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Politics and Aesthetics of the Urban Commons: Navigating the Gaze of the City, the State, the Market

Editors

Peer Smets and Louis Volont

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Editorial

The Politics and Aesthetics of the Urban Commons: Navigating the Gaze of the City, the State, the Market

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Abstract
This thematic issue puts "urban commoning" centre stage. Urban commoning constitutes the practice of sharing urban resources (space, streets, energy, and more) through principles of inclusion and cooperation. Whilst generally defined as an autonomous, bottom-up, and most of all cooperative practice, the sphere of the commons necessarily stands in interaction with two other spheres: the state/city ("provision") and the market ("competition"). Yet, the various interlinkages between the commons, the state/city, and the market are underexplored. Hence the rationale for this thematic issue: How does the relation between commons, states/cities, and markets play out in the urban realm? What are the possibilities and pitfalls of linking commons with states/cities and markets? In the first section of this editorial, we provide a substantiated introduction to the concept of the commons, its history, and its urban applications. In the second part, we give an overview of the issue's contributions. Scholars, activists, and practitioners from the disciplines of urban studies, cultural studies, planning, sustainability, sociology, architecture, and philosophy delve into the uncharted territory between commons, states/cities, and markets, through case studies from the Global North and South. The first three articles delve into the politics of urban commoning while the last three articles illuminate the practice's aesthetic dimension.

Keywords
city; commoning; commons; market; neoliberalism; space; state

Issue
This editorial is a part of the issue "The Politics and Aesthetics of the Urban Commons: Navigating the Gaze of the City, the State, the Market" edited by Peer Smets (Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam) and Louis Volont (Massachusetts Institute of Technology).

1. Introduction

This thematic issue brings the practice of urban commoning into dialogue with two other social spheres: the state/city and the market. How do the commons ("cooperation''), states/cities ("provision") and markets ("competition") entangle and interact? What are the possibilities and pitfalls of these interlinkages, specifically in the urban realm? In this editorial, we will (a) disentangle the theoretical underpinnings of urban commoning and (b) give an overview of the articles published in this edition.

It is safe to say that the city has become a pivotal place in which global challenges unfold: climate change, housing inequality, privatization of public services, political conflict, gentrification, poverty, stress, pandemics, to name just a few. Yet, one may wonder whether Simmel (1903/2005) was right in saying that the urban experience turns the urbanite into a "blasé," uncaring, disinterested social subject. After all, the city also constitutes the battlefield on which the aforementioned challenges are confronted by groups as diverse as citizens, activists, artists, and policy representatives. Through for example autonomous neighbourhoods,

urban occupations, Community Land Trusts, and grassroots artistic experimentation, urbanites in the Global North and South set out to reassert participatory control over the urban commonwealth.

"A commons" refers to a resource shared by a group of people (Ostrom, 1990). "Commoning," then, constitutes the everyday practice of sharing resources, a cooperative stance that goes beyond state/public provision and market-based competition. The "commoner," finally, is the social subject engaging in the sharing, based on principles of inclusivity and cooperation.

Commoning dates back to the feudal mode of social organization, flourishing in Europe between the 9th and 15th centuries. In that constellation, the commons were unparcelled pieces of rural land, collectively cultivated and relied upon by peasant families (Bravo & De Moor, 2008; Zückert, 2012). For the landless masses and disparate groups of tradesmen, artisans, and immigrants, survival depended entirely on natural common resources as a means of subsistence, a dependence which was enabled by customary law or outright trespass (Linebaugh, 2008, 2014).

With this thematic issue, however, we investigate commoning in current times and in urban conditions. As Kip (2015) once argued: "The commons thus finally come to town." For our present purposes, we consider the work of American economist Elinor Ostrom as the first significant academic interest in modern commoning. Ostrom (1990) set out to lay bare the organizational preconditions that would allow for sustainable commoning. In her landmark study *Governing the Commons*, she defined a series of organizational "design principles" for sustainable and collective resource management—defining clear group boundaries, matching the rules of resource use to local conditions, ensuring that fellow-commoners can participate in modifying the rules, developing a system for monitoring fellow-commoners' behaviour, deploying sanctions for rule violators, providing accessible and low-cost means of dispute resolution, and having one's commoning project recognized ("not challenged") by external governmental authorities.

Whilst Ostrom's account was based on environmental commons (water basins, forests, irrigation systems), it was her colleague Charlotte Hess who shifted the focus to "various types of shared resources that have recently evolved…without pre-existing rules or clear institutional arrangements" (Hess, 2008, p. 1), such as "cultural commons," "knowledge commons," "infrastructure commons," and "neighbourhood commons" (see also Hess & Ostrom, 2007).

Moreover, Ostrom's precedent has inspired a new wave of urban literature (Foster & Iaione, 2016; Iaione, 2015, 2016) that conceives of urban commoning as the process whereby the governance of urban spaces (parks, streets, deserted factories, and the like) is devolved from the municipality to the urban citizenry. Examples can be found in the *Bologna Regulation for the Care and Regeneration of Urban Commons*, in the civic management facilities discussed by Pera and Bianchi (2022), and in the environmentally-oriented urban commons discussed by Colding et al. (2022).

In recent years, an emancipatory school of thought has seen the light of day as well, in which urban commoning is explicitly conceived as a bottom-up political project against the reign of capital in the urban realm. Hardt and Negri (2009), for instance, have coined the notion of "the common," referring not only to "the fruits of the soil" and to "nature's bounty," but more so to the shared outcomes of urban sociality ("social production"). By being together and co-mingling in the city, Hardt and Negri argue, urbanites create vibes, moods, languages, cultures, affects—in all: common goods which are invariably prone to privatization. As Hardt and Negri (2009, p. 142) wrote in *Commonwealth*, "capital simply [hovers] over [the common] parasitically with its disciplinary regimes, apparatuses of capture, mechanisms of appropriation, financial networks and the like."

In a similar vein, Stavrides (2012, p. 588) put forward the concept of "common space," which:

> Is not the public space as we know it, space given from a certain authority to the public…nor is it private space, if by this we mean space controlled and used by a limited group of people….Communities create "common space," space used under conditions decided on by communities and open to anyone.

Hence, the here-described emancipatory school emphasizes that the urban commons are not just mere resources to be shared, but also, and more importantly, a "means" through which to explore new and emancipatory forms of togetherness in the contemporary city. This school inherently argues that urban commons are not evidently pre-given, but must be made "common" by the social subject of the commoner and through the very process of commoning. "Commoning," De Angelis (2017, p. 211) contends, "is a form of social cooperation…that operates outside the code and protocol of capitalist-dominated social cooperation…in which profit for profit's sake, expropriation and competitiveness are not the dominant drivers."

The previous discussion of the Ostromian and the emancipatory tradition in (urban) commons scholarship is inevitably a reductive one. Far more theoretical accounts and empirical applications can be found in an extensive body of commons literature (Bresnihan & Byrne, 2015; Dardot & Laval, 2019; Eizenberg, 2012; Harvey, 2011; Noterman, 2016; Volont & Dobson, 2021). However, one finding invariably recurs throughout the field. The sphere of the commons necessarily stands in interaction with two other spheres: the state/city and the market. It is our contention that the various interlinkages between the commons, the state/city, and the market are not well-understood and are undertheorized. Hence the rationale for this thematic issue: How does the relation between commons, states/cities, and markets

play out in the urban realm? Which forms can these interlinkages take on? What are the possibilities and pitfalls of linking commons with states/cities and markets?

An additional rationale for our endeavour is the observation that both the state/city and the market—essential foundations of social life—are dominated by neoliberal values. Neoliberal values have created models that encourage individualism and discourage cooperation. The state tends to stimulate competition and individual conduct, which has led to a number of financial, economic, and social crises (Beck, 1992; Bollier, 2014; Geldof, 2020; Smets & Salman, 2008). Overall, we may describe the neoliberal state by a transition from "government" to "governance." Governmental institutions set up partnerships with actors from the market and/or civil society. These partnerships could offer possibilities for innovation but are also pervaded by market principles, privatization, the growth of private sector organizations, and non-bureaucratic modes of regulation (Peck et al., 2009). It is important to mention that the impact of neoliberalism differs in different countries. For example, England deals with a strict form of neoliberalism where the government has a small role, while the Netherlands cope with a neoliberal approach in which the governmental bureaucracy dominates (Korstenbroek & Smets, 2019).

Hence, *homo economicus* plays a prominent role in the market where efficiency reigns supreme. Enterprises often influence the state by using powerful political lobbies, interest groups, and institutionalized politics. Their aim is market exchange and growth in such a way that profit will be dominant. As such, scarcity can be used to raise profit margins. Neoliberalism brings together capitalism and democracy, which generates friction between market solutions and local empowerment. In other words, neoliberalism hampers democratic planning (Goonewardena, 2003). One example is the deliberative co-optation of protestors, once they will be faced with repeated cycles of institutional practices and authority discourses (Sager, 2011). Another example is what De Angelis (2013, p. 605–606) calls the "commons fix," i.e., the process whereby markets, states, and municipalities, guided by the reign of capital, "have to ask the commons to help manage the devastation."

However, once stakeholders from the commons, the state/city, and the market find a common ground, it creates possibilities for the creation of vital coalitions. Stakeholders working together with the local government can create ad-hoc and sustainable actions. Governance creates cooperation among stakeholders but also enables opportunities for power games among the elites who tend to decide what is useful for the other partners (Swyngedouw, 2005). The different groups have to face frictions between the mindsets of the partners within the triarchy. Governments tend to use a SMART approach that goes together with blueprints. The market and the commons tend to use a more flexible process approach (Smets & Azarhoosh, 2019).

Given this thematic issue's focus on the interplay between the commons, the state/city, and the market, we end this introductory section with Table 1, which gives an overview of the essential characteristics of the issue's central tripartite.

2. Overview of the Articles

Each article in this thematic issue illuminates the interrelationship between the three essential realms—the commons, the state/city, the market—in its own distinctive way. Nevertheless, as the issue's overall title attests, we

Table 1. A short comparison of the market, the state, and the commons.

	Market	State	Commons
Resources	Scarcity is given or created	Public funds	For rivalrous resources, there is enough for all through sharing. For non-rivalrous resources there is abundance
Strategy	Efficient resource allocation	Effective approach	Strengthening social relations
Ideas of individual	Homo economicus	Equality for all	Humans are primarily cooperative social beings
Change agents	Powerful political lobbies, interest groups, and institutionalized politics focused on government	Law and policies	Diverse communities working as diversity networks, with solutions coming from the margins
Focus	Market exchange and growth through individual initiative, innovation and efficiency	Rules, regulations	Use-value, common wealth, sustainable livelihoods and complementarity of enterprise
Core question	What can be sold and bought?	How can citizens be treated equally	What do I/we need to live?

Source: Based on Bollier (2014, p. 179) and Bauwens (2010).

present two clusters consisting of three articles each: the first cluster evolves around the politics of the urban commons; the second one around the aesthetics of the urban commons.

We open the first cluster with Caroline Newton and Roberto Rocco's article "Actually Existing Commons: Using the Commons to Reclaim the City." The authors advocate a conception of urban commoning that goes beyond the traditional imaginary of inclusivity, horizontal organization, and anti-capitalism. Instead, they shift the focus to the role of local communities, everyday commoning, and power mechanisms in slum governance. Newton and Rocco take us to the Paraisópolis slum in São Paulo, Brazil, where community development reflects the reproduction of social life in combination with everyday realities. At Paraisópolis, many communities and processes of commoning are widespread. The authors immediately touch upon the essence of the thematic issue, arguing that "rather than being purely insurgent against the market and the state, the commons exist in a complex web of continuous negotiation and trade-offs with them" (Newton & Rocco, 2022, p. 92). We discover how commoning practices are intertwined with the Covid-19 pandemic and at certain moments proved to be more successful than outside the slum area. In Newton and Rocco's account, slum dwellers are neither "victims" nor "heroes" but commoners: The slum commons create opportunities for citizens in vulnerable circumstances as they make use of formal and informal institutions of the state/city and the market. In fact, the slum contains a web of "nested commons," in which communities, state/city, and market interact through dialogue or struggle to obtain access to resources (water, electricity, land) and facilities (such as health care).

The cluster continues with the article "Urban Commons and Collective Action to Address Climate Change," by Johan Colding, Stephan Barthel, Robert Ljung, Felix Eriksson, and Stefan Sjöberg. This article evolves around collective action against the climate crisis: urban green commons, co-working spaces, and community climate commons. Urban green commons include for example allotments and community gardens that encourage environmental learning about global warming and its consequences. Co-working spaces create opportunities for sharing institutional attributes of commons by for example the sharing economy and through the reduction of transport and commuting distance. Thirdly, community climate commons create possibilities for reducing the use of carbon and for empowering communities and civil society groups. The authors also explore the determinants for the up-scaling of environmentally-oriented urban commons in a critical manner. Colding et al. (2022) argue for public sector support, but doubt whether private interests could or should sustain the development of urban commons. Moreover, collective choice arrangements in co-working spaces emerge as desirable, but it remains to be discovered how the continuum between "privately-run" and "collectively-run" manifests itself in the empirical realm. And lastly—scale. Colding and colleagues argue that trust-building is an essential characteristic of well-functioning common property systems. Smaller groups are likely to sustain trust and social cohesion. Once communities become too large or the number of stakeholders grows too much, trust among participants decreases; as seen earlier, this is a distinctively Ostromian statement. Overall: small is beautiful.

We end the first cluster with Marina Pera and Iolanda Bianchi's article "Governmentality, the Local State, and the Commons: An Analysis of Civic Management Facilities in Barcelona." Civic management facilities (cultural centres, neighbourhood centres, youth centres, among others) are in the hands of the City of Barcelona, but their operation and maintenance are in the hands of the communities that establish their own rules and norms to carry out socially transformative projects. We thus encounter commoning practices that are characterized by a hybrid institutional configuration. Building on Foucault's notion of governmentality, Pera and Bianchi (2022) show how the municipality uses technologies of power to control administration and bureaucratic procedures which encapsulates elements of revisionist neoliberalism. Such development tends to neutralize transformation and depoliticize the community that manages the facilities. Still, both realms (city, community) benefit from this hybrid form. For the commons, it creates opportunities for stability and economic capacity; for the local government, it creates opportunities for service provision and citizen participation. Reminiscent of the arguments made by Newton and Rocco (2022), these authors reiterate that purely autonomist commons are hard to find; or, in the words of the authors, that "it is rarely possible for commons to achieve autonomy in capitalist societies" (Pera & Bianchi, 2022, p. 122).

In the second cluster, we group three articles that revolve around the aesthetics of urban commoning. The cluster opens with Bart Wissink and Lara van Meeteren's article "Art Organisers as Commoners: On the Sustainability and Counter-Hegemonic Potential of the Bangkok Biennial." In this article, we discover how the relationship between commons, state and market is played out in the field of cultural production. Wissink and van Meeteren (2022) provide a detailed account of the commons-based Bangkok Biennial. The authors reflect on the counter-hegemonic potency of the latter, particularly in relation to the state-organized Thailand Biennale and the corporate Bangkok Art Biennale. Playing a pivotal part in this contribution is political philosopher Chantal Mouffe's conceptual apparatus. Mouffe is known for her argument that "politics proper" implies a perpetual clash between hegemonic projects in all domains of society; in the grander scheme of this issue, this would mean an engagement of the commons with the state/city and the market. However, Wissink and van Meeteren posit an important caveat: context is crucial. The commons-

based Bangkok Biennial explicitly refused to engage with state and market actors, thus embarking on what may be called an "exodus" strategy. As the authors argue, the commoners involved imagined "state and market parties not as friendly opposition, but as enemies with whom they shouldn't engage" (Wissink & van Meeteren, 2022, p. 137). Whilst the exodus approach might undermine the sustainability of commoning practices, the authors end their article nevertheless with a reflection on how artists might take on organizing functions, in the streets as well as in the art world. Such multiplicity of organizing roles, the authors argue, is what might augment the sustainability of counter-hegemonic artistic commoning.

The cluster continues with Louis Volont's "Urban Commoning: An Assessment of Its Aesthetic Dimension." Volont approaches the notion of "aesthetics" in the literal sense, namely, as "that which presents itself to sense perception" (Volont, 2022, p. 141). Urban politics, Volont argues with the help of philosopher Jacques Rancière, is a constant play of aesthetics: Some social groups are seen and heard, whilst others pass unnoticed. Some have a voice, others are noise. The article describes the case of Pension Almonde, Rotterdam. Pension Almonde emerged after a group of commoners transformed a vacant social housing complex into a temporary living and working space for individuals and cultural initiatives who, due to the nomadic nature of their activities, are unable to apply for social housing, nor to buy accommodation on the private market. The aim of Pension Almonde was thus an inherently aesthetic one: to make the voice of nomadic urbanites perceptible in Rotterdam's urban public realm. Through a thick description of the social dynamics unfolding at Pension Almonde, Volont highlights how the project made the voice of urban nomads and cultural initiatives perceptible in the urban arena but simultaneously struggled to shift political power differentials in relation to the property owner of the social housing complex. Volont, therefore, argues to move away from active, "artificialized," community formation as was seen in Rotterdam, and proposes instead "let commoning communities emerge autonomously" (p. 150). Lastly, the author maintains that the shifting of power relations becomes possible only when activists "consider a given project's universal relevance (equality, humanity, inclusion) rather than its technical utility" (p. 150). For this, he argues pro an agonistic relation between the commons, the state, and the market.

We end the thematic issue with Thijs Lijster's "Community, Commons, Common Sense." Lijster's contribution is broad in theoretical scope, yet specific in analytical focus. It has become a truism to state that there are no commons without community. However, Lijster asks, what kind of community should that be? In everyday politics and parlance, the notion of community continues to be equated with static unities, bound to specific territories or ethnicities. Lijster shows how current commons scholarship has tried to overturn such identitarian conception of community, by framing the commoning community as an "organizational principle" (De Angelis, 2017) or as the cause and consequence of collective praxis (Dardot & Laval, 2019). Yet Lijster is not content with this solution and argues that current commons scholarship largely overlooks the cultural and symbolic connotations of the concept of community. To solve the impasse, Lijster finds refuge in Kant and Rancière to present a fresh conception of community. Lijster's (2022, p. 158) community is grounded in joint action but is "not restricted by it, being sufficiently open to be imagined otherwise." Lijster's commoning community is furthermore pervaded by what he calls a *dissensual* commonsense, "wherein common sense refers to how we commonly sense the world, and to the way we conceive of ourselves as community" (p. 158). Citing urban examples from Greece and the Netherlands, Lijster explores the consequences of his account and concludes the issue with a significant statement:

> The question of whether we see (sense) and understand (make sense of) something as either "common" or as "commodity" has drastic consequences for our world, and will make the difference between a politics of extraction, exploitation, and inequality, or one of common abundance, mutual care, and democratic governance.

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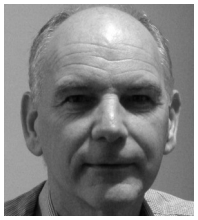

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Cluster 1:

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Article

Actually Existing Commons: Using the Commons to Reclaim the City

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Abstract
In Paraisópolis, a slum in São Paulo (Brazil) housing over 100.000 inhabitants, the Covid crisis seemed to have less of a death toll (0,0217%) than in other areas of the city (an average of 0,0652% as of May 2020); or at least it did at first. The sense of community in the area is strong, leading to many community initiatives and organisations to rise to the challenge of combating the pandemic with little help from the authorities. The community's initial efficient response to the Covid crisis relied heavily on self-reliance and self-organization to mobilise common resources. Despite their later failure in containing the virus, the community's response to the pandemic is exemplary of a well-known phenomenon: how communities are able to mobilise the commons to create general welfare. The commons concept is used in this contribution to help us better understand slum governance and the power and limitations of community reliance. At the same time, we aim to refine our understanding of the commons as a contentious category rooted in agonistic relationships instead of the romanticised leftist social imaginary that views the commons as purely anti-capitalist. Thus, we explicitly argue for a view of the commons and commoning that transcends the narrow "Leftist imaginary" of the commons as egalitarian, inclusive, anti-capitalist, horizontal, and as expressions of sharing (and caring), and instead views the commons as embedded in everyday realities, where commoning practices emerge as practises that support the reproduction of (social) life.

Keywords
commons and commoning; community reliance; Covid-19 responses; grassroots and the state; informal settlements

Issue
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1. Introduction

Paraisópolis, the largest slum in São Paulo (Brazil), with over 100.000 residents crammed in approximately 118 hectares (IBGE, 2020), neighbours the elite neighbourhood of Morumbi. The harsh border between the two is often used to depict both the stark inequality and the close proximity of oppositional urban settings in megacities (see Figure 1). At the same time, it represents a complex web of interrelationships that include trade-offs between the slum and its surroundings, as well as the strategies used to negotiate with the state. Paraisópolis is almost embedded in Morumbi, an extremely wealthy neighbourhood in South West São Paulo. It is estimated that 60% to 80% of Paraisópolis inhabitants work in Morumbi (UN-Habitat, 2010) as domestic workers, nannies, security guards, construction workers, and store attendants, and a good number work in the thriving commercial activities of the slum itself.

In Paraisópolis, the Covid crisis initially appeared to have had a lower death toll (0,021%) than in other parts of the city (an average of 0,065%) in May 2020 (Instituto Polis, 2020). The area's strong sense of community and the interest of many NGOs and civil society organisations resulted in numerous community initiatives to tackle the pandemic. Self-reliance and self-organisation were critical in the community's rapid response to the Covid crisis, illustrating that "slums" are far more than their typical portrayal as the physical concentration of poverty (Szwarcwald et al., 2000; UN-Habitat, 2003), disease

(Szwarcwald et al., 2000), informality (Roy, 2005), and illegality (Bromley, 1978; Mahmud, 2010), most often located in the fringes or the hazardous areas of megacities (Davis, 2006; UN-Habitat, 2003). However, as we have pointed out elsewhere (Rocco et al., 2021), the community's success in containing the pandemic was short-lived. An increase of almost 240% in morbidity rates in late 2020, from 21 deaths by 100.000 inhabitants in May 2020 to 54 deaths/100.000 inhabitants in August 2020, indicated the limits of community self-reliance within a metropolis and a country where the responses to the pandemic were almost unanimously recognised as botched. For public health doctor and researcher at the Polis Institute, Jorge Kayano, cites Mello (2020), "there was an exhaustion of community actions over the months[:] 'All the measures that have been adopted end up being exhausted over time because they are no longer able to contain the population inside their homes hoping to end the pandemic.'"

How can we understand the coordinated emergence of these rapid response actions while at the same time explaining the demise of these activities within several months? Numerous examples have shown that when the state is unable (or unwilling) to provide urban infrastructure and urban facilities, NGOs and citizen's organisations often step in to address the everyday needs through grassroots solutions (e.g., SPARC and Mahila Milan in Mumbai, The People's Homeless Federation in South-Africa, or the Orangi Pilot Project in Pakistan, just to name a few) and sometimes "appropriate significant parts of the means of governance" (Appadurai, 2002, p. 24). Is this what has happened in Paraisópolis? Are these initiatives illustrations of the insurgent struggle for true citizenship, which Holston (2009) terms "insurgent citizenship"? And, building on Miraftab (2009), is the rapid demise of the positive effects of these actions to be understood because of the co-optation and instrumentalisation of civil society and citizen participation by the state?

The argument we develop in this study is that, in order to understand how communities thrive or dwindle in the absence of citizens' rights and governmental intervention, the concept of a nested hierarchy of commons is extremely helpful. To substantiate this claim, we put forward two premises. First, we argue that communities are not islands: They exist in real political, economic, and physical settings and are influenced by what happens beyond their borders. And secondly, we challenge the concept of the commons as an anti-capitalist, anti-neoliberal category.

Thus, although we recognise the potential for insurgency in commoning activities and the role commoning may play in exploring an alternative to predatory neoliberal capitalism that extracts value from labour and land without redistributing the benefits of economic activity, we wish to challenge the idea that commons exist outside of the economic system surrounding them and rather than being purely insurgent against the market and the state, the commons exist in a complex web of continuous negotiation and trade-offs with them. In this sense, the concept of the commons is (a) still suitable to understand how slum dwellers can tackle their everyday challenges and (b) allows for a better understanding of how slums are governed, considering the existing complexities that characterise slums and their relation to the state and the market.

In other words, commoning in the slum is not (always) synonymous with anticapitalism, but it is rather a strategy that allows slum dwellers to bypass, challenge, and negotiate with the state and the market in order to get by and achieve their objectives. In this text, we examine how commoning can be used to accomplish multiple aims concurrently, as well as how it is entwined with formal and informal strategies and institutions, understood as the (formal and informal) norms that govern people's (and organisations') behaviour and actions. For Ostrom (2008, p. 24) "the term institutions refers to the rules that humans use when interacting within a wide variety of repetitive and structured situations" (see also North, 2005; Ostrom, 2005). Complementarity between formal and informal institutions is recognised, and informal institutions can be used to cover deficiencies in formal institutions (Bentkowska, 2021).

To substantiate these points, our third section discusses the slum as a condition of subaltern urbanism that we need to understand in its own merit, and as an integral part of our current urban reality, and not an anomaly. The following section then discusses the two views on the commons that are present in the contemporary debate, with, on the one hand, a political and critical scholarship that is mainly anti-capitalist and, on the other hand, a scholarship that works with the actual and existing commons, thus understanding commoning as a day-to-day strategy of negotiation.

In the fourth section, we then explore how both the commons and the slum interact in the case of Paraisópolis, and more precisely, the inhabitants' reaction to the challenges posed by the Covid-19 pandemic. The conclusion synthesises our findings and argues that a more practical operationalisation of the commons creates an opportunity for those who are now dispossessed to reclaim the city in their own terms.

2. Methodology

The article mainly draws on desk research to explain the planning context of Brazill and is supported by the ongoing research of the second author during the last 15 years and his years-long collaboration with community leaders and organisations in Paraisópolis. To understand the specific responses of the community to the Covid-19 pandemic, five interviews were conducted with two community leaders active in the area and with three municipal public servants. Interviews were conducted in Portuguese by the second author. Observations on the community's actions in dealing with the Covid crisis were

discussed among the writers and between the second author and community leaders and government authorities. Furthermore, life stories have been collected from a number of inhabitants about their experiences during the Covid-19 pandemic (Rocco et al., 2021), these are used in this article to illustrate some of the points raised.

3. Subaltern Urbanism and Citizen's Tactics

As argued by scholars such as Roy (2011), Arabindoo (2011), and others, the portraying of "slums" and "megacities" within an "apocalyptic and dystopian narrative" impairs the daily life of their inhabitants to mere survival and strip their residents of their dignity, turning them into slumdogs and dispossessed victims. On the other hand, they are also critical of the non-nuanced romanticisation of slums as places of "creative self-organisation." Elsewhere (Rocco & van Ballegooijen, 2018), we have argued that both victimisation and heroicisation of slum dwellers is unhelpful and fails to see them as political agents negotiating political and civil rights through an array of tactics and actions that frequently inhabit grey areas of formality and informality, as well as legality and illegality. As we point out there, Koolhaas' understanding of Lagos is exemplary in this regard, as he sees the city of Lagos at the forefront of globalising modernity, making the point that "Lagos is not catching up with us. Rather, we may be catching up with Lagos" (Koolhaas as cited in Baan & van der Haak, 2002). Gandy (2005) and Fourchard (2011) rightfully point out that Koolhaas, in his admiration for informal, "spontaneous" organisation and "alternative systems," fails to understand that this informal organisation and alternative system is in itself a complex organisation, with internal hierarchies and power inequalities (Gandy, 2005, pp. 46–47) and that instead of a city that supposedly "escaped the colonial order," it is a city that "works especially for those who are able to extract money from the use of public space according to a web of client/patron relationships" (Fourchard, 2011, pp. 52–53). While informal urbanisation can certainly be understood from an insurgent perspective in which citizens fight for their right to have rights (Holston, 2011), it is also the material expression of exclusion from those rights. In summary, informal urbanisation is not an alternative to unimaginative planning and the tyrannies of capitalist production of space, but an integral element in the link between urbanisation and capitalism (Harvey, 2008).

Neither the dystopian images of the slum nor its over-romanticised depiction as creative, self-reliant, and heroic, come close to the everyday reality of life in what we could understand as contested urban conditions, whether they are located in the Global South or the Global North.

The acts of resistance performed in people's everyday lives in slums must also be understood through the material conditions and the very space they inhabit. Looking at the institutions (formal and informal) that shape the life in the slum and the tactics employed to negotiate with the state and the market is crucial to understand how the tactics of survival in the city alternatively normalise or challenge the relationship between citizens, the state and with neoliberal capitalism. Looking at space allows us to understand determinant elements that influence and shape those tactics, and often lead them to success or failure.

From the above, we derive two essential points. First, we need to understand the informal urban condition as relational, as an interaction between the existing material conditions and the daily systems of its inhabitants, made of the networks of social life and patterns of daily use of space, within and outside informal settlements themselves. This means that we move from an abstract and theoretical understanding of informality to an embedded and empirical one. Or as Arabindoo (2011, p. 638) argues: "Capturing the social, economic and cultural complexities of their everyday life is demanding as one needs to sift spatio-temporally through a layered multiplicity that is perhaps better unpacked empirically than theoretically." This also entails that we need to acknowledge the relation of the informal with its surroundings, spatially, socially, and politically.

Secondly, the material conditions of informality and related daily challenges are navigated by its inhabitants with flexibility and pragmatism. At the same time, these material conditions have a meaning at the political level, as they are the physical representation of the continuous challenging of the existing market regime and that regime's incapacity or unwillingness to ensure inhabitants their access to their citizen's positive rights (e.g., the right to decent housing, education, and healthcare, for example) and represent a challenge to the idea of democracy itself, as exclusion from the realm of rights for a portion of the population puts in check the notion of a liberal representative democracy.

We witness a similar pattern in the emerging research on the commons, where the commons are viewed as a practical means of governing the use of and access to a common pool resource on the one hand, and as an anti-capitalist political argument on the other. As Wagner (2012, p. 621) explains, "understanding commons as a social imaginary rather than a set of institutional property-rights arrangements makes it, in fact, more coherent as a social phenomenon and brings into play the role of imagination in creating alternatives to current power structures." This way of presenting the commons as an alternative to the current system is evident in the work of several scholars (Caffentzis, 2011; Caffentzis & Federici, 2014; Chatterton & Pusey, 2019; Cumbers, 2015; Dardot & Laval, 2014; De Angelis, 2017a, 2017b; Gibson-Graham et al., 2016; Hardt & Negri, 2009) and beautifully illustrated by this quote from Bollier and Helfrich (2019, p. 15), who highlight that "the elemental human impulse that we are born with—to help others, to improve existing practices—ripens into a stable social form with countless variations: a commons."

Wagner (2012, p. 621) quotes Appadurai (1996):

> The image, the imagined, the imaginary—these are all terms that direct us to something critical and new in global cultural processes: the imagination as a social practice….The imagination is now central to all forms of agency, is itself a social fact, and is the key component of the new global order.

The commons—as this imaginary—is thus helpful to explore alternatives to the capitalist hegemony, but if we want to better understand the actual commons, not as something outside of the current system, but as part of a complex web of relations with the state and the marker we need more than the social imaginary of the commons.

Bodirsky (2018) attempts to reconcile the "actually existing" practical common and the "Leftist imaginary" of the commons, which sees in the commons an instrument to overcome capitalism and achieve social justice. She recommends using the notion of property regimes to better comprehend the commons' relationship to the state and the market. This will be discussed in further detail in the following section.

4. Commons: Social Engagement, Community Formation, and the Commons Exogenous Character

Since Ostrom's (1990) pioneering work, progressive scholars and social movements critical of growth-based capitalism have viewed the concept of the commons as a possible alternative for the organization and structure of society (Caffentzis, 2011; Caffentzis & Federici, 2014; Chatterton & Pusey, 2019; Cumbers, 2015; De Angelis, 2017a, 2017b; Gibson-Graham et al., 2016) and increased attention has been paid to alternative and community economies.

4.1. Social Engagement, Community Formation Polycentric Governance

Whereas Ostrom analyses the commons alongside the state and the market, other authors have swiftly identified the commons as a potential counter-hegemonic force capable of undermining neoliberal capitalism in its current form. In today's struggle for a more just and fair future, scholars and activists are increasingly putting forward the concept of the (urban) commons as the to move away from our capitalist world (e.g., An Architektur, 2010; De Angelis, 2017a, 2017b; Marcuse, 2009; Stavrides, 2016).

A large and diverse coalition of urban citizens' movements is inspired and guided by the concept of the commons because it incorporates the various small struggles and oppositional forces that question neoliberal preponderance in a wide variety of ways, such as Cirugeda and Recetas Urbanas in Spain, or the reappropriation of abandoned theatres, railway infrastructure, or housing in Rome.

Just as the traditional approach popularised by Elinor Ostrom, this radical approach theorises the commons along three fundamental features: Commons are initiated by a group of people (a community), referred to as commoners, who design a set of rules and procedures in order to manage or to govern the shared use of a set of resources, which can be material (such as land and water) or intangible (such as knowledge or cultural practices).

The resurgence of the commons concept and its use from a critical theory perspective is helpful to understand the increase in bottom-up initiatives in which the participants are looking for new forms of engagement, solidarity, and responsibility over the resources they are interested in, while simultaneously trying to escape market logic. Just as in the more classical commons (many forests, lakes, common land, and cultural goods), or the commons associated with indigenous practices, the commoning of the modern (primarily urban) commons is not always performed by a homogeneous group. Fascinatingly, when we talk about online commons or knowledge commons, the commoners do not necessarily share the same physical space, as they find shared virtual spaces (see, e.g., Ertas et al., 2019). Today's critical scholarship studies the commons from an anti-capitalist perspective (e.g., Dardot, 2018) and too often presumes that self-governance occurs in a peaceful and cooperative culture within these movements (Deleixhe, 2018, p. 66). These illusions of harmony and uniformity are unhelpful in understanding urban commons' governance in today's unequal and divided societies. Ostrom (2010, p. 643) has argued that the capacity of people "to organise and solve social dilemmas," such as the under-provision of local public goods (e.g., health care during the Covid pandemic), is very much dependent on the specific context and should not be underestimated. She has also illustrated how the gradual and incremental learning processes take shape through experience, practice and trial and error. Although not everyone shares a similar understanding of the (severeness of the) situation, most commoners adopt norms of fairness and justice that allow for the legitimacy of those norms (Ostrom, 2010, p. 660).

Since the beginning, the acknowledgement of complexity, layering, and multiplicity has been present in Ostrom's work. Ostrom outlined eight principles that tended to be present in the successful commons she studied. Among these is the core notion of "nested enterprises" or "polycentric governance," a complex form of governance characterised by several decision-making centres with varying degrees of autonomy. In a recent contribution, Carlisle and Gruby (2019, p. 932) define polycentric governance systems as (a) "multiple, overlapping decision-making centres with some degree of autonomy" and (b) "choosing to act in ways that take account of others through processes of cooperation, competition, conflict, and conflict resolution."

Ostrom illustrated that successful commons often started in small-scale initiatives that, building on a growing network of organisations and individuals, gradu-

ally tackled more significant problems using increasingly complex arrangements (Ostrom, 1990, pp. 187–189). The decisions taken by these initiatives are also partly influenced by the actions or the inaction of other actors in the system (Carlisle & Gruby, 2019; Ostrom, 1990). Understanding commons governance as a polycentric system reveals the commons' exogenous nature (Ostrom, 1990, p. 190), demonstrating that the commons' success cannot be understood solely in terms of their internal consistency, but that their relationship to the larger system of the state and market in which they are embedded is also crucial (Smets & Azarhoosh, 2019).

4.2. Property Regimes and the "Actually Existing" Commons

The problematic relationship between the state and the commons present in most current scholarship emphasises the citizens' lack of access or control of public goods. Scholars have argued to "extend the sphere of commons ecologies within society by turning public/private wealth into commons wealth" (De Angelis, 2017b, pp. 335–340) and, as such, take back control over the (common pool) resources. Again, this shows the longing for a better society, overcoming the current capitalist system. In reality, however, citizens are constantly moving between the different spheres created by state, market, and commons to provide for their livelihoods and reproduce social life. These three spheres are not in complete opposition (De Angelis, 2017b, pp. 332–336) and while we are aware of how the market uses commoning practices to its own benefit (e.g., volunteers in the organisation of large scale events), the opposite is also true. Commons use capitalist practices to sustain their projects or address (urgent) needs, as is illustrated in Paraisópolis' initiatives to face Covid-19 and discussed more extensively below. It thus makes good sense to follow Bodirsky's (2018, p. 122) suggestion to "define the commons as a (common pool) resource that can be managed in principle through various property regimes," thus acknowledging that commoning is "a set of practices that aim at the installation/defence of a common property regime over the commons." The common property regime (different from the public property regime or the private property regime) is characterised by an overlap of membership and ownership and is by definition not "open access" (Bodirsky, 2018, p. 127). The commons' reproduction depends on social relationships and agreements between commoners regarding the use, maintenance, and management of the (common pool) resource. The community that owns the resource regulates access to it, and membership does not guarantee equitable access.

In conclusion, we move away from the utopian imaginary of the commons and stress that "actually existing commons" are:

1. made out of a (common pool) resource (material or intangible);
2. managed under a common property regime (characterised by an overlap of ownership and membership) that is designed by a group of people (a community), referred to as commoners;
3. characterised by sharing relations that are intertwined with capitalist practices;
4. not necessarily motivated by political or ideological opposition to capitalism or the state.

When we look at the case of Paraisópolis, we might even claim that it is precisely the relation with the state and the market that allows the common to sustain itself over time. This is illustrated in the next section.

5. Paraisópolis as the Polycentric Governance of Nested Commons

5.1. Paraisópolis

Paraisópolis is a neighbourhood in the southwest of São Paulo. Although numbers are disputed, it is said to be the biggest slum in São Paulo. The 2010 Brazilian census counted roughly 43.000 inhabitants (IBGE, 2020), but it is believed the area had around 100.000 inhabitants in 0,8 km^2 in 2020, making it the densest residential neighbourhood in Brazil (Oliveira, 2016). Although Paraisópolis is widely recognised as a *favela* (slum) and has all the attributes of one, its citizens never refer to it as such, but prefer to call it "the community." Only 25% of its inhabitants have access to sanitation, half the streets are unpaved, and 60% of households tap into the energy grid illegally (Oliveira, 2016). Although more than 90% of households have access to running water, water provision is defective and irregular.

Most importantly, the history of Paraisópolis is intimately connected to the notion of accumulation by dispossession (Harvey, 2012, 2014). The settlement was created in 1921 by subdividing a former coffee farm into 2,200 plots of 10 m × 50 m and laying out regular 10-metre-wide roadways on irregular terrain, destined for the construction of high-end residences.

The development flopped, partly because of the poor accessibility of the area. The plots were unlawfully occupied in the 1950s by immigrants from the Brazilian Northeast drawn to the city's increasing industrialisation. Attracted by its semi-rural green hills, wealthy São Paulo elites settled into Morumbi, offering impoverished migrants work in construction and as domestic helpers. Because of public negligence and a lack of efficient housing policy, poor migrants resorted to "help themselves" by building temporary wooden shacks that quickly became permanent brick buildings of poor quality, without sewerage, and inconsistent and illegal access to water and electricity; 20,000 people lived illegally in the area in 1970 (Vilicic et al., 2009).

In the early 1980s, with Brazil still under military rule, the controversial military-appointed mayor Paulo Maluf tried to remove the slum by proposing the construction

of an avenue through the area. Several mayors use this well-documented strategy to get rid of what they see as "eyesores" in the city. Slum dwellers used to have next to no protection against evictions, which were often carried out overnight and involved police violence. This was fuelled by intense land valorisation in the area, with the construction of luxury walled condominiums, and great interest by real estate developers to get rid of the slum and develop the area. It is possible to imagine that some of the original plot owners, who by now are resigned to having lost their land to illegal occupation, would also benefit. The project failed thanks to fierce resistance from the community and the action of *comunidades eclesiais de base*, i.e., civil rights groups supported by the more progressive sections of the Catholic Church, animated by *teologia da libertação* (liberation theology), a Christian theological approach emphasising the liberation of the oppressed that took root in Latin America from the mid-1960s.

Local governments would refuse to provide public services, stating it was unconstitutional to do so until the land ownership issue was resolved. In brief, illegality meant the state did not act. The military dictatorship did not regard the poor, predominantly black and mixed-race residents of Paraisópolis as valid civil rights holders. The country's democratisation in 1986 and the introduction of a new progressive constitution in 1988 eventually brought change.

In 2003, a process of urbanisation and regularisation of land ownership began, similar to the process that took place in the former *favela* of Heliópolis. This process of land regularisation was based on one of the instruments proposed by the City Statute, a federal bill signed in 2001 containing one of the most progressive and ambitious urban development guidelines the country had seen.

In 2007, the State of Sao Paulo developed the Legal City Program to assist municipalities in regularising homes located on illegally occupied land (SEHAB, 2007). This story tells us of a resource (land) that is made "common" through the actions of a multitude of uncoordinated actors occupying underutilised land illegally, and progressively establishing both practical and moral ownership, which is ensured through the sheer number of occupations, their newly acquired notion of "citizens' rights" (especially after the Brazilian Constitution of 1988, but before that through the actions of the Church and community leaderships) and later through legal support via progressive legislation. This practical and moral ownership is built over time, in a very complex fashion, and is reinforced by various episodes of collective resistance to eviction and internal conflict. Other actors also play a role in negotiating ownership, notably organised crime, the action of evangelical leaders and the actions of a number of NGOs that support the predicaments of the inhabitants. But, simultaneously with this "commoning" process, there is a juxtaposing formation of a land and housing market in the slum, with houses and house extensions being rented to newcomers. We have no studies about the real estate market in Paraisópolis, nor the number of rented units to owner's occupied dwellings, but research conducted elsewhere in São Paulo (Baltrusis, 2004) indicates the existence of a vigorous market within the slum, with the action of "slum lords" (owners of multiple houses that make a living from renting them), possibly connected to drug traffic. In short, Paraisopolis is a paradoxical example of commoning that includes market elements and which has been the object of intense state action in the last 40 years.

5.2. Paraisópolis' Nested Commons

The impact of the Covid pandemic has been the hardest for the already more vulnerable groups in society, with slum dwellers disproportionately affected (Tampe, 2020). While governments worldwide tried to address the pandemic by imposing lock-downs and trying to back up their health care systems, slum areas and other already left behind places tried to address the emergency to the best of their abilities, sometimes without the support of the state. In what follows, we will illustrate how the nested commons in Paraisópolis evolved and shaped slum governance through time, with the Covid response being utilised to highlight specific features. More precisely, we will dissect three aspects that substantiate our thesis that the concept of a nested hierarchy of commons is particularly useful in understanding how communities survive or perish in the absence of citizens' rights and state action.

5.3. Property Regimes in Paraisópolis

Since the appearance of the *favela* in the 1950s, the inhabitants have tackled the social dilemmas they were faced both individually and collectively and found their force in numbers. The illegal utilisation of electricity and water infrastructure was a first step toward addressing a deficit of public goods provided by the state.

When the Covid-19 pandemic hit the *favela* in April 2020, young community leaders in Paraisópolis banded together to battle the new challenge. In the months leading up to the first local Covid cases, the community realised that if they were to survive the pandemic, they needed to act to survive the epidemic, because the government's intervention would likely be too late. Givanildo, a 20-year old community leader, reminds us: "As they [the government] don't do anything for us, we have decided to help ourselves" (Rocco et al., 2021). Local organisations mobilised the community and investigated how existing facilities and new initiatives could mitigate the situation. The community hired medical staff and ambulances on its own, making them available 24 hours a day to the local people. Through a crowdfunding campaign, local businesses were encouraged to give free meals and personal hygiene supplies.

Community leaders recruited over 600 volunteers to serve as "street presidents" and trained over 240

individuals to administer first aid. The street presidents' system was novel. These volunteers were assigned responsibility for an entire street (approximately 50 families); they not only provided direct information to residents about the disease and informed them about practicalities (use of masks, use of public transportation, curfew hours), but they also had their finger on the pulse of the street and could react when residents were in need or became ill. Those educated in first aid helped in the two schools that operated as quarantine and treatment centres. The ambulance service and the treatment facilities can be understood as common-pool resources, for which yet another regime was established, providing the most open access to it as possible. Next to these very tangible resources, knowledge sharing is another common pool resource that allowed residents to stay informed, especially in the first months, when the disease was still alien to everyone and information and best-practices tended to change over time, and to take the necessary measures to protect themselves.

As we have argued, this "commons" creation was both typical to the *favela* and confined to it. Such mobilisation was not seen in other parts of the formal city, where citizens relied exclusively on the public response by authorities. Despite initial successes in keeping the number of infections and deaths very low in relation to the rest of the city, and especially in relation to the wealthy neighbourhood surrounding the *favela* (Mello, 2020; Rocco et al., 2021), the lack of support by local authorities meant that the resources mobilised by the community were not enough to prevent further infections and deaths later in the pandemic, on par with what happened in the rest of the city. Notwithstanding the late failure to combat the pandemic and the apparent limitations to community action, the fact that such community action existed at all, while other parts of the city did not self-organise, is notable and tells us about the specific conditions that led the community to develop a sense of purpose and to ensure the commons created by all of them (sometimes individually and sometimes in groups) would be preserved.

5.4. Public Space Pace as Common and Space as the Cradle for Nested Commons

Addressing social concerns and safeguarding their common space were significant motivators for the formation of resident organisations and associations in Paraisópolis, as well as for the emergence of local service providers and commercial enterprises. Initially, the resident associations addressed concerns such as education, sanitation, and healthcare (Bento & Couto, 2021). Mion (2018, p. 103) considers that the *favela* functioned as an autonomous system, and a whole structure of associations has developed to organise access to public goods the local government failed to provide.

The complex governance of the slum is deeply interconnected with its spatial configuration. The eminently distinct space of the *favela*, with its well-defined main streets but an impossibly complicated network of alleyways, culs-de-sac, and narrow corridors between houses, offers a space of exception from the well-lit streets in the formal city. There is a situation of separation from the formal city, with clearly demarcated limits between *favela* and the formal neighbourhoods around it, and this separation offers protection from elements exogenous to the *favela*. These spaces house a multitude of informal, often illegal, and occasionally criminal activities, protected from the prying eyes of the authorities. The way store owners' associations work together with cultural and sports organisations and criminal organisations is well illustrated in Paraisópolis by the weekly funk dance events the *favela* hosts. Funk dance parties are prevalent events in Brazil's *favelas*, attracting thousands of participants. Parties in Paraisópolis attract more than 5.000 people to dance and party through the night in the streets. These parties are organised by the shop owner's association and are confined to four streets in the slum, prompting inhabitants from these streets to move away, bothered by the noise, leaving space for more commercial activities, also influenced by criminal gangs (Machado, 2019). Since 2003, the presence of these gangs has been prominent in Paraisópolis, particularly the criminal drug gang Primeiro Comando da Capital (PCC).

The events are good for the shop owners' business and lucrative for the gangs. The space of the *favela* is claimed by the partygoers during these nights, while during the day, they are used by the residents of the *favelas*. They are the same spaces where the street presidents and volunteers informed community members about the pandemic. Thus, different subgroups of the community make use of the same spatial resource in very different ways, taking advantage of the ghettoised spaces of the *favela*. As Stavrides (2016, p. 260) argues, "space matters because it is not an inert container of social life but an integral part of its manifestations and its events. Space gives form to encounters because it is a structured system of relations." However, through the different ways of appropriation, the public space also enforces a certain perception of what the *favela* is. Space, and especially public space, is predominantly perceived in the form of stereotyped images that circulate through the different media channels and contrast to the dominant culture of a society (Stavrides, 2016, p. 185). This idea is illustrated in the numerous pictures existing of the juxtaposition of Paraisópolis and its wealthy neighbour Morumbi (see Figure 1) and the "strangeness" of cultural manifestations of the *favela* to the inhabitants of the formal city. More interestingly, Stavrides (2016, p. 262, emphasis added) argues that "*common spaces* challenge situated identities as well as the fixity of boundaries of any preexisting community from which "individuals draw their own self-images." Two consequences are derived from this and are visible in Paraisópolis. First, the claiming of the public spaces by the street presidents and volunteers

Figure 1. Paraisópolis and Morumbi (picture by Roberto Rocco).

not only turn the public spaces into common spaces, their presence in the street and the representations of the street itself in this way are challenging the dominant image of the slum to the outside world. It shows that Paraisópolis is a community in motion, constantly reinventing itself, its organisations and spaces. It is, as Stavrides (20156, p. 125) would call it, "a community-in-the-making."

Secondly, the spatial representation of the slum and its actual physical condition serves as a nurturing condition for the other commons. The urban context and spatial conditions of Paraisópolis have been, and still are, what brings people together, what nurtures the establishment and emergence of other types of commons. During the Covid pandemic, the spatial constraints of small houses, as well as the overcrowding caused by people's incapacity to go out to work promoted the emergence of new commons, such as people temporarily migrating out of the slum and sharing housing to alleviate overpopulation (and the tension that comes with it).

5.5. Paraisópolis' Actually Existing Commons

In the 1980s, the government's attempt to clear the slum was halted because the community organised strong resistance with the help of human rights organisations and the church. These prior encounters with social difficulties fostered self-organisation. Several distinct *favelado* organisations are active in Paraisópolis. Since 1983, the Union of Inhabitants of the Favela of Paraisópolis (or Union) has defended the residents' concerns. The Multi-Stakeholder Forum was established in 1994 to better integrate social programmes in the *favela*, and the Steering Committee for Paraisópolis was formed in 2004 to monitor the slum's upgrading, particularly the multi-year efforts of SEHAB, the local housing authority.

The collaborations of these institutes illustrate that it is an illusion to look at the slum as "autonomous" or separated from the surrounding "formal" city. The specific physical conditions of the slum allow for a "border" condition, in which the "common spaces" are recognisable in opposition to the well-organised city around it, with its demarcated plots, streets and public spaces, its sewerage systems, and its well-controlled utilities, measured and billed. Over time, this aggregation of initiatives and associations developed into a dense network of overlapping decision-making centres with varying degrees of autonomy that choose to work cooperatively or competitively to facilitate the use and management of (common pool) resources, especially space, but also utilities, public transport, education and health provision. At various points in time, agreements with NGOs, organisations, and the state were sought in order to facilitate access to and use of a particular resource. These (temporary) collaborations or coalitions are reflected in the emergence of *favelado* organisations mentioned above.

Several initiatives illustrate the intense relationship between the state, the market, and the common during the pandemic. Community kitchens were created to distribute free meals for those who could not afford to buy food. The recently established G10 group in the ten biggest *favelas* in Brazil was an initiative by community leaders of these *favelas* triggered by the Covid pandemic. It aims to bring access to credit to the *favela*, to stimulate

private initiatives and SME's. Brazilian *favelas* have a GDP exceeding that of several large Latin American cities (Boehm, 2020).

The community is thus constantly organising and re-organising itself, testing different ways to organise and govern the slum. We argue that the shared spaces and the border conditions with the formal city are essential. These spaces feed and nurture the other commons. Sennett (2008, p. 237) describes how the improvised appropriation of the street by hawkers, shopkeepers, and tenants illustrates Rudofsky's (1964) point that it is precisely this improvisation of the street that which "attaches people to their communities." The appropriation of the slums' shared spaces are acts of commoning, and as De Angelis (2017b, pp. 90–98) stressed: "Through commoning, subjects create conditions of resilience and self-organisation and may develop from grassroots into more all-encompassing systems." The shared spaces of the slum also show how the state and market are not alien from the common. The three are linked and work together.

6. Conclusion

This article contributes to the increasing body of knowledge about the commons by providing a way to break free from the paralysing constraints of a Left-wing, utopian anti-capitalist paradigm that romanticises the commons and the commoners. We believe this romanticisation is not helpful when reimagining alternatives to neoliberalism. A more practical operationalisation of the commons opens up opportunities for the reclamation of the city by those who are currently dispossessed. It helps us understand how vulnerable citizens negotiate their daily existences with the space they occupy, the formal and informal institutions, the state, and the market.

In Paraisópolis, numerous practices illustrate precisely how, through the everyday practices, navigating the space of the market, the state, and the common, people are reclaiming the city.

They navigate the space of the market by starting businesses or by their jobs outside of the slum. Most residents of slum areas are faced with considerable commuting time to and from work, sometimes taking up to four hours. Most of the residents of Paraisópolis work in the adjacent elite neighbourhood of Morumbi (UN-Habitat, 2010). Their work in Morumbi is their essential source of income and their labour is needed in Morumbi, realising a mutual dependency between the two areas, illustrating that the residents of Paraisópolis are an integral part of the city.

They also navigate the spaces created by the state, by self-organising education or, during the Covid pandemic, medical care. Their ability to navigate these spaces on a daily basis is nurtured in the realm of the commons, which has evolved in Paraisópolis over time to become a nested hierarchy of multiple, overlapping decision-making centres, ranging from criminal organisations such as the PCC to SME organisations or collaborative structures between the community and the state, such as the Steering Committee for Paraisópolis. Each of these organisations has a different degree of autonomy, and their engagement with other organisations can be based on cooperation (such as the SME organisations or the Committee, and even between the shopkeeper's organisation and the PCC), but at times will be characterised by competition (e.g., the control over accessing the electricity grid) or even conflict.

The case of Paraisópolis demonstrates that citizens' managing of the commons is capable of ensuring its inhabitants' livelihoods, reproducing social life, and that citizens have the practical resources (space) and the moral stand to procure the resources (such as electricity and running water) and support structures (education or health care during the pandemic) that the state is so reluctant to provide, either by negotiating with the state or with the market and sometimes with both. In other words, The web of nested commons in Paraisópolis is embedded in a relationship with the state and the market, whether through dialogue or struggle for access to resources such as land, running water, or electricity, or for the appointment of a private ambulance service to transport the sick to the hospital. Hence, the actual common is inextricably linked to capitalist activities, from procuring external services to conducting economic transactions.

A representative democracy cannot function if significant segments of the population are routinely denied access to the realm of rights. At least in Brazil, this is inextricably linked to market inclusion, and so exclusion from the market entails inevitable exclusion from the sphere of rights. The Workers Party sought to address this distortion; nevertheless, its accomplishments are being undone by the Bolsonaro regime. In Paraisópolis, the residents gradually reclaim their rights, and they do so by engaging in mutually dependent relationships with their neighbours, by bringing market practices within the slum and creating a vibrant and thriving economy. They do it by taking over some responsibilities from the state in view of its indifference or hostility. What has nurtured these capabilities is the presence of a number of nested commons that emerged gradually since the *favela* was established. These nested commons are thus the leverage that allowed the residents in Paraisópolis to reclaim the city.

Conflict of Interests

The authors declare no conflict of interests.

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Article

Urban Commons and Collective Action to Address Climate Change

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Abstract
Climate change and the coupled loss of ecosystem services pose major collective action problems in that all individuals would benefit from better cooperation to address these problems but conflicting interests and/or incomplete knowledge discourage joint action. Adopting an inductive and multi-layered approach, drawing upon the authors' previous research on urban commons, we here summarize key insights on environmentally oriented urban commons and elaborate on what role they have in instigating climate-proofing activities in urban areas. We deal with three types of urban commons, i.e., "urban green commons," "coworking spaces," and "community climate commons." We describe how allotment gardens, community gardens, and other types of urban green commons contribute to environmental learning that may boost understanding of environmental issues and which constitute important learning arenas for climate-change mitigation and adaptation. We also deal with the newly emerging phenomenon of coworking spaces that share many essential institutional attributes of urban commons and which can work for climate-change mitigation through the benefits provided by a sharing economy and through reduction of domestic transportation and commuting distance. Community climate commons represent commons where local communities can mobilize together to create shared low-carbon assets and which hold the potential to empower certain segments and civil society groups so that they can have greater influence and ownership of the transformation of reaching net-zero carbon goals. We conclude this article by identifying some critical determinants for the up-scaling of environmentally oriented urban commons.

Keywords
civic society; climate change; collective action; community climate commons; coworking spaces; mobilization; urban commons; urban green commons

Issue
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1. Introduction

Human-induced global warming through greenhouse gas emissions is unquestionably humanity's greatest challenge. The *Sixth Assessment Report* (IPCC, 2021) emphasizes that we will not be able to limit global warming to even 2°C without extensive reductions in greenhouse gas emissions. The impacts of global warming are largely unpredictable, with extreme weather events and more long-term effects of elevated sea levels, loss of biodiversity, and ultimately loss of resilience at planetary scales (Rockström et al., 2009).

Climate change and the coupled loss of ecosystem services pose major collective action problems. This is because humans as a group would benefit from taking action to deal with these problems, but few individuals

have sufficient incentives to act alone (Nyborg et al., 2016). While much institutional inertia exists in effectively dealing with climate change (Colding et al., 2020), it is well worth asking what role collective-choice arenas could play for increased mobilization of civil society organizations to more effectively deal with the threats of climate change.

Horelli et al. (2015) show how self-organizing citizen initiatives, ranging from spontaneous events to long-term neighborhood developments aided by ICT, can have innovative impacts in urban life by activating new citizen groups. Devolution of property-right arrangements represents yet another means for initiating local climate action in society (Webb et al., 2021). Devolution entails that some or several of the bundles of rights and responsibilities associated with ownership are transferred to lower organizational levels (Ostrom & Schlager, 1996).

Civil society organizations already play a significant role in the emergence of many self-organizing citizen initiatives and the emerging environmentally oriented urban commons in a wide range of urban settings (Colding et al., 2013). This is likely due to achieving a more holistic perspective on sustainability in recognition that social and natural systems are intimately linked and could best be described as social-ecological systems (Berkes & Folke, 1998). The trend and ambition to establish "community centers" in marginalized neighborhoods or for certain marginalized groups is yet another example where urban commons can be designed and initiated. Community centers are public locations where members of a community gather for activities, social services, public information, education, and social mobilization. They can be open to the whole community or a specialized group within the greater community (Estes, 1997). Community work is closely related to the strategies and characteristics of the welfare state (Dominelli, 2020).

1.1. Article Content, Outline, and Methodological Departure

1.1.1. Preconditions

In this article we address what role urban commons could have in instigating collective action for climate-proofing activities in urban areas. The concept "urban" herein includes settings ranging from rural towns to megacities. By "climate proofing" we mean the process of turning climate change into mitigation and/or adaptation strategies and programs (Kabat et al., 2005). Such strategies need to be broad and holistic and address both social and environmental issues. Raworth (2012) discusses how environmental and social factors are correlated, ranging from basic human material and social needs to planetary factors such as the atmosphere, climate, land use, flora, and fauna. Hence, Raworth provides a holistic perspective on sustainability. A similar perspective is proposed by Dominelli (2020), who highlights the need for creating a new paradigm—green social work—for promoting mobilization for environmental justice and care for the planet.

In line with these holistic propositions, we adopt a broad definition of urban commons while recognizing that definitions vary quite extensively (Colding et al., 2013). Here we describe urban commons as key institutions (including rules and norms) that regulate natural and societal resources in urban areas that are accessible to all members of a group that use, share, and/or manage resources together (Ostrom, 1990). Active common participation, social mobilization, and democratic influence are key features of urban commons (Stavrides, 2016). Urban commons are usually excludable for non-members, recognizing that it is only the local community or group of users that share, hold rights, and set the rules for how to manage their commons (Berkes, 1989; Ostrom, 2008). The exclusion of non-members can be important for sustaining the commons and avoiding the tragedy of the commons (Hardin, 1968).

The commons may be synonymous with the public, but the public becomes a commons only when the citizens have real influence over public resources. Central to the notion of the commons is the community itself, not whether it exists in a private or public context and ownership (Colding & Barthel, 2013; Ostrom, 1990). Hess (2008) describes a whole range of "new commons" that recently have evolved or lately have been recognized as commons, ranging from cultural commons, knowledge commons, neighborhood commons to medical and health commons.

Previous research indicates that venues that support physical meetings among people are key for collective action. When participants share a common interest and interact with one another in groups, the probabilities of their developing social norms to govern repetitive relationships are much greater than in situations lacking such characteristics (Ostrom, 2005). That sharing an interest can be a sufficient condition for mobilization of collective action has been demonstrated in the urban policy and planning arena. Rydin and Pennington (2000), for example, argue that sharing certain traits and the enjoyment of collective effort, often is a sufficient incentive for greater participation in planning activities.

Research in environmental psychology also indicates that group-based learning is more effective for people to learn about climate change than individual learning (Holmgren et al., 2019; Xie et al., 2018). The work on common property systems by Elinor Ostrom supports this line of argument, emphasizing the critical role that collective choice arenas play in long-enduring resource management systems (Ostrom, 2005).

1.1.2. Methodological Departure

In writing this article, we have adopted the inductive approach used by Barthel et al. (2021), enabling multilayered and cross-disciplinary collaboration and analysis

from a diverse set of scientific disciplines in the natural, social, and humanistic sciences in which the authors hold expert knowledge. The approach was originally developed by Conrad and Sinner (2015) as a way to encourage scholars to work together to create new possibilities and interactivity with other professionals and community groups to explore questions, generate knowledge, and express shared understandings of phenomena. The purpose here has been to present and elaborate on a set of environmentally oriented urban commons with the potential to instigate collective climate proofing in society. We here elaborate on three types of environmentally oriented urban commons that the authors hold expert knowledge of, including "urban green commons," "coworking spaces," and "community climate commons." In line with the classification made by Hess (2008), the latter two represent "new commons" that more recently have been classified as commons.

2. Environmental Urban Commons

2.1. Urban Green Commons

Colding and Barthel (2013, p. 159) have defined urban green commons as:

> Physical green spaces in urban settings of diverse land ownership that depend on collective organization and management and to which individuals and interest groups participating in management hold a rich set of bundles of rights, including rights to craft their own institutions and to decide whom they want to include in such management schemes.

Urban green commons, as dealt with here, allow for a considerably larger set of the urban populace to actively manage land in cities. Few property rights regimes enable a larger set of urban residents to actively "manage" land in cities. As Table 1 shows, most natural and semi-natural land in cities only offers access rights to land but does not offer management rights to ordinary citizens.

Most urban green commons involve quite traditional landforms, such as "allotment areas" that are a customary feature in European urban landscapes and that historically have played a role by ensuring food security during crises (Barthel & Isendahl, 2013). Allotment associations effectively deal with the problem of congestion resulting from open access through fixed sizes and numbers of individual plots, and by membership fees. Leaseholds between the allotment association and the landholder tend to be rather long, lasting up to 25 years in some cases.

Exclusion of outsiders to allotments is often physically embodied in that fences or hedges surround these areas. A more recent trend in the UK is to create community allotments that can be used by large groups of people such as schools (Speak et al., 2015). Allotments differ from private domestic gardens by being subject to prescriptive gardening association codes. These local and national codes determine how management is carried out (Cabral et al., 2017). Barthel et al. (2010) refer to allotment gardens as communities-of-practice (Wenger, 1998) that involve acquisition, transmission, and modification of ecological practices and local ecological knowledge.

"Community gardens" are another example of urban green commons, although they represent a considerably more unstable form of commons, having a tradition of being self-organized (Ruitenbeek & Cartier, 2001), and often constituting an interim use for vacant land awaiting construction (Colding, 2011). They represent a very diffuse phenomenon with a long tradition and history both across the EU and in the rest of the world. Community gardens often involve small land plots used for food cultivation by urban dwellers with limited ability to own land. They represent bottom-up, community-based efforts to grow food (Okvat & Zautra, 2011). Only a tiny proportion of the community gardens in the US are permanent and their fate is largely determined by the real estate market (Linn, 1999).

In comparison to allotments, community gardens are surrounded by less strict regulations (Cabral et al., 2017). Many community gardens afford a holistic framework for sustainability by integrating environmental restoration, community activism, social interaction, cultural expression, and food security (Krasny & Tidball, 2009).

Even whole public parks, or portions of parks, are sometimes managed as urban green commons. The city

Table 1. Bundle of rights to nature from a citizen perspective in relation to different landforms.

	Residential garden	Tree alleys	Parks	Urban green commons
Access	x	x	x	x
Withdrawal	x			x
Management	x			x
Exclusion	x			x
Alienation	x			
Property rights regime	Private	Public	Public	Commons

Notes: In residential gardens, only the owner can conduct gardening. In street tree alleys and parks, people normally only have access rights; urban green commons increase the opportunity for urban residents to have management and access rights to urban ecosystems; (x) = partial rights. Source: Modified and adapted from Colding et al. (2013).

of Berlin, for example, holds a number of public parks that are managed (not owned) by collective user groups (Bendt et al., 2013). Membership to these areas is either formally defined or according to ex post criteria such as residency or acceptance by existing members in the group.

Urban "community forests" are yet another example of Urban green commons that are collectively managed by a diverse set of stakeholders. Community forests in the UK are often located in green belts and often cover several hundred hectares of land (Colding, 2011). "Sacred groves" are common in Asia and Africa (Colding & Folke, 2001). A sacred grove is usually a part of a forest set aside for spiritual or religious purposes and therefore considered sacred, and the removal of even dead wood is strictly taboo (Gadgil & Vartak, 1974). Due to increasing urbanization pressures, many sacred groves are protected as cultural heritage sites. In some parts of the world they represent the only remaining virgin forests (Colding & Folke, 2001).

2.1.1. Environmental Learning as a Co-Benefit of Urban Green Commons

Bendt et al. (2013) found that much holistic learning takes place in urban green commons, including learning about gardening and local ecological conditions, learning about self-organization and social integration, learning about the politics of urban space, and learning about social entrepreneurship. For example, respondents state that they learned about micro-ecological conditions—e.g., soil quality, shade patterns, heat levels in different parts of the garden, and local wind patterns—and also became more aware of climate change and displayed an increased concern for environmental issues. Hence, urban gardening, which is an active way of learning by doing, instills participants with new, or reinforced, awareness of ecological issues and processes that are operating at greater scales than the gardens themselves. Barthel et al. (2010) provide ample examples of ecological learning among allotment holders—knowledge that may or may not be transmitted to others via mimicking or oral means.

Suffice to say, we view urban green commons as key institutional arrangements for civil society groups to become more deeply involved in the resilience building of cities and local communities through combining climate-change adaptation with climate-change mitigation measures. Urban planners and policymakers should nurture such property rights arrangements for harnessing the climate-change agency of different civil society groups (Colding et al., 2020). As elaborated upon here, urban green commons can grant urban residents the right to actively engage in the management of both public and private land and this, in turn, contributes to environmental learning. As shown in previous studies, local-level institutions can respond to environmental feedback and surprises much faster than formal institutions used by centralized agencies (Folke et al., 2007). This is because informal institutions are locally crafted and socially enforced by the group of users themselves; hence, their flexible character renders them sensitive to environmental variability. Many of the practices that are carried out in urban green commons promote climate proofing. For example, urban gardening that may abate food shortage during periods of crisis (i.e., adaptation) could reduce unnecessary transports. Protecting community forests and green infrastructure for biodiversity reasons in community forests, allotments, and even in public parks (i.e., adaptation) also helps to sequester carbon from the atmosphere (i.e., mitigation). Protecting green structures and wetlands to adapt cities to the impacts of droughts and flooding is another adaptation strategy that enhances climate resilience while sequestering carbon and reducing carbon emissions generated by traffic, fossil fuel-based power plants, and other forms of combustion sources (Jansson & Nohrstedt, 2001).

To create opportunities for civil society groups to act against climate crises, property rights regimes need to exist to promote such advancement. A strengthened socio-economic investment in urban green commons could help instigate climate-change adaption in the wider society and could, in the long run, be more effective for dealing with the climate crisis than solely focusing on achieving specific mitigation targets that often lack a socio-cultural context (Colding et al., 2020). As studies also indicate, socio-cultural factors often represent a strong motive for people to take up urban gardening (Oddsberg, 2011). Interest in partaking in urban green commons can, in a more theoretical sense, be interpreted as an expression of the antithesis of globalization and for proliferating cultural identities that increasingly have become diluted (Tomlinson, 2003). Identity in this sense denotes the rising power of local culture ("glocalization'') that offers resistance to the market forces of globalization (Tomlinson, 2003). This line of argument is supported by Pearsall et al. (2017) and Saldivar-Tanaka and Krasny (2004) who found that the preservation of cultural identities was the strongest motive for respondents to take up urban gardening in several examined community gardens in the US.

3. Coworking Spaces

Coworking spaces share some essential institutional attributes of urban common property systems. First of all, they represent physical locations or meeting places in cities, suburbs, and even rural areas, bringing people together. Secondly, and similar to other forms of urban commons, they are not freely open to everyone, but to a subset of people that become active members through rental fees and/or admittance fees. Thirdly, sharing of certain resources is a distinct characteristic of coworking spaces. To what degree participants in coworking spaces hold collective-choice rights and may influence organizational decisions is, however, a question not looked into

here due to lack of empirical findings. However, this characteristic should be explored in further studies.

Coworking has globally grown on a regular basis during the last two decades. The definition of coworking varies depending on the interpreter. An accepted description is that it stands for a fundamentally new way of working in that two or more people work in the same place but for different companies (DTZ, 2014). Coworking can be described as a mixture of working from home and public workspaces (Brown, 2017). It represents but one example of the ample emergence of autonomous ways of working and living, such as mobile work, flex office, platform-based entrepreneurship, virtual collaborations, DIY, the work-from-home phenomenon, digital nomads, and other emergent trends of organizing work practices (de Vaujany et al., 2021).

Freelance engineer Brad Neuberg is by many seen as the pioneer of the concept when starting the Spiral Muse in San Francisco in 2005. Neuberg launched the Spiral Muse for lack of like-minded people to boost exchange knowledge and experience through creative flows that arose through collaboration with other individuals (Waters-Lynch et al., 2016). Similar examples then spread to other cities around the US and eventually to Europe.

The sharing of office space among employees of different interests and occupations has rapidly spread in conjunction with the growth of digitalization (Luo & Chan, 2020), especially in relation to the development of smart cities where coworking is seen as an important tool of a sharing economy that aims at reducing resource use by joint use of goods and services (Akande et al., 2020). Luo and Chan (2020) have estimated that about 1.7 million people worked in 19,000 coworking offices worldwide by the end of 2018, in contrast to the 160 coworking offices that existed in 2008. It is not only freelancers and self-employed people that take advantage of shared office landscapes, but also technology giants such as Microsoft and Google (Bouncken et al., 2020). Many companies have increasingly begun to develop their physical office landscapes during the past 20 years to improve the flow of communication, collaboration, and innovation among employees (Bouncken et al., 2020).

3.1. Drivers Behind Coworking

There is a multitude of reasons behind the rapid growth of coworking spaces, some of which converge and reinforce each other. One key determinant was the global economic recession of 2008. After the financial crisis, office rents in many cities rose dramatically (Yang et al., 2019). In many contemporary urban regions, office shortages are as common as housing shortages (Börjesson, 2018). This affects start-ups and independent entrepreneurs as rents, equipment, and resources are significant costs for young companies (Yang et al., 2019). Sharing office space and necessary equipment, therefore, becomes a viable alternative for survival (Räisänen et al., 2020).

Coworking is directly linked to the "gig economy" that broke out during the financial crisis in 2008 when employment conditions became more unstable. Journalist Tina Brown suggested the term "gig economy" when she observed the shift between more traditional working hours to more and more people choosing their own working hours (Goswami, 2020). Gig economics is characterized by short-term employment with specific work assignments, hence the word "gig" alluding to the music scene (Schroeder et al., 2019).

One should not underestimate the great need that people have to meet physically, something that the Covid-19 pandemic reminds us of. For many companies, physical meetings are an important strategy for business development. Moriset (2013) describes how the term "creative city" (Scott, 2006) aims to maximize opportunities for face-to-face meetings that in turn nurture the exchange of "tacit knowledge" (Polanyi, 1966), a concept that has received much attention from economic geographers (Moriset, 2013). Many researchers regard tacit knowledge as "a key determinant of the geography of innovative activity" (Gertler, 2003, p. 79). While codified knowledge—like "raw information"—may be exchanged and traded at distance through digital platforms and technologies, the production and exchange of tacit knowledge involve social and cultural components and require some intimate trust between participants. Moriset (2013) argues that this level of trust is often achieved through close contact during in-person meetings, which occur in selected places.

In her studies of common-property systems, Elinor Ostrom stressed the key role of eye-to-eye contact for trust building in social settings where individuals cooperate to achieve desired ends (see, e.g., Ostrom, 1990). Climate change represents a major collective action problem that depends on trust building and cooperation among a greater set of people. Many of the dimensions that are deemed key by social scientists for achieving sustainability (e.g., social cohesion, social inclusion, human well-being, and quality of life) depend likewise on the physical meetings of community members.

3.1.1. Environmental Co-Benefits of Coworking

Domestic transport and travel account for a significant part of today's greenhouse gas emissions. In Sweden, for example, they accounted for about 17 million tons of carbon dioxide equivalents of greenhouse gas emissions in 2019. This corresponds to about a third of Sweden's total emissions within its borders.

While positive environmental outcomes have been reported for teleworking in general (Hook et al., 2020), empirical research has revealed an overestimation in reducing greenhouse gas emissions (Ohnmacht et al., 2020). Besides the reported potential reductions of work-from-home, the travel time saved by shorter trips for

work reasons may be reinvested in travel for other reasons, thus leading to rebound effects (Ohnmacht et al., 2020).

While there are few empirical studies so far on the environmental gains of coworking, the ones that do exist suggest that it can contribute to reduced transportation and that this part can be significant. For example, Kylili et al. (2020) showed that the environmental impact on Cyprus was reduced by 43% through coworking by reducing daily commuting. In a study by Eriksson (2021) in Sweden, a significant difference in kilometer distance was observed between people commuting to coworking spaces relative to their previous commuting behavior to regular offices. This difference was not trivial, as coworking reduced commuting by a significant distance per day.

Moreover, in a study of coworking in Switzerland, Ohnmacht et al. (2020) found that CO_2 emissions from commuting for work were significantly lower for urban coworking spaces than for rural coworking spaces. They concluded that coworking spaces have the potential to reduce CO_2 emissions from commuting by 10%.

The notion of the sharing economy that coworking centers rest upon also plays an important role in achieving several Agenda 2030 goals (Akande et al., 2020). Sharing economy creates new jobs, new income forms, and business ventures. From a social perspective, it creates new social ties and helps build communities (Akande et al., 2020). Despite a lack of empirical evidence from sustainability assessments of sharing initiatives, sharing economy has been shown to contribute to increased resource efficiency and climate-change mitigation through the utilization of redundant assets (Harris et al., 2021). While tool sharing does not demonstrate a large potential for national reductions, office sharing has been found to have a significant potential to reduce greenhouse gas emissions (Harris et al., 2021).

Buildings use a lot of energy to heat, cool, and illuminate offices as well as to operate various types of office equipment. This energy use is not insignificant. Rivas et al. (2020) found that office buildings account for one-fifth of all commercial energy consumption. Estimates determined by the Swedish Environmental Research Institute (2019) show that shared office types have the potential to reduce energy use and greenhouse gas emissions by as much as 38–70% depending on how the office spaces are used. These estimates do not include savings from work equipment and furniture.

3.1.2. Public vs Social Spaces

Coworking spaces are initiated by both top-down and bottom-up forces (Moriset, 2013). Due to the ongoing decline of the national welfare states, the private sector increasingly replaces funding of services that previously were provided by various governmental bodies. For example, hybrid forms of contractual relations between the public and private sectors are increasing all over the world (Vincent-Jones, 2000). Public-private partnerships (PPPs) are often used to re-develop and manage public spaces, especially when capital investments are needed. Such a development may not always be socially sustainable. According to modern conceptions of property rights, ownership of public space also implies control over the range of permissible uses of a particular location (Kohn, 2004). While PPPs arrangements may not directly lead to the loss of public space, they can affect public space in more indirect ways, such as through increased crowd control and by creating more social spaces that fragmentize formerly public spaces. Kohn (2004) refers to such intrusion of private spaces into public spaces as "café creep," referring to the ongoing gradual privatization in many cities and which cuts residents off from places that previously were public. Unless revenues also are redistributed to the public sector from a profit-maximizing private sector, PPPs arrangements may not always be socially desirable from a democratic point of view. As an effect of the globalized market economy, there is an increasing dislodging of locally supplied resources and responsibilities that contributes negatively to public health, welfare, and people's living conditions, and is thus not socially sustainable.

On the other hand, coworking spaces could positively contribute to the loss of many "third places" as experienced in many cities due to lack of public funding (Moriset, 2013). Third places describe places that are separate from the two usual social environments of home ("first place") and workplace ("second place"); hence, these represent places where people convene and socialize in a free, informal manner and that are irreplaceable in the production of the urban social fabric (Oldenburg, 1989). This includes public libraries, bookstores, parks, and various community centers. The fact that many coworking spaces were founded based on self-organization in the beginning era of the coworking movement (2005–2010) is testimony to their role as serving as new forms of physical meeting places in the digital era.

4. Community Climate Commons

Given the gravity of the issue at stake, the scientific literature is surprisingly devoid of relevant examples of urban commons that are specifically targeted for climate-change abatement. Webb et al. (2021, p. 5) refer to such commons as "local climate commons," representing commons where local people are "coming together to create shared low carbon assets," including renewable energy, housing, woodland, and food cultivation. The purpose of this type of commons is to empower local communities so that they can have greater participation and ownership of the transition to net-zero emissions that are locally tailored and locally driven while also addressing inequality. To bring about such a shift, Webb et al. (2021) argue that three key conditions are required:

- Widespread devolution of power and resources;

- Setting ambitions for climate action and the community;
- Policies to drive community climate action and build community-owned green assets.

We have previously addressed the first point regarding the devolution of powers down to local levels. Devolution of formal rules to informal institutions could nurture social norms that may have greater power to facilitate collective action. McGinnis and Ostrom (1992) argue that the most successful institutions to control environmental problems are those that are best matched to micro- or meso-level environments rather than institutions determined at a global level. The notion of "community" is central here and entails everything from a congregation of people living together, to civil society groups or organizations, and even whole urban neighborhoods (Webb et al., 2021). The community concept includes both a delimited geographical area and an interest-based social community of people (Popple, 2015). Within the community discourse, scholars stress that successful community mobilization presupposes a number of components (see, e.g., Fook, 2016; Popple, 2015; Pyles, 2020; Sjöberg et al., 2015):

- Creating interaction, dialogue, confidence, and collective identity within the community;
- Spreading knowledge and awareness of identified common problems;
- Promoting activation, participation, and democratic influence;
- Building networks, cooperation, and collective resources;
- Organizing common activities and collective empowerment to act for change and development.

Active common participation, democratic influence, and social mobilization are key features in the creation of urban commons where people meet and act together (Stavrides, 2016). Commons can also include the social practice of managing a resource by a community of users that self-governs through institutions that it has created. To create collective action for climate-proofing activities, it is important to have places to meet in the urban space. This means places where people and organizations can meet, exchange experiences, and arrange meetings for knowledge acquisition and awareness-raising. We then believe that community centers can have a key role in the social mobilization of community climate commons. Community centers are common locations where members of a community can gather for education, lectures, autonomous dialogue, activities, and social mobilization. Community centers can serve as a foundation for commons that can evolve both top-down (e.g., initiated by public actors) or bottom-up (driven by, e.g., civil society organizations and through different forms of hybrid governance). Besides being a multi-service location, it might work as a node of cooperation and community mobilizing agent for increased participatory democracy (Estes, 1997; Sjöberg & Kings, 2021). Community centers have been of interest within social sciences ever since the settlement movement and the labor movement's establishment of such centers in the 19th century (Kohn, 2001; Yan, 2004). In Sweden so-called *Folkets hus* (literary meaning "the People's houses") were built by the labor movement around the country starting in 1932, and they still work as important community centers for education, debate, and social awareness (Kohn, 2001). Community commons have the potential to function as catalysts of mobilization for climate action, where venues in the built environment can serve as places for various community-based organizations and actors to start to mobilize for collective climate action in deliberative democratic processes (Dryzek & Niemeyer, 2019).

There are many examples of how community centers have been important for the mobilization of civil society. A local example in Stockholm is the community center Folkets Husby in the marginalized suburb of Husby. The premises are owned by the municipal public housing company and the community center is self-governed by local voluntary associations. Folkets Husby has managed to generate a strong local mobilization, started a cooperation with the long-established nationwide organization Folkets Hus, and has run new premises in the neighborhood since 2016. Today, this community center is run by some 50 associations and many residents have become members involved in the center in different ways (Sjöberg & Kings, 2021). The center is democratically governed by the members and primarily financed by state or municipal grants. Folkets Husby has served as a basis for getting people and organizations from various backgrounds together and has resulted in social mobilization for the socially sustainable development of segregated neighborhoods in Stockholm. Using the community center as a basis for their activities, the organized civil society actors have successfully mobilized to put issues such as social exclusion and segregation on the agenda, including meetings and discussions with, e.g., decision-making politicians. We consider that such community centers are important cornerstones and that they have the potential to serve as nodes and basis for mobilization for climate action and change, and the formation of community climate commons.

4.1. Community Climate Commons in the Built Environment

The built environment is of particular importance for instigating community climate commons since this is where the majority of people reside. By the built environment we mean the human-made space in which people live, work, and recreate on a day-to-day basis (Roof & Oleru, 2008). Setting ambitions for the climate proofing of the built environment is also in the self-interest of most real estate companies, whether public, non-profit, or private profit-oriented real estate companies. Suffice

to say, it is also in the interest of the tenants to have a stake in the climate proofing of their local outdoor environments, such as courtyard and backyard habitats and nearby green spaces. Community climate commons are also important to nurture to increase awareness and knowledge about climate change in wider society. Interestingly, research in environmental psychology suggests that group-based learning about climate change is more effective than individual learning (Holmgren et al., 2019; Xie et al., 2018).

It is first when physically built community centers function so that the people who are there are active participants who design and democratically decide which activities are to be carried out, that the community centers become urban commons. Community centers then have the potential to function as catalysts of mobilization for climate action, where venues in the built environment can serve as places for various community-based organizations and actors to start mobilizing for climate-proofing action.

We suggest that local community centers and outdoor environments of different types are suitable locales around which to create climate commons. In many cases, present-day courtyards need to be retrofitted to better buffer against undesirable climate-change effects. Both technical and nature-based solutions could be harnessed to achieve climate adaptation, e.g., underground tanks to store rainwater, green roofs, the planting of species to support pollinators, creation of bioswales and wetlands, wind and solar power systems, etc. The use of augmented reality technology (https://bit.ly/33NCJsu) can be useful for designing community climate commons by visualizing different types of design solutions and can also provide information about ecosystem services, biodiversity, and linked social activities.

5. Concluding Remarks

Much "devolutionary inertia" acts as a real barrier for facilitating climate-proofing in present-day society. There probably are many reasons for this, such as a lack of trust in, and the unwillingness of, local governments to transfer power (read "property rights") to groups of non-authorial stakeholders. High transaction costs might be another reason as well as lack of financial means for local governments to handle devolution issues. We also believe that there is a lack of knowledge about the virtues of urban commons more generally in society. Hence, an article of this kind may shed new light on the environmental ramifications of urban commons and identify ways to make them even more relevant for climate proofing in the near future.

A number of critical questions still circumscribe an upscaling of urban commons in wider society. One refers to the question of private-public interests and cooperation. We see it as crucial that the public sector actively supports urban common projects. We are not sure however to what extent private interests could back up and assist the development of urban commons. And is it feasible or even desirable that governments, e.g., provide economic incentives (tax cuts, etc.) for private companies that invest in urban commons projects?

Another critical question is to determine to what degree participants in coworking spaces hold collective-choice rights and may influence organizational decisions. In conjunction with this question, there likely is a continuum of different types of coworking spaces, from those being collectively run and managed to those being privately run and managed. This needs to be determined in future studies since this likely influences to what degree coworking spaces can instigate collective climate-change action more broadly in society.

Moreover, is there a critical size for urban commons for them to function well? Is this contingent on the number of people participating, or the size of an area managed as urban commons? Both of these questions are likely interdependent. As pointed out above, trust-building is an essential characteristic of well-functioning common property systems. As empirical research suggests (Feinberg et al., 2020; Rogge et al., 2018), smaller group sizes are more likely to sustain trust and social cohesion. This, perhaps, also indicates that the "community" to start with should not be too big and involve too many stakeholders, also taking into consideration Ostrom's critical design principle of having well-demarcated resource areas to be governed and/or managed. That might be an argument for instigating locally based community climate commons which could then serve as a basis for building strong networks for collective climate-proofing action.

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Conflict of Interests

The authors declare no conflict of interests.

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Article

Governmentality, the Local State, and the Commons: An Analysis of Civic Management Facilities in Barcelona

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Abstract
This article deploys the Foucauldian concept of governmentality to study the political tensions that may unfold when commons are enacted through hybrid institutional configurations. We focus on civic management facilities (CMFs) that are located in the city of Barcelona. These are facilities owned by Barcelona City Council which, responding to organised citizens' demands, are transferred to them so that they can develop their own transformative projects for the community. The hybrid institutional nature of these CMFs makes it impossible for them to avoid maintaining a relationship with the local state. Based on a survey to 51 CMFs, semi-structured interviews with 41 grassroots members of CMFs and seven semi-structured interviews with public employees and politicians, we argue that hybrid forms of commons lead to the development of political tensions. On the one hand, we show how the local state's administrative procedures—to do with accountability and the use of public space—reshape the activities of the CMFs, leading to the depoliticisation of their transformative projects. On the other hand, the analysis also presents the strategies of resistance articulated by the facilities, which enable members to work towards the development of their transformative aims. We conclude that such political tensions cannot be resolved but must be properly governed in order to make the commons' transformative project an enduring one.

Keywords
co-option; depoliticisation; governmentality; grassroots; hybrid commons; local state; participation; qualitative research; strategies of resistance; technologies of power

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1. Introduction

Gestió cívica ("civic management") is a legal-political category that includes public facilities—cultural centres, community centres, youth clubs, and more—owned by the city of Barcelona, which is governed by the Barcelona City Council (henceforth City Council), and transferred to the non-profit grassroots organisations that manage them: civic management facilities (CMFs). The city of Barcelona has a wide network of public facilities that are either directly managed by the City Council, outsourced to private companies, or managed by grassroots organisations, such as CMFs. The emergence of CMFs is related to Barcelona's tradition of self-organisation that created cultural and social centres for providing education and social protection for workers at the end of the 19th century (Bianchi, 2018a; Dalmau & Miró, 2010) and to neighbourhood struggles that emerged in the 1960s to demand social transformation in the city (Andreu Acebal, 2014). CMFs act as commons in critical terms (De Angelis, 2018; Federici, 2018; Harvey, 2012), given that these are resources, i.e., facilities, that are self-managed by

non-profit grassroots organisations that establish their own rules and norms to carry out socially transformative projects. Nevertheless, they represent a very particular type of commons, since the facilities are owned by the City Council, which temporarily cedes their management to the grassroots organisations and provides a yearly financial subsidy to contribute to their functioning and work in the community. In short, CMFs are commoning practices that are enacted through hybrid institutional configurations (Mullins et al., 2018). This hybrid institutional nature means that CMFs maintain ongoing organisational relationships with the local state, which require them to comply with a set of administrative norms and bureaucratic procedures. These hybrid forms of commons are more widespread that is often thought, and we aim to contribute to understanding the types of political tensions that may unfold when commons develop through these hybrid institutional configurations.

In this article, using Foucault's concept of governmentality, we seek to investigate how the City Council's administrative norms and bureaucratic procedures—concerning accountability and the use of public space—affect transformative CMF projects. We understand governmentality as the rationalisation and implementation of power arrangements to align subjects and transform dissidence; this is not applied exclusively by the state, but is also exercised by it (Dean, 1999; Rose, 1999). We also seek to investigate the forms of resistance that are generated and mobilised by CMFs in order to work towards their transformative goals. Adopting a case study method with multiple subcases (Yin, 2014) that investigates CMFs in the city of Barcelona, we use mixed techniques to analyse how the City Council implements public administration procedures and reshapes the activities developed by the CMFs by absorbing members' time and resources, and how different strategies are articulated by CMF members to circumvent this reshaping of their projects. We argue that when commons adopt hybrid institutional configurations, political tensions unfold. Observing the case of CMFs, on the one hand, administrative norms and bureaucratic procedures function as the City Council's technologies of power to depoliticise commons' actions. This is understood as the co-optation of the transformative potential of commons (Mayer, 2013). However, on the other hand, we also show how activists endeavour to create forms of resistance that hinder this form of co-optation.

In this article, we begin with a conceptual section in which we present CMFs as hybrid commons, considering their historical origins in citizen mobilisation. Then we introduce the concept of governmentality, examining how the concept is articulated in the study of power, and we justify the use of it to analyse CMFs. Afterwards we discuss how two different administrative procedures related to accountability and to the use of public space act as technologies of power. We then analyse strategies of resistance aimed at the development of more transformative goals in the CMFs. Finally, we conclude by underlining the need to explore strategies and modes to govern the idiosyncratic character of hybrid forms of commons and to limit the effects of technologies of power.

2. Civic Management Facilities as Commons

Barcelona—and Catalonia in general—has a strong tradition of self-organisation that can be dated back to the beginning of the 19th century, when different self-organised social centres (*ateneus populars*) were set up to offer cultural and educational opportunities by and for the working class (Solà, 1978). These initiatives were all suppressed by the Franco regime. However, demands for self-organisation resurged in the late 1960s with the emergence of neighbourhood associations that fought to improve living conditions and produce social transformation in the city (Andreu Acebal, 2014). These struggles contributed to the emergence of CMFs in Barcelona. In the transition to democracy, after the dictatorship (the late 1970s), the City Council began creating its own directly-managed network of public cultural and social facilities—e.g., cultural centres, community centres, youth clubs, and more. Later on, these were progressively and partially outsourced (Sánchez Belando, 2015). The neighbourhood associations and grassroots organisations demanded the creation of their own self-governing cultural and social spaces, especially in low-income neighbourhoods that had been neglected by the City Council's welfare policy. These struggles led the City Council to hand over the management of some of these facilities to grassroots organisations to develop their own projects (Bianchi, 2018a; García et al., 2015). This type of public facility management was called *gestió cívica* ("civic management," and thus CMFs). In 2019, the City Council participated in 56 CMFs.

According to the critical theory of the commons, CMFs act like commons. The theory of the phenomenon, which has grown in particular since the second half of the 20th century, has been explored by different disciplines and with varying slants. Among the most relevant currents, it is worth mentioning the neo-institutionalist and the critical approaches (Bianchi, 2018c; Enright & Rossi, 2018). The neo-institutionalist approach interprets the commons as an alternative management form to that of the state and the market. Neo-institutionalist scholars see the commons as (tangible or intangible) resources that are self-managed by a collective that establishes its own rules and norms (Hess & Ostrom, 2007; Ostrom, 1990). For its part, the critical approach interprets the commons as self-organised social practices—commoning practices—that, by representing an alternative to that of the state and the market, can represent the means for overcoming both, and can thus open up the possibility of outlining a path of emancipation from capitalism. Critical scholars see the commons as collective activities through which communities govern and manage (tangible or intangible) resources that hold transformative potential, as they operate outside profit-making

logics and use horizontal and participatory dynamics (De Angelis, 2018; Federici, 2018).

CMFs act as commons in the latter sense as tangible resources, i.e., facilities, that are self-managed in a participatory manner by non-profit grassroots organisations to carry out their own projects that seek to promote a more inclusive and democratic society (Pera, 2020). Some examples of these facilities in Barcelona are, among others, Casa Orlandai, a community/cultural centre that seeks to promote "social transformation through coexistence, respect and freedom," as well as to "build a more just society" (Casa Orlandai, 2020), and Casal de Barri Pou de la Figuera, a community centre that seeks to promote "social cohesion, equality, autonomy, and co-responsibility" (Casal Pou de la Figuera, 2020) through democratic participation that is open to all the many diverse social groups of the neighbourhood. However, as has been mentioned, CMFs are a particular type of commons, since their existence is based on the temporary transfer of the management of a public service by the City Council that has to be periodically renewed (generally every three years); in addition, the City Council subsidises CMFs to support the implementation of their projects financially.

It is likely that if we were to adopt a purist notion of commons, understood exclusively as "self-organising practices," we would not be able to study CMFs through this theoretical lens, because of the intrinsic relationship they maintain with the local state. However, the critical literature on the commons, especially on the urban commons, has increasingly pointed out that, in the dense and contested urban context, "we need to abandon a view that fantasises about uncontaminated enclaves of emancipation" (Stavrides, 2016, p. 56). This means that it is difficult to find commons that develop completely autonomously from their environment (Böhm et al., 2010; Narotzky, 2013), and that forms of institutional hybridisation are more widespread than is often thought. The literature on housing commons is an example of how the lens of the commons can be used to analyse initiatives that have an important component of self-organisation but that often represent forms of housing production and management that include both public and private actors, as well as public and private forms of ownership (Ferreri & Vidal, 2020; Mullins et al., 2018). However, the hybrid nature of housing commons does not invalidate the practice of democratic and horizontal self-organisation that underpins them, nor does it invalidate the desire for de-commodifying these goods that drives these housing initiatives. Negotiations with private and public actors, using private forms of ownership, and being supported by public funding must be seen for what they are: strategies adopted by the different collectives to engender commons initiatives and keep them alive over time (Bianchi, 2018b; Huron, 2018).

Certainly, examining commoning practices that are enacted through hybrid institutional configurations poses additional analytical questions for our study. The rationality and modalities of action that drive the commons is distinct from the rationality and modalities of action of state or market actors. Hence, the analysis of these hybrid commons configurations must pay particular attention to these differences and dissect the possible forms of tensions and frictions that might be produced by this kind of hybrid institutional nature. In our case, in fact, we are referring to commoning practices that have an ongoing relationship with the local state, because they are based on the City Council temporarily transferring the management of a public service, leading them to be deeply embedded in the local state's administrative norms and procedures. It is therefore the aim of this article to analyse what happens when these two divergent rationalities and modalities of action come together and, above all, how the local state's administrative norms and procedures influence the activity of these commoning practices, and if the commoning practices develop any forms of resistance, and how. We study the effect of these norms and procedures as well as the possibility of developing forms of resistance through the concept of governmentality.

3. Governmentality and the State as Sites of Power

Michel Foucault's studies in governmentality are part of his approach to the study of power. This investigates the diversity of forms and the multiplicity of sources of power, and the possibilities of resisting the application of power. Governmentality was defined by Foucault as "the ensemble constituted by the institutions, procedures, analyses, and reflections, the calculations and tactics that permit the exercise of this quite specific, albeit very complex form of power, which has, as its principal target population" (Foucault, 1979, p. 20). This ensemble represents a more or less calculated mentality—a governmentality—that directs and shapes the conduct of individuals for a variety of ends through different agencies—government, trade unions, non-profits, companies, and social institutions (Dean, 1999). Governmentality is enacted through technologies of power, i.e., intertwining coherent or contradictory forms of activating and managing a population (Donzelot, 1979), such as accountability, entrepreneurship and risk calculation. In short, governmentality is a form of exercising political power, which is not necessarily only reified in certain institutions such as the state, and that directs the conduct of individuals through specific technologies.

Foucault's reflections on governmentality have inspired a series of theoretical and empirical studies, especially in the English-speaking world, that have decentred the study of power from the state and have investigated ways of governing through a variety of practices spread throughout society (Dean, 1999; Lemke, 2002; Rose, 1999). These scholars have overcome conventional tenets in political science and Marxist studies that equate political power with state power and,

instead, have incorporated the multiple and complex sites and forms of exercising power. One of the most studied fields has been the community as a new site of power (Rose, 1999). According to these studies, communities increasingly embody a new government territory "whose vectors and forces could be mobilised, enrolled, deployed in novel programmes and techniques which operated through the instrumentalisation of personal allegiances and active responsibilities" (Rose, 1996, p. 332). This led Rose to coin the expression "government through community."

The Foucault-inspired literature on community written in the English-speaking world has made an important contribution to understanding how practices of community involvement and citizen participation have been progressively used by different authorities to give individuals responsibility for their own destinies (Swyngedouw, 2005), to reduce their critical capacity since they are engaged in solving social problems without being called upon to analyse major structural problems, to normalise the retrenchment of the welfare state (Raco, 2000), to transform dissidence into a domesticated form of participation (Watkins, 2017), and so forth. Nevertheless, these studies, by adopting a Foucault-inspired decentring approach to the analysis of power, have tended to underestimate the role of the state: They refuse to "equate government with the state, understood as centralized locus of rule" and focus on decomposing power into microprocesses and elements applied to individuals (Jessop, 2010, p. 59). This tendency is due to an incomplete understanding of the concept of governmentality that, according to Jessop (2007), is not consistent with the evolution of Foucault's thought.

According to Jessop's critical review, Foucault's studies in governmentality were part of an intellectual journey that, although initially aiming to decentre the study of power from the state, returned to it by focusing on how state power is a crucial emergent field of strategic action (Jessop, 2010). In fact, Foucault (2009) identified three government dispositions through history: sovereignty, disciplinarity, and governmentality. The third one, the governmentalisation of the state, was fulfilled in the 19th century when the state focused on controlling the masses instead of controlling the territory as such. The idea of the governmentalisation of the state has provided stimulus to state scholars, who continue to see the state as a valid object of theoretical analysis and political practice, but aim to provide a critical and non-essentialist account of it in order to integrate the Foucauldian approach to governmentality into their perspectives (Jessop, 2007). The integration of the governmentality perspective into state theory implies delving into the multiple power relationships that crystallise within the state and its technologies of power but without considering the state as a unique and universal source of power (Jessop, 2007).

Finally, according to Foucault, resistance to governmentality and the corresponding technologies of power is possible, since rather than being monolithic and deterministic (Lentrichia, 1988; Wickham, 1986), power has a contingent relationship with resistance (Cortés Rodríguez, 2013; Driver, 1985; Pickett, 1996). In fact, Foucault (1987, p. 123) states that:

> In the relations of power, there is necessarily the possibility of resistance, for if there were no possibility of resistance—of violent resistance, of escape, of ruse, of strategies that reverse the situation—there would be no relations of power.

In particular, Foucault envisaged resistance as an empirical and strategic response to concrete implementations of power, rejecting the existence of a universal ideal that could articulate and unify different struggles, such as justice (Cortés Rodríguez, 2013; Driver, 1985). The subjects to which the technologies of power are applied are not always completely docile, and "something always eludes the diffusion of power and expresses itself as indocility and resistance" (Pickett, 1996, p. 458). Indeed, the application of power can create circumstances that lead to resistance, for example, by creating huge factories where workers are submitted to disciplinary techniques, the conditions for a mass strike are also created (Pickett, 1996). Thus, we analyse whether any strategies of resistance are articulated in the CMFs in response to the bureaucratic and administrative processes applied by the City Council.

In sum, this article takes into account the relevant theoretical and empirical contributions of English-speaking Foucault-inspired scholars regarding community involvement and citizen participation, but also considers the state as one of the main sources of power that administers the population by applying technologies of power that seek to control and align individuals and collectives with the state's rationalities (Driver, 1985; Tilly, 1993). We focus on how the local state adopts specific technologies of power, administrative norms, and bureaucratic procedures to control and reshape the identity, activities, and projects developed in the CMFs. In addition, we consider the possibility of resisting technologies of power.

4. Methodology

The phenomenon of civic management in the city of Barcelona was used as a case study, with the multiple CMFs employed as sub-cases (Yin, 2014). The aim was to use a mixed approach to investigate the relationship between the City Council and the CMFs, identifying the aspects that have an effect on the everyday practices and structures of the CMF, which we divided into two areas: (a) administrative procedures related to accountability processes and (b) authorisation requests for the use of public space. The fieldwork took place in 2019 in two stages: The first phase was a questionnaire that was designed to record the main characteristics

of the facilities, such as the year they were founded, their budgets, and their internal organisation. The second phase consisted of semi-structured interviews with grassroots members (mainly activists and some CMF workers) responsible for each facility, as well as politicians and public employees from the City Council. In this second phase, we focused on evaluating the experiences themselves and the relationship between the local state and the CMFs, identifying the administrative regulations and bureaucratic procedures that act as technologies of power, and examining the effects of these procedures on CMFs and on the associations that manage them.

In the first phase, of the 56 CMFs that existed in 2019, we received answers to our online questionnaire from 51. The results were analysed using descriptive statistics and enabled us to obtain a general description of the characteristics of the CMFs. In the second phase, 34 CMF were selected from those that had answered the survey, considering their location and their type of activity. The criteria used for selecting the CMFs—location and type of activity—were chosen according to the diversity of the administrative areas of the municipality that the CMF established regular communication with and the processing of bureaucracy. The city of Barcelona is divided territorially into ten districts that have their own administrative structures, and in 2019 each had a certain degree of autonomy in the implementation of the agreements with the CMFs. Moreover, each area of activity—culture, sports, community development, youth, etc.—has its own administrative department and its own officials with whom the CMFs interact on a regular basis. Therefore, each CMF is principally related to its district as well as to the Department that corresponds to its scope of action. In this second phase we sampled 34 CMF, interviewing a total of 41 grassroots members and a total of seven public employees. The transcripts of the interviews were analysed qualitatively with Atlas.ti software.

5. Administrative Procedures as Technologies of Power

To use the concept of governmentality to illustrate the mechanisms implemented by the local state to monitor the CMFs, we describe and discuss the most common administrative procedures that result from the agreements established between the CMFs and the City Council. Firstly, we discuss local state regulations intended to ensure the accountability of the CMFs' activities. Secondly, we analyse the local state regulations related to requesting authorisation for using the public space. We focus on how these two types of administrative processes act as technologies of power and lead to the modification of the projects developed by the CMFs, hampering their transformative goals. Finally, we show some strategies of resistance that the CMFs have developed to invest more time and resources in their transformative goals.

5.1. Accountability

Each CMF signs an agreement with the City Council that is renewed approximately every three years; this specifies the cession of the facility to the grassroots organisation and the annual subsidy allocated to it. Consequently, the CMFs have to meet some requirements related to accountability. We refer to accountability as the external scrutiny of activities and decisions of an entity by the local state or an external agent, made to monitor, evaluate, and assess programmes that receive public funding or have an agreement with the City Council (Goodin, 2003). Accountability is a key element in democratic systems, and here we analyse the processes and instruments used to make CMFs accountable to the City Council.

The subsidies received by CMFs range from 18,000 to 250,000 euros depending on the facility and the project, and according to the results of the survey, money received as subsidies represent more than 50% of the total budget in 72% of the CMF. Spanish and Catalan subsidy laws all require CMFs to report all expenses incurred in detail, which turns to be a time-consuming task for CMF members. Moreover, CMFs often have to adapt their activities to comply with legal requirements, as expressed here by a member of a youth club in the Nou Barris district who complains about the fact that when they organise events, they cannot buy food at a supermarket but have to use a catering service instead:

> There are many things that we would like to do differently, but the district administration doesn't approve of them. They prefer us to use a catering service instead of going to the supermarket to buy food, because they don't accept supermarket receipts as proof of payment.

In this case, for the youth club, having to use a catering service means, firstly, higher costs, and secondly, the loss of part of their own way of organising, as they are used to preparing food themselves and prefer to do it.

When the funding a CMF receives is greater than 30,000 euros, they are submitted to audits in which external private firms review the use of public money and the justification of it, according to the standards of the administration. The following quote is from a member of a CMF in the Sant Martí district and shows how the external audit process puts pressure on CMFs throughout the year, as they must generate invoices that meet the requirements of the City Council and have them prepared properly to the audit. Both are processes that require the time and resources of the CMF members:

> Every year we have an audit. We have to present the statement of accounts. We have to report all, absolutely all the invoices of the entire budget, not only the subsidy from the City Council, but the entire budget.

Secondly, the agreement with the City Council also defines the control and regulation procedures for the accountability of the activity performed. Each CMF has to provide periodic reports about the activity and, on an annual basis, a longer version that compares the reports with the CMF's projected work plan and projects. The termly reports mainly consist of quantitative indicators that measure the number of events held and other characteristics, such as the number of participants and their genders.

Respondents pointed out that the indicators demanded by the City Council are purely quantitative in nature and do not ask them about their community work, nor their commitment to strategies to create networks of reciprocity. Moreover, they argue that the indicators do not take into account the slower pace that non-professional organisations, such as CMFs, work at. In the following quote, a CMF member from the Eixample district explains their opinion and experiences with the metrics required by the City Council:

> The City Council does not see civic management as a process and even less as citizen participation, in other words, they ask us for totally quantitative indicators, number of activities, number of people participating in the activities….This puts us in a tight spot, this imposes pressure on the people involved in participative activities….The CMF employee [who is hired to carry out the day to day tasks of the CMF] spends the whole day filling in metrics, she's always telling us that the date to send the activity data is getting nearer; it's all about numbers.

In this community centre, members feel pressurised by the quantitative indicators and feel they are pushed to relegating the work that centres on building bonds of reciprocity into second place, as well as modifying schedules they had envisioned. In addition, the interviewee points out how accountability metrics take valuable time away from the CMF employee, who could otherwise have been focussed on supporting CMF projects.

Moreover, the necessity of using these types of quantitative indicators tends to encourage the CMFs to schedule several events, prioritising the number of them rather than concentrating on activities that involve engaging with fewer participants on a longer-term basis. As the previous respondent pointed out:

> We feel that for the City Council it's better to organize 20 activities rather than 10, but we work with other principles: Neighbourhood engagement is achieved on a long-term basis.

The administrative procedures described so far—the financial and the activity reports—require CMF members to learn the codes, language, and methods that the administration uses. For instance, the quantitative indicators required to assess the CMF activity are the result of vertical formulas used to evaluate the performance of external actors that provide public services in a context of ever-increasing outsourcing of public services. These procedures "create new calculable spaces for experts to monitor and leaves partnerships open to quantitative assessment and funding discipline from above" (Raco & Imrie, 2000, p. 2198)

These technologies of power are the result of the determination of the state at any level to increase its control over budget spending in favour of greater accountability to society (Raco & Imrie, 2000), and to avoid fraudulent practices being carried out with public money (Shleifer & Vishny, 1993). Whilst accountability is crucial in democratic systems, the mechanisms described here have been designed mainly for being applied to third sector organisations or companies that have a professionalised structures responsible for these processes, rather than the local grassroots groups studied here. There are other ways of evaluating grassroots activities; these are based on qualitative parameters that visualize long-term achievement such as building trust and ties, evaluation by external actors using ethnographic techniques and so forth (O'Dwyer & Unerman, 2008).

5.2. The Use of Public Space

Another technology of power in the form of administrative procedures is the authorisation required to use public space. If CMFs wish to pursue any activities in the public space, such as cultural performances or workshops in a public square, they must request the corresponding permits. The grassroots members of the CMFs described frequent difficulties in processing authorisations. This often led to them having to cancel activities, or modify when or where they were held, in order to adapt them to the City Council's requirements. In the following quote, a CMF member from the Nou Barris district expresses how not being granted a permit complicates and slows down its aims of promoting citizens' self-organisation:

> Some women from the neighbourhood have created a new feminist group linked to our CMF. Their first event was a cultural exhibition of flamenco dancing by some women from the neighbourhood in a public square, so they had to ask permission to use the square during the afternoon and the evening. The City Council refused permission on the grounds that we were already organising a lot of events here in the neighbourhood….This attitude undermines the motivation of people who have started to self-organise activities.

Furthermore, from the Sarrià-Sant Gervasi district, another CMF member illustrates how the refusal of a permit leads CMFs to change the location of their activities, which means they have to dedicate extra time to reformulate them:

> We wanted to hold an activity in the community garden next to the CMF, but they told us that we couldn't do it there, that we could only use the building.

The request for permits for the use of public space is not a technology of power deployed exclusively for controlling CMF activities, but also those of many other grassroots organisations. It should be contextualised in the reconfiguration of urban public spaces in global cities, in the planning and restructuring trends led by the public and private sector working together (Harvey, 1992; Raco, 2003). The tendency has consisted of a major commodification and securitisation of the public space, at the expense of politicised uses of it, which had included "a toleration of the risks of disorder as central to its functioning" (Mitchell, 1995, p. 115) and giving urban movements the possibility of making their demands public. The model has increased regulation of the practices that take place in the public space, sanctioning or excluding people that are considered in some way inappropriate, unimportant or as politically divergent, in favour of promoting the experience of the city as a spectacle (Delgado, 2011), where entertainment, consumption, and safety is encouraged above disruptive politics (Mitchell, 1995).

This paradigm has been applied to the city of Barcelona mostly through the adoption of a civic ordinance (Ajuntament de Barcelona, 2006). This ordinance has meant that CMF have to request authorisations and to comply with the norms stated within them when they carry out events in the public space; this often means having to reformulate activities. But most importantly, this kind of administrative procedure involves a significant investment of CMF members' time and resources to comply with them. In other words, from a governmentality approach, the local state uses the CMF members' time (with delays and reformulation procedures) as a monitoring strategy (Auyero, 2012).

To summarise, the application of technologies of power through administrative procedures related to accountability and the use of the public space have an impact on the transformative projects of CMF commons. They lead to the modification of the CMFs' activities, encourage the professionalisation of their structures and the adoption of state logics, such as a productivist vision of the activities organised, of the budget requirements, etc. In addition, complying with the necessary paperwork, dealing with delays, and the process of adaptation to the administration's codes all require the CMFs' members to invest time and resources, giving them less time to develop the more transformative and critical sides of their projects. Thus, commons such as CMFs that constantly have to relate with the local state may "feel pressured to forget their transformative goals in the interests of more productive partnerships with the state" (Watkins, 2017, p. 2145). In this way, the administrative procedures cause the CMF to run the risk of becoming part of a revisionist neoliberalism that uses local state procedures and norms to neutralise more transformative forms of association and to depoliticise them (Watkins, 2017).

5.3. Strategies of Resistance

While the application of technologies of power has been observed in all the CMF throughout the different districts of the city, their reactions to the threat of depoliticisation are diverse and have not so far generated coordinated action among CMFs. First, in some cases, the CMF members interviewed were barely aware of the phenomenon; they aimed to debate it collectively, but had not taken any counter-actions yet, as illustrated by a CMF member from the Sant Martí district:

> This [the lack of time and resources to develop their project] is a recurrent debate that we have in different bodies of deliberation and participation with CMF members; we have mentioned it to the City Council, but there is some reluctance to admit it.

In other cases, when a permit to hold an activity in public space has been refused, a minority of the CMF interviewed opted to simplify the activity and carry it out without a permit, opening themselves up to sanctions from the City Council. However, this was perceived as a strategy for pursuing their objectives despite difficulties in processing authorisations.

Finally, one of the most common formulas to rationalise time and resources in order to carry out key activities was to create commissions that work exclusively on administrative procedures, supported by CMF workers. This strategy does not combat administrative procedures directly but does free up other CMF members' time so that they can focus on developing more transformative types of activities. The following quote, from a CMF member in the Sant Martí district, shows how this strategy has been adopted by a community centre:

> Last April when I was the president, I saw that the management of the community centre was taking up a lot of the association's time, and we created a committee to manage the centre, and a committee for developing our project….With this division, we can do both things and separate the issues that belong to the management of the centre from the ones that belong to the association project.

The strategies of resistance employed by CMFs to avoid being fully reshaped by technologies of power show how, despite the substantial capacity of governmentality to hamper the performance of individuals and communities by the implementation of technologies of power, "dominant strategies do not occupy an empty landscape. They have to overcome resistances, refusals, and blockages" (Clarke, 2004, p. 44). The strategies implemented by CMFs do not directly confront the technologies of power identified in this article, neither do they dismantle

them. The mechanisms of resistance observed in CMFs focus on escaping from co-optation mechanisms in order to continue with their transformative goals. Foucault (1987) considered escaping from technologies of power or even using them as forms of resistance to attempt to reverse the situation. Thus, our analysis shows that the City Council's technologies of power that aim to control and co-opt the CMFs are not wholly successful: Some critical discourses persist and encourage hybrid institutional commons to explore different ways of continuing with their transformative goals.

6. Conclusion

CMFs represent a particular case of commons, since they are public facilities that have been transferred to grassroots organisations and, therefore, must maintain an ongoing relationship with the local state. We have conceptualised these commoning practices as hybrid forms of commons, i.e., commons that are enacted through hybrid institutional configurations (Ferreri & Vidal, 2020; Mullins et al., 2018). With this article we aim to further the knowledge on these hybrid forms of commons by exploring the political tensions that may unfold when different rationalities and modalities of action, such as those of the commons and those of the state, need to co-exist under the same institutional umbrella. We have examined these contingent political tensions that CMFs experience through the concept of governmentality, analysing how the transformative projects developed by hybrid forms of commons located in Barcelona are affected by a series of technologies of power used by the local state, namely administrative norms and procedures such as accountability processes, and if and how forms of resistance are developed by commons' members. The analysis has shown that when commons are enacted that have hybrid institutional configurations, contingent political tensions unfold.

On the one hand, the local state deploys administrative norms and procedures as technologies of power to control and redirect the actions of these commons. They do so by absorbing the working time of members who must comply with these norms and procedures and cannot devote themselves to organising activities through which they pursue transformative projects; they also do so by directly changing or influencing the rationality and mode of developing these activities. The reason for the technologies of power seems, in the first instance, to stem from a need to apply procedures of control and accountability to their activities. Nevertheless, these technologies of power also act as an attempt by the local state to co-opt the transformative potential of these commons. The analysis also shows how the commons can articulate some forms of resistance, which, although they do not directly contest these technologies of power, are used to reduce the local state's co-optation effects so that the commons can continue to pursue their transformative goals.

The tensions that have risen within these hybrid forms of commons—between grassroots organisations and the local state—seem almost inevitable and are difficult to resolve due to the different natures, objectives, and rationalities of the actors involved, as well as the local state's power and capacity to rule (Böhm et al., 2010). Both actors benefit from the public–commons collaboration, which for the CMF means stability and economic capacity for developing their projects, and for the local state means an innovative form of citizen participation and service provision (Blanco, 2021). Thus, we believe this article underscores the need to explore new forms of governing the idiosyncrasies of hybrid forms of commons to limit the effects of the technologies of power. For instance, the City Council, in cooperation with civil society organisations, including some CMFs, have recently been working on a new set of criteria to evaluate community-based projects such as CMFs: The plan is to implement them gradually over the next few years. This evaluation is called *balanç comunitari* ("community balance") and includes criteria proposed by grassroots organisations themselves and later adopted by the City Council, such as social impact and return, local bonds, internal democracy and participation, quality of work, and environmental sustainability (Ajuntament de Barcelona, 2020).

The community balance is only one of the many different strategies possible; other tools can be constructed to govern the idiosyncrasies of hybrid forms of the commons. What we intend to emphasise with this example is that possibilities do exist to govern this phenomenon, ones that can allow community projects that materialise through a hybrid form of commons to continue to pursue their transformative objectives. However, these forms of governing the hybrid forms of commons cannot be developed without a firm commitment from the grassroots organisations themselves, which must include this push within their own strategies of resistance.

Regarding resistance strategies articulated by CMFs, we have observed that they are a contingent reaction to the implementation of technologies of power, developed in order to fulfil their transformative goals. However, they do not directly confront technologies of power. A long-term perspective is needed to evaluate to what extent these strategies enable the development of the CMFs' transformative goals and reverse the effect of the City Council's technologies of power. Moreover, a long-term perspective would also allow us to evaluate whether these resistance strategies can evolve into other forms of struggle that might lead to situations of conflictual cooperation (Giugni & Passy, 1998) between the CMFs and the City Council.

In conclusion, we think that this work contributes to informing commons theory in a broader fashion, since it is rarely possible for commons to achieve autonomy in capitalist societies (Böhm et al., 2010; Narotzky, 2013). Many urban commons find themselves entering relationships with the state, sometimes to ask for

financial support, sometimes to demand the cession of a space, among other reasons (Bianchi, 2018b). The application of the Foucauldian perspective of governmentality enables scholars to analyse contradictory rationalities, the implementation of technologies of power, and the process of co-optation that commons can experience when they take on a hybrid institutional form. Moreover, the study of commons from a Foucauldian approach does not exclude the possibility of the commons reacting in order to resist the processes that exert power.

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Conflict of Interests

The authors declare no conflict of interests.

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Article

Art Organisers as Commoners: On the Sustainability and Counter-Hegemonic Potential of the Bangkok Biennial

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Abstract
As part of a remarkable wave of perennial contemporary art events in Thailand, the Bangkok Biennial was organised for the first time in 2018. Without central curation or funding, the organisational strategy of this artist-led, open-access event was strikingly different from the state-organised Thailand Biennale and the corporate Bangkok Art Biennale that were inaugurated several months later. Through the eyes of the literature on "commoning" as a third way of organising next to the state and market, we explore the "common spaces" that the Bangkok Biennial has produced. Reflecting on arguments articulated in the introduction to this thematic issue, as well as on Chantal Mouffe's analysis of the detrimental nature of an "exodus strategy" for counter-hegemonic action, we focus on the connections—if any—of the Bangkok Biennial with the state and corporations. Specifically, we address the following research questions: What are the characteristics of the Bangkok Biennial as a common art event? Which connections with the state and market have its organisers developed? And what are the consequences of this strategy for its sustainability and counter-hegemonic potential? We conclude that the organisers have consciously resisted developing relationships with the state and market, and argue that this "exodus strategy" is a necessity in Thailand's socio-political setting. And while this strategy might endanger the sustainability of this biennial as an art event, we argue that at the same time it supports an infrastructure for counter-hegemonic action inside and—possibly more importantly—outside art.

Keywords
antagonism; art organiser as commoner; artist as organiser; Bangkok Biennial; biennial; common space; common; commoning; contemporary art; Thailand

Issue
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1. Introduction

"Why 'biennial' and not 'biennale'? The two words mean the same thing, just in different languages. None of us are Italian" (Bangkok Biennial, 2018). With this matter-of-fact statement on the last page of their *Guide to Pavilions*, initiators Lee Anantawat, Jeff Gompertz, and Liam Morgan clarified the reasons behind the precise naming of the Bangkok Biennial, which was about to take place for the first time from July through September 2018. It was a sly dig at two other biennials that were to be inaugurated later that same year: the state-organised Thailand Biennale and the corporate Bangkok Art Biennale that both sport the "Italian" name. While such name-teasing in itself might be of minor importance—it is more tongue-in-cheek joke than serious criticism after all—it is symbolic for the attitude of the initiators of an event, "set up as a challenge to the authority of access to representation in art and curatorial practices" (Bangkok Biennial, 2018). As we will

see, in Thailand that authority mainly rests with a state that appropriates art to communicate correct views of "Thainess," and with increasingly smooth corporations that have discovered art as a means to boost consumption and real estate values. In response, with others, the art organisers involved with the Bangkok Biennial follow a "third" way of organising that, in a growing literature, is analysed as a process of "commoning" (e.g., De Angelis, 2017; Stavrides, 2016; Volont, 2020). Adding "common spaces" to the art landscape, these "commoners" try to counter the appropriation of art by the state and corporations, and to broaden the public sphere through the production of spaces for imagining different ways of being and living together.

In Thailand, as in other countries in the region, there is a tradition of art commoning, befitting ideas about the importance of the artist as organiser (McKee, 2017). We aim to reflect on the counter-hegemonic potential of these common art initiatives vis-à-vis the state and market in Thailand. Following the discussion of Volont and Smets (2022) in the introduction to this thematic issue, we will especially focus on the relationships that the Bangkok Biennial organisers have established with the state and corporations. After all, as these authors have pointed out (Volont & Smets, 2021), while establishing such relationships might risk appropriation of common practices, without them the sustainability of common spaces is at risk. We will bring these arguments in conversation with Mouffe (2013), who stresses that art practices can play a crucial role in counter-hegemonic struggle as they help breed alternative subjectivities. In response to "exodus strategies" advocated by Virno (2004) and Hardt and Negri (2009), Mouffe is adamant that this struggle needs to play out in all institutional domains of society, including in art spaces and events led by the state and market. Using the Bangkok Biennial as an example, we examine how these dynamics play out for art initiatives in Thailand.

We write this article in the conviction that in today's setting of radical appropriation of art by the state and market there is an urgent need to explicitly address the counter-hegemonic potential of common art initiatives. With limited archiving and resources mostly directed towards state- and corporate-run events, common initiatives have not been sufficiently theorised, which might eventually hurt their potential. We aim to help change this by contributing to the scholarship on independent artist-led organising, a scholarship that—we are happy to see—is starting to grow in recent years (e.g., Teh, 2018). We do so through the following research questions: What are the characteristics of the Bangkok Biennial as a common art event? Which connections with the state and market have its organisers developed? And what are the consequences of this strategy for its sustainability and counter-hegemonic potential?

We address these research questions in the following six sections. First, we will turn our attention to Thailand, introducing the context within which its contemporary art practices in general and biennials in particular function. Then we will present commoning as a third way of social organisation next to the state and market. Developing the arguments introduced above, we wonder if common initiatives should engage with the state and market. We will also reflect on the relevance of this discussion for the Thai context. In the following section we present the methodological choices that have guided our research. Next, we turn our attention to the Bangkok Biennial itself, discussing its organisational model and the characteristics of the common spaces that have been produced. We then show that the organisers behind this biennial have deliberately resisted engagement with the state and market, arguing that this is a necessity in Thailand's socio-political context. In the final section we will reflect on the consequences of this decision, discussing the sustainability of the biennial as well as its counter-hegemonic potential. Throughout, we stress the importance to study biennials and other commoning art practices not only as "art" events, but to instead place these events in the world, and to broaden the scope of analysis beyond contemporary art and its institutions.

2. Contemporary Art in Thailand

The biennial is one of the prime platforms through which people encounter contemporary art today (Green & Gardner, 2016). Applauded as sites of experimentation (Basualdo, 2003), they are criticised for their complicity to the interests of states and corporations as well. However, next to state-funded and corporate-funded biennials, there are "other" biennials—like the Bangkok Biennial—that result from common-oriented art organising (Oren, 2014). While these various organisational models certainly influence the potential role of biennials, at the same time the specific characteristics of the societies within which they are organised are crucial for their form, role, and effects as well. We will therefore first discuss the characteristics of the Thai art system, and the context within which this functions (see also Teh, 2017, 2018; van Meeteren & Wissink, 2019, 2020).

As even the most cursory observer will know, the past decades have seen recurrent street occupations, bloody clearances, and military coups in Thailand, resulting from radically opposing views of the Thai nation (Chachavalpongpun, 2014; Ferrara, 2015; Montesano et al., 2012). The dominant view—or, to speak with Gramsci, the hegemonic view—centres on three pillars: a nation built upon an imagined, uniform Thai identity based on ethnolinguistic homogeneity and so-called "Thainess" (Connors, 2005); a Buddhist religion; and a quasi-divine king, protected by strict lèse-majesté laws (Isager & Ivarsson, 2010). The nation is presented as having a distinctly graded hierarchy with *khon di* ("good people") who aspire to be *siwilai* or "civilised" (Winichakul, 2000) at the top, and with Bangkok as its Sino-Thai centre, overseeing peripheries like the "Laotian" Northeast and "Malay" South. In this view, it is

the task of the state—heavily leaning on the bureaucracy, monarchy, and army—to educate people and defend this unity against internal and external threats (Baker & Phongpaichit, 2017, pp. 282–284).

Over the past decades, this hegemony has been challenged from two sides. On the one hand, with a switch to export-oriented production, economic conglomerates gained rapid influence and started to push domestic consumption (Phongpaichit & Baker, 1998; Suehiro, 1992). They did not challenge the core ideas of national unity, religion, and monarchy, but did gain considerable influence on the functioning of the state (Baker & Phongpaichit, 2017). On the other hand, and more fundamentally, the hegemony has been challenged by an egalitarian popular nationalism that situates sovereignty in the people rather than the palace. Embracing the nation's diversity, in this view the state should improve the well-being of all, and diminish the enormous political and economic inequalities (Baker & Phongpaichit, 2017, pp. 282–284).

Art practices in Thailand operate within this context of hegemonic struggle (van Meeteren & Wissink, 2020). Since the 1930s, the state perceived modern 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. The engagement of the state with contemporary art has been late, effectively only starting with the establishment of the Office of Contemporary Art and Culture (OCAC) within the Ministry of Culture in 2002 under the directorship of established curator Apinan Poshyananda. This founding director had already left the OCAC for some time when this office finally executed his long-held ambition to organise a biennial, resulting in the 2018 Thailand Biennale. In many ways, the Thailand Biennale was meant as an extension of the view that art should serve particular images of the nation, and it is therefore not surprising that it was mired by heavy-handed interferences in curatorial decision-making (van Meeteren & Wissink, 2020).

The engagement of the Thai corporate world with contemporary art stemmed from the discovery of its potential for stimulating consumption. This coincided with the emergence of a new generation of contemporary art visitors, for whom consumerist imaginations of the "good life" are aspirational. The Bangkok Art Biennale is an exponent of this consumption-centred vision of art. It was inaugurated in 2018 by Thaibev as a means to add value to—or in the words of Boltanski and Esquerre (2020): to *enrich*—shopping malls and real estate owned by the company and its strategic corporate partners. In the hands of its artistic director Apinan Poshyananda—who, as we mentioned, had transitioned from the OCAC to the much more "efficient" market sector—the Bangkok Art Biennale aims to be an explicit counterpoint to the art of the state (Poshyananda, 2021). The art on show also included various so-called "critical works," honed in on by reviewers in newspapers and art publications. However, underlining Mouffe's (2013) argument that critical gestures in the "advertisement domain" are easily appropriated and neutralised, a curatorial strategy of "total curation" has guaranteed that these critical works did not lead to serious discussion or engagement (van Meeteren & Wissink, 2020).

The alternative art scene that started to develop in the 1980s was earlier in its engagement with contemporary art (Teh, 2018; van Meeteren & Wissink, 2020). Newly instituted art schools—at Chiang Mai University and elsewhere—and study periods abroad brought students in conversation with alternatives to the state's views of art. New art spaces including the Ruang Pong Art Community in the 1980s, and Concrete House, Project 304, and About Studio/About Café a decade later, provided platforms that supported new artist networks (Teh, 2018). Art was thus increasingly wrested free from control by the "Silpakorn system"—the system of state-centred institutions with Silpakorn University at its core that for long had exercised an iron grip on all facets of Thai art practices (see Teh, 2017; van Meeteren & Wissink, 2020). These developments also supported the initiation of artist-led perennial events like Chiang Mai Social Installation (Teh, 2018), Womanifesto (Nair, 2019), Asiatopia, and the Bangkok Experimental Film Festival. Together, these artist-led activities created spaces that supported imaginations of another Thailand. The Bangkok Biennial aligns with this third view of art.

3. The State, the Market, and the Common

With a direct link between different types of art events, practices and spaces, and different visions of the relationship between state and society, the analysis of art practices in Thailand has an undeniably political dimension. The literature on the urban common provides a useful conceptual lens for analysing this fragmentation of the Thai art field. After all, a considerable part of this literature similarly presents commoning as a third way of social organising next to the state and market (e.g., De Angelis, 2017; Stavrides, 2016; Volont, 2020). In this view, the common is a means to "reassert participatory control over the urban commonwealth" vis-á-vis the state and market (Volont & Smets, 2021). In the case of the Bangkok Biennial, this means resistance to control over contemporary art by creating and supporting alternative practices and infrastructures. The art organisers involved with the Bangkok Biennial emerge as commoners, who facilitate the addition of common spaces to the art landscape, through what are called biennial pavilions. These commoners thereby try to counter the appropriation of art by the state and corporations, and to broaden the public sphere by introducing spaces for imagining "different" ways of being and living. This supports the transformation of contemporary art from

an advertisement domain of consensual soft power in which critical gestures are quickly appropriated and neutralised, into a core battlefield of explicit agonistic political disagreement (Mouffe, 2013).

While a small but growing number of publications have started to analyse Thailand through the concept of the common (e.g., Chaitawat et al., 2021; Shelby, 2021), the applicability of this framework has not yet been conceptualised well. In particular, for the analysis of art practices in Thailand we want to place two footnotes. First, the relationship between art and the common is complex, and its history still needs to be written. To mention just one obvious issue, state involvement with art in itself does not have to be problematic, provided that it functions through institutional arrangements that can guarantee relative independence to art organisers and their spaces. However, in Thailand state involvement has never really aimed at developing independent art practices. A discussion of art practices in terms of the common will therefore have to be a situated discussion, which is one of the reasons why we started our discussion with an analysis of the Thai art field.

Second, and related to this, as anybody familiar with this literature knows all too well, the writing on the common consists of various strands that each have their own assumptions and critical potential (e.g., Dardot & Laval, 2019; Volont, 2020). In the words of Berlant (2016, p. 397), "the commons is incoherent, like all powerful concepts." We position our perspective of the common within one of those strands: the critical tradition that highlights the potential of this concept for counter-hegemonic agency. However, with our last footnote in mind, we aim to broaden this perspective. After all, following authors like Hardt and Negri (2009), De Angelis (2017), and Dardot and Laval (2019), a considerable part of this critical literature discusses the common mainly in relation to neoliberal economic practices. As a case in point, Dardot and Laval (2019, p. 125) state: "For us, the common is the philosophical principle that makes it possible to conceive of a future beyond neoliberalism." While we obviously acknowledge the role of neoliberal practices in domination, at the same time we stress that other forms of domination—for instance, in relation to the Thai autocratic state and related views of national identity, as well as issues of race, gender, and age—need attention as well. We do so from the shared conviction that while there are clear intersections between class and difference, a focus on class alone will be insufficient for an adequate analysis, or for meaningful action for that matter (e.g., Fraser, 2014). Again, this means that an analysis of art practices through the lens of the commons should be a situated analysis, in which the particular intersections are highlighted of class and difference that are at play in forms of domination which counter-hegemonic practices seek to resist—in our case in Thailand.

With these footnotes firmly in mind, we set out to analyse the Bangkok Biennial through the lens of the common. Following the discussion of Volont and Smets (2022) in the introduction to this thematic issue, we will especially focus on the relationships—if any—that organisers of the Bangkok Biennial have established with the state and corporations. As these authors have pointed out (Volont & Smets, 2021), the long-term viability of common spaces might necessitate the support of the state or market. However, they also acknowledge that these relations might result in the appropriation of common practices. In social theory, this question of engagement with the state and market is not a neutral one. In view of the risk of appropriation, Virno (2004) for instance argues that the best way for the "multitude" out of the current "disciplinary regime" is withdrawal or "exit," in the hope that this will eventually establish an "absolute democracy." Hardt and Negri (2009) advocate a similar "exodus" strategy.

Mouffe (2013) disagrees. She argues that an effective counter-hegemonic offensive to the capitalist order has to be organised within a variety of practices in a multiplicity of spaces, including the art practices and institutions of the state and market, so as to prevent that common practices will only create an "extra" outside of the capitalist world. However, in her recent writing Mouffe (2018, pp. 91–92) has delimited this approach of "agonistic engagement" to certain circumstances—the institutions of pluralist democracy—that do not exist in Thailand. In such other situations, according to Mouffe, antagonism is the only viable approach. Or, as she argued in a discussion during an *inappropriate BOOK CLUB* meeting that we organised in Bangkok in the spring of 2021 (www.facebook.com/inappropriateBOOKCLUB), "a dictator is always an enemy that needs to be removed." With our observations of the need for a situated analysis firmly in mind, we explore which form the common art practices of the Bangkok Biennial take; we wonder how the commoners behind this biennial have navigated the needs and challenges of connections with the state and market; and we question what this means for the sustainability and counter-hegemonic potential of this event.

4. Researching the Bangkok Biennial: Some Remarks on Methods

In this article we foreground the effects of the choices of the Bangkok Biennial organisers regarding the mode of organising this biennial, and regarding relations with the state and corporations for both its sustainability and counter-hegemonic potential. In particular, on the basis of an exploratory analysis, we aim to reach a speculative understanding of possible linkages between these "strategies" of the Bangkok Biennial organisers and the effects that these might have had. We base this exploratory analysis on three types of sources. First, as organisers of one of the 2018 Bangkok Biennial pavilions, we were cast in a process of participant observation. This pavilion—*coming soon* • เร็ว ๆ นี้—consisted of a video installation in a small room at

the back of our house, presenting eleven Thai and Hong Kong artists discussing their experiences with, and expectations of, the arrival of the "international art world" (https://www.comingsoonbkk.com). Visitors were invited to watch the videos and discuss their experiences with and opinions of the effects of the entrance of international art world actors into their art ecosystems. As pavilion organisers, we gained first-hand experience with the organisation of the Bangkok Biennial, with the choices and requirements involved, and with the interaction between biennial initiators and pavilion organisers.

Second, we visited about thirty of the seventy pavilions that were organised in the context of the 2018 Bangkok Biennial. During these pavilion visits we observed the physical pavilion spaces, the presentation and engagement formats employed, and the social interactions that took place. We also talked with the pavilion organisers about the ideas behind their pavilions, the rationale for their Bangkok Biennial participation, the funding and practical organisation of their pavilion, and the role of art in society in general, and in Thailand in particular. In about half of these cases we have met up again and talked further with pavilion organisers about their ideas—often when visiting other Bangkok Biennial pavilions.

In addition to these informal conversations, we have also conducted about twenty hour-long structured interviews with Bangkok Biennial initiators, pavilion organisers, and with "outsiders" that could reflect on the Bangkok Biennial vis-à-vis other biennials in Thailand, and the Thai art world in general. During these interviews we discussed the aims and strategies of the biennial and pavilion organisers, the reasons for participating in the biennial, practical issues including funding and production, challenges relating to the sustainability of the biennial, the effects of this biennial for the Thai art world, and the political protests that erupted in Thailand in 2019. Arranging these interviews turned out to be easy, as they were either based on personal contacts or introductions by people that we know. The first batch of ten interviews were conducted face-to-face in Bangkok, either at our home, at pavilions, or in studio spaces. Due to the Covid-19 pandemic we have had to conduct our second batch of interviews online. We have transcribed the interviews and then analysed them following the structure of this article. The quotes that are woven into our analysis on the coming pages are taken from these twenty interviews.

5. The Bangkok Biennial and Its Pavilions: Strategies and Common Spaces

As we observed at the start of this article, the Bangkok Biennial is an artist-initiated, self-organised, and collective bottom-up event. So far, it has been organised twice, with the first edition taking place over a three-month period in the summer of 2018. Due to the emergence of Covid-19, the 2020 event was postponed and eventually unfolded as three shorter "episodes" between October 2020 and October 2021. According to the initiators, the Bangkok Biennial is meant to be "a level platform, a participatory framework and open-access" (Bangkok Biennial, 2018). It thereby aims to challenge mechanisms of gatekeeping and the top-down hierarchy in art events in Thailand.

Figure 1. Bangkok Biennial opening ceremony during the daily 6 PM public aerobic session, under the Rama VIII bridge in Bangkok (July 2018). Photo by the authors.

The Bangkok Biennial initiators have made various decisions to ascertain that the Biennial would live up to this ideal. First, the biennial does not have a central organising authority, no central budget, no theme, and no central curator. There is no central exhibition, nor are there other "central" facilities. Instead, the biennial initiators acted as facilitators and insisted upon anonymity in the run-up to the first edition, so that the biennial would not be "defined by the various people initially involved" (Bangkok Biennial, 2018). Secondly, and related to this, the core of the Bangkok Biennial is formed by a collection of decentralised initiatives, called "pavilions." The "commoners" that create these pavilions are themselves responsible for the form, content and funding of their programme. In 2018 this resulted in some seventy pavilions. The third characteristic of the event, radical openness, was achieved by doing away with selection criteria: anyone could join and register a pavilion through an open online registration platform. As we will see, there were restrictions regarding the participation of commercial parties, but apart from this, there was no form of selection or control.

As a result of these choices, pavilions have been a lot of different things. In the first edition, pavilions were located in parks, temple grounds, private homes, empty plots of land, and indoor markets, as well as in more conventional art spaces and galleries (see Figure 2). Furthermore, they were located in Bangkok and beyond, with pavilions in the north-eastern city of Khon Kaen and in Pattani in the "Deep South" that aimed at resisting the control by Thailand's centre and Bangkok in particular (see Figures 3 and 4). Pavilions were flexible in time as well: Some pavilions were one-night affairs, others remained open and active for several weeks or for the full duration of the biennial. The communication about the pavilion's activities was organised through a crowdsourced online wiki-type environment, as well as through the Bangkok Biennial page on Facebook—which, while under fire globally, is still widely used in Thailand for lack of an alternative. With these characteristics, the Bangkok Biennial is a clear example of what Stavrides (2016, p. 50) calls "expanding commoning," which "always invites different groups or individuals to become co-producers of a common world-in-the-making."

These decisions have led to a biennial that lacked what Gardner (2019) has called the "spectacle time" of the opening event. The state-organised Thailand Biennale and corporate Bangkok Art Biennale used their opening events to showcase their vision of the "right" society or "good life" respectively to a select group of honorary spectators—be they state dignitaries, corporate sponsors, or hi-so visitors. Instead, for its opening, the Bangkok Biennial circulated an invitation to participate in an outdoors aerobics session—a 6 PM activity happening all over Thailand (see Figure 1). Hot, sweaty, loud, accessible to everyone, and as such indistinguishable from the messy daily life in the city, it represented the epitome of inconvenience for people that aspire

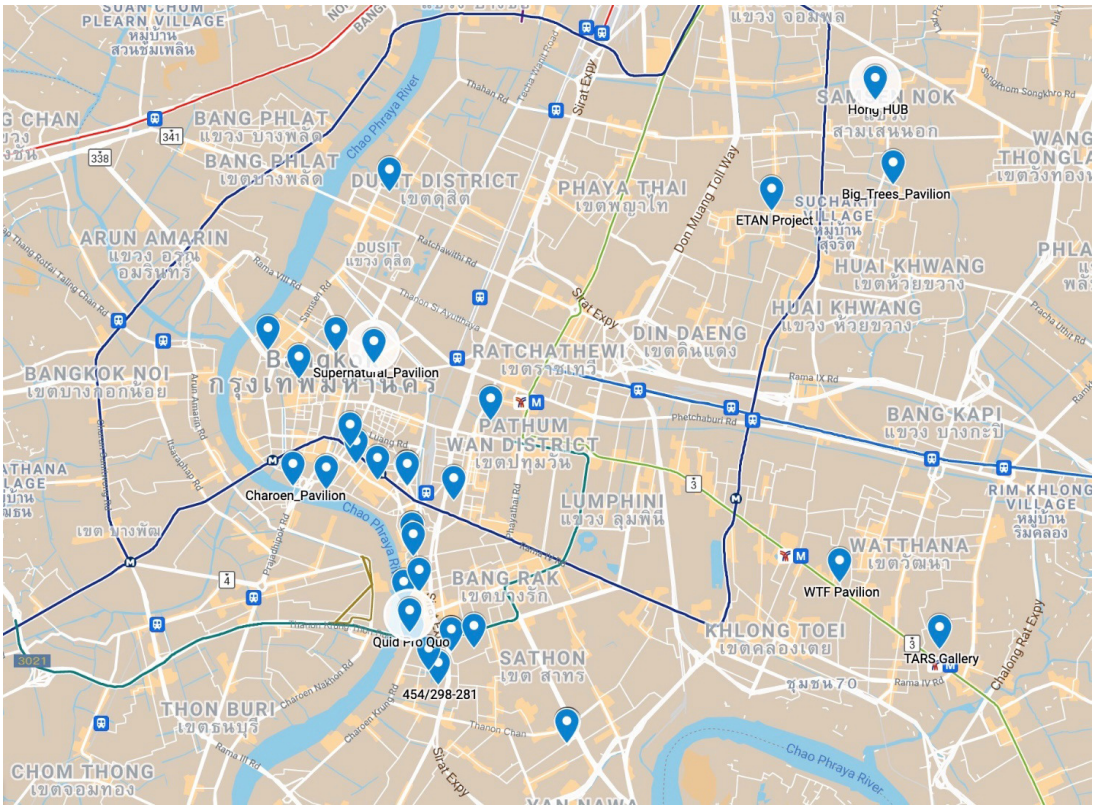

Figure 2. Overview of the location of Bangkok Biennial 2018 pavilions in central Bangkok, with three discussed pavilions highlighted.

Figure 3. The *Monument in the Motherland* performance by Wilawan Wiangthong at Khon Kaen Manifesto in Khon Kaen (October 2018). Photo by the authors.

Figure 4. *Patani Playhouse* by Firhana Almuddin, made for RE/FORM/ING PATANI at Patani Artspace in Pattani (August 2018). Photo by the authors.

to live the "good life," foreshadowing a biennial that is not easy to consume. Throughout the Bangkok Biennial, the pavilion's prime audience consisted of a growing local community of participants whom—supported by the biennial's temporal strategy—over a three-month period visited many pavilions that often approached them as contributors and co-creators instead of passive spectators. Artworks were often the pretext for encounters, and not necessarily the main point (cf. Teh, 2018). Slow social engagement replaced quick consumerist visits, reminding us of Berlant's (2016, p. 395) observation that the "better power of the commons is to point to the difficulty of convening a world conjointly, although it is inconvenient and hard, and to offer incitements to imagining a liveable provisional life."

The biennial's pavilions have created a temporary network of pockets of resistance, coming to the surface here and there. The overwhelming majority of these pavilions were connected to their location through engagements that predated the biennial or forged links with people or groups with an attachment to that place. The biennial functioned as its own ecosystem, with spin-offs, interactions, and collaborations between pavilions that didn't necessarily pass through a centre. As such the biennial became more than the sum of its parts. That said, a closer look at three of those parts can help to further illustrate the character of this biennial.

Supernatural Pavilion was co-produced by Japanese theatre maker Chiharu Shinoda (or "Shin") and the E-Lerng Group in the Wat Khae Nang Loeng community. This tight-knit community of some 200 households in the vicinity of Sunthorn Thammathan temple (colloquially known as Wat Khae Nang Loeng) is located in Bangkok's old town and faces many of its problems, including poverty, drug abuse and eviction threats. Spending about ten years working and living in Thailand, Shin had started to collaborate regularly with the E-Lerng Group in 2010, doing workshops with children amongst other things. With a large and varied interest in the supernatural in Thai popular culture, the community had suggested to Shin to organise an activity based on the many ghost stories of the area. As Shin herself recollects, "the first idea did not come from me; it came from the community….I think that the community likes how I work with community people." However, with funding hard to find, the plan went on the backburner. It was revived for the Bangkok Biennial with help of artists providing a logo, stickers, a zine, and riso-printed posters that were sold to raise funds (see Figure 5). This resulted in a three-part Supernatural Pavilion spread out over a month. The first part, the performance *5x5 Legged Stool*, was based on the dance score *Five Legged Stool* (1962) by Ann Halprin. Openly accessible, it was performed on the neighbourhood temple grounds. In the second part, *Tiger, Tiger*, Japanese dancer and actionist Aokid and local drum-player Khruu Pin led residents and visitors on a neighbourhood parade past spots known for supernatural activity (see Figure 6). The third part, *Kannagara/ZOO*, consisted of a VR installation in two locations. Supernatural Pavilion returned for the second edition of the Bangkok Biennial—this time in an online format in view of Covid-19—aimed at supporting the community during the pandemic.

Hong HUB is a residency programme in a house in the quiet, residential Sutthisan/Huai Khwang area. It was established by Thai exhibition maker Ekarat Tosomboon, who has been based in France for over 10 years but grew up in this neighbourhood and still has strong ties here.

Figure 5. Zine and poster of Supernatural Pavilion at Baan Silapa (September 2018). Photo by TRMN, courtesy of Chiharu Shinoda.

Figure 6. *Tiger, Tiger* parade and performance at Soonthorn Thammathan temple (Wat Khae Nang Loeng) in Nang Loeng, Bangkok (August 2018). Photo courtesy of Bangkok Biennial.

In Ekarat's perception, contemporary art-related events have now exploded all over Bangkok, but they mainly target a consumer class and are not relevant for people in the neighbourhoods where they happen: "For me, doing that in my own street, it was not possible….The idea [of the pavilion] was to do something that has some meaning for the people around this area." The resulting Hong HUB pavilion—developed with French curator Maëlys Moreau—was funded by the Institut Français, the municipality of Rennes and the Jeunes à Travers le Monde youth organisation. It combined various elements including a collaboration with the French Init Collectif and alternative art space Speedy Grandma in Bangkok that centred on the exchange between artists in France and Thailand. Another part took place on a family-owned plot around the corner of Hong HUB. French artist Michaël Harpin, a participant in the residency programme, hung posters—a common sight in Thai neighbourhoods—asking people to donate broken pots and other building materials (see Figure 7). With these materials, Harpin built a structure that functioned as a sculpture, a conversation starter, a resting place, and an outsized botanical vessel. The unusual activity in the July heat drew attention from the neighbourhood, with taxi drivers hanging around the plot, for instance, starting to explain to curious passers-by what was going on. The work was inaugurated in early August through a blessing ceremony performed by Buddhist monks and a lunch, guaranteeing that all neighbours felt welcome (see Figure 8).

Figure 7. Ekarat Tosomboon and Michaël Harpin hanging posters requesting broken pots in the Hong HUB neighbourhood (July 2018). Photo courtesy of Hong HUB.

The Quid Pro Quo pavilion was organised by LIV_ID, a feminist collective consisting of Thai and American artists and organisers, aiming to create things outside gallery spaces, which they felt didn't happen much. When the open access Bangkok Biennial was announced, the collective was excited. The members were working or living in Bang Rak, a central riverside neighbourhood at the edge of the recently rebranded Charoen Krung Creative District. Bangrak Bazaar—an indoor market that the collective often visited—is a remnant of a not-so-smooth former Bangkok that does not agree with the new image of this district. According to one of the members, Elissa Rae Ecker, it was a natural fit for their pavilion: "If you actually take the time and look around, there is so much to see already….It is big. We knew we could place things and they would get lost….We wanted things to kind of just become part of the daily market." Confused about their plans but equally intrigued, the owner of the market was soon on board. With funding from a Thai art patron, LIV_ID contacted the Guerrilla Girls to ask permission to translate their *Wealth and Power* poster into Thai (see Figure 9). Next, they approached other fem-

Figure 8. Lunch and ceremony inaugurating Michäel Harpin's sculpture, visible on the right (August 2018). Photo courtesy of Hong HUB.

Figure 9. *Wealth and Power* by the Guerrilla Girls hanging in the food court at Bangrak Bazaar market (September 2018). Photo courtesy of LIV_ID.

inist artists and collectives to contribute as well (see Figure 10). In the process, the collective got to know the vendors well, and one tattoo artist for instance asked if he could be an artist in the pavilion. According to Elissa, the collective was enthusiastic: "Yeah, sure! So, we kept adding people onto our pavilion map, if they wanted to be an artist in our pavilion." The opening night of the month-long pavilion started with three all-female bands playing at indie music venue JAM. Afterwards, the art event crowd and unsuspecting market visitors alike were treated to a feast prepared by the vendors at the market's food court for which no one had to pay, illustrating the collective's agenda to siphon "art money" away and spread it around in new ways. LIV_ID was another organiser returning for the second Bangkok Biennial edition in 2021.

Figure 10. *Bangrak Beauty* by Sareena Sattapon, photos of workers and vendors in Bangrak Bazaar's beauty zone (September 2018). Photo courtesy of LIV_ID.

These three pavilions illustrate that the Bangkok Biennial has worked as a spark, igniting people to organise things concurrently that might or might not have happened otherwise. It also enabled this organising by creating a context that helped with funding, inviting participant artists, and building an audience. The resulting diversity of pavilions had many characteristics in common. Mostly, pavilion organisers built on long engagements with places and communities. And often, pavilion visitors would be received by the art organisers and artists involved with those pavilions, who would have considerable time for exchanging ideas. Many of these organisers and artists would also visit each other's pavilions over the three-month period of the biennial. In their encounters, participating artists and art organisers would often display enormous enthusiasm and energy, and a strong sense of care as they had conceived everything themselves from start to finish. Most importantly, however, many organisers resisted the hierarchies at play inside and outside of art in Thailand, claiming their "right to the city." The strong commitment to this mission is also illustrated by the return of organisers for the second Bangkok Biennial. As such, for a limited period of time, the Bangkok Biennial has added common spaces as pockets of resistance to the "long-term" independent art spaces existing in Bangkok. Or, as one of the biennial organisers concludes:

> The biennial is very visible and fast. It came up, it was exciting, it got a lot of media attention, and a lot of people were involved. So, it had more public outreach than a long-term, smaller-scale [independent art] space….So, [the Bangkok Biennial and existing independent art spaces] have different roles, [but they point] in a similar direction.

6. The Necessity of an Antagonistic Approach

This leaves the issue of connections with the state and market—which is a decision in its own right. Here we make a distinction between connections of the Bangkok Biennial with the state and market in general, and connections with art organisations of the state and market. Regarding the connections with the state and market in general we can be relatively short: the Bangkok Biennial team has consciously not engaged with either. There was no contact with the state at all, but the initiators were approached by various market parties that offered sponsorship in return for brand advertisement. However, as one of the initiators recollects:

> The model that we wanted to set up was based on the fact that the pavilions deal with everything themselves. [Us accepting sponsorship would make] people question things. If I was considering organising a pavilion and…I read…that you must find your own funding…and then I see that there is sponsorship; then I think "where does that money go; why do I have to find my own money if they get money from those people?"

Thus, the feeling was that accepting central sponsorship would undermine the organisational model of the biennial. In the end, the organisers decided not to accept any of the sponsorship offers. Instead, they negotiated free printing of guidebooks and posters from a friendly local printer and managed to sell two wind tubes used during the opening to a Thai collector to pay for the Bangkok Biennial app. When they realised that, for subsequent editions, they would need funding to develop the online platform, which could guarantee the sustainability of the event, they looked for this outside of Thailand.

For the individual pavilions, the picture is more diverse. Some pavilions—like PostScripts by Charoen Contemporaries that took place in a building owned by Thailand Post—had to interact with government agencies for permission. However, by and large, the story here was the same, and interactions with both state and market were kept to a minimum. In short, the initiators of the Bangkok Biennial have operated from an antagonistic stance, imagining state and market parties not as friendly opposition, but as enemies with whom they shouldn't engage. Or, in the words of Volont (2020), they have engaged in "oppositional commoning."

When looking at the relations with the state and market within the art system, things are a bit different. Generally, the art spaces involved with the Bangkok Biennial came from the field of independent organising discussed earlier. However, in their role as organisers of TalkTalkVilion—a discussion pavilion—the biennial initiators did approach the Bangkok Art & Culture Centre, a municipally funded space, as well as the Jim Thompson Art Center, a privately funded art space linked to the Jim Thompson silk company. Eventually, TalkTalkVilion took place at the latter. The pavilion organisers had meant to instigate engagement with the organisers of the Bangkok Art Biennale and the Thailand Biennale. However, both of those biennials didn't send core representatives and the hotly anticipated debate never became a real conversation. According to one of the organisers, the Bangkok Art Biennale organisers and the OCAC "are probably not in the business of criticality. They don't want to be…the subject of criticism….Furthermore, within the OCAC there is a potential that they don't want to legitimise the BB by sending a high-level representative." So, here actually the Bangkok Art Biennale and Thailand Biennale organisers did not want to engage with the Bangkok Biennial.

How to understand and judge this antagonistic approach? Not everyone has looked upon this positively, and the emergence of several concurrent biennials was derided by various art professionals as "typically Thai." However, in our opinion, this overlooks the fundamental antagonistic nature of Thai politics. In a setting of hegemonic struggle, the decentralised open approach of the Bangkok Biennial is alien—and even a threat—to both state and market parties. After all, those are in the

business of selling the "right" images of the Thai nation, either in relation to nation-religion-monarchy or in the form of the consumerist "good life." In such a setting, cooperation would certainly mean diluting the aims of radical decentralisation and openness; something that is further illustrated by the disinterest of the Bangkok Art Biennale and the Thailand Biennale in the Bangkok Biennial, or for that matter in each other. This illustrates as we have stressed in our footnotes to the literature on the common that context is crucial. Speaking from India, Kapur (2018, p. 88) has argued for an antagonistic approach there, because "confront[ing]…hostile conditions in a grossly unequal world through the model of agonism seems difficult." Speaking from Thailand, and considering the fundamental non-democratic nature of the Thai state, we conclude that here an antagonistic strategy has been a necessity for the commoners behind the Bangkok Biennial as well.

7. Beyond Antagonism? After the Bangkok Biennial

While resistance to engagements with the state and market might be understandable—and even necessary—in the Thai context, at the same time, this brings specific challenges. As Volont and Smets (2021) have pointed out, without support from the state and market, the sustainability of the Bangkok Biennial could easily come under pressure. This is very understandable when realising that the full brunt of independent organising rests on the shoulders of a few with no—or limited—material returns, in economic settings that are increasingly precarious. Or, as one Bangkok Biennial organiser shared with us:

> The first time that you do it you are running on adrenaline. It's pure energy. And then you are fucking exhausted afterwards. And then, when you think that you will do the whole process again, it is pretty daunting, because the adrenaline is not there anymore.

It is not surprising, therefore, that while independent initiatives might exist shorter or longer, as Oren (2014) observes, after a few iterations they generally either disintegrate or institutionalise. An alternative could be to pass on organisational responsibilities to others, but that is not easy either, as "even to find someone is already a job." To add insult to injury, with time and money seriously constricted, archiving, documentation, and theorisation are especially limited, and without serious scholarly work, often the traces of works, spaces, practices, and events disappear over time. It is not surprising, therefore, that one art organiser from the Philippines told us that, for them, "one major critique [of independent art organising] would be the lack of a sustained dialogue due to lack of documentation….They are talking about the same things [every time again], almost the same issues."

There is a second issue relating to the sustainability of the Bangkok Biennial, which centres on the risk of appropriation. With its strategy of radical openness, over time the commoning character of the Bangkok Biennial could come under pressure. What, for instance, if commercial galleries aggressively start using this event for their commercial purposes? The Bangkok Biennial would certainly not be the first common initiative to be appropriated in this way, as experiences with the invasion of a common event like Burning Man by commercial enterprises, for instance, illustrate (Spencer, 2015). Thus, even when consciously deciding against engagement with the state or market, without any access control, the common character of this event might still be at risk. In this light it is not surprising that the Bangkok Biennial works with a guideline restricting commercial pavilions. As one initiator explains, "in the first edition there were a number of pavilions which we didn't accept because of that rule." The messiness, "unprofessionalism," as well as the lack of smoothness of the Bangkok Biennial—all symbolised by the "discomfort" of its opening event—might also help to limit its consumability, and thus the chance of appropriation.

However, there is another take on these issues of sustainability. As painful as it might be when a space or event disappears—and we certainly hope that the Bangkok Biennial will see many future iterations—maybe the counter-hegemonic potential of independent art organising does not primarily reside within the art system. Maybe social practices that emerge within art settings play a role beyond their boundaries as well. McKee (2017, p. 26) thus stresses that the transformative nature of "artists as organisers" might not lay in their "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." Similarly, as one of the initiators of the Bangkok Biennial suggests:

> Our hypothesis was that you don't need to ask permission from anyone [to organise a biennial]….And it was true. And the very simple act of naming it and promoting it and letting people know about it opened the channel for a lot of people to express whatever they wanted….In a society like Thailand, where that is not common or encouraged, it helps to effect a way of acting.

On its own, of course the Bangkok Biennial has limited counter-hegemonic potential outside the art system. However, as an event of social organising with the development of communities at its core, this biennial adds common spaces to a network of similar spaces inside and outside the art world that together provide an infrastructure for radical transformation. If we look at it in this way, in the end it might not be too problematic if a specific independent art event like the Bangkok Biennial ceases to exist, as long as others inside and outside the art system continue to take up this role as common organisers.

In Thailand's recent political protests, artists certainly have played their role amongst others, and networks developed in common art spaces provide a basis for political and social organising next to networks developed elsewhere (see also van Meeteren & Wissink, in press). Examples of such organising include the Free Arts (ศิลปะปลดแอก) network, a group of activists from the cultural sphere that emerged in 2020 to support political protests, and the People Taking Care of Ourselves Group (กลุ่มคนดูแลกันเอง), a volunteer group working out of an artist studio providing food and health care services to construction workers—mainly Southeast Asian migrants—that were locked in their work camps as a consequence of government-imposed Covid-19 restrictions. In itself, the art background of the people involved in these initiatives is probably not very important; after all, as Colectivo Situaciones (2007) argues, at times of crisis and protest "professional" identities, including the identity of the artist, lose their importance. However, at the same time, these initiatives rest on networks that emerged in common art spaces. As one protester from the art world suggests, "they just use the people that they know." Another organiser agrees, stressing that "of course, all the people I know come through the art community." In this light, the Bangkok Biennial is part of a much wider network of common spaces that together provide the physical infrastructure for the development of counter-hegemonic action. And while the specific art spaces, practices, or events that contributed to this infrastructure might not live on in the future, outside of art, the commoning that was at their basis might well have a lasting effect.

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Conflict of Interests

The authors declare no conflict of interests.

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Article

Urban Commoning: An Assessment of Its Aesthetic Dimension

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Abstract
The practice of urban commoning continues to tickle the imagination of activists and academics alike. Urban commoning's aesthetic dimension, yet, has not been fully understood. This contribution seeks to fill such gap and approaches aesthetics in the literal sense: That which presents itself to sense perception. The article thus asks: To what extent may commoning practices that are dedicated to the disclosure of unheard voices (hence having an aesthetic dimension) shift urban power relations? This contribution takes its cue in Jacques Rancière's theory of aesthetics and has the commoning experiment of Pension Almonde as its central case. Pension Almonde constituted a commons-based, temporary occupation of a vacant social housing complex in Rotterdam, aimed specifically to undo the subordinate position of urban nomads and orphaned cultural initiatives. The article finally develops the distinction between a particular-aesthetic dimension (making unheard voices merely perceptible) and a universal-aesthetic dimension (shifting power relations) of urban commoning. Given the case's lack of collective agency and external resonance, urban power relations remained in place.

Keywords
activism; aesthetics; commoning; Rancière; Rotterdam; urban commons

Issue
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1. Introduction

This article sheds light on urban commoning's aesthetic dimension. With "aesthetic," I do not point to the practice of art-making per se, but to the notion's literal meaning: That which presents itself to sense perception. Consequently, the article's central question is: To what extent may commoning practices that are dedicated to the disclosure of unheard voices (hence having an aesthetic dimension) shift urban power relations?

The article's central case is an urban commoning experiment called Pension Almonde (Rotterdam, the Netherlands, 2019–2020). With Pension Almonde, the activist collective City in the Making transformed an entire street of social housing (the Almonde Street) into a temporary living and working space for individuals and cultural initiatives who, due to the nomadic nature of their activities (see below) are unable to apply for social housing or buy accommodation on the private market. Pension Almonde thus constituted a commoning experiment where "urban nomads" and "orphaned" cultural initiatives (given the increasing closure rate of community centers in the Netherlands) could temporarily reside, create, debate, collaborate, and express themselves.

The Almonde Street is owned in its entirety by Havensteder, a housing association that owns and lets social housing in Rotterdam-North. "Housing associations," as semi-public institutions, own and let "social housing" or "public housing" for people with low incomes or in vulnerable positions. Havensteder announced in 2018 that the Almonde Street would become vacant for a period of two years before its final demolition and renovation—the latter being related to the worsening conditions of its foundations. This vacancy/renovation enabled the commoning experiment of Pension Almonde, yet also meant that the street's initial residents were temporarily displaced (Havensteder foresees a guaranteed return for

the displaced residents by proposing three consecutive options; if none of the three options is chosen by a resident, Havensteder withdraws). Whilst Pension Almonde (as well as the research for this contribution) mainly involved urban nomads and cultural initiatives, I will return later on to the role of the initial residents.

With this contribution, I intend first and foremost to expand the extant debate on urban commoning. The debate's state-of-the-art currently encapsulates various clusters of scholarly work: studies concerning the collective management of urban public spaces (Colding, 2013; O'Brien, 2012); theoretical exercises exploring commoning's philosophical, political, and economic underpinnings (Dardot & Laval, 2019; De Angelis, 2017; Hardt & Negri, 2009); accounts on emancipatory commoning, as seen in square occupations (Stavrides, 2012), squatting (Montagna & Grazioli, 2019), and social movement organizing (Varvarousis, 2020); and studies on the commons' resonance in urban policy-making (Foster & Iaione, 2016; Iaione, 2016). Less explored, however, is urban commoning's aesthetic dimension. Despite the extant hypothesis that urban commoning constitutes an alternative channel of urban dissent (Iaione, 2016; Mouffe, 2007; Otte & Gielen, 2020), we still lack a deeper understanding of its potential to make unheard voices effectively sensible in the urban public realm, and from there on out, to shift urban power relations.

Secondly, this article aspires to expand the debate on the "just city" (Davies, 2011; Fainstein, 2010; Harvey, 1973; Marcuse et al., 2011; Purcell, 2008). Whilst both the urban commons debate and the just city debate find their rationale in the predominance of capital-led urban development, the latter is geared more specifically to the question of how urban change is to be undertaken. In this vein, some argue that the road towards a more just and equitable urban society cannot be paved by urban institutions (markets, governments, and the alliances between them), but can only emerge through bottom-up, grassroots action (direct democracy, "right to the city" movements, etc.; see Harvey, 1973, 1989; Marcuse et al., 2011; Purcell, 2008). On the other hand, others have argued that the dialectical opposition between the bottom-up and the top-down (a) enables urban institutions' "business-as-usual" to continue unchallenged, namely by placing all agency and responsibility on the grassroots, and (b) neglects the fact that within urban institutions, too, actors will acknowledge that urban change is necessary (Agyeman & Evans, 2004; Davies, 2011; Fainstein, 2010; Perry & Atherton, 2017). Overemphasizing the role of the grassroots, Perry and Atherton (2017, p. 38) argue, increases "the chasm between informal and formal governance practices in the city"; therefore, the authors continue, one should also consider "the nuanced positions, values and actions of different individuals, groups and organizations."

With these premises in mind, the case of Pension Almonde gains significance. After all, Pension Almonde's organizing activists decided to collaborate with an urban institution: Havensteder. Hence, suffice it to say that Pension Almonde constitutes a unique opportunity to investigate the dynamics that emerge when a sole focus on bottom-up action is exchanged for a collaborative approach between a grassroots collective (City in the Making) and an urban institution (Havensteder).

The article will be structured as follows. First, I come to terms with the aforementioned "aesthetic" dimension of urban commoning. In doing so, I will mobilize the work of French philosopher Rancière (1992, 1999, 2004b, 2004a). More specifically, Rancière's core concepts of the "part without part" (those lacking a sensible voice in the urban public realm) and "repartitioning the sensible" (effectively shifting power relations) will be exposed. Subsequently, I highlight the article's case and qualitative methods. Thereafter, the article's central section will empirically discuss (a) the collective agency and (b) the external resonance of Pension Almonde's part without part (urban nomads, cultural initiatives). In conclusion, I develop the distinction between a particular-aesthetic (making unheard voices perceptible) and a universal-aesthetic (shifting power relations) dimension of urban commoning. Pension Almonde will be seen to effectuate the former, yet not the second, dimension.

2. Rancière's Aesthetic Lexicon

If we are to investigate urban commoning's aesthetic dimension, the thought of Jacques Rancière provides the conceptual tools to do so. To understand the aforementioned concepts of (a) the part without part and (b) repartitioning the sensible, another precursory concept should be introduced, namely: the partition of the sensible.

The partition of the sensible refers to the seemingly natural division of society in a series of constituent parts (say: social groups) that are "sensible" (perceptible) during the governance of common (as in public) affairs. Rancière (2000, p. 12) defines the concept as a "system of sensible evidences that discloses at once the existence of a common and the partitions that define the respective places and parts in it." The partition of the sensible thus reveals which social groups are recognized as accepted interlocutors within the societal arena, based on their function: property owners, lobby groups, dominant ethnicities, political representatives, to name a few. Moreover, any partition of the sensible has a tendency to reproduce itself, to keep itself intact. Through various means (institutionalized political procedures, policy-making, public discourses) those *within* the partition will, according to Rancière, leave no space for additional subject positions to enter into the business of social governance.

Hence, there are always certain social groups that fall outside the partition of the sensible. These omitted groups are called by Rancière (2015, p. 35) "the part without part": the silenced ones, the invisible ones, those whose utterances are non-*sensed* within

the administrative apparatus of social governance. In Rancière's (2004a, p. 5) words, the part without part entails "those who are outside the count, those who can assert no particular title over common affairs." Furthermore, the part without part cannot be reduced to any specified social group or identity. Rancière (1992, p. 61, 2004a, p. 6) uses different metaphors to capture the part without part: It exists "over and above," but also "in-between" the count of social groups. In all, an essential component of the part without part is its "combinatory multiplicity" of divergent subject positions. The part without part entails "subjects that are not reducible to social groups or identities but are, rather, collectives of enunciation and demonstration surplus to the count of social groups," Rancière wrote (2004a, p. 6). Contemporary designations such as the Indignados, the Yellow Vests, the 99%, and the Precarity Movement show indeed how emancipating groups seek to trickle through and combine a wide diversity of social subjects.

Yet, every order of domination might always be shattered and reshuffled. This is the act of *re*partitioning the sensible: an interruption of instituted power differentials, conducted by a part without part. It is the moment through which the partition of the sensible is confronted with what Rancière (1992, p. 60) calls "the equality of any speaking being with any other speaking being." This latter point entails that any (previously non-sensed) subject, at any time, might step forward and reshuffle the partition of the sensible. To repartition the sensible, hence, is an intrinsically *aesthetic* act: It redefines who can be heard, seen, precepted in the societal edifice. As Rancière (1999, p. 40) wrote, it "decomposes and recomposes the relationships between the ways of doing, of being, and of saying that define the perceptible organization of the community."

Finally, repartitioning the sensible rests on "universalization": shifting power relations through the use of universal categories—equality, humanity, inclusion, participation—instead of particular, local interests (Rancière & Panagia, 2000, p. 125). For instance, a demand for more schools can be seen as a particular issue, whilst the demand for universal state provision of high-quality public services is a universal issue (Baeten, 2009, p. 248). Effectively repartitioning the sensible thus radically differs from an excluded group's entry into pre-existing systems of social management. Repartitioning the sensible is thus not only about making oneself known/perceptible, but also about redefining "the rules of the game." Or still: Repartitioning the sensible is not merely about making oneself known/perceptible, but also about appropriating a piece of power that previously belonged to another. As Rancière argued (2004a, p. 6):

> [It is not a] quarrel over which solutions to apply to a situation, but a dispute over the situation itself, a dispute over what is visible as an element of a situation, over which visible elements belong to what is common, over the capacity of subjects to designate this common and argue for it.

Stavrides (2013, 2016) has been particularly active in transposing Rancière's ideas to the field of urban commoning. For Stavrides, the urban commonwealth, too, is rooted in a partition of the sensible: a division between those having (representatives, developers) and those *not* having (the poor, the homeless) a part in the process of urban governance. The process of urban commoning, however, constitutes for Stavrides a potent way to initiate a polemic over instituted urban power differentials—indeed, to repartition the sensible (Stavrides, 2013, 2016, 2019). Reminiscent of Rancière's account of the part without part as a "combinatory multiplicity," Stavrides argues in a similar vein for an open and inclusive commoning community, one that traverses rather than separates differing subject positions by being always open to newcomers: "Newcomers thus remake the community as they open it to the transformative power of equalitarian inclusion" (Stavrides, 2013, p. 47).

Next to Stavrides, multiple commons scholars have taken their cue from Rancière by assuming value in urban commoning as an alternative channel of urban dissent (Otte & Gielen, 2020; Van Wymeersch & Oosterlynck, 2018; Volont, 2020; Volont & Dobson, 2021). After all, urban commoners explicitly seek to alter power differentials, invent new concepts, and act on an egalitarian basis. This article will put this hypothesis to the test through the case of Pension Almonde. First, yet, we will delve into the article's case and methods.

3. Case and Methods

3.1. Pension Almonde and Its Context

The article's central case is Pension Almonde, organized by the Rotterdam-based collective City in the Making (activists, architects, cultural producers). City in the Making generally engages in the temporary occupation of vacant urban infrastructure. So far, the collective occupied eight vacant buildings that are formally owned by Havensteder. At each occupation, the collective transforms the upper floors into living and working spaces for urbanites with temporary housing needs, while it transforms the ground floors into common spaces—launderettes, kitchens, gathering places, workshops—that are available for the occupying residents and the wider neighborhood.

The last addition to City in the Making's repertoire of occupations is Pension Almonde, located in Rotterdam's Zoho neighborhood. As seen in Figure 1, this occupation encompasses not a single building, but the entire Almonde Street. With Pension Almonde, City in the Making focused on two groups in particular: urban nomads and "orphaned" cultural initiatives. Whilst there exists a considerable literature concerning urban nomads (Attali, 1992; Bronner & Reikersdorfer, 2016;

Institut für moderne Kunst Nürnberg, 2014; Makimoto & Manners, 1997; McLuhan, 1994; Pronkhorst, 2019), City in the Making's characterization of the term is a broad one, entailing those that are nomadic for ideological reasons (choosing not to spend a considerate amount of their income to permanent housing), for practical reasons (expats, artists) or out of necessity (the homeless, *sans papiers*, seasonal workers). "We consciously opted for a broad definition of urban nomads," an activist of City in the Making argued, continuing:

> At Pension Almonde, one finds homeless youngsters, asylum seekers, people that are homeless after a divorce, but indeed, also graduated, promising people. They bring stability. A community emerges on the basis of collective living, rather than social and economic status.

The aforementioned orphaned cultural initiatives, furthermore, are equally nomadic due to the increasing closure rate of spaces for cultural production in the Netherlands. The Almonde Street became a temporary shelter for 13 cultural initiatives, including, to name a few: Woodstone Kugelblitz, an anarchist copy shop ran by an anonymous artists' collective; Motherdock, a non-profit that enables mothers to combine co-working with childcare; Taalent010, which works on the societal position of women through language education; and Al Khema, a place of encounter between Syrian and Dutch citizens. Hence, what unites both urban nomads and orphaned cultural initiatives is that due to the nomadic nature of their living and/or working situation, they are unable to apply for social housing, nor to buy property on the private housing market. They seek, according to City in the Making, an "in-between space" (neither private nor public, but common) and an "in-between time" (temporary occupation).

Multiple channels were developed in order to visibilize the project: During the open days ("Open Commons"), people from the neighborhood could familiarize with the project and its commoners; during "Soup Tuesdays," a communal meal was prepared by and for the commoners, but also for the broader neighborhood; the radio station Good Times Bad Times broadcasted episodes from within Pension Almonde concerning the experience of time in urban conditions; the final event of the Slopera—a Dutch neologism which combines "sloop" (demolition) and opera—brought the project's themes into a public theater play; the *De Stoker* newspaper regularly reported about the everyday life of Pension Almonde's commoners and the street's former inhabitants; three deliberative sessions brought the project's commoners, Havensteder, public representatives, and commoners from other Dutch cities together, around themes such as urban nomadism, cooperative living, and the concept of the commons; through the

Figure 1. Pension Almonde.

project Vacancy Prose, six writers captured the life narratives of the street's past residents; and finally, continuous archiving (of the initial residents' life narratives, of the commoners' visions, and of the organizational methods) allowed to launch recommendations towards Havensteder (describing how future acts of "displacement-vacancy-renovation" could be organized in a more social manner, by linking them to commoning projects such as Pension Almonde).

One contextual remark should be added: Pension Almonde's surrounding Zoho area is subject to planned gentrification. The area has been sold in its entirety—by the City of Rotterdam and Havensteder—to a private developer with the purpose of redeveloping it into an inner-city zone of creative industry: New Zoho. In a public letter, Rotterdam's Deputy for Building, Living and Energy Transition in the Built Environment argued that the "organic development of the Zoho area" has led to an "interesting dynamic" and to the "presence of lots of creative entrepreneurs" (Kurvers, 2018). Given the "good real estate market" and the "great need for housing," it was decided to embed the Zoho area in a public tender. While Almonde Street was added to the tender in the very last instance, Havensteder argues nonetheless that there is no direct link between the demolition/renovation of the street, the displacement of the initial residents, and the transposition of the area to the private market.

3.2. Methods

I investigated Pension Almonde for a period of 18 months, starting in February 2019. Three data sources should be pointed to: (a) interview data; (b) participatory observation; and (c) written documents. Qua interviewing, 14 semi-structured in-depth interviews were performed. Interviewees were selected through a combination of "maximum variation" and "snowball" sampling (Creswell & Poth, 2016, p. 159), leading to a cast of information-rich interviewees ranging from organizing commoners (activists, artists, and architects of City in the Making) and participating commoners (different urban-nomadic subject positions and members of the cultural initiatives). Interviews were conducted through a pre-established protocol, centered around the rationale (intro), organization (main section), and possibilities/pitfalls (outro) of Pension Almonde. Subsequently, interviews were transcribed ad verbatim in NVivo. Regarding (overt) participatory observation, I engaged in deliberation sessions, communal meals, informal encounters, open days, public information sessions, and a one-week stay-over to augment my understanding of everyday life in the street. These moments allowed me to set up additional, unstructured, informal interviews with organizing and affiliated commoners. After each session, I captured these conversations and insights in field notes. During document analysis, lastly, I scrutinized internal communication and public discourses concerning Pension Almonde (project's archives, internal mail exchanges, the *De Stoker* newspaper, media reports, political/policy documents). The three aforementioned data sources were finally subjected to a structured approach of thematic analysis (Guest et al., 2011), whereby relevant passages are first highlighted in the reviewer's own words, then grouped into codes, and subsequently regrouped into final themes. In the next section, final themes are arranged according to two separate clusters: (a) the internal collective agency and (b) the external resonance of Pension Almonde's part without part.

Given the fact that Pension Almonde constituted not only a social experiment but also an in-situ research trajectory on urban commoning, I was involved in Pension Almonde's research team—Team Search. It is safe to say that participating in one's case's research team might proffer a contradiction between one's role as researcher and one's role as participant. However, it was assured that the researcher's and the case's objectives did not intermingle, namely through the protocol of "convocation" (Khasnabish & Haiven, 2012). Convocation means that the researcher creates a middle ground between *in*vocation (being fully immersed in one's case, as in action research) and *a*vocation (being entirely disconnected from one's case). In other words, during practices of convocation, the researcher retains his/her autonomy (research questions, objectives, methods, conclusions), but at the same time offers one's independent research *to* the case, as a learning tool. Offering the research as a learning tool was done through publishing an article on urban nomadism in the *De Stoker* and through knowledge sharing during thematic sessions on urban nomadism, cooperative living and commoning.

4. The Aesthetic Dimension of Urban Commoning: A Rotterdam Case

4.1. The "Part Without Part" and its Commoning Capacities

At Pension Almonde, a Rancièrian part without part—urban nomads, orphaned cultural initiatives—was actively composed through what we may call a "selection at the doorstep." If a cultural initiative or urban nomad expressed the intent to participate, Pension Almonde's management team (consisting of four activists of City in the Making) assessed whether the candidate would be willing to engage in the project's collective governance, debates, performances, publications, and the like. In this regard, one activist of City in the Making argued that:

> [One] cannot just walk in and participate, you have to be aware of these values, of the general aim, and your personal relationship to the commons. If it is not there, then it is way too loose, you don't have focus.

Nevertheless, despite the here-posited "active crafting" of a part without part, evidence suggests that it lacked the capacity to act collectively.

To begin with, contrary to the aspirations of City in the Making, the front doors of the by-now "commoned" Almonde Street remained locked. "In the beginning," argued one activist responsible for community building, "we would dispense the buildings, and every organization would get a key of the front door." Consequently, the activist continued, one "loses the commons, the spirit of the place. The agency disappeared behind the front door." At unease with the fact that the doors of Almonde Street seemed to be regularly locked, a new rule was instituted: When a nomad or initiative is assigned a house, it gets a back room which can be locked, and a front room which imperatively must remain common. As the activist concluded: "You can program it [the front room], but another can do so too."

The composition and activation of the so-called "Almonde Board," second, equally confirms the difficulty of establishing a part without part that is effectively endowed with the capacity of collective action. The Almonde Board was intended to become a deliberative body that would take care of Pension Almonde's day-to-day governance. But this, the organizing activists reckoned, was a step too far for the commoners present, an ambition too naive to be fully realized. One of the urban nomads living in Pension Almonde, who was to participate in the Almonde Board, argued that "it seems to be artificially introduced. Suddenly, you know, there is this board, while I think most people that are coming in are probably just looking for a temporary place to land." In parallel, multiple organizing activists acknowledged the difficulties of establishing an active Almonde Board:

> It's not really a sort of natural way to press a group of people that don't know each other into a group. Because a lot of tasks have to be done in a fast way. We are trying to find a way to put the governance, of this group, of the tasks, in a pressure cooker. We tried to set up the Almonde Board with all the initiatives. That was like a bridge too far.
>
> They were separately brought in, so they were like all individuals that didn't speak the same language, they didn't have the same ideas on the purposes of the tasks. So, to get to a sort of result took too much time and stress, so we were like "okay, let's rethink this."
>
> We said that there should be an Almonde Board, in order to activate and maintain the commons, and to come up with activities. But it was a step too far to ask this in the first place. Everybody thought: I just got my place, which is already a lot of work…it's all temporary, so how much will I invest? If you put a layer of governance on top of that, that scares people, so it didn't work.

The aforementioned signals surrounding the Almonde Board, thirdly, can also be applied to Pension Almonde's "community formation" in general. Not only the Almonde Board, but the Almonde community as well were described by its participants as lacking collective agency. In this vein, the following interview excerpts of two residing urban nomads confirm that despite the presence of an urban-nomadic part without part, its *activation* as a collectively acting subject remained problematic:

> Commoning is a highly inefficient sort of process. It doesn't follow these steps, like "first we do this, and then this, first we move people in, and then people get to know each other, and then," you know….It is almost impossible to follow a set of procedures, right? Because that is the antithesis of a commoning process, of the principle of commoning.
>
> There is no incubation time. It cannot happen in a natural way, slowly, according to everyone's obligations, interests, energy, or mission. I mean, these people came together by coincidence, they didn't decide altogether to start something. It's almost orchestrated. These people are here now, and all of a sudden they have to collaborate. This pressure, that everything must happen now, generates a lot of frustration. A lot is expected from us. Consequently, doors close quickly.

Pondering on the lack of collective agency among Pension Almonde's community, one residing artist critiqued City in the Making's coercive role in organizing the project. According to this respondent, City in the Making would pursue a certain "agenda" through Pension Almonde. As argued before, one of the project's goals was to consolidate the experiment through its archive; an exercise in which concepts such as commoning, nomadism, and temporary occupation would play a pivotal part. However, when this narrative takes the upper hand, individual life experiences get lost from sight, the respondent argued:

> City in the Making has a certain desire, makes theories about it, and carries them out. But to what extent does this correspond to the actual performance on the ground? Where lies the common aspect of this project? Which shared ownership is being generated? That's very debatable. One could say that City in the Making sees this as a research endeavor from which it can distill information, but to what extent are these people part of the commons? Or is it just a form of data gathering?
>
> What is in fact the ambition of this project? The people living in this project, are they part of a bigger meta-idea that City in the Making carries out? To what extent does this meta-idea correspond to the practical implementation? Does City in the Making's imagination of this project correspond to what happens on the ground, or does it dominate what happens on the ground?

Finally, it must be mentioned that City in the Making's active approach to "communify" Pension Almonde's part without part had yet another reason, which can shortly be stated as short time, large scale. Given the fact that Pension Almonde was much shorter in duration than City in the Making's previous occupations throughout Rotterdam-North, and given the fact that the project encompassed an entire street rather than a single building, City in the Making felt the urge to reframe its modus operandi. After all, during City in the Making's precedent occupations, the collective's adage was invariably to let organizational principles emerge, a posteriori, out of the commoning process. As one of the founders of City in the Making argued: "We have always made the commons by organically letting things happen….No rules, just experimenting with how far we get." However, at Pension Almonde, a reversal took place: "first" the organizational principles, "next" the very process of commoning. For instance, a communication manager was appointed in order to "ensure more sharing and social control" (retrieved through document analysis, as stated in internal mail communication among organizing activists). Moreover, a protocol for conflict solving was put in place, in case of disputes. Commenting on the transition to "institute" the commoning process, rather than letting it develop organically, the same founder continued:

> If we want to move forward, we need to work on our design principles. We have little time and a much larger project than we are used to. We cannot afford to let the rules grow from day-to-day use….Although personally I have always found that City in the Making is, among other things, also an experiment in radical freedom, and that chaos and/or frustration and/or laziness and/or indecision are all very much part of this freedom, I must admit that even for me the need for rules and procedures is slowly coming.

In a first interim conclusion, we witness at Pension Almonde the active formation of a part without part, albeit one that lacks the capacity to act collectively. Despite the organizing commoners' selection procedures at the doorstep of Pension Almonde, despite their efforts to initiate the Almonde Board, and despite the overall goal to "communify" urban nomads and cultural initiatives, the previous section highlighted the difficulty of effectively "igniting" a part without part, of effectively setting it in motion.

4.2. The "Part without Part" and its External Resonance

Notwithstanding Pension Almonde's lack of collective agency, it was nevertheless endowed with a series of expositional channels, as mentioned earlier: the "Open Commons", the "Soup Tuesdays", the Good Times Bad Times radio station, the Slopera, the *De Stoker* newspaper, deliberative sessions with the broader public, Vacancy Prose, the archiving operation. The question remains, however, to what extent such "channels of sensibilization" effectively reverberated beyond the walls of Pension Almonde. The now-following sets of evidence, however, suggest a series of pitfalls during the attempt to shift power relations.

A first series of remarks evolves around the relation between Pension Almonde and Havensteder. In this context, a contradiction takes center stage. On the one hand, Pension Almonde's activists opt for an approach of partnership towards Havensteder, whilst on the other hand, Havensteder's instrumentalization of the project has been signaled at multiple moments. Looking first at the approach of partnership, one of the organizing activists argued that a commoning project such as Pension Almonde creates "the opportunity to put our foot in the door and say, 'hey, we should talk about a bigger agenda.' " Another activist contended likewise that Pension Almonde's "social value" and "community ambitions" may push "the powers that be [Havensteder, City of Rotterdam] to embrace an idea like that [urban commoning as a way to accommodate urban nomads]." For this same respondent, the approach should ideally be "less extreme" and "more collaborative," continuing:

> It's not an assignment from Havensteder, they didn't have money for it. But it's still our partner, our neighbor, and we have a lot of communication together. So, you treat each other with respect. It's not a fight against Havensteder. We notice of course that they do not solve housing for the group of people that we want to. So, we are not in a competition, we don't like the fight against them. Respect, yes, respect.

Yet, in parallel with the aforementioned "partnership approach," Pension Almonde's organizing activists equally acknowledge the project's instrumentalization by Havensteder. "We are definitely accommodating them. We are helping them with a problem, yes, for sure," said one respondent engaged in Pension Almonde's governance team. Two other activists followed suit. One focused precisely on the fact that, ever since the end of the 2008 credit crisis, Havensteder allows its vacant infrastructures to be occupied for ever-shorter periods of time, whilst the other argued that the subject position of urban nomads and cultural initiatives might easily be "dismissed," once a period of short-term occupation has come to an end:

> Havensteder said to us: "Five years ago, we had a problem, and you were the solution. Today, yet, this problem has ceased to exist, so your solution doesn't serve us anymore." So, we asked, "what is your current problem then?" The Almonde Street, that is their new problem. They defined a policy that states that buildings cannot remain empty. But they don't know how to solve that problem in periods of transition. For that, we have a possible solution.

> They have the idea that artists are like that, that they are city nomads. That they like to be nomadic, that they like to be flexible, that they like to do nice and positive stuff. And because they can address us as a group, they know that we can put some peer pressure if people do not want to leave. If you work with people that are outside of that group, who are not artists, it becomes more of a risk. Because, how can we control those who are not within this artistic scene?

Havensteder, too, acknowledges the function that a project such as Pension Almonde might have, namely, as a way to give a more social undertone to the renovation of its social housing complexes (which, as seen before, goes hand in hand with the temporary displacement of initial residents). A Havensteder representative argued in local public media that Pension Almonde's "sharing of photos and stories about the Almonde street" functions "as a sort of grief counseling" for the street's displaced tenants (Lucky, 2018). Moreover, in an edition of City in the Making's neighborhood-wide *De Stoker* newspaper, a representative of Havensteder shared a series of thoughts on the project:

> Other instances see it [the management of vacancy] as a business case. But socially, they don't augment the livability of the neighborhood. That's different with City in the Making, they add a social function to the neighborhood. We find it of course more attractive when something is given back to the neighborhood….To board up a street, because the tenants left, makes nobody happy. It creates a tedious appearance. Vacant buildings speak volumes to the rest of the inhabitants. We want to keep it livable for as long as possible, that is the value for which we aim….It falls a little bit outside of our usual way of working. Therefore, this is an interesting experiment to see what it can generate and to earn from. (van der Vlist & Teran, 2019, p. 8)

Concerning the uneven power differentials between Pension Almonde and Havensteder, critical remarks also emerged among Pension Almonde's commoners and participants. The project's corresponding research team hinted at its instrumentalization within Havensteder's everyday proceedings, namely by posing in the *De Stoker* newspaper a series of "uneasy questions":

> How do we research the commons when a community is being displaced as we are researching it? Who is part of the community of Pension Almonde? Why is Pension Almonde interesting and even desirable for a housing association like Havensteder? What role could organizations like City in the Making have in the political city planning game being played at a higher level? (van der Vlist, 2019, p. 7)

In similar vein, one of the residing urban nomads critically remarked that the various activities and expositions unfolding at Pension Almonde might indeed be beneficial for a housing association such as Havensteder, proposing instead that a mere "holding hostage" (hence: non-functionalization) of urban infrastructure might be more potent:

> The most political thing that you can do, is to do nothing. Just to observe. Don't fill it with projects and things. Just observe it. Mark out areas and observe how things grow. These expectations, you know, that are coming from the city, from the housing association, from whatever sort of partners and actors and stakeholders that are participating in this process, are predicated on this expectation of "what are you going to do?" And inactivity is an impossibility. This is interesting to me. If there are these external expectations, of filling things in and making things happen, I mean—is this really a commons?

A second set of evidence revolves around the relationship between Pension Almonde and the urban area surrounding the project. One might argue that Pension Almonde encountered difficulties to effectively "spread its tentacles" throughout the broader Zoho neighborhood. On the one hand, City in the Making set out actively to involve the broader neighborhood in its aims; as one activist argued: "Once you do something for somebody, providing a service or listening to a story, then you start a relationship, and that is now happening." However, the same activist continued: "But it goes slow. Reaching everybody is impossible. Because there are also a lot of people who just don't care. They just want to be anonymous in the city, they are just minding their own business."

Similar signals were heard during moments of personal presence within the street and the neighborhood. One long-time resident of the neighborhood, who found in Pension Almonde the possibility to set up a local bakery in combination with childcare, noticed that "the door remains closed all too often. People [from the neighborhood] tend not to cross the threshold to see what's going on behind the doors." Additionally, an urban nomad who lived in Pension Almonde from the beginning commented that "Soup Tuesdays" would not be able to augment the broader neighborhoods' knowledge of what goes on behind Pension Almonde's doors: "Just by creating this open platform, there are still many steps of exclusion. Just to be very clear, most of the residents living here are white, and most of the residents outside are non-white." Moments of personal presence during "Soup Tuesdays" confirmed that its participants mainly related to the project (urban nomads, initiatives) and the "creative class" (external artists, activists, and art students interested in the project).

Finally, looking at the reception of Pension Almonde in public media, the following observation emerges:

Of all the articles published about Pension Almonde, just one instance analyzed the case through the social-theoretical lens of urban commoning. In other words, only one public writing coupled the case to a deeper-lying thematic (by putting forward Pension Almonde as an instance of "social real estate"). Yet, other scrutinized articles evolved less about the social/theoretical/ideological substance of Pension Almonde, but reported about the multiple activities that took place within the project: the Slopera, participation in the Rotterdam Art Week, handling of the Covid-19 pandemic, its archive being part of an exposition in Rotterdam's New Institute architecture museum, to name a few.

In a second interim conclusion, we witness Pension Almonde's limited external resonance. The project (a) managed to expose its corresponding part without part towards Havensteder, but became complicit in a subordinate power differential; (b) it managed to expose its corresponding part without part to the broader neighborhood, while at the same reproducing mechanisms of exclusion; and (c) it managed to expose its corresponding part without part in local public media, while at the same time the project's social-theoretical component—the equal right to living and working spaces for nomadic subject positions—received less attention.

5. Discussion and Conclusion: Pension Almonde's Particularization

In this article, I set out to put the aesthetic dimension of urban commoning to the test by asking to what extent may commoning practices that are dedicated to the disclosure of unheard voices (hence having an aesthetic dimension) shift urban power relations. By way of concluding the contribution I shall (a) assess Pension Almonde's aesthetic dimension through the lens of Rancière's lexicon (looking first at the part without part, and from there on out, to the act of repartitioning the sensible) and (b) embed the assessment within the just city debate, as indicated in the introduction.

For Rancière (1992, p. 61), a part without part constitutes a combinatory social entity, one existing both "over and above" and "in-between" the count of different social groups. One might thus argue that commoning constitutes a practice *par excellence* in order to generate a Rancièrian part without part; after all, communities of commoners are—at least theoretically—assumed to be open to newcomers and to span a diverse set of subject positions (De Angelis, 2017; Stavrides, 2016). However, the formation of Pension Almonde's part without part may be described as a community both open and closed. It was open, for it sought to include nomadic subjects ranging from artists to *sans papiers*, from expats to the homeless. Yet, it was also closed, given its selection at the doorstep. Consequently, an actively and artificially crafted part without part emerged, one which was bounded spatially (brought together in the Almonde Street) and socially (having the same nomadic background), rather than ideologically (sharing a self-defined common project of shifting power relations). Hence, we witnessed a part without part lacking collective agency and experiencing difficulties to make itself known within the perpetual coordinates of Havensteder, the wider neighborhood, and local public media.

Abstracting from the part without part's lack of collective agency and limited external resonance, we might argue that it was unable to ignite a repartitioning of the sensible. On the one hand, a part without part was made sensible/perceptible through multiple channels of sensibilization: "Open Commons," "Soup Tuesdays," Slopera, Vacancy Prose, the archiving exercise, and so forth. On the other hand, a repartitioning of the sensible did not take place. As argued earlier, a Rancièrian repartitioning of the sensible implies that a collectively acting subject appropriates its place as an accepted interlocutor in the urban public realm—in other words: That it appropriates a piece of power that previously belonged to another (Rancière & Panagia, 2000, p. 125).

We might explain Pension Almonde's non-repartitioning of the sensible by distinguishing between a "particular-aesthetic" dimension (making a part without part merely sensible) and a "universal-aesthetic" dimension (shifting power relations through a universal message). While Pension Almonde was based on a universal message (equal right to living and working spaces for urban nomads), it suffered from being reframed—particularized—as a project relating to *just* the Almonde Street. One may conclude that the main locus of particularization lies at the intersection with Havensteder. Whilst Pension Almonde's activists projected upon Havensteder the universal theme of urban nomads and their subordinate position within the housing allocation system, Havensteder framed the project as a particular solution for the vacant Almonde Street. As Rancière (2004a, p. 6) argued: Repartitioning the sensible entails not "a quarrel over which solutions to apply to a situation, but a dispute over the situation itself." Despite the activists' intentions, it remained difficult to initiate with Havensteder "a dispute over the situation itself" (including for instance the equal right to living and working spaces for urban nomads, the initial residents' displacement, the area's gentrification, and so forth).

The relationship between Pension Almonde and the street's displaced residents lends support to the aforementioned particular-aesthetic dimension of the project. As argued in the introduction, Pension Almonde aimed to involve urban nomads and cultural initiatives in the first place, but also the former residents of the Almonde Street. Whilst the street's initial residents were equally made sensible/perceptible through the project—the capturing of their life narratives in Vacancy Prose, participating in "Soup Tuesdays," participating in "Open Commons"—Pension Almonde could not explicitly frame them through the lens of deeper-lying themes such as displacement and the inequality that emerges through

capital-led urban development. An exception can be found in the Slopera, Pension Almonde's theatre play about urban inequality. However, through the Slopera, the initial residents were merely "symbolized," played by professional actors.

The case of Pension Almonde, finally, allows one to cautiously expand the just city debate. As argued in the introduction, the just city debate is a two-pronged one: While some assume merit in the grassroots for the creation of urban change (Harvey, 1973, 1989; Marcuse et al., 2011; Purcell, 2008), others demand cooperation between the grassroots and urban institutions (Agyeman & Evans, 2004; Davies, 2011; Fainstein, 2010; Perry & Atherton, 2017). Whilst the above analysis is an example of the instrumentalization of the grassroots by an urban institution, lessons can still be drawn for activists seeking to engage in a mutual relationship with urban institutions. After all, urban institutions may provide precisely what the grassroots desire: In the case of Pension Almonde, this entailed vacant urban space for specified periods of time, but one may also think of lobbying power, financial support, institutional reform, and so forth.

As a first takeaway, activists seeking urban change through institutional cooperation may focus less on active (artificialized) community formation, but may let commoning communities emerge autonomously, namely based on communities' own needs and demands. After all, in the case of Pension Almonde, it was precisely the artificial creation of a commoning community (initiated by the external organization of City in the Making) that led to the lack of collective agency. As a second takeaway, once a commoning community is in place, activists seeking urban change through institutional cooperation may focus less on the "public presentation" of the communities they work with, but on acting as an agonistic *interface* between communities on the one hand, and urban institutions on the other. This would mean that activists seeking urban change assure that urban institutions effectively consider a given project's universal relevance (equality, humanity, inclusion) rather than its technical utility.

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Conflict of Interests

The author declares no conflict of interests.

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Article

Community, Commons, Common Sense

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Abstract
As De Angelis, Federici, and others have noted, there are "no commons without community." The concept of community, however (as, among others, Jean-Luc Nancy and Roberto Esposito have shown), has a dark history continuing up until today, when extreme right-wing or even downright fascist appropriations of the concept have understood it as a static and identitarian unity bound to a specific territory or ethnicity. While commons-scholars try to circumvent this legacy by emphasizing the commons as a "praxis" (Dardot and Laval) or "organizational principle" (De Angelis), they thereby tend to neglect the important cultural and symbolic connotations of the concept of community (which, in part, seem to make right-wing movements appealing for certain segments of the population). In my article, I want to raise the following question: Do we need a sense of community for a politics of the commons, and, if so, what concept of community should it be? To answer this question, I will refer back to the use of the concept of "common sense" (*sensus communis*) in Immanuel Kant's *Critique of Judgment*. Characteristic of Kant's use of the term is that it does not refer to an actually existing community, but rather to an imaginary community that is anticipated in our (aesthetic) judgment. Common sense, in other words, involves "acting as if"—with the dual dimensions of *acting* (i.e., the community is based in praxis) and *as if* (an imagined, anticipated community bordering between the fictional and the real).

Keywords
common sense; commons; community; imagination; Kant; Rancière

Issue
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1. Introduction

Despite, or perhaps precisely because of its long and, at times, dark history, the concept of "community" continues to concern us. In Jean-Luc Nancy's words, community "haunts us, as it abandons us or as it embarrasses us" (Nancy, 2003, p. 27). Today, there are at least two reasons to think about the concept. The first is, obviously, the rise of extreme right-wing or downright neofascist movements that mobilize the concept to funnel discontent. These movements understand community as a clearly delineated and identifiable unity bound to a specific territory or ethnicity—a unity that is under constant threat from hostile elements, either from outside or from within. Progressive politics has rightfully criticized this concept, unmasking it as a form of ideology, but thereby it has often tended to neglect its important cultural, symbolic, and emotional connotations (which, in part, seem to make right-wing movements so appealing in the first place, at least for certain segments of the population).

A second reason is the re-emergence of the concept of the "commons" amongst the left—both in activist circles and scholarship—since the beginning of the century, and especially since the economic crisis of 2007. Talking about the commons has allowed us to see how many contemporary social struggles and activist movements are or can be connected. From environmentalism to the "right to the city," and from creative commons and "copyleft" on the internet to land reform and the redistribution of wealth—all of these can be considered as forms of resistance against the enclosure, appropriation, or destruction of the commons and attempt to, in Klein's (2001) words, "reclaim the commons."

This phrase of "reclaiming," however, immediately raises the question of who should own the commons, or "govern" them (Ostrom, 1990). There are, after all, "no commons without community," as Federici (2019, p. 110) recently wrote. This question becomes all the more pressing considering that the "new enclosures" concern commons, and hence communities, that are less clearly defined and bounded than the ones studied by Ostrom. Who is and who is not part of an urban or online community is not as easily determined as who is part of a Zanjera irrigation community in the Philippines (Ostrom, 1990, pp. 82–88). In this article, I want to address the following question: Do we need the concept of community for a politics of the commons, and, if so, what concept of community should it be? To answer this question, I will first contrast an ontological approach to community to the practical/materialist approach dominant in commons scholarship, arguing that both are ultimately insufficient. Next, I will propose an aesthetic approach based on the Kantian concept of *sensus communis* and Jacques Rancière's concept of *consensus*. I will argue that the concept of community that belongs to the politics of the commons is a "dissensual community," revolving around an "acting as if," with the dual emphasis on *acting* (i.e., a community based on praxis) and *as if* (an imaginary, anticipated community), that borders between the fictional and the real.

2. Ontology and Praxis

In the 1990s, as a response to both the fall of the Berlin Wall and the resurgence of different nationalisms, there was a renewed interest in the concept of community within continental (post-)phenomenological philosophy in the works of, among others, Jean-Luc Nancy and Roberto Esposito (on whom I will primarily draw here). Modern sociology and political thought, from Ferdinand Tönnies to John Rawls, generally made the rather strict distinction between "community" (*Gemeinschaft*), as the organic unity characteristic of small and historical societies, and "society" (*Gesellschaft*) as the aggregate of atomistic individuals in modern societies. The Italian philosopher Roberto Esposito, however, argues that the concept of community, from the outset, contains a contradiction within itself. While the community has been traditionally understood in terms of the "proper"—that is, what belongs to me (and to which I belong) in the most intimate sense—he takes a radically different approach: "The common is not characterized by what is proper but by what is improper, or even more drastically, by the other" (Esposito, 2010, p. 7). Going back to the roots of the term *communitas*, in Greek philosophy and Roman law, he demonstrates that the *munus* in *com-munity* refers to an obligation, an official task, or a gift (a gift given but not received). *Cum-munus*, then, is the sharing of such an obligation, a shared responsibility or indebtedness. Following this, Esposito says that community, therefore, should not be understood in terms of property: that is, neither as a shared characteristic (such as the color of one's skin) nor as a shared property (as in a territory). Rather, "community" is defined precisely by a lack of something, or a void. With a play on words, he writes that what we have in common is *ni-ente*, which means "nothing," but also "no-thing." It is, however, precisely this common void that is constitutive of our shared subjectivity, just like the Christian understanding of community consists in the shared *loss* of Christ, which bestows upon us a shared task and responsibility.

In Esposito's view, modern political thought, since Thomas Hobbes, consists precisely in the denial of this void, or an attempt to fill it, which can only lead to authoritarianism. As is well known, Hobbes' *Leviathan* starts from the presupposition of the "state of nature," in which sources are scarce and people are more or less equal in physical strength, which means that we are in a permanent "war of all against all." The most basic social relation for Hobbes is thus characterized by competition and fear, and all that we have in common is the capacity to hurt and kill one another. Our only option, and our only *rational* choice, is hence to collectively submit to some higher authority—the sovereign ruler and state—who consequently acts, in Hobbes' political philosophy, as a replacement for all human relations. As Esposito (2010, p. 27) phrases it:

> If the relation between men is in itself destructive, the only route of escape from this unbearable state of affairs is the destruction of the relation itself. If the only community that is humanly verifiable is that of crime, there doesn't remain anything except the crime of the community: the drastic elimination of every kind of social bond.

As a consequence, the social contract is basically a form of *immunization*, that is the denial or erasure of our shared obligations to one another: *Im-munus* is then understood, in the legal and political sense, as being exempt from an obligation, office, or task. The original void of the *munus* is "filled," as it were, by what Esposito calls a "third," that stands above the people: In Hobbes, it is no longer our shared void or weakness, but rather our submission to the Leviathan that binds and connects us, which implies that a horizontal social relation is replaced by a vertical one—of each individual to the state.

In this way, throughout modern political history, there has been a constant tension between the "improper" community, bound by a shared void or lack of something, and the attempts (often by the state) to "immunize" the community against the void of the improper, precisely by defining it on the basis of a shared characteristic (blood) or property (soil). The process of immunization, even if it is meant to protect it, thus always tends to turn against the community itself. And although not all modern political thought has been as explicitly authoritarian as Hobbes', Esposito argues that, therefore, any attempt to define *what* is common to the

community—i.e., any attempt to replace the no-thing with some-thing—must lead to totalitarianism: "It's only through the abolition of its nothing that the thing can finally be fulfilled. Yet the realization of the thing, which is necessarily phantasmic, is precisely the objective of totalitarianism" (Esposito, 2010, p. 143).

The strength of such an ontological approach to the concept of community, beyond its philosophical and historical interests, lies in its potential to deconstruct any attempt to define community on the basis of a particular property, that is inherently exclusionary and hence undemocratic. Ontology can thus serve as a basis of a critique of communitarian, nationalistic, and (neo)fascist ideologies. The question is, however, whether it can be made politically productive beyond ideology critique, since, as Dardot and Laval (2019, p. 190) have stated, "the passage from ontology to politics can only ever be a leap of faith." Indeed, following this ontological line, community is "always already" present, as it implies, in Nancy's (2010, p. 148) words, "that the *with* belongs to the very constitution or disposition or, as you may wish to say, to the *being* of us." But if being is, in Nancy's Heideggerian phrasing, always "being-in-common" or "being-with," it is still unclear how we could distinguish between forms of political praxis that are more or less "communal," and hence, what precisely the political significance of this ontology of community is. Esposito (2010, p. 140) acknowledges this when he writes that *communitas*, as he understands it, is ultimately "impolitical'':

> [It] doesn't keep us warm, and it doesn't protect us; on the contrary, it exposes us to the most extreme of risks: that of losing, along with our individuality, the borders that guarantee its inviolability with respect to the other; of suddenly falling into the nothing of the thing.

I want to contrast this ontological approach to the concept of community with the materialist one that is connected to the aforementioned emergence of commons-scholarship. Elinor Ostrom, in her landmark study *Governing the Commons* (1990) described and investigated common-pool resources (CPRs) such as meadows, forests, water basins, and fishing ponds that were owned, shared, and governed by a local community. Against the tradition in economic thought that considered commons to be inherently unsustainable (e.g., the infamous "tragedy of the commons" by Garret Hardin), she showed that commons were in fact highly efficient and a viable alternative to private or public (i.e., state-)ownership. While her case studies concern rather traditional and clearly delineated commons, the concept of the commons has also (by Ostrom herself, as well as by others) been applied to cultural, artificial, and digital commons such as knowledges, information, and artistic practices, and also to an urban context. In fact, several authors challenge the idea that commons are a particular "type" of resource with certain "natural" characteristics that make them more likely to be governed as commons (for instance, objects that are non-extractable or boundless, such as air, running water, or beaches). "Against this naturalism," Dardot and Laval write (2019, p. 21), "we must insist that there is no natural standard of unappropriability, and any such norm can only be a legal norm." David Harvey likewise argues that, in the same way that any resource can be appropriated and enclosed by capital, anything can be or become a commons; therefore, it makes more sense to focus on "commoning" as an activity rather than on CPRs as a particular resource (Harvey, 2012, p. 73). Interestingly, he exemplifies the process of commoning by referring to urban movements concerned with the "right to the city" and the different movements of squares, such as Indignados, Occupy, and the Arab Spring uprisings. These movements resignified urban spaces and contested their status as either public or private goods. Through processes like gentrification, regeneration, and Disneyfication, wealth that was created in common by urban dwellers is extracted and turned into private property. This common wealth, however, should not be considered separate from the activity of commoning—it is rather capital that first separates them. As Bollier (2014, p. 15) writes, the concept of commons already involves this activity, as well as the people who are involved in it:

> Commons certainly include physical and intangible resources of all sorts, but they are more accurately defined as paradigms that combine a distinct community with a set of social practices, values and norms that are used to manage a resource. Put another way, a commons is *a resource + a community + a set of social protocols*. The three are an integrated, interdependent whole.

This implies that, in this line of thought, the concept of community is, reversely, necessarily related to practical and productive activity; or, to put it otherwise, the "community" is understood as the plurality of people (or *commoners*) who do the work of commoning, i.e., the collective sharing, producing, and governing of a particular resource or value.

A clear upshot of this concept, vis-à-vis both the reactionary one and the ontological approach, is precisely its materialist, anti-metaphysical and anti-ideological nature. Although they acknowledge that commons can be—and, indeed, traditionally often have been—xenophobic and patriarchal, Federici and De Angelis argue that this practical, materialist conception makes a community at least potentially more open and inclusive: community is what materially produces and what is in turn produced by the commons, which means that whoever shares in the work of commoning belongs, on that very basis, to the community. For that reason, De Angelis (2014, p. 125) explicitly distinguishes this conception of commons from Benedict Anderson's *imagined* community:

> Commons thus are not the place for imaginary communities, for those who feel they belong to the same nation, race, or football club without even leaving their private living rooms. Commons are instead made of real communities, in the sense that their practices reproduce not only a network of relations, but also a web of recognizable faces, names and characters and dispositions.

Such a materialist conception, however, comes with its own problems. First of all, it raises the problem of scale. If "community" would indeed be restricted to "recognizable faces," as De Angelis writes, we risk limiting commons to what Srnicek and Williams have provocatively called "folk politics": namely, the romanticization of small-scale localized politics and direct action at the expense of more ambitious, long-term political strategies, the building of sustainable political institutions, and so forth (Srnicek & Williams, 2015, p. 5). Folk politics would even be contradicting this material, productivist conception itself if we accept Hardt and Negri's argument that the driving force of contemporary capitalist production is "biopolitical labor," i.e., the common production of forms of life (Hardt & Negri, 2009). After all, such an understanding of capitalism implies an extension of the community even beyond the scope of Marx's proletariat, since biopolitical labor also involves unwaged affective, cognitive, and reproductive labor, and hence, basically involves and binds all of us. For that very reason, Hardt and Negri (2017, p. 99) part ways with those who "insist that the community that shares access and decision-making must be small and limited by clear boundaries to divide those inside from outside" and instead are interested "in more expansive democratic experiences that are open to others."

The question is, though, how and to what extent such an all-encompassing community could actually be *recognized as* and would *consider itself as* a community, or, to put it in Hegelese: the extent to which it is not just a community-in-itself but also a community-for-itself. While De Angelis (in the quote above) makes a distinction between "imaginary" and "real" communities, I will instead argue that each community must necessarily have an imaginary, fictitious, or, as I will call it, "aesthetic" moment.

3. Common Sense

In mentioning the "aesthetic" moment in community, I am not referring to the "aestheticization of politics" that Walter Benjamin associated with fascism. Rather, I am pointing to the fact that the concept of community hangs together with a particular way of sensing the world, and the community itself, or what I will refer to here as "common sense." Common sense has generally been understood in epistemological terms, namely as common knowledge or common opinion, i.e., what everyone thinks is the case and what, therefore, does not need further proof or argumentation. The political relevance of this concept has been pointed out at least since Thomas Payne and later also by Antonio Gramsci, who famously described "hegemony" as the power to define what is common sense (Gramsci, 1971; for a historical overview of the politics of "common sense," see also Rosenfeld, 2011). Here, I want to emphasize a different dimension of common sense—namely, as a shared *sense*—wherein meaning-making and sensing the world are combined. For that, I will draw on the aesthetic theories of Immanuel Kant and Jacques Rancière.

In the *Critique of Judgment* (1790), Kant distinguishes aesthetic judgment, or judgment of taste, from other judgments, like logical and moral ones. One of the interesting peculiarities of aesthetic judgment, according to Kant, is that we can offer no proof for them (since they are based on a feeling and hence subjective), and yet we expect that others will agree with us, and may even make claims of universal assent. Taste, as he puts it, is "the ability to judge something that makes our feeling in a given presentation *universally communicable* without mediation by a concept" (Kant, 1987, p. 162). To explain this peculiarity and justify it, Kant draws on what he calls a *sensus communis*. He goes on to distinguish his concept from the general use of it as "common human understanding," which he names "vulgar," and "which involves no merit or superiority whatever" (Kant, 1987, p. 160). Instead, he writes:

> We must here take *sensus communis* to mean the idea of a sense *shared* by all of us, i.e., a power to judge that in reflecting takes account (a priori), in our thought, of everyone else's way of presenting something, in order *as it were* to compare our own judgment with human reason in general and thus escape the illusion that arises from the ease of mistaking subjective and private conditions for objective ones, an illusion that would have a prejudicial influence on the judgment. (Kant, 1987, p. 160)

For Kant, then, a judgment of taste is "pure" only when we do not consider it ourselves as a purely subjective feeling (which, in the strict sense, it is), but rather as a sensation that we imagine is shared by all. If I am enjoying the sight of a beautiful flower or the sound of a Mozart sonata, I cannot help but expect that others will share my feeling, precisely because there is nothing about me, in particular, that would distinguish my sensation from that of others (or, in Kant's terms, I have no particular *interest* in the object). Comparing our judgments with those of others, then, does not mean that I *adjust* my taste to that of the majority (as in the famous phrase that "fifty million Elvis fans can't be wrong"), but rather, reversely, that I presume that my sensation cannot merely be my own, but must be based on some generally shared sense of what is beautiful. Kant even takes this one step further when he states that this means that aesthetic pleasure is derived from the universal communicability of

our aesthetic judgment, rather than my judgment being based on my subjective pleasure (see Kant, 1987, p. 62).

It is not my intention, here, to elaborate in detail on Kant's aesthetics, which is notoriously complex: As said, I am primarily interested in the concept of *sensus communis*. Two things make Kant's argument interesting for our present purposes. First, is the already-mentioned emphasis on the *aesthetic* nature of this common sense (at some point, Kant calls it the *sensus communis aestheticus*). Common sense is indeed the way we commonly *sense* the world, a shared sense of our world and of ourselves *as* community. This is an important addition to the epistemological understanding of the concept and is the way that, for instance, Gramsci used it. Kant's concept of common sense is more fundamental, since it refers not so much to opinions and ideology, but rather to the way in which we experience the world in the first place. Hannah Arendt has pointed out the "hidden" political dimension in this thought. In her *Lectures on Kant's Political Philosophy,* she states that the third critique is basically about "the insight that men are dependent on their fellow men not only because of their having a body and physical needs but precisely for their mental faculties" (Arendt, 1992, p. 14). What Kant says about aesthetic judgment—namely, that it is based on "universal communicability" and the "public use" of reason—is true for judgments in general, according to Arendt. Taking into account the perspective of others is a fundamental part of what constitutes thought and even what makes us human. It connects the way we experience the world to a community.

The question is, of course, what community we are talking about, which brings me to the second point of interest in Kant's concept of "common sense." As indicated, Kant does not claim that everyone will *actually* agree with my aesthetic judgment; rather, that the community we appeal to in making aesthetic judgments has the form of the "as if" (*als ob*). In the passage quoted above, he writes that we "*as it were*…compare our own judgment with human reason in general" (for an exploration of the "as if" perspective in Kant, see also Früchtl, 2020). He continues:

> We compare our judgments not so much with actual as rather with the merely possible judgments of others, and [thus] put ourselves in the position of everyone else, merely by abstracting from the limitations that [may] happen to attach to our own judging. (Kant, 1987, p. 160)

The community to which we relate in our judgments is thus not so much an empirical community, but rather an anticipated community, one that is not (yet) empirically present. That does not mean that this community is entirely fictitious either, but rather that it fundamentally depends (as, again, Arendt already noted) on the power of the imagination: "By the force of imagination it makes the others present and thus moves in a space that is potentially public, open to all sides" (Arendt, 1992, p. 43).

Precisely therein lies the political, if not revolutionary, potential of the Kantian notion of "common sense" and its relation to the concept of community. The community of the commons, I would argue against De Angelis, is in fact an "imagined community," though not only or not so much an imagination of the community as it currently is (as emphasized in the concept of Benedict Anderson) but rather an imagining of what community *could be* or become. It is to be emphasized that "imagination" here is not an individual matter (like a mental picture in my head), but itself a collective or common feature; it is nourished and shaped by aesthetic experiences, stories, and so on. Furthermore, going beyond Kant, I would underline the practical dimension of this form of imagination: namely, in the attempts to realize and reproduce in reality the common of community. Haiven and Khasnabish have called this "radical imagination": the ability to imagine the world and the community otherwise. They add, however, that the radical imagination "is not just about dreaming of different futures. It's about bringing those possible futures "back" to *work* on the present, to inspire action and new forms of solidarity today" (Haiven & Khasnabish, 2014, p. 3).

4. Consensus/Dissensus

Whereas Gramsci talked about "common sense" (*senso comune*) as shared opinions, knowledges, and worldviews, and Kant considered *sensus communis* as a shared mode of experience, the French philosopher Jacques Rancière attempts to tie these two different meanings together in what he calls "consensus." This term might be somewhat confusing, since we tend to associate it with the outcome of political deliberation—especially considering the centrality of the term in Habermas' writings. From this association, Rancière explicitly distinguishes his use of the term:

> Consensus means far more than simply a new way of governing that, in order to avoid conflicts, appeals to expertise, arbitration and the agreement of the respective parts of a population. Instead, consensus is an agreement between sense and sense, in other words between a mode of sensory presentation and a regime of meaning. (Rancière, 2010, pp. 143–144)

Consensus is precisely the point where aesthetics and politics meet, in what Rancière elsewhere calls, respectively, the aesthetics of politics and the politics of aesthetics. Aesthetics and politics, as he understands them, are forms of *partage du sensible* (distributing of the sensible)—a formulation in which, according to good French tradition, both terms have multiple meanings. "Sensible" has the already-mentioned double meaning of what can be understood and what can be perceived (Rancière, 2004, p. 12, speaks of "self-evident facts of

sense-perception"), and *partage* can both mean "to divide" (and thus, to separate) and "to share." What we are able to see, hear, feel, imagine (and so on) together determines our common world: In other words, this sensory space is what we share. Yet, at the same time, it is that which distinguishes and divides us, since not everyone is equally visible, audible, etc. Some groups of people are obviously better represented than others in the media and in parliament, and even in public spaces. In cities, most notably, certain groups can literally disappear from sight. Gentrification, for example, makes people from lower classes invisible in city centers where they can no longer pay the rent, while, for instance, the design of city benches—making it impossible to sleep on them—keeps homeless people out of parks.

This also means that politics entails much more than deliberation over—and development of policies and laws within—state institutions. This, what we usually call politics, is what Rancière calls the "police order," and its function is to sustain and manage a *particular* distribution of the sensible: that is, a certain division of society into groups, positions, and functions in which each has his or her proper "part" in and of the division. Actual politics, according to Rancière, consists precisely in an interruption of that order by what he calls "the part of those who have no part" (*le part des sans part*). This means that a group of people who were, up until then, invisible or unheard now make themselves visible (or audible, etc.). Historical examples are, of course, the struggle for universal suffrage by workers and women who had hitherto gone without political representation, or the American civil rights movement. To take a more recent example, one can also think of the Fridays for Future demonstrators, also known as "climate strikers"—mostly underage students who take to the street, precisely because they have no voting rights and are therefore not politically represented. In doing so, they make themselves and future generations—i.e., those for whom the most is at stake in the political struggle over a habitable future planet—visible (see De Cauter, 2021, p. 132). This is the "aesthetics" of politics, namely, that politics is fundamentally about who can make themselves visible and audible in the common domain of experience, and the fact that, as a result of political struggle, the domain is redistributed insofar as those who were invisible become visible. However, Rancière also emphasizes that this redistribution is never finished or settled for once and for all: There will always be a "part that has no part" that might challenge and interrupt the existing order. Consensus should, therefore, not be considered the goal of politics; on the contrary, politics is essentially the creation of "a new form, as it were, of *dissensual* 'commonsense'" (Rancière, 2010, p. 139).

This form of dissensus is also, in his view, what art and politics have in common: "Art and politics both define a form of dissensus, a dissensual re-configuration of the common experience of the sensible" (Rancière, 2010, p. 140). Although art, and the question of to what extent it should or should not be politically "committed," is not our primary concern here; nevertheless, it is relevant to briefly look at what Rancière writes about the "politics of aesthetics" (for a more elaborate discussion of this question in relation to Rancière's aesthetics see Lijster, 2021). For him, art is always political in a certain sense: namely, to the extent that it always participates in and contributes to a certain distribution of the sensible. Hence, a work of art does not have to convey an explicit political message, or otherwise "activate" the spectator, in order to be political. Rancière is even quite skeptical towards artistic practices that feel the need to bring the "outside world" to the art world, or vice versa (for instance, by organizing political rallies in art institutions, or by putting "ordinary" people—preferably from marginalized groups—on the theater stage). Paradoxically, such artistic practices actually confirm the misconception that there is a strict distinction between an artwork over there and a "real world" over there. But, according to Rancière (2010, p. 48):

> There is no "real world" that functions as the outside of art. Instead, there is a multiplicity of folds in the sensory fabric of the common, in which outside and inside take on a multiplicity of shifting forms….There is no "real world." Instead, there are definite configurations of what is given as our real, as the object of our perceptions and the field of our interventions.

By this, he does not mean that there are no facts or truth, but rather that those facts and truth, and the extent to which they are visible, are always the outcome of a political struggle and subject to public discussion and investigation (take, for example, again, the climate catastrophe and the extent to which the *facts* about it have for decades been obscured and made invisible in official policy-making and public debate). Just as art is always already part of the "real" world, this said world "always is a matter of construction, a matter of a 'fiction.'" Rancière (2010, p. 149) argues:

> Political and artistic fictions introduce dissensus by hollowing out that "real" and multiplying it in a polemical way….The practice of fiction undoes, and then re-articulates, connections between signs and images, images and times, and signs and spaces, framing a given sense of reality, a given "commonsense." It is a practice that invents new trajectories between what can be seen, what can be said and what can be done.

Now connecting Kant to Rancière, I would argue that such political and artistic fictions thereby anticipate a particular type of community, a community characterized by "dissensual commonsense." This is, in other words, a community constituted not by consensus, but rather by dissensus: a dissensual community. While in a consensual community, everyone has and knows their

"proper" place, a dissensual community is, with reference to Esposito, improper. A well-known historical example of a political action that brings about such a dissensual community is that of Rosa Parks, who refused to give up her seat on the bus to a white passenger in the segregated America of the 1950s. By not sitting in her "proper" place (that is, in a "colored" row on the bus), she created a sense of an improper, dissensual community. Thus, she anticipated what Rancière also calls a "community of equals"—namely, a community that not so much shares a property, but only the demand to be treated equally. Likewise, the Black Lives Matter demonstrations, which spread across the world during the summer of 2020, showed that racism is still ubiquitous and that it is not so much a remnant of the past or a personal flaw or character trait of a few, but a systemic flaw in government institutions like the police, the carceral system, as well as in education, media, etc. As a result of these political actions, and by making visible something that has been invisible, a consensus was broken and things were up for discussion that had, until then, been part of the "common sense."

5. Dissensual and Liminal Community

Let us now return to the question that we started off with: What kind of conception of community does the politics of the commons require? To answer this question, we have moved from an ontological approach of community to a practical-material conception, finally arriving at an aesthetic conception. I would argue, however, that these strands are by no means mutually exclusive, but rather cumulative: They reinforce and build upon one another. The ontological take, as I have argued, functions as a deconstruction and critique of existing conservative and reactionary concepts of community based on a common property; the practical-materialist concept emphasizes how community is intimately tied to material struggles over the governing of resources and the means of production and reproduction (i.e., the commons); the aesthetic concept, finally, ties community to communicability and regimes of shared meaning and sense-making.

By bringing these different dimensions into dialogue, my attempt has been to sketch the contours of a concept of community that is "improper" (Esposito), and that consists, to speak with Kant, in an "acting as if," in which both the "acting" (practice) and the "as if" (imagination) are of crucial importance. It is, finally, defined by what Rancière termed a *dissensual* common sense, wherein common sense refers to how we commonly sense the world, and to the way we conceive of ourselves as community. Thus, this concept takes into account the dual dialectic of a community that is, simultaneously, "always already" and always "to come"—thus, never complete—and of a community that is grounded in material praxis but not restricted by it, being sufficiently open to be imagined otherwise. A community, in other words, that happens and appears through our politics, temporarily emerging through the production of the common. We might also say that community, in this way, is understood as a *performance*, with the three-fold meaning of it as something actually present on stage ("live"), of a *play*, and of an accomplishment or achievement.

In their account of the urban protests following the Greek debt crisis, and the mass unemployment and poverty that were the result of it, Angelos Varvarousis and Giorgos Kallis give an example of such a community in an urban context. The protests, they argue, were a result of a process of de-identification, in which people from various backgrounds, and without a clearly and previously shared ideological, ethnic, or cultural identity, joined to form new self-organized communities based on the collective management of and access to shared resources (like food, clothes, shelter, and medicine). Opposed to Ostrom's claim that commons need "clear group boundaries," Varvarousis and Kallis (2017, p. 131) describe these common as "liminal":

> In liminal commons, instead, the community of the commoners *shines through its absence*. Some kind of community of course is temporarily emerging for the production of the common. But this is always precarious and often dissolves. The borders of a liminal community are not only blurred. They actually do not exist as such. Liminal commons, in other words, are not defined by exclusion. Because of this they are more likely to *happen* in spaces where exclusion is not likely or desirable, such as a public square.

I would argue that such a conception of community is not specific for these urban protests but actually characterizes the urban community per se, even though this non-exclusionary, open, and performative character is constantly contested (by identities that want, in Esposito's terms, to fill the void of the *munus*). Sociologist Richard Sennett and urban designer Pablo Sendra, in their book *Designing Disorder* (2020), argue, in line with the above theories, that a city benefits from openness, incompleteness, and liminality, and indeed a certain degree of disorder. Only in this way can urban commons and an urban community thrive, instead of being enclosed for a limited segment of the population or being dispossessed by real estate capital. They write: "When the city operates as an open system…it becomes democratic not in the legal sense, but as a tactile experience" (Sendra & Sennett, 2020, p. 35). Equality and democracy, in other words, are not just a matter of laws but are sedimented in our shared material environment as well as in our shared urban experience, or common sense.

To give one final example of what this might mean for urban aesthetics (in the narrow sense), I want to refer to the Amsterdam-based art project Welcome Stranger, which, since the 1990s, has curated art exhibitions in urban spaces. In the summer of 2021, Welcome Stranger invited four artists—Esther Tielemans, Lily van

der Stokker, Radna Rumping, and Kévin Bray—to create works of art in various streets of Amsterdam on or near their own homes. The fact that these works appear outside the conventional spaces of the "official" art institutions (museums, art fairs, galleries) influences both the aesthetic and urban experience at the same time. Still, these are not "public artworks" in the regular sense either, since they are created nearby or sometimes literally on the façade of the artists' homes. This makes them simultaneously more intimate. In some cases, the artworks appear as protrusions of the private space of the artist onto the street; in other cases, the street or public space is reflected or projected onto the house. Sometimes, this reflection takes place literally, as in the green foil of the work *Scenery* by Esther Tielemans, which sparkles at the passer-by like candy wrappers or the foil of a hazelnut bonbon. The title suggests a green landscape but also the *green screen* used in films to project imaginary backgrounds. With *Roof Terrace With Bubble Bath*, Lily van der Stokker, a huge text work attached to the roof of her house, delivers a kind of parody of the garish advertising that often mars the public space in cities and the commercialization of living spaces that is encouraged via Airbnb or similar rental sites.

The works developed within the framework of Welcome Stranger exemplify the redistribution of our shared space and, therewith, a recreation of common sense. They demonstrate how one can bring back openness and playfulness in an urban environment that is threatened by enclosure, and how one can, in Sendra and Sennett's (2020) terms, "design disorder." This is a paradox, of course, for how can one design disorder when "design" inherently implies order? The significance of these urban works, however, is that they tilt our view on the urban space. They create space for the unexpected and the uncommon, and thus offer the possibility to resist the invisible hand of urban planners, real estate entrepreneurs, and city-marketers. The artists turn the unsuspecting passer-by into a participant: Places that you would otherwise probably have passed without thinking, places that at first glance might have seemed uninteresting or where there was nothing to do (which usually means, nothing to consume) now become charged with meaning. This meaning is not (yet) fixed, because it is sufficiently open and undetermined to enter into a dialogue with the experience and interpretation of that passer-by. In short, it becomes an invitation or incentive to rediscover the city, thus reclaiming space for play, for commoning, and for an alternative common sense.

A potential critique of this proposed "aesthetic" approach to the community and the commons might be that it reverts to a form of idealism. Did not Marx, in his famous eleventh thesis on Feuerbach, say that philosophers have merely interpreted the world in various ways, when, according to him, the point was precisely to change it? I hope to have made clear, though, that this objection, at least in the present context, rests on a false dichotomy—for two reasons. First, and very generally speaking, the activity of changing the world (i.e., political action) already implies that you have interpreted (and imagined) the world in a different way, that is, that you see the possibility of it being other than it is at present (Marx understood this all too well, of course, otherwise he would not have spent so much time interpreting capitalism in a different way than Adam Smith or David Ricardo).

Moreover, our "interpretation" of the world does not exist merely in our minds; it is reflected in practices, institutions, laws, policies, the urban landscape, etc. Common sense, as I have understood it here, not only refers to a sense of community, but also to the way a community senses: in other words, to what and how we commonly sense. For instance, it determines the extent to which we perceive the things around us as commodities (hence, as private property) or as commons (and hence, as resources to be governed and reproduced in common). This implies that the very existence of commons is dependent on our ability to *sense* the commons and to conceive of ourselves as community, that is, on our common sense. Indeed, the question of whether we see (sense) and understand (make sense of) something as either "common" or as "commodity" has drastic consequences for our world, and will make the difference between a politics of extraction, exploitation, and inequality, or one of common abundance, mutual care, and democratic governance. Our "common sense," then, is precisely the mediator between theory and practice, and between interpreting the world differently and changing it.

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