities since the 1990s are often explained as being a reaction to these exclusion mechanisms (Gielen, 2015). Up to and including the Occupy Movement, these protests are often seen by both politicians and mainstream media as 'random' or 'senseless', either because the 'rioters' simply pose no political demands or because these demands cannot be understood unequivocally (such as in the case of the Indignados). Such eruptions can however be seen as symptoms of the fact that—both within a representative and a deliberative democracy—certain segments of the population are not being heard. These are primarily groups with little education, or immigrants who do not speak the national language or don't use the 'proper' (i.e., white, middle- class) vocabulary. It is one of the reasons why political philosophers and sociologists such as Chantal Mouffe, Ernesto Laclau, Jacques Rancière and Manuel Castells point out the civil and political importance of affects and emotion for a democracy. This brings us to a third form of participation, which, inspired by Mouffe, we call 'agonistic' (Mouffe, 2013). An agonistic democracy assumes—in line with Oliver Marchart (Marchart, 2007)—that democratic politics is 'post-foundational'. This means that there is no foundation for power, such as God is in a theocracy or the majority is in a representative democracy, or a ratio is in a deliberative democracy. There can be consensus in a democracy about who can be in power and how this power can be obtained but an agonistic model assumes that this consensus is the product of hegemony. This means that the consensus arrived at is always that of a specific, privileged group that has obtained the control of power in a society. However, by suggesting that this consensus is not that of a certain power faction but of society as a whole, the opinions and cultures of subaltern groups and other alleged minorities are obscured and excluded. An agonistic democracy now assumes that consensus never applies to the whole of society and therefore can always be contested. In other words, dissensus is always possible.

Characteristic for the civil struggle after this 'affective turn' is that it focuses on *doing*, on performance. The third feminist wave, for example, does not so much aspire to

a typical male career or role pattern but rather tries to form and claim its own identity in a performative manner (Butler, 1990; Honig, 1995), in order to give its own (feminine) meaning to a profession, organisational structure, or politics. Performance also expresses itself in so-called pre-figurative politics (Boggs, 1977) whereby citizens organise themselves in a different way and thereby effectively realise and test alternative political models of organisation or, in a broader sense, social models. An agonistic political model assumes that in addition to the vote—either quantitatively or qualitatively—there are also other forms of democratic participation. Democracy is therefore not limited to a proper debate in public or civic space, but translates itself in *acting* in civil space (Gielen, 2017). And it is exactly here that art and cultural codes may play a crucial part. After all, artists have the talent and training to express themselves in other ways than through rational arguments. Expression in visual language, dance, music but also using an idiosyncratic vocabulary or presenting an alternative narrative are part of the core business of the arts. An agonistic cultural policy will therefore primarily create the conditions (cf. Rancière) for making (as yet) invisible, inaudible, and unutterable democratic demands visible and audible.

COMMONING POLITICS

One of the demands and practices that, for the past thirty years, have remained unseen, and has also been repressed and suppressed, is that of the commons. Commoning in fact is a form of participation whereby commoners give form to their (social) environment by collective self-management of resources. To achieve this, commoners use competencies that are required in both a deliberative and an agonistic democracy. In addition to 'doing'; for example, setting up an organisation, a blog, a platform, or developing rules, a lot of discussion and negotiation takes place (such as in assemblies), among commoners. Although commoners will vote every once in a while, in order to arrive at a decision (representation), the emphasis is on deliberation and agonistics (cf. supra). Especially the development of common initiatives rests on this participative model. Commoning practices tend to develop particularly in domains for which governments show no interest or where they fail to act and where market parties do not or not yet see, potential for profit. This third space between state and market is that of the civil initiative where citizens take matters into their own hands. And, according to Castells, such civil actions originate in emotions (Castells, 2015). Also, passions generate the energy and drive for such actions.

However, for commoning practices to develop sustainably, rules, forms of management and structures need to be developed. Commoning politics then means 1) agreeing on rules for the collective self-management of resources, 2) designing strategies to safeguard the commons from interference by the government or the market and to realise an expansion of the commons, by which 3) exchange and community bonds are developed in alternative ways. We have already written elsewhere how culture,

in the anthropological sense as the source of 'giving meaning to themselves and to the society in which human-beings live' (Gielen, 2015), forms the basis for these commoning politics. Whereas both communism and (neo)liberalism see the economy as the foundation of society, so-called 'commonism' regards economy, politics but also ecology as the outcome of processes of giving meaning. This is why commonism is able to propose alternative forms of economy, politics, and living together in a broader sense, on the basis of culture. In the cases discussed below, we therefore see art and culture as critical allies that influence a democracy and in a broader sense a society, mainly through deliberative and agonistic participation. In other words, artists and cultural organisations relate to the three outlined forms of participation, which, let's be clear, can exist beside and with each other in a democracy, albeit with varying degrees of tension.

How they (can) do this exactly, we will try to clarify by providing three case studies in which artists and/or cultural organisations attempt to change the management of common resources by the city government or market parties into a management according to commoning principles. The project *Montaña Verde* was about a public square in the city of Antwerp that was to be 'given back to its residents and users'. With the *Tower of Babel* multilingualism was the communal resource that was reimagined. And with 'De Grond der Dingen' (The Ground of Things) an attempt was made to equally redistribute part of the land on which the city of Mechelen is built.

Before setting out on our journey through these colourful cultural initiatives, we must stress that we only analyse their commoning politics and the interplay of the three outlined participative forms from their relationship and negotiation with city government agencies. We make no analysis of the forms of participation clarifying the internal operation and organisation of, for example, the initiative-taking artists and volunteers among themselves. Internal forms of participation can be very different from the 'external' forms entered into, with government agencies or market parties.

Montaña Verde

During spring and summer of 2018, the Spanish architect collective Recetas Urbanas realised the artwork *Montaña Verde* in the De Coninck Square in Antwerp. The idea was to 'give back this part of the city to its residents and make it grow to serve the wishes of residents and users' (City of Antwerp, 2018). The Middelheim Museum and the Green Department, acting on behalf of the city government, were enthusiastic about the agonistic work methods of Recetas Urbanas, which can be described as:

> *Citizen actions that engender a civil space emancipated from the state …, as the emancipation of a group that constitutes itself as an active subject capable of engaging with the authorities and disputing their power as a conscious and proactive purposeful citizen.*
> *(Bonet, 2017: 166)*

However, the slope of the green mountain turned out to be a steep one to climb. This had everything to do with the setting: the project took place in a form the Spaniards found unfamiliar for a public space and the commissioning partner strictly adhered to its civic character, whereas Recetas Urbanas is used to making such a public or civic space, civil again. They do so by working in what they themselves call an 'a-legal' manner. Taking human rights as their starting point, they often build works because there is a need for them, because people ask for these works, often without official permission. Part of the building process is to build a new relationship with representatives of the representative democracy. This is why in every building project Recetas Urbanas bargains for a 'social protocol', often drawn up with the aid of lawyers. These protocols stipulate the right of use by the groups involved, according to commoning principles in an agreement with governments. By *doing*, especially by starting to build immediately, the architects manage to manoeuvre themselves into a negotiating position opposite politicians and policymakers. Civil action and agonistic acting thus triggers a process of deliberation. However, in Antwerp this tactic of commoning politics failed and that is what makes this case so interesting, as it shows what happens when the political game between the various forms of participation starts to falter.

The reason for the project was 'The year of the Baroque'. The city administration wished for an artwork that would appeal to a lot of tourists, the Green Department wanted to realise something sustainable to sensitise citizens to the green ideal and the Middelheim Museum aimed for involving local residents in an art project. The experts of both departments saw potential in the agonistic and deliberative work method of Recetas Urbanas. However, it wasn't long before this method was at odds with the representative mode of operation of the city services. This already began during the decision-making stage. Together with Recetas Urbanas, the organisers selected a suitable place in the city. It was to be a 'grey' (i.e., not-green) public space, accessible to tourists but one that was, at the request of Recetas Urbanas and the Middelheim Museum, mainly in use by residents living at the margins of society and whose voice—in a representative democracy—was hardly being heard. Eventually the De Coninck Square was chosen, infamous for its drugs-related crime which the city had been trying for years to combat with measures ranging from 24-hour camera surveillance and strict police controls to attempts at gentrification. The agonistic proposal by Recetas Urbanas was to establish new social connections through the metaphor of ill or 'bad' weeds:

> *The huge challenge for cities is to bring extremely different people to live in and share the same environment and to design this environment for all. Obviously, there will be some left behind. Because they are too different, not 'adapted' or integrated', sick or lost… they are considered as the 'bad weed' of urban life. Yet, everyone has a right to the city, to participate in city life and the city's development. … If we want to rethink how we build and live in our cities, it is crucial to include those who are excluded now. Let's use this moment to grow social links as much as green; to re-introduce bad weed and wild weed, by changing the way we look at them.*
> *(Recetas Urbanas, 2017)*

During the first negotiations Recetas Urbanas came away empty-handed. It was decided not to follow the metaphor of 'bad weed', but to remain close to the theme of the Baroque by using herbs and fruit trees 'that were cultivated during the Baroque era for their nutritious or healing qualities' (Hermans & Boons, 2018: 91). Normally, since civil action is their trademark, Recetas Urbanas do have a strong negotiating position vis-à-vis the authorities. However, their commoning attempts to create some empowerment for those who have no voice during the phase of building – such as the residents' wish to create a temporary safe playground for children or have a debate about the design of the square— failed. The leader of Recetas Urbanas, architect Santiago Cirugeda, was clearly frustrated:

> *The problem is that we never had political meetings (…) If you want to really make it a social process, you must involve [politicians]. But how can I meet with the district? I don't know where the building district is!.*
> *(Cirugeda, 2018).*

All discussions were mediated by the city services or by freelancers appointed by them. Therefore, Cirugeda was unable to initiate a deliberative process. Recetas Urbanas had gone along with the logic of a representative democracy and were now unable to turn the tide. The plans were too far advanced and political issues underrepresented. The work was constructed in a top-down manner in the image of the square that the representatives had: a sculpture that would be appealing to tourists and that would refer to Baroque in an artful way, while at the same time making the inhabitants of the square more sensitive to green ideas. As a consequence, there was no 'giving back this piece of the city'. An agonistic approach didn't work: residents and users of the square could participate in the plans conceived by others but could no longer contest or change these plans with the help of Recetas Urbanas.

The Tower of Babel

Montaña Verde was dismantled when the 'Experience Traps' exhibition ended. The wood and the tools were distributed among the people of Antwerp. Much of the wood was collected by Rooftoptiger, an artist collective that is temporarily housed on the site of a former slaughterhouse in the north of Antwerp. The city service Antwerp Book City, which supports and organises all kinds of literary activities, had introduced them to Antwerp's city poet 2018-2019, Maud Vanhauwaert. Vanhauwaert wanted to build a Tower of Babel, as a monument to the confusion of tongues in a superdiverse city where more than four hundred languages are spoken and social, economic and ideological differences exist. It so happened that Rooftoptiger had been wanting to build such a tower for a long time. By reversing the legend of the tower, the artists wanted to find out how the multilingualism could be shared as a common pool resource, unlike the representative democracy, which foregrounds only one language, Dutch. Legend has it that the Tower of Babel was never finished because God punished the people who tried

to reach up to heaven with multilingualism so that they could no longer understand each other and had to abandon their ambitious scheme. By contrast, Vanhauwaert says: "It is in our speechlessness that we understand each other best" (Vanhauwaert, 2018).

As with *Montaña Verde*, a suitable location still had to be found during the conceptual phase of the project. Attempts were made to erect a tower somewhere in the city centre, but this always brought with it too many problems in terms of permits and regulations. Eventually, Rooftoptiger decided to use the slaughterhouse site where their workshop is; an old shed owned by a project developer that Rooftoptiger is allowed to use in exchange for participation projects in the neighbourhood. So, a private site. With permission of the owner, it gave the artists the freedom to design everything according to their own ideas. In order to make the site accessible for the public they only needed an event permit from the city, and the fire brigade checked whether the Tower would be built according to safety regulations. Thanks to the collaboration with Antwerp Book City, the permit was given without problems. The city only provided services and did not interfere with the content of the project. For four months, the site became a semi-public space where artists, together with citizens, could shape a multilingual and diverse community. The idea was to erect a high tower from bamboo and other natural materials and to do this together with a great diversity of people from the neighbourhood and elsewhere in Antwerp. A tower from which as many languages as possible would play out through a sound system and where people with various mother tongues could meet. The space was imagined by the artists as one of possibilities, thanks to multilingualism and cultural diversity, elements that are so often seen as problematic by politics and the media. By starting from the wishes and dreams of local residents who had trouble getting their voices heard, by involving as many other languages, artists, volunteers, and sometimes illegals, in the construction and the activities in and around the tower, an agonistic process was initiated. The *Tower of Babel* was eventually shaped by this heterogenous gang. The whole period of building, weaving, making, organising, talking, cooking, caring, eating, living, in short *doing* together, defined the project of the *Tower of Babel*. During all this, many languages were spoken, including Arabic, French, Wolof, English, Dutch and Russian. Some people came to learn better Dutch, others found out that English gave them more opportunities. But people could understand each other: not just by speaking different languages and helping each other along the way but especially by the doing: by pointing, by demonstrating things, reading each other's faces.

> *… it is actually through a process and because you are really working with other people [that] you don't really need to know the same language (…). That was really my experience: 'it's not because you don't know a language that you can't work together'. And, actually, this language simply disappears. Just by holding something and saying 'give me a glass' and then saying 'this is a glass', then you have a language …*
> *(Rombouts, 2020)*

The form of participation in this project is deliberative because the use of the space was negotiated with the owner in the preparation stage and the city services gave their blessing. However, it becomes agonistic when it gives a stage and voice to citizens who have difficulty being heard in a representative democracy and who also do not speak the right language to get anything done in a deliberative model. With the *Tower of Babel* many people were given the chance to help design an urban space and a community. However, the civil action—building a multilingual and diverse community—was only temporary and the commoning politics took place on a site for which future plans had already been made.

In the near future, the project developer will turn this site into a road that will run through a completely renovated neighbourhood with high-rise apartments. So, the site already has a destination that is being structured top-down: the project developer, together with city planning and other stakeholders, makes a plan for what the space will look like, will build according to the design, and then the residents can move in. The *Tower of Babel* happened independent of these plans, meaning that in the setup the project did not have a direct influence on the designs or building plans that are already in place. It was a cultural event in a fictional space (just like *Montaña Verde* was, which remained part of a visual arts exhibition. In the latter case, the city services did what they could to keep it that way, by reining in the agonistic attempts by Recetas Urbanas as much as possible, from a representative logic. In the case of the *Tower of Babel* they did not have to make this effort, as the project was performed entirely outside public space. On the one hand this gives Rooftoptiger and the city poet a lot of space to have a place for an agonistic form of democracy but on the other hand it raises the question of how far it will actually have a place in society. In other words: can the initiated deliberation be continued and thus also make real political claims from this fictitious site?

The Ground of Things

The Theatre Arsenaal/Lazarus and municipal museum Hof van Busleyden began the project, 'The Ground of Things', in 2019. The goal was to address inequality by claiming one square metre of ground for each inhabitant of Mechelen. After all, the main cause of socio-economic inequality has less to do with income than with inheritance, the organisers concluded. To everyone's surprise, the city administration quickly took a liking to the project and immediately made 20,000 square metres available. This started a commoning dynamics in which all residents were invited to come up with ideas for (re) designing the urban space. So, in this project the people of Mechelen take the lead. This means that they are sketching the future image of the city. Arsenaal and the museum collected all the proposals, brought the ideas and the people behind them together, organised negotiations, meetings and debates to discuss the plans, and provided a large underground park, an exhibition designed by scenographer Jozef Wouters and Barry Ahmad Talib. In this 'Neverending Park' the eighty proposals that were selected after a deliberative day of negotiation were exhibited. Each idea was visualised in a scale model, made by the artist Benjamin Verdonck.

As researchers we only looked at the deliberative and agonistic elements of the preparation phase (of which the exhibition is a part). The initial claim by the artist Willy Thomas, who from the Arsenaal demanded a square metre per Mecheler, can certainly be called agonistic. But the positive reaction of the mayor to immediately make 20,000 square metres available soon led him into a deliberative logic. Also, civil servants and politicians were willing to negotiate with citizens and the intention is to realise at least some of the proposals in collaboration with the city services. One proposal was even immediately realised, as it was highly feasible. One point of attention that remains is: who are the citizens that come to negotiate around the proposals? Are they not again mainly the white, empowered, and skilled middle-class people who feel at home in a deliberative model?

The initiators therefore, on a caravan bicycle, consciously visited the more disenfranchised neighbourhoods, the care centres and charity organisations. This tour resulted, among other things, in the project 'Unheard'. It was a platform for the voices of people who have the feeling that they are not being heard. This 'chair' has meanwhile been realised and has become the subject of a two-year process, in collaboration with a charity organisation, in which the chair will tour Mechelen to collect all those unheard voices.

Still, it remains difficult to reach subaltern groups, the organisers freely admitted. Many of the proposals did however focus on ideas to benefit people without voices, ranging from inserting low stimulus pauses, at events for those who cannot tolerate the level of sound and lights, to a project where pet owners (who can't afford a vet), can obtain free consults for their sick animals. Other examples were road signs listing the countries of origin of all Mechelen residents in recognition of the various cultures in the city, improving pathways for wheelchair users and even a 'throwaway fridge' where food can be placed for residents who have nothing to eat. The project is deliberative as it organises debates and negotiation rounds and perhaps therefore mainly attracts a white middle class but those same people—also because of encouragement by the organisers—do feel challenged to submit proposals, on behalf of and to the benefit of, citizens who usually are less seen and heard. By transforming these proposals into images and showing these in a large exhibition space that by its very design invites people to roam, meet people, and engage in conversation, the image, the doing and the experiencing are added to the deliberative process. In other words, the deliberative process results in concrete projects and in 'doing' so, that agonistic proposals can be realised.

In this 'The Ground of Things' is different from projects such as the participatory budgeting in Antwerp or Ghent, which are often managed by the government within a representative logic. 'The Ground of Things', by contrast, was initiated and completely organised by two cultural organisations. The local government in no way interfered with the content but did take an interest. The council member for Culture even spent a few nights in the park to talk with visitors and familiarise himself with the various ideas. Civil servants too came to the Neverending Park to learn about everything that

concerns the people of Mechelen who participate in the project. In the final phase, the negotiations will start with them and the local government about the realisation of the plans that surfaced in the deliberative process. And that's when it becomes exciting: eventually, it is still the government that decides whether plans will go through or not and in what form. Then it will become clear in how far the commoning politics will succeed and in how far 'The Ground of Things' can penetrate from the fictional space of the exhibition into the real urban fabric. The 'Neverending Park' was mainly, both literally and figuratively, a space of imagination in a museum, where everything can still be dreamt and said. As soon as the city makes good on its promise to execute the plans, the distinction will be gone and it will turn out that the imagination can really shape the city and with it, society. Agonistic voices then find their way within a representative order through an artistic and deliberative mediation.

CULTURE AS A CRITICAL ALLY

In all three art projects artists and cultural organisations proposed an urban common, in which a communal resource—a public square, language and public ground, respectively—were to be managed, organised, and (re)produced by residents. The 'success' of this turned out to depend on the interplay between the stakeholders and the forms of participation they represent. But even more important, was local government accepting and recognising other forms of participation than just that of a representative democracy. As all three projects showed, the government can quite easily lock up the agonistic movements of the artist in the realm of fiction.

Thus, *Montaña Verde* remained part of the 'Experience Traps' exhibition and was constantly held in that fictional space, by avoiding the deliberation between the agonistic moves of Recetas Urbanas and the representative democracy. The *Tower of Babel*, since it was built on private property, was able to completely avoid the representatives of representative democracy, thereby creating the freedom to thematise multilingualism in an agonistic move. But the distance to the government simply remained too large: agony was permitted within the poetic and artistic licence, but remained far from the politically charged debate on multilingualism. The poet Vanhauwaert, by the way, has on many occasions publicly declared that she does not wish to make political art, which is quite different from the case of 'The Ground of Things', where the dialogue with politicians and civil servants is deliberately entertained. For now, it seems like the city is willing to allow an agonistic participation through deliberation. It would be a first, that a city allows commoning politics and that the local government acts as a facilitator. Artists, as critical allies, can play a meaningful role in this because they of all people are capable of bringing out the voices of those who cannot speak or who are not being heard. By imagining, performing, expressing, playing, they expand the possibilities of making, planting, building, creating together. In short, of *doing* democracy.

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CONTRIBUTORS

Walter van Andel holds the research chair on 'Valuable entrepreneurship in and by the arts' at the University of the Arts, Utrecht, and is lecturer at Antwerp Management School and the University of Antwerp. Since 2010, Walter has been researching business models, entrepreneurship and innovation at creative and cultural organisations, with a focus on uncovering (bundles of) strategic choices and organisational principles that could lead to a sustainable and healthy creative practice. Walter obtained a PhD in applied economics at the University of Antwerp with a research that focused on the role of business models in harnessing organisational tensions within creative organisations, with special attention towards the sector of architecture.

Iolanda Bianchi (PhD in political science and PhD in urban planning) is an urban political scholar. Her research focuses on the interplay between collective and public action at the urban scale, to examine how this interplay can produce social and policy change, in order to achieve more just, equal and democratic cities. To push knowledge forward in this debate, she is working at the crossroad of commons and new municipalism theory. She currently holds a Juan de la Cierva postdoctoral researcher position at the Institute of Government and Public Policy (IGOP) at the Autonomous University of Barcelona.

Gideon Boie is an architect-philosopher, visiting professor at the Faculty of Architecture of KU Leuven and founder of the architecture-critical collective BAVO. His work focuses on the political dimension of art, architecture and spatial planning. See: www.bavo.biz.

Giuliana Ciancio – researcher, cultural manager, curator, and lecturer – deals with live performing arts, international programming and cultural policies in Europe. In her career she has been creating and managing large-scale cultural cooperation projects at the national and international level. She teaches cultural management, new cultural trends and international programming at post-graduated level. Currently, she is PhD candidate at the University of Antwerp (Belgium) within the C.C.Q.O – Cultural Commons Quest Office; co-curator and project manager of the Creative Europe funded large-scale cooperation project Be SpectACTive; co-founder and board member of the Italian based organisation Liv.in.g. (Live Internationalization Gateway).

Lara García Díaz hybridises fields of action such as academic and artistic research, cultural mediation, social participation, pedagogy and critical thinking. Her work relates to studies on precarity politics, psychopathologies, ethics of care and cultural and urban commons in the European context. Her research can be found in a variety of books, exhibitions, journals or fanzines and has been translated into languages such as English, Spanish, Italian, Dutch or Thai. Lara is co-founder of the feminist cultural collective Larre and has shared ideas in spaces such as Oslo Biennale (2019), ZonaMACO (México, 2020) or Thailand Biennale (2021).

Pascal Gielen is full professor of sociology of art and politics at the Antwerp Research Institute for the Arts (Antwerp University – Belgium) where he leads the Culture Commons Quest Office. Gielen is editor in-chief of the international book series Arts in Society. In 2016 he became laureate of the Odysseus grant for excellent international scientific research of the Fund for Scientific Research Flanders in Belgium. His research focuses on creative labour, the institutional context of the arts and on cultural politics. Gielen has published many books which are translated in English, Korean, Polish, Portuguese, Russian, Spanish and Turkish.

Arne Herman is associated with the Antwerp Symphony Orchestra as programmer and dramaturg, and with the Royal Conservatory of Antwerp as lecturer in 'Music and Literature'. He studied musicology and philosophy at the KU Leuven, and clarinet at the LUCA School of Arts. At the University of Antwerp, Arne obtained his doctorate in music philosophy, with a dissertation on current symphonic orchestral practice and its impact on the development of the musical repertoire. For this research, he worked out case studies in Amsterdam, London and Antwerp. In 2022, the result of this research is published by Routledge Publishers under the title *Orchestra Management. Models and Repertoires for the Symphony Orchestra*. In addition, Arne is regularly asked for introductions, lectures and texts at various cultural institutions in Belgium.

Gökhan Kodalak is a theorist, teaching philosophies of architecture, nature, and cities at Pratt Institute; an architect, directing design studios at Parsons School of Design; and an architectural historian, having completed his PhD dissertation titled "Spinoza and Architecture" at Cornell University. Kodalak's work explores diverse issues such as architectural ontology and epistemology, design ecology and nature-architecture continuum, spatial politics and urban commons, affective aesthetics and immanent ethics, and the heterodox Spinozist conception that architectural modalities are alive [*animata*]. His scholarship has been awarded by the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation and Canadian Centre for Architecture, and published in *Footprint* (2015), *Spinoza's Philosophy of Ratio* (2018), *Deleuze Studies Journal* (2018), *Log* (2020-21), and *Architectures of Life and Death* (2021). And his design work is acknowledged with international awards and exhibited at Johnson Museum of Art (NY) and Antalya Architecture Biennial.

Thijs Lijster is assistant professor of philosophy of art and culture at the Faculty of Arts of the University of Groningen, and was a postdoc researcher at the Culture Commons Quest Office of the University of Antwerp. He published *Benjamin and Adorno on Art and Art Criticism. Critique of Art* (2017), was editor of *The Future of the New* (2018), and coeditor of *De Nieuwe Duitse Filosofie* (*The New German Philosophy*, 2013), *De Kunst van Kritiek* (*The Art of Critique*, 2015), and *Spaces for Criticism. Shifts in Contemporary Art Discourses* (2015).

Lara van Meeteren lives and works in Hong Kong and Bangkok. She conducts research, writes and co-organises projects. Aiming to make the political nature of art and its events and institutions visible, in her work Lara explores the idea of contemporary art as counter-hegemonic practice. Her writing has been published in Open Philosophy, OnCurating and Social Inclusion, among others. With co-author Bart Wissink, she has a collaborative research-based practice, interrogating the social role of art and independent art organising in East and Southeast Asia. A recent ongoing project, with Ariane Sutthavong and Sina Wittayawiroj, is the *inappropriate BOOK CLUB*, a common-based initiative focusing on art and politics.

Hanka Otte is senior researcher and university teacher in the field of art sociology and cultural policy. She works at the University of Antwerp (BE), Groningen University (NL) and as a freelancer. In her research, she mainly focuses on the civil value of art and how policy can help generate culture commons. In 2018 she was awarded the NWO Boekman Dissertation Prize for her thesis *Binding or Bridging? On the Relation between Art, Cultural Policy and Social Cohesion*. Hanka lives in Groningen, where she is a member of Breeding place De Campagne, an organisation figuring out how to 'common'.

Ching Lin Pang is Associate Professor in the Department of Applied Linguistics, Translation and Interpreting and Academic Director of the Postgraduate Program China Europe Cultural Curatorship Studies, University of Antwerp. She is also affiliated with KU Leuven, Belgium. Her research is situated at the intersection of mobilities, multilingualism, arts and aesthetics of cultural workers in the urban context. She is an editorial member of Leuven University Press and the Cosmopolitan Civil Societies Journal. Contact: chinglin.pang@uantwerpen.be.

Tian Shi recently obtained her PhD in anthropology from KU Leuven, Belgium. Her research interests include research on migration, refugee resettlement, ethnic identity, and the Hmong diaspora. She has been involved in a variety of migration and new media research projects, such as 'Ethnic Policy in the EU and European Hmong Integration' (CPRC project).

Stavros Stavrides, architect and activist, is Professor at the School of Architecture, National Technical University of Athens, Greece. He is currently the head of NTUA *Lab for the Architectural Design and Communication*. He has done extensive research fieldwork in Brazil, Uruguay, Argentina and Mexico focused on housing-as-commons and urban struggles for self-management. His recent publications include *Common Spaces of Urban Emancipation* (Manchester 2019), *Common Space. The City as Commons*, (London 2016, Istanbul 2016, Athens 2019, Lisbon 2021, Milano 2022, Seoul and Belgrade forthcoming) and *Towards the City of Thresholds* (Trento, 2010, Madrid 2016, Istanbul 2016, N. York 2019). Personal homepage: http://courses.arch.ntua.gr/stavrides.html.

Maria Francesca De Tullio is researcher in Constitutional Law (Federico II University of Naples). She also worked at University of Antwerp, within the project Cultural and Creative Spaces and Cities (www.spacesandcities.com), and fulfilled a research residency at Université Paris 2. She authored a book on *Substantial Equality and New Dimensions of Political Participation*. Other main areas of research are: counter-terrorism and states of emergency, competition law on the Internet, the collective dimension of privacy in the age of big data. Finally, she is active in co-research processes with Italian and European commons movements, also in their negotiations with administrations.

Louis Volont is a sociologist. He is a Fulbright visiting scholar at MIT's School of Architecture & Planning (Program in Art, Culture & Technology) and a postdoc at the HafenCity University Hamburg. He studied sociology in Leuven and Milan, and defended his PhD in 2021 at the University of Antwerp (*Shapeshifting: The Cultural Production of Common Space*, Antwerp University Press). Louis investigates processes of urban future-making, urban commoning, socio-technical imaginaries and the work of Henri Lefebvre. His work has been featured in journals such as *Antipode*, *City & Community* and *Social Inclusion*.

Bart Wissink is associate professor urban studies and urban policy at City University of Hong Kong. His research centres on issues relating to urban governance and social justice, with a focus on cultural commoning in recent years. With co-author Lara van Meeteren, he has a research-based practice that interrogates the social role of art and independent contemporary art organising in East and Southeast Asia. They co-created *coming soon* • เร็ว ๆ นี้ for the 2018 Bangkok Biennial (www.comingsoonbkk.com). For the 2020 Bangkok Biennial, together with Ariane Sutthavong and Sina Wittayawiroj, they organised the *inappropriate BOOK CLUB*, a common-oriented initiative focusing on art and politics (www.facebook.com/inappropriateBOOKCLUB).

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