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***FIELDS OF COMMONING:
ATTEMPTS AT CREATING
(UN)COMMON WORLDS
IN NEW CROSS***

PhD Thesis
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*Submitted in accordance with the requirements for the Degree of Doctor of
Philosophy in June 2019*

DECLARATION OF AUTHORSHIP

I, Toby Austin Locke, hereby declare that this thesis and the work presented in it is entirely my own. Where I have consulted the work of others this is always clearly stated.

June 2019

ABSTRACT

Based on three years participation in an attempt to establish a social centre in an abandoned building in New Cross, this thesis explores the forms of commoning practiced as part of that process. The commons here concern forms of interrelationships between beings (human and nonhuman) that cannot be appropriately understood through the idioms of narrowly defined economic logics, such as extraction, resources, management, production, utility and exchange. Rather, the commons constitutes a radically democratic, or transversal, site of encounter with difference, uncommonalities, and other beings. In the cosmopolitical modalities of interrelation that the commons and commoning constitute and seek to explore care and communication play a fundamental role. The modalities of care and communication that commoning explores and creates function as existentially constitutive gestures that define the interrelationships of beings brought together through commoning. Care, as such is not only people caring for one another, or their environment, but more intrinsically is a mode of relating to, and communicating with, difference and others. Commoning is found to be a process which starts from difference and creates further difference, revealing the uncommons as both the possibility and limit of the commons.

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To the Commoners

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INTRODUCTION

No future. A small standing clock, black, the face inscribed with roman numerals and the hands set to 8 minutes to two, next to a hanging clock—faceless with a green A drawn in its centre. Said the bourgeois bitch as she counted the day's takings. An unidentified mobile phone number written in green

07815635982

1

marked only by a large red encircled 23. PUNK ROCKER—a profile of a mohawked person raising their middle figure below. To the left of the figure,

BLEACH

Coffee

Milk x 4

T-BAGS

BAKERS D/food

Bog Rolls

RiZLA

Vimto

a shopping list, in black marker, framed by a stepped black outer line. Why ██████████ sack in? the second, third and fourth words of the question blocked out in the same marker pen used to write them. More phone numbers, incomplete and lost with the peeling wallpaper on which they were written. A front on portrait of Predator from the 1987 Schwarzenegger film of the same name, black with red eyes. Smearings of what looks like human excrement in one corner. War. Hate & War.

These markings covered the interior walls of the building, lined with damaged, peeling, dirty yellow wallpaper, the kind of luminous yellow with which children often draw or paint the sun.



By the time the first three people entered the building on Queens Road that would become The Field in 2014, its state of disrepair was beyond habitation and instead what was found were traces such as these. The building had been squatted for many years, but over the course of time it had fallen into an unusable state—half of the roof had collapsed, most of the floor boards had given way to rot, the piping between drain and toilet were backed up to the point of overspill, windows smashed, pieces of a used chemistry set were found scattered across the back room.

Areas of the garden were almost head height with waste. White goods, bicycle parts, more chemistry equipment, a toy train set and used syringes were found amongst the discarded items. About halfway down the garden a tent had been put together in a valley formed between two mounds of rubbish using an old tarpaulin and rope. The traces of human inhabitation had entered decay, giving way to new non-human bacterial and fungal ecologies.

These traces were the latest expressions of material histories that had become layered on the space, layers that both formed surfaces and were formed upon them; lines, threads and traces that woven together formed surfaces (Ingold 2007). And the threads that formed these surfaces ran off in different directions, now returning upon themselves to inscribe the surfaces that they formed, now shooting off to become entangled and knotted elsewhere. Lines interrupted other lines, surfaces broke off into their constituent threads, traces led to other traces.

The building itself sits to one side of a line. The road on which it sits forms a psychogeographic fault line. The front of the building faces the slopes of Telegraph Hill, populated by Victorian terraced houses built by the Worshipful Company of Haberdashers from 1871 onwards. That company continues to support the school which sits at the base and summit of the hill. It's motto—serve and obey—can still be seen inscribed in Latin on the boards of the school. Walking up the hill, with my back turned to the building in which these traces were found, I pass through streets lined by plane trees and populated by large houses built of London stock brick until I arrive at the park which sits atop Telegraph Hill. Stood here, on a clear day, one can see far across the city. The tall glass

skyscrapers in and around the City of London shoot up from the lower cityscape, reaching towards the skies. There is a calm and spaciousness to be experienced sat in this park, and the traffic surrounding it is few and slow moving.

Travelling in the opposite direction from the building is a different story. Turning left as I leave, I come towards the intersection of Queens Road and that part of the A2 named New Cross Road. Once the site of the New Cross Turnpike, the barrier that leaves its trace in the name of the nearby station New Cross Gate, this intersection is fast moving. The traffic rushes past, and countless buses pass by on their way from the nearby bus depot and on towards their destinations across London. Walking along New Cross Road, which cuts diagonally behind the building, it soon gives way to the Old Kent Road, one of the cheapest brown tiles on the Monopoly board. The road is lined with retail parks and commercial shop fronts, and behind these is found a mixture of housing estates and industrial centres, timber yards, and the local waste disposal centre. The experience of this side of the fault line is quite different. There are no clear views across the city here.

The building sits between these two urban spaces, complimentary, connected and separate, which merge and face one another at Queens Road. These urban spaces interrupt one another, fold into one another. The road which runs between them, and which marks the base of the hill, appears to attempt to separate them, but never entirely successfully. It is a threshold (Stavrides 2010; 2016), which both separates and connects, offering possibilities for invitation and inclusion. And it is on this threshold, this shifting and transient boundary between inside and outside, that the building sits. It is already in some senses a commons—a site of intersection between differences and encounters between uncommonalities, a knot of entanglement.

It was this building, this entanglement of lines and histories, some hidden, some revealed, some awaiting discovery, that became the site of an attempt to put the theories of the commons into practice. The Field was the name given to the project, partly in reference to the open field system of the old English commons, partly in reference to the open-ended and

contingent nature of fieldwork, and partly due to the romantic imaginary of the freedom of country fields. The process brought various individuals and collectives together in an attempt to establish a self-organised neighbourhood resource, and it is my engagement with this process that is the subject of this thesis. It comes at a time when political realities appear uncertain and unstable, where the future of the current global system itself appears increasingly under question, for better or worse, and also at a time when the discourses on the commons have become greatly popularised within and beyond academia. The political moment in which my fieldwork began was quite different to the one we find ourselves in now, the prospect of a Trump presidency was unimaginable, Jeremy Corbyn was still a little-known radical backbencher, and Brexit was generally considered an improbable event only really supported by the more traditional elements of the Conservative party and UKIP. I will return to these transformations which occurred during my research in the conclusion, but now I will attempt to briefly situate the political moment from which The Field emerged.

Since the Thatcher-Regan axis of the 1980s deregulation and the expansion of private markets has been the hegemonic form of political economy. During this period, the post-war settlement between labour and capital was dismantled, and public provision of services increasingly became framed in terms of burdens to the free-flowing operation of markets. Thatcher's famous declaration that there is no such thing as society, but only individuals and families, opened the way for a deconstruction of the position of the state as a pastoral carer in relation to a broader society to which it had responsibilities and duties. The public provision of utilities such as gas, water and electricity, and key services such as housing, education and healthcare that had been a key component of the post-war settlement came under increasing scrutiny and neoliberal programs of privatisation and deregulation became the norm. This period also witnessed the collapse of the Soviet Union and the end international competition between capitalist and socialist world orders. Another of Thatcher's famous pronouncements, that there is no alternative to market led societies, embodied what Francis Fukuyama referred to as *The End of His-*

tory (2012) whereby market societies coupled with liberal democracy appeared to have emerged victorious over planned economies and state socialism. Marx, it seemed, had misrecognised the solution to the riddle of history which appeared not as the withering of the state into communism, but rather in the state's dismantlement and the dominance of the free market. Western economies became increasingly financialised as the financial sector, freed from the regulations that separated retail and speculative banking, developed new derivative markets capable of producing huge amounts of wealth through complex manipulations of market transactions.

Throughout this period, enabling market expansion became the hegemonic *modus operandi* of Western governments. Sectors that had previously been considered as of a different order of value, such as housing, education and healthcare, and thus protected from market speculation by the state, became open to commodification and market expansion through privatisation. With Tony Blair's New Labour government, which came to power in Britain in 1997, this process continued. Tuition fees were introduced and subsequently increased for higher education, and maintenance grants were replaced with loans, whilst various private finance initiatives introduced markets into state education and healthcare. The traditional public-private split, where the state tempered the market and provided that which could not operate according to profit motives, became increasingly weighted towards privatisation. It was also during this period that social enterprise legislation, establishing a new form of company structure known as the Community Interest Company, was introduced. It was, under this legislation that The Field initially formed itself as a legal entity.

From 2007 to 2008 these ongoing processes of deregulation and financialisation led towards the greatest financial crisis since the Great Depression. The collapse of the collateralised debt obligation market in 2008 triggered the bankruptcy of several key US financial organisations, such as Lehman Brothers and the American International Group, leading to a domino effect across the world. The bubble of the financial derivative market appeared to have burst with states having to step in

with a series of vast bail outs. The hegemony of neoliberal privatisation and financialisation, however, remained strong. Rather than triggering a questioning of the validity of neoliberal theory and political economy, the crisis appeared to consolidate its position as the only alternative even further (Mirowski 2014). In popular political discourse the causes of the crisis increasingly appeared to shift from risky speculative markets and financial malpractice by large corporations, to financial mismanagement by governments. The proponents of neoliberalism doubled down declaring that the problem was not deregulation, but that markets had not been deregulated enough.

In 2010, the New Labour government now led by Gordon Brown lost the general election after emerging tarnished and bruised from a campaign that identified their government as financially incompetent overspenders who had constructed a bloated state and were in a large part responsible for the crisis. They were replaced by a coalition government formed of the Conservative party led by David Cameron and the Liberal Democrats led by Nick Clegg. With this government came a new series of terms within mainstream political discourse, most notably the introduction of a program of austerity whereby public spending was increasingly cut in order to close the deficit that skyrocketed after the financial crisis. Cuts to almost all areas of public spending followed, coupled by continuing and increased privatisation of state provided services in an explicit effort to reduce the size of the state.

The Coalition Government coupled these policies with the 'Big Society' program. A bloated state was to be replaced by the very entity Thatcher declared to be non-existent, "'Big Government' must give way to 'Big Society'" (Seymour 2010: 74). However, as critical political commentators have argued, far from being a departure from Thatcherism, the Big Society was its continuation and served as a cover for ongoing privatisation and the continuation of policies that found their roots in the Thatcher government (Tuckett 2017: 24). The Big Society program promoted a model "*in which all the world is a market and all the men and women merely consumers*" (Seymour 2010: 74 emphasis original). Through privatisation and withdrawal of the state, new markets were to be created for

business and social enterprise. The Big Society promised “the voluntary running of public services in theory, with Serco or Capita running public services in practice” (Hatherly 2012: xviii). Whilst localism and community empowerment were the promise, the extension of privatisation and profit-making appeared to be the reality.

These conditions created a paradoxical situation in which the withdrawal of the state under the cover of austerity economics opened possibilities for both privatisation and resistive forms of self-organisation, with the line between the two often being unclear. A “politics of *abandonment*” (Tonkiss 2013: 314 emphasis original) opened possibilities for forms of self-organisation to emerge in the cracks left by the receding state. In New Cross, for example, the library was due for closure and sale under a round of public spending cuts in 2011. After a series of protests and occupations, however, it was kept open as a volunteer run organisation initially known as New Cross People’s Library, and subsequently New Cross Learning. On the one hand, such an introduction of volunteerism where there had previously been state supported service provision appears as a manifestation of the ‘Big Society’, but on the other it was a form of antagonism towards neoliberal austerity politics. To borrow Owen Hatherly’s subtitle, which carries with it echoes of Pierre Clastres’ *Society Against the State* (2007), it is “*Society against the Big Society*” (Hatherly 2012: xxiii emphasis original). In becoming a volunteer run organisation the library was afforded a level of autonomy in relation to state bureaucracy, autonomy that would allow it to organise events that were antagonistic towards the politics of austerity. It was at New Cross Learning that the New Cross Commoners, a collective which fore-ran The Field, would first meet.

What is highlighted here is how transformations within mainstream political discourse and policy, bring with them transformations in forms of resistance. As Foucauldians have long maintained, transformations in the practices of power bring about transformation in modes of counter-power and resistance. Within six months of the rise of austerity politics in Britain a wave of protests and occupations sprung up. In October 2010 UK Uncut was set up to protest austerity measures and corporate tax avoidance, engaging in its first direct action campaign against

Vodafone, who had been reported to have a large unpaid tax bill (Mason 2012: 54). This began an ongoing series of actions targeting organisations identified as engaged in tax avoidance such as Topshop, Boots and Fortnum and Masons, as well as various protest events and actions against cuts to public services.

Alongside the Big Society and austerity narratives and policy programs the coalition government began the process of raising the cap on university tuition fees from £3,000 to £9,000 in spite of the fact that the Liberal Democrats, who had enjoyed a surge of support from young voters in the election, had stood on a manifesto promising to abolish them. University budgets were also cut, along with maintenance grants for poorer students. In November 2010 the first of a series of demonstrations took place in central London, jointly organised by the National Union of Students and the University and College Union. The action began with a march of 30,000 - 50,000 people through central London. Around 200 students broke away from the march and forced their way into Conservative Party HQ at Millbank Tower, briefly occupying the building (ibid: 43). This event began a wave of student protests which continued into March 2011, as well as a series of occupations at 40 UK Universities (Ibrahim 2014). New political realities were compelling students and protestors to adopt new tactics.

It was during this period that I first met several of the founding members of The Field. In 2010 Matt, Jane and Hiro, of whom we shall hear more of later, as well as myself, were undergraduate anthropology students at Goldsmiths. We were each engaged, in different capacities, in the ongoing protests as well as the occupation of the library which took place in December of that year. The occupations that we visited furthered our engagement with the forms of political organisation which were rising in prominence at the time. Strategies which had been developed through the anti-globalisation movements in the 1990s, such as the appropriation of space, consensus decision making, horizontalism and self-organisation, general assemblies, working groups, and spontaneous swarm and hive tactics, were quickly becoming the norm for resistive actions and occupations, "protest methods once known to a committed few

were adopted by the uncommitted mass” (Mason 2012: 62). Such constellations of strategies and tactics were fast emerging as what Srnicek and Williams have since referred to as the folk political common sense of today’s left (2015). These tactics placed emphasis on the localised autonomy of a group, collective or occupation, as well as on non-hierarchical means of organisation through general assemblies, direct democracy, working groups and consensus decision making, many of which continued in the organisational structures of The Field. In addition, there was no overarching ideology directing these actions, but rather attempts to open spaces of discussion and negotiation through which different orientations and world views could be brought together.

The student protests and occupations also brought together trade unions with school, college and university students, and the dispossessed youth of London, who participated in the marches that took place during this period. Paul Mason identifies this as one of the key political phenomenon of the period, “the presence of youth: *banlieue*-style youth from places like Croydon and Peckham, or the council estates of Camden, Islington and Hackney” (2012: 49). It was a similar demographic, young people of colour from impoverished urban centres, that would be the driving force behind the riots of 2011 which broke out from August 6-11th in 30 towns and cities in the UK following the shooting of Mark Duggan by police in Tottenham.

Events in the UK had not been occurring in isolation. Austerity programs across Europe had been met with resistance. Since 2008 protests against the financial sector had been growing in Iceland leading to a referendum on a new constitution in 2012. In Greece, anti-austerity movements had been underway since May 2010, leading to the emergence of the ‘Indignant Citizens Movement’ in 2011 which sought to join with parallel movements in Spain, known as 15-M movement or the *Indignigos*. In addition, the Arab Spring, which started in 2010, led to the overthrow of the governments of Yemen, Tunisia, Egypt and Lybia, as well as major government changes in other nations and the outbreak of civil wars in Syria and Iraq. There appeared to be the possibility of a “rebirth of History... whose aim is to make a genuine exit from the established

order.” (Badiou 2012: 15). Whilst all diverse and heterogeneous movements, horizontalism and the occupation of space for collective decision making featured as key strategies, as well as the use of digital media to establish networks of resistance (Gerbaudo 2012). Activists from Britain, Spain, Greece, Egypt and America were connecting and sharing stories and tactics in unprecedented ways (Graeber 2013a). New forms of resistance were emerging and taking hold across networks that were capable of expanding at previously unthinkable speeds.

In 2011, Occupy London set up camp outside St Paul’s Cathedral in solidarity with Occupy Wall Street and with support from the London branch of Spain’s 15-M movement and UK Uncut. Movements across the world appeared to be linking up through “the widespread adoption of a common territorial form which allowed for disparate and distant events to be narrated and understood as a connected global phenomenon.” (Matthews 2018: 127). Again, many of the people who would go on to form members of The Field’s collectives, including myself, participated in these occupations, attending general assemblies, joining working groups or visiting free schools, teach-outs and sites for alternative education that emerged during this period. As with the student occupations, Occupy did not have an overarching ideology or single set of aims or demands, although many of its tactics and strategies had anarchist-tinted tendencies. Rather, Occupy attempted to open spaces of negotiation and debate, “a genuine popular assembly, a new agora, based on direct democracy principles” (Graeber 2013a). The assemblies and occupations were themselves the demand and message, the opening of a space of communication through which alternative political possibilities could be explored. By the summer of 2012, all the camps of Occupy London had been evicted, but the political horizons and forms of organisation that had emerged in the preceding years and crystallised through Occupy continued.

Many of the practices which became prominent forms of political action during this period were carried forward into The Field. The discourses on the commons intersected well with the strategies of direct democracy, prefigurative politics, horizontal organisation and the occupation of space that had spread in the social movements following the

2008 crisis, as well as offering a resistive counterpoint to the Big Society narrative of the coalition government. I recall in one of The Field's meeting, a couple of years later, a member of Mad Pride declaring: "they talk about the Big Society—let's give them a Big Society they didn't expect!". The ideas of commoning offered means of continuing the exploration of the political horizons that opened and expanded during this period, and it is not incidental that these ideas rose to prominence alongside the tactics, events and practices described above. Whilst having a history¹ which vastly predates the 2008 crisis, as well as the emergence of austerity economics and the spread of horizontalist strategies in broader social movements, the practices of commoning that form the subject of this thesis take on a particular shade in the light of these developments, and it is alongside these developments that the rise in prominence of the discourses on the commons can be better understood.

It is now half a century since Garrett Hardin published *The Tragedy of the Commons* (1968). That article continued a long history of theoretically convincing justifications for enclosure and privatisation, a history that can be said to include the likes of John Locke (1988) and Thomas Malthus (2008) amongst its most prominent representatives. This history asserts clearly, with the unquestionable authority of rationality, that what is in the best interests of the population, what will bring about the greatest good for the greatest number, to adopt the language of Bentham's principle of utility (2007), is the protection of private property and the enclosure of commons. In short, it is in the interest of the common good that the commons be enclosed and portioned off into private property, for "[f]reedom in a commons brings ruin to all" (Hardin 1968: 1244). Here is the tragedy—people do not know the collective ruin that their actions are leading them towards. They do not know what's good for them. An intervention is required. The commons must be enclosed, given over to either state or market. There is a form of intellectual vanguardism here, one which determines a form of life as best and asserts that it must be

1 There is a long history of the commons and English common land which, whilst significant, will not be substantially addressed by this thesis. Readers who are interested in this history may wish to turn to some of the relevant historical literature (e.g. Neeson 1993; Federici 2014; Linebaugh 2008)

imposed on others who are incapable of recognising that it is in their best interests. Such a form of theoretical imposition is one that anthropologists have regularly been suspicious of, preferring to examine how people actually organise themselves, create values and make sense of their worlds, rather than relying on the distanced assertions of Enlightenment rationality.

Two decades after Hardin laid out the inevitable ruin of the commons, Elinor Ostrom enacted a supremely anthropological gesture. She took the claims of the inevitable tragic demise of the commons to task by paying attention to specific, grounded, empirical examples. One of the peculiarities of Hardin's original article was that in spite of being published in *Science*, it contained no empirical material. Elinor Ostrom's *Governing the Commons* (1990)² took up the theoretical claims of the tragedy of the commons and subjected them to empirical scrutiny through studies of 'common pool resources' such as fisheries, forestries and shared pastures. What she found was that sometimes the tragedy could be observed, but often it could not. Another highly anthropological observation—empirical realities are far more complicated and varied than a one size fits all theoretical argument might have us believe, no matter how convincing it might seem. Through these observations it became clear that often, when left to their own devices, far from exploiting resources to exhaustion people would come up with practical rules and systems of organisations which would maintain and care for the commons. Many of the examples where the tragedy could be found occurred precisely because people were not in a position to establish such systems—there were impositions from the state or market which prevented the self-organisation of the commons.

These observations did a huge amount to demonstrate that other arrangements are possible beyond the classical economic dichotomy of state and market. The choice is not a matter of state, or market, or tragic ruin. Much of this may seem obvious to anthropologists, whose discipline has developed around the recognition that human societies vary greatly

² Whilst Ostrom's study was not the only one to do this, (e.g. Feeny et al. 1990), it was one of the more influential as attested to by Ostrom being awarded the Nobel Prize in economics.

across the world, and across time, and that institutions like the state and free market are by no means universal. But it appears not to be so obvious to many policy makers and orthodox economists. With Ostrom, however, there is a shift towards a more complex understanding of economic phenomenon, leading her to advocate arrangements of ‘polycentric governance’ (Ostrom 2010), in which state, market and other localised institutions come together in complex nested arrangements. From an anthropological lens, and with just a bit of poetic licence, such a proposal can appear like the Maussian total social fact (2002: 100) as a principle of social organisation or governance. It is a perspective that rejects simple either/or dichotomies (state or market, or tragic ruin), and instead becomes attuned to the simultaneous presence of all elements of society within observed phenomenon—components of the state interact with components of the market, whilst components of potential tragic ruin remain present, and a whole host of other institutions often relegated to the position of externalities in orthodox economic discourse remain in play.

With Ostrom, as with Mauss, it is not a case of either a total egalitarian commons, or a total state-market based capitalism—the question is always more complex and nuanced. This tendency, as far as Mauss is concerned, is expressed clearly in *The Manual of Ethnography*, where he writes,

“If one really wants, societies can be defined by their communism or individualism, or more precisely by the degree of communism and individualism that they show. *Both are always present*; the task is to determine their respective proportions.”

(2009: 99 emphasis added).

As with *The Gift* (2002), it is neither a case of total altruism or total self-interest—both are always present. Likewise, with Ostrom it is neither a case of the inevitable tragedy of the commons, nor of holding up the commons as a complete alternative model of social organisation.

Ostrom’s analysis, as with many other economically oriented

analyses of the commons, deals primarily with a category labelled as resources, hence the use of the term 'common pool resources' in her works. A large amount of insightful ethnographic and anthropological has developed around this perspective. Much of this literature examines how people do, or do not, establish self-organised rules and systems to care for the commons, and how these commons intersect, become entangled with, or enter into conflicts with other state, market and non-state institutions and agencies. But there is another discourse on the commons which, whilst it cannot be entirely separated from the analysis of common pool resources, thinks of the commons in terms of relations and processes. Such a perspective often starts from a broader understanding of the commons. For instance, in *Commonwealth* Hardt and Negri recognise the importance of the commons understood as resources, or in their words, "the common wealth of the material world", but also understand the commons to include "those results of social production that are necessary for social interaction and further production, such as knowledges, languages, codes, information, affects, and so forth." (2009: viii). This later understanding of the commons is emphasised by Hardt and Negri as more significant and attempts to "not position humanity separate from nature, as either its exploiter or custodian, but focuses on the practices of interaction, care and cohabitation in a common world" (ibid). Such a definition, as summarised and paraphrased by Žižek, concerns "the shared substance of our social being" (2009). As with Ostrom, there are more anthropological resonances here.

To describe the commons as those relations that facilitate social interaction, production and shared inhabitation of a common world brings us close to an understanding of the commons which resonates with one of anthropology's historically central concepts—culture. We are in many respects not so far from Geertz's famous summary of culture as the webs of significance in which people are suspended and which they have themselves spun (1973: 5). The shared substance of our being that Žižek calls commons, by another name, is these very webs. But culture as a concept has been subject to much contestation within anthropology and beyond. Within anthropology the culture concept has at times been criticised for

upholding an Enlightenment epistemology which imposes separations between culture and nature. Such an imposition has led to a rigid taxonomy separating humans (with culture) from non-humans (without culture) and causing people to become radically separated from their environments and from other kinds of beings. Much anthropological ink has been spilt attempting to bridge this gap, or great divide (Latour 1993), between nature and culture in order to open a way towards more ecologically oriented understandings (e.g. Bateson 1985, 2000; Morris 1996; Ingold 2011; Descola 2014). And here, there is also another anthropological resonance with Hardt and Negri's understanding of the commons—namely that they do not separate humans from nature.

This is one of the criticisms that has been levelled against Ostrom, and many other economically oriented understandings of the commons, namely that by treating commons as resources they are reduced to economic categories subject to scarcity and exploitation—they are reduced to a matter of management, and “this transformation of commons into resources dissolves them” (Esteva 2014: i148). The commons become inactive objects of a nature radically separate to and manipulated by culture. Through such an understanding the commons, as resources and objects, become assigned to the pole of nature and the rules for governing the commons are assigned to the pole of culture. In contrast to this economic perspective, this thesis engages in an understanding of the commons as relation and process. Such an understanding of the commons was regularly expressed by the collectives with which I participated in the collaborative construction of *The Field*. Often, these collectives explicitly rejected Ostrom's analysis as being economic, reformist and having the potential to aid in the maintenance of capitalist hegemony. Whilst I do not entirely reject Ostrom's work, as some members of these collectives appeared to at times, I do share some of the suspicion of economic perspectives and tend instead towards ecological ones. I consider Ostrom's work to be of great significance and use, and it has done a huge amount to demonstrate that other forms of ownership and property are possible beyond the stale opposition of public and private. However, all bodies of work and perspectives have limits and horizons beyond which they can-

not see.

It is here that the broader understanding of the commons as process and relation comes into play. It is a perspective that is often better encapsulated by the verb to common, or commoning, rather than the noun commons. As Peter Linebaugh writes,

“To speak of the commons as if it were a natural resource is misleading at best and dangerous at worst—the commons is an activity and, if anything, it expresses relationships in society that are inseparable from relations to nature. It might be better to keep the word as a verb, an activity, rather than as a noun, a substantive.”

(2009: 279)

To common here becomes a practice, an action. Commoning “*is a way of doing both community and economics as immersed in the here and now of living habitat.*” (Menzies 2014: 123 emphasis original). To common is not to manage an inactive resource, but to act with it, alongside it and through it, it is to engage with other beings in a manner that is ecological, caring for and attending to the relations between them. I here follow from Gregory Bateson’s use of the term ecology—for Bateson, mind was not bound to the human brain, or even the human body, but “immanent in the total interconnected social system and planetary ecology” (2000: 467), and it was in these relations of interconnectivity between differential beings that ecological problematics were located. In short, it makes little sense to consider an agency, experience, organism or being outside of the relations in which it is entangled. Tim Ingold has offered a revision of Bateson’s *Ecology of Mind*, opting instead for an *Ecology of Life*, looking at the “creative unfolding of an entire field of relations within which beings emerge and take on the particular forms they do, each in relation to the others.” (2011: 19). Commoning, as an activity of caring for and communicating with a living world is a practice of attending to and exploring the possibilities of such an ecology of life, of creatively exploring other ways of being, thinking and doing. It is such an understanding of commoning

that is explored in this thesis.

Ingold has himself, in his more recent publications and lectures, turned to notions of commoning (2017; 2018a; 2018b). One of the central themes of this thesis, that of communication, is explicitly referred to in these works. Drawing on Dewey's discussions of education (2004), Ingold points to communication understood as a creative process, as forms of commoning. The relationship between communication and commoning is an intimate one, as both Dewey and Ingold highlight. To communicate is to create a process of commoning, it is to "make meaning together" (Ingold 2018a: 4). In this way commonality is not the prerequisite of communication, but its outcome. It is the establishment of a relation of correspondence (Ingold 2017). The starting point of communication is difference, rather than an absolute similarity or univocality, it is the uncommons that makes possible the commons (Blaser & de la Cadena 2017). Communication is not simply the conveyance of information, but a practice of actively making and remaking meanings. It is the composition of systems of meaning capable of nurturing common forms of life. Ingold states this clearly, and links back to an ecology of life, when he writes "communication is the commoning of life" (Ingold 2018a: 5), it is the process of exploring and creating new forms of life. Throughout this thesis, communication will be explored in a range of shapes and forms, as well as the noise and interruptions that disrupt, distort and transform communication, and so too commoning.

Such disruptions, distortions and interferences form one of the meanings of the term *parasite*, as used by Michel Serres (2007). The French term *parasite* used by Serres, incorporates the meanings of social or biological parasite which are present in the English, but it also includes a third meaning, that of static or noise. For Serres communicative signals are always run through with noise and static, "[n]oise is always already part of the signal; blindness inescapably accompanies vision" (Wolfe in Serres 2007: xiii). Attempts to communicate are accompanied by a third, a para-site (*para*—besides, other, adjacent; *site*—space, domain, locus). Such noise emerges of these sites of adjacency, alternative patterns and modalities of communication which run alongside others and which have dif-

ferent histories and trajectories. Sometimes these adjacent communicative fields intersect and establish successful channels of communication, sometimes they produce misunderstandings, repulsions, diversions and interruptions. Sometimes they simply fall to static and noise. Communication is never a simple matter of conveying information, all kinds of sites of adjacency come into play, all kinds of noise disrupt the signals. Collective endeavours produce clamour, “[t]he collective is a black box. The set makes the noise... The collective is white noise itself... Noise comes out of the black box. Noise and shivarees.” (Serres 2007: 123). Whilst we attempt to unpack the black box, to discern sense amidst noise, there always remains something unseen, unheard, something that falls to static, an observation that applies to ethnography as much as it does to commoning.

Another central theme that recurs throughout the following chapters is that of care, and it is another notion that Ingold has taken up in his more recent publications. Care, for Ingold, is related to attentionality, and in this way also to commoning and communication. It is a matter of attending to others, of being present to them and allowing them to be present to us in order that we can respond and attend to their needs and desires (Ingold 2017; 2018a). The theme of care recurs throughout much of the literature on the commons. As Maria Mies clearly states, “The main principles of the commons were (and are): Commons could not exist without a community who took care of them” (2014: i107). Attending to and exploring ecologies of life requires practices of caring for the participants of those ecologies, be they human or non-human. In this regard I have also drawn from Maria Puig de la Bellacasa’s understanding of living webs of care incorporating human and non-human actants, which call on us to “take care of things in order to remain responsible for their becoming” (2010: 43). Care throughout the following chapters is explored as a contingent practice (Mol et al. 2010) of attending to differences in such a way as to facilitate their flourishing, and as such is understood as a central component of commoning as the attempt to explore the possibilities for ecologies of life.

Just as communication always comes with interruptions and noise,

however, so too does care come with its counter parts, what Heidegger referred to as “[t]he deficient modes of omitting, neglecting, renouncing, resting” (2010: 57). Just as practices of care run throughout the following chapters, so too do manifestations of these failures of care, moments where attending to others became too great a burden, or where an excess of attention in one direction led to a deficiency in another. Such deficiencies of care could be found in the collapse of the building itself, in the relations between people, or in emergent affective states. So just as this thesis explores the central importance of care, so too does it highlight the ever present possibility of modes of neglect that are an inescapable possibility for commoning. Such modes of neglect, however, are not inevitabilities as with the fatalistic tragedy of the commons, but are rather the contingent results of specific arrangements, orientations and positions.

Care is also a domain of practice that has become systemically neglected by capitalism. David Graeber has proposed a phenomenon that is particularly acute in what he refers to as the ‘caring classes,’ namely the fact that the more a task produces collective social value, the less it is compensated for through wages (2018). There is an inverse relation between the creation of social value and the compensation it receives in quantified economic value. Graeber points to how those engaged in caring professions, such as nurses, social workers, and teachers, are often those who receive the least amount of compensation in the form of wages. There is a link here to Graeber’s earlier work on value (2001), where a distinction is marked between singular economic value and a plurality of values belonging to moral or ethical considerations. The former domain is the narrow quantification of practices in terms of the economic value they produce; the latter, that of values, is a domain where it is difficult, if not impossible, to apply a unitary quantification of the benefits produced. Many of the practices that fall into the domain of what Silvia Federici has referred to as “the means of reproduction”, referring to “all the activities necessary for the reproduction of human life” (2012b: 55), have come to fall in this latter domain of values which cannot be fully quantified from the narrow perspective of economic value.

Federici shows how this separation, between the productive

sphere for which a wage is paid and the reproductive sphere which receives less or no remuneration, is a gendered division. In *Caliban and the Witch*, she argues that during the transition to capitalism and a wage-based proletariat,

“production-for-market was defined as a value-creating activity, whereas the reproduction of the worker began to be considered as valueless from an economic viewpoint and even ceased to be considered as work.... The economic importance of the reproduction labour-power carried out in the home, and its function in the accumulation of capital became invisible, being mystified as a natural vocation and labelled “women’s labor.””

(2014: 75)

A slight of hand is enacted, whereby those practices which are most vital for the continuation of human life, and so also for labour-power, are precisely those that are most devalued from the stand point of economic value and become concealed in the naturalised female sphere of domestic work. The practices of maintaining, nurturing and recreating human life became assigned to a domain deemed valueless from the lens of unitary economic value, in spite of the fact that these very practices are vital to the production of economic value itself.

This tendency continues in the monetary devaluation of caring labour in contemporary capitalism. Graeber has outlined ‘caring labour’ as entailing “a self-effacing openness to the realities of others and their needs and desires [...] caring is not actually a value but the primary means for the creation of value [...] caring labour’s best conceived as labour that is directed ultimately at maintaining or enhancing another’s freedom” (2018). It is these forms of practice, systems of values beyond the singular economic value, that commoning seeks to explore in attempts to find mechanisms to allow forms of care to be valued. Commoning attempts to find ecologies of life in which care is not devalued or concealed. As such, the practices of commoning discussed in the following pages hold within

them an integral feminist and anti-capitalist orientation. They seek to expand what is valued beyond the narrow limits of economic value.

This orientation also brings them into an uneasy, but nevertheless antagonistic, relationship to the narratives on the Big Society discussed above. Emma Dowling has argued that the Big Society

“is about increasing that huge amount of work that we do in its unwaged form... The rhetoric of care, compassion and community is an attempt to make work not appear as work so that it does not have to be negotiated as such and remunerated.”

(2012 : 88).

From this perspective, the Big Society is a continuation of the marginalisation of the caring classes, an attempt to expand the concealed and mystified domain of reproductive work that is excluded from, or minimised in relation to, the cipher of economic value whilst simultaneously being the foundational possibility of that system of value. Commoning, in this dimension, is the attempt to return reproductive work to centre stage, to become attuned to and recognise its centrality in the continuation and flourishing of life.

If there is ‘a thesis’ to the following pages then, it is this: commoning is based upon the uncommons, that is the encounter of difference, and emerges as a grounded exploration of ecologies of living and forms of life in which communication and care are central practices and orientations. But this very ground of the uncommons, and the centrality of communication and care, whilst being the positive conditions for commoning are both its possibility and potential limit. The attempt to common may collapse back into uncommons, care can be run through with neglect, and communication can fall to noise.

It is these themes that I attempt to draw out in the following chapters, in all their inherent ambiguity, complexity and potential for misunderstanding and miscommunication, as well as the ever-present reality that my attention for one thing may lead to neglect for another. Chap-

ter one, *The Field and The Field*, explores the entangled formation of The Field, and my anthropological fieldsite. The chapter shows how the two were nested processes, that is how the emergence of my research project, methodology and fieldsite, was inseparable from the emergence of The Field as a proper noun, place and project. Drawing on contemporary proposals for social research methodologies, the chapter outlines the approach that I took during my research. Attention is also drawn to the points of overlap between commoning practices and anthropology. Both practices seek to explore the possibilities of human collectivity, and both do so through encounters with forms of difference. These points of overlap and intersection are drawn together through the notion of *commoning anthropologically*, a situated and awkward form of inquiry that asks about the possibilities of collective life. Running alongside this chapter are two textual ‘parasites’ which prefigure one of the central arguments of this thesis—that all communication across difference is run through with interference, static and noise from other channels. These parasites attempt to embody this proposal in the form of the text itself by running alongside the more academic and scholarly form of textual communication that this chapter enacts, and by introducing more experiential and affective material describing my experiences of some of the moments discussed in this chapter. In this way they attempt to set up spaces of communicative adjacency which both overlap and depart from the main body of the text, and which show how modes of communication are rarely univocal or simple.

The second chapter, *On What Commons?*, develops a partial literature review primarily based on the reading groups of the New Cross Commoners, a collective which preceded The Field and who were an important part of The Field throughout its development. The chapter outlines a particular notion of the commons and commoning, one that emerges as a form of struggle against the state and capital. This notion of the commons is one that is anti-capitalist, and anti-statist, looking to the commons as holding the potential to bring about social transformation and a post-capitalist form of life. The literature review is based on a selection of reading groups, discussions and workshops organised by the New Cross Commoners that occurred in locations and places directly

related to the texts themselves, enacting a form of situated and grounded study that sought to develop forms of practice from the theories of the commons.

Chapter three, *Communication*, examines the role of non-humans in the commons and The Field. Drawing on developments within posthumanism and other forms of social research which turn to material culture, objects, things, and beings other than humans, the chapter attempts to consider the commons as cosmopolitical ecological formation. The space of encounter here, is not only an encounter between human beings, but between a broad range of differences—buildings, environments, tools, materials, affects. This broader range of difference I refer to as difference-writ-large. It is through attending to these encounters with difference-writ-large that beings which have formerly been excluded from political activity can begin to be included in it. The chapter concerns an attempt to allow politics and political actions to become attuned to a broader range of agencies entities and beings through the composition of common worlds. Two primary conceptual devices are deployed in this chapter. First, through *the call of ruins* the chapter attempts to look at the force that the building itself, and its state of disrepair, enacted in the composition of the commons. Second, through a discussion of *communication*, the chapter attempts to expand communicative practices beyond the limited realm symbolic language to open possibilities of communication with other beings.

Following this chapter, we encounter the first of two major ‘parasites.’ As with the shorter adjacent parasites in Chapter One, they establish sites of adjacent communication that both overlap with and partly diverge from the main structure of the text and in so doing interfere with and transform other meanings elsewhere. This first parasite is a partial transcription of a long sound recording in which five people engage in a difficult and very dangerous building job without the proper skills, tools or knowledge. Alongside the clamour of the five human voices, I have incorporated the voice of the building and the materials itself, drawing them into the interruptive clamour that this section seeks to enact.

Chapter Four, *Four Fields of Politics*, sketches four forms of politics

that I identified as emerging from The Field. The first of the four fields outlined is that of transversal radical democracy, an opening towards a community comprised of anyone. This is the field that has been identified by some political thinkers as the primordial field of politics—a open and anarchic space in which difference is encountered and identities are disrupted. The second field is that of constitutive outsides. This is the field of oppositions between us and them, and friends and enemies, the field of antagonism and agonism. It is the field which enacts the inverse gesture of transversal radical democracy in which the opening towards anyone is closed and the political community locates its inside and points of exclusion. Third, the political force of relations to futures is sketched through a discussion of the relationship between the apophatic gesture of analysis, and the non-apophatic gesture of the imperative. This field emerges as a gap between an identified current state of affairs and a desired and desirable future, one which compels action and intervention. The final political field to be sketched is that of cosmopolitics. This final field is a stance of non-disqualification towards others and attempts to retain political modesty in relation to other ways of thinking, doing, communicating and being. This stance is one that attempts to guard against the premature closure of the political community, that attempts to keep it open to others.

Following these four political fields comes the second parasite which takes the form of a collation of visual materials that provide an adjacent narrative for the formation of The Field. The materials gathered here are ones that did not have a clear location within the main flow of the thesis, but nevertheless are useful in expanding its ethnographic depth. This section is free of text so as to not attempt to explain the visual through discourse, but rather to allow it to exist as its own modality of expression. The lack of text also seeks to show, in the form itself, that not all communicative interferences are audible, and can be ocular or relating to other sensory and affective registers.

The fifth chapter, *Commoning Beyond the Commons*, approaches the limits of commoning practices as they were found at The Field. The encounter with difference, that this thesis proposes should be considered as central to the commons, always brings with it the possibility of friction,

conflict and failure to construct common worlds. Some of these moments are discussed in this chapter. The title attempts to highlight the fact that commoning is a practice which takes place beyond the commons-- it is the moment at which commons attempt to recompose themselves in order to incorporate an element that was previously excluded, be it a person, an object, an idea or anything else. This practice highlights the fact that common does not simply mean a unity of the same, but a community in which differences come together whilst retaining their specificities. This is the (non)domain of the uncommons. Several conflicts that occurred at The Field are discussed to show how this is not always a smooth process, and how common worlds cannot always be successfully recomposed, and that at times uncommonalities proliferate. However, these uncommonalities are also the very possibility of the common as they mark the differences upon which the heterogeneous commons are founded.

The final chapter *Affective Activity and Careful Collectivity*, turns its attention to a theme that runs throughout the entire thesis—the importance of care in commoning. The chapter particularly focuses on care in relation to value, action and affect, looking at how they intersect and are entangled with one another. Drawing on personal experience, as well as the experience of other participants at The Field, the chapter develops a reconsideration of the notion of burnout through the lens of value, affect, care and neglect, to consider burnout as emergent of particular constellations of value, care and neglect that produce oppressive affective states. The proliferation of communicative failure, or noise and static, is discussed with a view to revealing a clamorous cascade of misunderstanding, resentment and neglect which produces the experience of burnout. The chapter seeks to demonstrate the importance of becoming attuned to a wide variety of modes of care in order for the composition of common worlds to be emotionally sustainable for participants.

The conclusion attempts to draw the preceding chapters together to examine some of the key emergent themes and additional problematic fields. The opening section offers a cautious reconsideration of the notion of commoning anthropologically given in chapter one, proposing that whilst it can be important for anthropologists to participate in the

composition of common worlds, this is not without its dangers, shortcoming and possible failures. Following this, commoning is examined as a practice of making-sense in which both communication and care function as existentially constitutive gestures. The question of difference is then returned to, examining how commoning produces further differentiation rather than its diminishment before turning to the problematic of 'differences which make a difference'. Finally, the chapter concludes with a brief discussion of the political moment in which my fieldwork concluded.

I have opted to list photographs and images in the appendix, rather than at the front with the table of contents, in order that this material may be permitted to speak for itself, rather than being subordinated to textual description. I have also not used any captions or numbering throughout the thesis for the same reason. In the second appendix a list of images can be found with the relevant page numbers. In this I have followed the example of Bourgois and Schonberg in *Righteous Dopefiend* (2009) with the exception that the images are not repeated for a second time in the appendix.

This text does not always achieve, or indeed strive for clarity. The political formations that it participates in themselves deny such a possibility. The modes of commoning that emerged in the three years of field work that form the basis of the text was one that could not always permit clarity. The emphasis on the encounter of difference, negotiation, experimentation, recomposition, flexibility, transversality and participation, produced modalities of politics that defy classification and clarity, that relish in the ambiguity emergent of the encounter of difference and the uncertainty that this entails. As Anna Tsing (2015) has discussed, encounters across difference entail indeterminacy and transformation, they are creative moments which bring with them contingency, uncertainty and ambiguity; as too does the persistence of forms of interference, noise and static. To attempt to cover over this uncertainty and ambiguity, and transparently communicate what was itself far from transparent, would itself conceal a large amount about commoning, it would fail to attend to the potential consequences of the question asked by Judith Butler, namely

“[w]hat doe “transparency” keep obscure?” (1999: xix). There is much that can be lost in striving for clarity for not everything is itself clear in the first place.

Throughout this text, and following the uncertainty that emerges of a politics of encounter and difference, “ambiguity is *itself* the generator of meaning” (Lepselter 2016: 34 emphasis original). I have then, not attempted to produce a coherent narrative of my fieldwork, or of The Field. I was asked by certain members of the collectives engaged with The Field to avoid this. I have not sought to represent the project or the others with whom I spent much of those three years, but rather to attempt to continue to engage with the tensions between us, between different ideas, subject positions, theories, political horizons, projects, and encounters. My experience was that neither the narratives of the project, or the idea, or the biographies of specific people, ever emerged as coherent or selfsame. There are then, many unresolved tensions, refrains, passages and ideas in this text, proposals that remain incomplete or unrealised, theorisations or considerations that seem to jar with one another, or even with themselves, that never emerge into a larger framework—academic or otherwise. There are interruptions, interference, disturbances, disjunctions, jolts, displacements. And this ambiguity and indeterminacy emerges as a positive condition of the text, rather than something to be ironed out.

As such, I aim towards a continuation of the tensions and resonances of encounter, always from my own partial perspective. When other voices speak, it is in conversation with me, it is through my own struggle to listen to and hear the other, to communicate with them through all the misunderstandings, misinterpretations and displaced meanings this inevitably implies—to discern their voice clearly amidst noise. I attempt to continue the ongoing tensions between complimentary, conflictual, conversational and communicative interactions of ideas, theories, practices, ideologies, people, places and things.

It is, however, useful to attempt to briefly clarify a three of key conceptual terms that I use in the following pages that are perhaps the most likely to succumb to static with potentially negative results. Each of these

terms will be returned to over the following chapters and elaborated further, but for now it is important to offer a few preliminary remarks on their use. The first of these terms is 'difference.' Drawing primarily on the works of Gilles Deleuze (e.g. 1988a; 2011), I understand difference not as a matter of opposition or contradiction, but as an emergent process of differentiation through repetition. Difference emerges through processes of becoming, it is less a matter of negating similarities than it is of affirming differences in their continual transformation and emergence. Differences are not set or static, but emerge through moments of encounter that produce differentiations, thus difference is closely associated to becoming and multiplicity, and at times appear to converge within Deleuze's work. Difference, throughout this thesis, does not refer to an opposition or contradiction between terms or identities, but to processes of encounter through which differentiations emerge and are created, differentiations which are not unitary, fixed or static, but multiple and in flux.

This emergence of differentiation through encounter brings us to the second of terms that I would like to briefly clarify, that is 'the other' and 'others.' It is a notion that has been the subject of much controversy within anthropology, and whilst it may be tempting to abandon it entirely, and not without good reason, when approaching matters of communication, (un)commonality and care the other cannot be easily wished away. As Fanon states, "to speak is to exist absolutely for the other" (2008: 8), that is to communicate, to express, is to address oneself to another. The manner in which these others are constituted and experienced is of vital importance in understanding the expressive, communicative and caring modalities of which they are part. As such, to avoid potential misunderstanding, it is important to mark how 'others' is used in this text. As with difference, the other does not here refer to an identity of contradiction or opposition, but rather to the experiential moment of recognising difference, that is the moment where difference is expressed and experienced as expression. The other, then, is an event rather than a subject. In considering the other in this way I have also drawn on Deleuze, who conceives of "the Other as *the expression of a possible world*" (2011: 261 emphasis original), as well as others such as Lacan (2006) and Levinas (2011) who open

pathways to understanding the other as experiential encounter. The other here is an event which opens possibility through its expressive encounter, it emerges as an invitation to other possibilities. How this invitation is received, whether it is entirely rejected, successfully accepted, clumsily negotiated, or maliciously rejected is a contingent matter that cannot be decided in advance, but the other as event and invitation here emerges as a threshold to another way of being, thinking, communicating or doing. The question then, is how these others are constituted and constructed, how they are related to, and what kind of invitation is heard from them.

Finally, I would like to clarify my use of a term that has risen to prominence in a number of social sciences of late, and that is the notion of 'common worlds.' A common world I understand to be a shared space of interdependency that facilitates the co-flourishing (Haraway 2008) of its participants. Common worlds, however, do not efface the emergent differences of participants, but establish mechanisms of care and communication that are capable of bringing them together without erasing them. They are constellations of sense, action, value and practice that open possibilities for communication and becoming-with (ibid). There is not however, in my usage, a (unitary) common world, or worse—*the* common world. Just as common worlds are internally heterogeneous and multiple, so too are they heterogeneous and multiple in relation to other common worlds. I have found some of the insights of Peter Sloterdijk's work on *Spheres* (2011; 2014; 2016) useful in providing mechanisms to conceptualise such dizzying proliferation of common worlds. To borrow from Sloterdijk's language, a common world is akin to *a bubble amidst foam*. It is a shared space of experience and sense, but one that is part of foam, an intersecting, expanding and shrinking aggregate of common worlds, all of which can impinge on each other, bounce off each other, puncture and pop one another. They are never settled or fixed but remain in composition. They are processes of worlding rather than existent or predestined forms. Commoning, then, is the practice of embarking on the foam of caring for and expanding and intersecting these bubble-worlds-in-process.

During fieldwork, it was often unclear to me where my thought began and ended. As my ideas, theories and practices were continually

articulated within the field of commoning, I could not easily separate my own theorisations from those of the collectives. This is perhaps unremarkable, for as Anna Tsing writes, “we are mixed up with others before we even begin any new collaboration” (2015: 29). Of course, there were times when differences were clearly marked, but others where the boundary was unclear. Where, in this text, differences are announced and expressed through different voices and subject positions, it is less with a view to assigning a certain opinion or theory to a certain person, but more with a view to reveal tensions, interactions, conflicts, encounters and resonances. I generally find that my own voice, both as the writer of this text and as a shifting series of subject positions within it, is not stable, and as such I do not ask that the voices of others manifest stability or coherence either.

I learnt of the commons, of commoning, and of this particular kind of political practice and thought, through the three years of participation at The Field. I had a vague awareness of the commons, mainly through the copy of Hardt and Negri’s *Commonwealth* (2009) that had sat on my bookshelf, mostly unread, for years, but I had never engaged with the theories and practices of the commons in any kind of sustained way. This period of participation in The Field then, was one of conversational education where I was drawn into a field of thought and practice with others. I could not be an external observer to the practices, processes and ideas that are the subject of this text. My own voice in writing merges with those of others, it is an open instrument, one which is always already run through with the voices of others, that is formed by the voices of others and which speaks to others. Theories, ideas, texts and stories come to us from the other and leave us to the other. There is never the moment where we can fix them down and declare them as our own.

CHAPTER 1

THE FIELD AND THE FIELD



My arrival at my fieldsite was gradual, messy and porous. There is a sense in which my fieldsite arrived, or better continued to travel, rather than me arriving at it. The fieldsite had its own agency in the emergence of my research. It did not simply await my arrival.

When I first entered the building on Queens Road that would later become The Field it was not as an ethnographer crossing *I* the threshold beyond which their research would begin. *s t e p* The basis of my initial engagement with The Field un- *across the* folded gradually over a course of time that also *threshold of the* unfolded the shifting horizons of my research *plot of land. Under-* in a way that meant the fieldsite did not *foot I travel from the slabs* pre-exist the research project, nor *of the pavement, to the cement* the project the site. At the point *aggregate that lies before the build-* at which I set foot across the *ing. It is a small and squat building, set* threshold of the build- *back from the pavement by a couple of meters.* ing, it was not as an *It is small, squat and grey. It was once white, but* anthropologist, *years of weathering have rendered it grey. The surfaces of* *paint have become dirtied and the surfaces beneath the paint* *have been revealed. The windows are broken. Many are boarded* *up. Some are simply broken.*

I step across the threshold. But the threshold is not clear. It is not clear until it is crossed. It is not clear where the pavement ends and where the plot on which the building sits begins. It is only when invited to cross this threshold that I notice that the building is there. It is only one story and being attached to the two story building that is the doctor's surgery on one side and neighboured by a two story house ethnographer, or researcher that I did so. At this time, at the beginning of 2014, I was attempting to develop a different research project, one that would explore the contemporary political economy and ecology of 'creativity' within London. My test fieldsites for this project had been various—artists working in studios in converted factories in Bermondsey, stop motion animators and musicians living and working in warehouses in Tottenham, advertising executives in SoHo, governmental discourse on the 'creative' industries, public art installations. The process of establishing the research project was unfolding as a gradual exploration of the possibility of locating field sites, an attempt to move from a theoretical and discursive consideration about the role of the notion of creativity in contemporary political economy, to an ontological domain in which I could observe empirically the effects these discourses produced. My first engagement with what would become The Field, then, can be understood as a continuation of

these processes—the search for and creation of fieldsites. I, with others, helped to create The Field, but the challenge it presented was quite different to that of observation, participatory or otherwise.

On first entering the building, as has been mentioned, I did not do so as a researcher but more as potential contributor to an emergent process. I had known several members of the collective that formed at The Field for years before, having been undergraduates alongside several of them and attended protests, occupations and demonstrations together, we shared certain political ideals, aspirations and horizons. We had shared late night conversations about the possibility of setting up what at that time was simply referred to as ‘a space.’ So it was in this context that my first engagements with The Field occurred. Enrolled as a part-time research student and working close to full-time, the hours I spent at The Field initially took place in what little spare time I had and occurred on the basis of specific

prefigurative devices. I refer to these devices as prefigurative

because they unfolded prior to my recognition of The Field as a space. I step inside. To walk through the door that looks unusable and as prefigurative I step inside. It is dark. It is dark and dank and the smell of rotting wood mixed with wet dust fills my nostrils and I cannot see far in front of me and to my left the wall is coated in a moist slime-like substance and to my right an archway opens up to a small dark room lit only by what little natural light can get through the few windows that are not boarded up and above me the roof is open and water is falling through and through the archway at my feet there is a hole in the floor where the floorboards have turned to sawdust and have

been eaten away and the room is filled with junk and the smell shifts from rotting wood to something far more foul. Something that I cannot identify.
site Something imposes itself upon me.
and The friends that invited me in step in behind me.
re - They tell me to watch out for my coat.
search To watch out for my shoes.
focus, and They are excited.
as such they This is their place they tell me.
played a pre- But I am uneasy.
figurative role I am sceptical.
in relation to the The building is dirty.
entire research pro- It is polluted.
ject. They manifested It is dangerous.
prototypical characteris- It makes me uneasy.
tics (Corsín Jiménez & Es- And I don't know who will clean it.
taella 2016; Corsín Jiménez I would not come back to the building for
2014b), that set-in motion pro- months
cess that modified the devices
themselves as ongoing open-ended
experiments. They functioned as de-
VICES in which processes re-inscribed
themselves, and which were in turn re-
inscribed by those processes in an ongoing
recursive feedback loop.

The earliest of these devices was the building itself. Each week I would go down to the building on one or both of the two days a week I had free and offer what unskilled work I could. Scraping paint off walls, chipping away at old plaster, sanding down doors, floorboards and shelves, clearing debris from the garden and rubble from the previous work, building planters and fixing window frames, walking the streets of New Cross looking for pallets or other discarded materials that could be of use—these were the practices which I engaged with initially

at The Field. Through this work I became gradually more engaged with the day to day life of the project, the ideas that were informing it and the processes that were occurring alongside the building renovation. I was included in e-mail discussions about the economy and direction of the project and invited to meetings, which initially I did not attend due to time pressures. Starting from the materiality of the building, I was drawn further into the formation of the project, and as I became more involved with the project, a series of other prototypical prefigurative devices emerged.

I began talking to people more about the specific needs of The Field, and where it was headed. The building work, it began to become apparent, was not only prefigurative to what would become my research, but also to The Field as a whole. The work was unskilled, unpaid, and exploratory. The point was not only to renovate the building, but also to explore the possibilities of self-organisation, of learning new skills together, of developing new relationships to one another and the city through this specific site. The process of exploring and caring for the building, was also a process of caring for one another, of producing common spaces, common vernacular knowledges, com-



mon affects, common social aggregates—in short, common worlds. As we explored the building and the process of building work we explored what the building could be and become. Conversations were had with passers-by, and ideas about the possibilities of the building were drawn in from regular and one-time visitors alike. Meetings and discussion were held probing the possibilities for the general economy of The Field.

Starting from the building other devices emerged. The need for someone to work on various digital platforms became apparent and having an amateur interest in web design and coding, and having my own hosting account, I volunteered myself. The website became another of the prototypical prefigurative devices. Groups of us would meet to discuss what we wanted the website to be, how we wanted it to function, what we wanted to communicate. We would try and write copy together, objecting to the use of certain words as being too academic, too hegemonic, too twee. Like the building, the website provided a platform from which to discuss the conceptual shape of The Field whilst maintaining a relation to a practical task—that of communicating and representing whilst exploring modes of collective expression.

After being informally involved for a few months I saw an e-mail circulating the Goldsmiths Anthropology Department calling for contributors for a zine based on the topic of ‘the makeshift city’ based on a two-day event to be organised in Hackney Wick comprised of a public debate and walking tour. The event formed part of an ongoing collaboration between public works, “a critical design practice set up in 2004 that occupies the terrain in-between architecture, art, performance and activism” (public works 2018), and Isaac Marrero-Guillamón, who would later become one of my doctoral supervisors.¹ Initially I engaged in this project from the perspective of the research project on ‘creativity,’ makeshift architecture being a mode of creative practice that challenges certain modernist conceptions of what it means to create. As I became more involved in the project, talking

1 In this instance these prefigurative devices also influenced and fed into the institutional infrastructure of my research in contributing to the choice of doctoral supervisors.

more with Isaac and the others involved, the affinities between make-shift architectural practices and The Field became clearer and it was proposed that we invite members of the collective to present at the public debate. At this point, what and who formed the collective of The Field was particularly unclear, and so it was the New Cross Commoners² who were invited to the public debate as the primary identifiable collective coalescing around the building.

We are stood in a playground in Hackney Wick.

We stand in a circle introducing ourselves.

It *I have a camera around my neck.*
was at *I don't really know how to use it.*
the public
debate, held ~~*I am anxious.*~~
at 90 Main Yard ~~*I have invited the Commoners to attend and have a pe-*~~
beside the River ~~*culiar feeling of individual responsibility.*~~
Lee Navigation canal,
when the New Cross *As we stand in this circle I see Commoners ar-*
Commoners stepped up to *riving and joining the circle. We smile and*
present, that it was said for the *nod at one another. Others text me to*
first time—'Toby is pretty much *say they are on their way.*
a commoner' and I was asked
to join them. If we are to look for a *Later we are sat upstairs at 90*
telic point of entry to the field, one that *Main Yard. The lights are*
marks a *dim. Illumination comes*
beginning, this moment could perhaps im- *from laptop screens*
perfectly stand in its place. However, there was *and the projected*
a sense in which I entered the field without being *power point*
aware that I had done so in a manner that makes any *presenta-*
after the fact attempt to locate a telic start to fieldwork *tions. The*
disingenuous. *hum of*

It was through these devices that my initial interactions *the*
with The Field unfolded. Each of them set a tone and prefig-

^{2e} The New Cross Commoners will be discussed in more detail in Chapter 2: *On What Commons?*

ured the way in which research would unfold. The building work, the website, the Wick Session established modes of collaboration through the materiality of the space, the structures and platforms *pro-* of organisation, and the epistemic exchange of discourses. *je c-* Each of these areas opened the fieldwork process as collabo- *tor fan* rative, collective and experimental, functioning as “[m] *rattles in* ethodological devices that allow us to intervene in so- *the back-* cial research through an experimental gesture in col- *ground. Oc-* laborations with our counterparts in the empirical *casional shouts* work.” (Estalella & Sanchez-Criado 2015: 2). These *are heard from a* devices were the foundation of my participa- *drama rehearsal tak-* tion in The Field, and they paved the way for *ing place in an adja-* my future contributions which took forms *cent room.*

such as other digital platforms, account-
 ing and bookkeeping, building and *The Commoners are called up*
 maintenance work, organisational re- *to speak.*

views and various other day to day *Someone jokes (a Commoner or*
 contributions to the project. These *not? —the distinction does not really*
 devices highlight the entangle- *matter or hold true) that half the audi-*
 ment of the formation of The *ence is to step forward. Those who do step*
 Field and the formation of *forward spread themselves out. They want*
 my research project and *to join with the audience, to be continuous*
 its fieldsite. The demar- *with them in a way that undoes the very possi-*
 cation and emergence *bility of a fourth wall. They look around to see who*
 of The Field and *else can join them, who else counts as a Commoner.*
 the field were in- *I am called up. Someone jokes that it will never end.*
 separable from *Someone agrees that it should never end, that it should*
 one another. *extend all the way from here to New Cross. I sit at the edge*
of the non-boundary between the presenters and the audience.
We begin to talk.
I still feel anxious.



THE AGENCY OF THEORY

There is a sense then, in which the epistemic work of defining my research project was also part of, and entangled with, the epistemic work of The Field. The formation of the conceptual directions of The Field, was also the formation of what became my research project. The two were nested processes, sharing common entanglements, inquiries and horizons. Through the process of becoming more involved with the project, engaging with the collective discussions, a series of questions unfolded. These were not questions that were exclusively mine, or that I asked alone, but questions that emerged collectively and that we sought to address collectively. The Field and the Commoners, as such formed examples of what Holmes and Marcus have referred to as “[e]pistemic communities” (2008a: 82). These are communities “in which “research,” broadly conceived is integral” (ibid) to their collectivity, communities which are already engaged in para-ethnographic practices (Holmes & Marcus 2005; 2008b). Research, then, was not something that was added by my project, or by the presence of the ethnographer’s gaze, but was something that was already present prior to a clear anthropological or ethnographic commitment on my part. On-

going inquiry and reflection formed a large part of the practices of The Field and the New Cross Commoners.³ Research was not something that I added to The Field, but something I became entangled with.

The immanent forms of enquiry already unfolding in the processes of self-organisation The Field was attempting posed both common questions and questions of the commons. They concerned the possibility of creating commons, and catalysts of commoning practices within the urban context of New Cross. This was a line of enquiry that many members of the collective had been engaged with for several years previously as the New Cross Commoners³, both prior to The Field and to my interaction with these processes. In the Commoners' 2013 publication, commoning was defined as

I) The activities through which a common is constituted and maintained, through which a resource, material and/or immaterial, comes to be used and organized collectively. These activities imply conflicts, negotiations and care. The conflicts are both antagonistic towards the market and privatization and towards the control of the State. On a different level conflicts and care take place amongst the different people using the resource.

II) Sharing a certain knowledge, thing or skill with people openly and with pleasure: Suzy thinks that commoning is not a concept but an embodied activity that needs time, space and care.

III) Any act through which you remove yourself (mentally, financially, socially) from the grips of State control and Market control.

The Field was in part a continuation of these lines of enquiry, an attempt to explore the possibility of commoning a building and creating a neighbourhood resource. These processes of enquiry, research and experimentation were unfolding long before I formalised

³ See Chapter 2: *On What Commons?*

a research project.

Terms in the definitions offered above such as 'conflict', 'negotiation' and 'care' signal to the need for ongoing emergent processes of collective learning and interaction. The conditions of organisation for a given resource are not given beforehand but are dependent on these ongoing processes of *negotiation*. Commoning is a process of ongoing *care* between people and resources, one in which attention is directed towards the collective, directed towards processes of taking care. As such, the processes of commoning are ones of ongoing research and collective education, of exploring and establishing the conditions in which the resource can be managed and used collectively. As such, commoning implies modes of pedagogy in that it concerns learning different ways of relating to one another and the world, ways of living and organising social aggregates differently. Practices of commoning express desires to establish different methods of social organisation that are not already given, and as such must be learnt collectively—this exploratory process is expressed in the description of The Field as “an experiment in creating a new institution of the commons, one for local, self-organised research, education and action” found on the Twitter page, or in the poster which adorned one of the boarded up windows briefly during the period of building work that described The Field as “an experiment in growing, building, sharing, learning, creating, collaborating, improvising.” Both these descriptions emphasise the pedagogic components of The Field as a site for exploratory learning practices and experimentation.

Such a process requires modes of research different to those practiced in the institutional setting of the university, but which nevertheless share points of overlap and intersection. Commoning, as such, is also the sharing, redistribution and collectivisation of knowledges and practices. What is more, the definition above clearly places the processes of commoning within the realm of struggle against capital and the state. In addition to the pedagogic project of learning and establishing how to common a particular resource, commoning also concerns the project of attempting to move beyond hegemonic social

structures, of exploring and establishing new modalities of collectivity that can be enacted and reproduced. The Commoners, as was expressed by Rebecca, one of the founding members, was established to try and close the gap between the commons as theory and commoning as practice. As they put it, The Commoners was established to

“try to create a group to discuss these concepts but to not just discuss the concepts and read texts about them but to also see how they connect to our lives ... There was a desire to say it all sounds fantastic when you read about it, how you share, negotiate, produce, reproduce, how you create community that is heterogenous and so on, but then also think, well what happens once you put this in practice”



Commoning, then, could be said to reveal itself as a mode of *praxis* understood both as purposeful activity targeted at bringing about change in the world, as the more Marxian genealogy would define it, and as actions incorporating ethico-political concepts and practices, as the more classical Aristolean definition could be argued to sug-

gest. As praxis, commoning presents an ongoing process of “reflection and action upon the world in order to transform it” (Freire 2005: 51). It acts upon the world in an attempt to alter it. It is a conscious and concerted effort to intervene in and direct the “production of material life” (Agamben 1999: 59). In this way commoning seeks to examine possible modalities of sociality through the practical transformation of material conditions. It seeks to locate tools for the transformation of ecologies of life. As one member of The Field and Commoners collectives put it to me when I began to speak about the ‘beauty’ of a concept, “I kind of want weapons, and don’t much mind if they’re ugly.” The aim of commoning was not distanced theoretical reflection, but action in a world with a view to transforming that world.

However, this practical focus does not mean that commoning, as praxis, as a wilful attempt to locate tools and methods of transformational and emancipatory potential, is devoid of relationships to theory. As Heidegger puts it in discussing the relation of theory and praxis,

““[p]ractical” dealings have their *own* way of lingering. And just as praxis has its own specific sight (“theory”), theoretical research is not without its own praxis.... It is by no means clear where the ontological boundary between “theoretical” and “atheoretical” behaviour really lies!”

(Heidegger 2010: 341 emphasis original).

Indeed, the praxis of the Commoners and The Field can in part be understood as an effort to bring theory into the domain of action, that is to enact commoning as a means of overcoming the false opposition of theory and practice that Heidegger challenges above, to see how theory becomes practice, to grant theory agency, or rather to support, enrich and enable the agency of theory. This is a way of conceiving of theory that is profoundly empirical, in that it brings with it concrete and practice-based manifestations and transformations; it is a theory that is put to work in the domain of practice in such a way as to collapse their initial separation. Thus, theory here has an empirical

character, it is manifest in worlds and enacts changes in those worlds. There are resonances here with what Goethe alluded to as “a delicate empiricism which makes itself utterly identical with the object, thereby becoming true theory” (Quoted in Robbins 2006: 1); an empiricism in which concepts also find their place in the picture of reality and as such must find their place in ethnographic practice as objects of empirical observation, not only as the tools and frameworks of the anthropologist.

Theory here is not understood as a distanced reflection, a mode of consciousness outside of everyday life, or as the ideational pinnacle of thought, an expression of the “supreme mind at the top of the ladder, ... the explanation of everything downwards” (Bateson 1971: 35). It is no longer given the role of explicator, of the plane of meta-analysis, but that of a tool, a device, of an instrument that brings about changes to what it is possible to achieve within a given state of affairs. The use of theory here is the use of tools, it is a mode of theory for which agency is not only recognised, but actively sort and enacted. As such, theory does not operate only in the domain of being present-at-hand (Heidegger 2010), of being an object of observation, consideration, abstraction and deliberation, but also moves over into the mode of being ready-to-hand (ibid), it is put to work and experienced through embodied action in the world, through being put to use. It is here that theory finds its tool-being (Harman 2002), that is it finds meaning in action, in a practice that is not devoid of theory, but borne of the interfacing of theory with the worlds to be created and transformed. Theory as a mode of tool-being changes what it is possible to achieve within a given state of affairs through enabling and expanding the agency of others whilst simultaneously expressing its own agency.

This is one of the meanings of the ‘theory’ of the commons for *The Field and The Commoners*—that of enabling us to think otherwise, to see otherwise and to practice otherwise, to enact and explore new futures through an ongoing process of research and collective pedagogy, to expand our field of vision. And for my own writing now,

MAKING NATIVES AND REMAKING THE SOCIAL

The formation of The Field was caught up with various trajectories, many of which connected it to Goldsmiths College. Several of the early members of The Field collective had attended Goldsmiths previously, some still did, and some worked there. Likewise, the New Cross Commoners also emerged from milieus connected with Goldsmiths. Not only was the Commoners emergent from a desire to engage with theory differently, that is as praxis, but it also came from a desire to do so starting from everyday life in New Cross. As Rebecca, explains in an interview in 2013 for Uncut Talks,

we are all living in New Cross, we have a connection because we come to Goldsmiths to study, but there was not much we would do in between studying at Goldsmiths and our homes, so we would basically cycle to college maybe go to the pub, cycle back home, and then go to the city centre for cultural activities and then to say, well couldn't we live the neighbourhood differently and try to see what is there already going on ... because I think there was this feeling of New Cross being a bit run down, not so exciting, somehow, everything is concentrated at Goldsmiths, there is not so much cultural activity going on around it, that was sort of the sensation we had, and then starting with the New Cross Commoners to actually go to visit places, like the library, housing co-ops, house boat communities, community gardens, we realised that actually a lot is going on and that it's a vibrant place to be

The Commoners, came from a desire to move outwards from Goldsmiths, to explore the area in which Goldsmiths is situated differently, and in so doing find means of commoning some of the enclosures the university enacts. These enclosures were multiple, referring at once to the material space in New Cross that was closed off to those

without the required authorisation, and the enclosure of knowledge that Goldsmiths enacted as a neoliberal academy. And it was this gesture, this outward movement, that was in part understood under the banner of commoning, the gesture of moving outward from enclosures and in so doing, producing, locating and sustaining commons.

These outward movements reiterate what was perceived as a disconnection of Goldsmiths from the local area. As Rebecca said above, the engagement of students or staff at Goldsmiths with the surrounding area was often very limited, and as with so much of urban life in London, was limited to certain enclaves and well-trodden routes. The situation was similar for me. I had studied at Goldsmiths for many years, but my interactions with New Cross and the surrounding areas were largely limited to the kind of activities pointed to above—attending events or lectures at Goldsmiths or going to the pub with friends and colleagues. For me, as with the other commoners, this outward movement of exploration constituted a new form of engagement with New Cross.

The process of renovating the building on Queens Road that would become The Field led us to new places and to meet new people—for the first time we would begin to explore the vast industrial estates between New Cross and Surrey Quays looking for a good deal on certain building materials, or we would walk the streets looking for discarded items. We would meet traders of reclaimed materials under the railway arches between Queens Road Peckham and Peckham Rye, their makeshift structures piled high with different lengths of timber. We would strike up conversations with local industrial bakers,



fine art packagers, shop owners and others, and come to arrangements where they would donate to us their surplus goods. And as we worked each day in the building, new people would look in to speak to us, interested in what was happening to a building they had passed for many years but had always been dilapidated and boarded up. We would meet people who had experienced New Cross in different ways—foragers who knew where all the fruit and nut trees in the area were, in private and public



areas, and would collect them regularly, local history enthusiasts who could tell us where the underground rivers ran, and hoarders, or so the Council called them, who would walk the streets with a sharp eye, looking for discarded items they could add to their collections. We would meet people passing by after coming from the Dr's surgery next door. And one night we would walk the streets with a heterodyne detector to explore the relationship between gentrification and the bat population in the area.

Entangled with and emergent from these processes my fieldwork became one of collective exploration and experimentation. I began within a milieu fairly familiar to me, in which I was already engaged—namely, that of Goldsmiths. Rather than going native, we made natives, and made ourselves our own natives. Our sense of belonging, the formation of the group or *ethnos*, was moulded through the construction of commons. Through the practices I have pointed to above, we engaged in processes of remaking the social. Here, I draw on and adapt Bruno Latour's title *Reassembling the Social* (2007). In so doing I wish to draw attention to the agency of nonhumans in the assemblages with which we engaged—the building, tools, the city,

discarded items, bats, documents, theoretical concepts, among others actants all become important components in the collectives and commons. And as will be discussed later, these nonhuman agencies are integral to commons and must be properly considered and accounted for. Such nonhumans played significant and transformative parts in the processes in which we engaged.⁴ However, in shifting from *reassembling* to *remaking*, I wish to move away from Latour and ANT's emphasis on description, shifting the focus instead to experimentation and intervention, that is a process of construction and engagement with the unknown. Where ANT can at times appear to attempt to aim towards a fly-on-the-wall form of research, one where the researcher seeks to become invisible and only describe what is already there, the form of research practice I am attempting to describe was far from neutral, rather it was implicated in the active co-production of situations and sites. There was a political commitment from the beginning, one that means epistemologies of observation are perhaps less appropriate here than epistemologies of experimentation. That is rather than reassembling what is already present through the act of descriptive writing and observation, we collectively sought to make and effect situations, collectives and contexts through experimental interventions.

EXPERIMENTAL ETHNOGRAPHIC INTERVENTION

This shift to *remaking*, that is to the construction of fieldsites as the site of ethnographic encounters, realigns the field as a domain of experimentation. This is not a term that I am introducing myself. Experimentation was a practice and notion that was drawn upon by various members of the collectives. The Field was described in many ways, but often in terms of experimentation. The project itself was described as 'an experiment in constructing a new institution of the commons.' In several of the various documents that described which groups, individuals and projects could use the space, it was said that

⁴ See Chapter 3: *Communication*

it was available to those 'experimenting with alternative political and economic organisation.' There was also discussion of experimenting with ourselves, with our individuality, the way we ordered our lives, our personal relationships, our needs and desires. Self-organisation itself was seen in terms of experimentation, as an attempt to explore possibilities of collectivity.

Several events organised at The Field structured themselves around practices of experimentation. One such event, the Fear and Anxiety Group, which soon became the Undoing Fear and Anxiety Group, emerged in such a manner. The initial meeting took place in the garden of The Field one evening in the summer of 2014. It was one of the longer days of the year, granting us those additional hours of half-light where the disappearance of the daytime is drawn out and extended and an atmosphere of hazy calm gradually settles until late. A time when the city appears to calm, as though drawing a long breath before night. Around twenty people met in the garden. There was no electrical supply in the building, which remained a building site scattered with the tools and materials that had been used during that day's work of sanding back rafters, attaching floorboards and repairing windows. The interior of the building was covered with a thick layer of sawdust which would stick in the corners of your eyes at the end of each day. So instead, we met in the garden which was, at that time, little more than a concrete yard. It was still a major improvement on its former state—at the very least it was clear. We pulled together a circle out of the mismatching chairs we had, and the benches we had built out of discarded timber and scaffold boards. Several people sat on logs.

We had come together to read *We're All Very Anxious: Six Theses on Anxiety and Why It is Effectively Preventing Militancy, and One Possible Strategy for Overcoming It* (Plan C 2014). The text proposed specific relationships between precarity, capital and anxiety, concluding with the proposal that new forms of consciousness raising groups are needed to focus on precarity and the construction of anxiety inducing situations. The suggestion was not read as a prescription, but as an

invitation to engage in an open-ended process of exploration. We discussed the specificities of the text, the problems we found with it, and what we found exciting, and agreed to meet again to explore where we might go next. The process that unfolded was one of gradually setting the boundaries to a collective, one in which participants discussed future directions as their possibilities emerged, leading to workshops on a range of topics that were uncovered as relating to anxiety. It was a process which engaged with an exploration of unknown possibilities without seeking to entirely predetermine the context or results. Gradually boundaries were set, but interestingly as more boundaries became set the number attending dwindled—it is hard to say why, but after a couple of months, the process drew to a close. The experiment had not failed, but rather its openings and closures became folded into other open-ended, experimental practices.

Such a notion of the experiment engages in encounters with the unknown; that is, with the active construction of conditions the result of which are unknown. In *Leviathan and the Air Pump* Schaffer and Shapin (1985) explore the nature of experimentation through the case of Robert Boyle's research in pneumatics and his air-pump experiments. They demonstrate a displacement of certainty in emergence of the epistemology of the experiment as introduced in the history of English empiricism by Boyle and his followers, which proposed "all that could be expected of physical knowledge was "probability," thus breaking down the radical distinction between "knowledge" and "opinion."" (ibid: 24). The links between knowledge and the absolute, philosophy and the god-king, are displaced here, opening a ground of controversy and conflict between knowledges. But with *The Field* we are talking about a gathering of people, a building, a political project, rather than an air pump. To take the claim that *The Field* developed an experimental practice seriously, it may be of use to be reminded of Schaffer and Shapin's proposal that "[s]olutions to the problem of knowledge are solutions to the problem of social order" (ibid: 332). The question of experimental knowledge is, then, inseparable from the organisation of the social, its remaking; the question of epistemology

inseparable to the question of politics. They are questions of forms of life, of possibilities for anthropos—Aristotle’s (1970) political animal.



The controversy between Hobbes and Boyle reveals not only the struggle to establish the hegemony of a certain mode of knowledge production, but also the struggle for other political possibilities. When Hobbes rejects the experimental practices of Boyle, he also rejects the contingency that this brings with it, the opening of a domain of political and epistemological indeterminacy, the questioning of dissidents and heretics. This contingency threatens the divine authority of the *Leviathan* (1985), the arbiter of social order, and so too knowledge according to the natural order. But it is this very displacement, this severance of the divine hierarchy which is unified under the figure of the Leviathan, that opens the possibility of politics. It is this negotiated contingency, that takes place between a scientific community as it does through political debate and struggle, that is pointed to by Rancière when he writes,

“[t]hat is effectively when politics commences: when the principle of government is separated from the law of kinship, all the while claiming to be representative of nature; when it invokes a nature that cannot be confounded

with the simple relation to the father of the tribe or to the divine father.”

(2006: 40).

A certain mode of politics begins with the experiment, with the opening of a space of contestation and indeterminacy that resists resolution by the divine father or *Leviathan*, with the acknowledgement of the very void that Hobbes could not admit.⁵ Boyle not only constructs the fact of the vacuum, but also gives form to the void integral to politics,⁶ a void emergent of experimental modalities which existed before his air pump, but nevertheless find a place in the ordering of discourse through it. Rather than a unification of the body politic, the experiment introduces the space of dissensus, a lack, an ongoing displacement of assurances and fixed identities, as the space in which divergent and contingent positions negotiate, bear witness to one another, construct their ontological conditions of existence.

Such experimentation is a form of constructive intervention, one where there is no certainty regarding the effect of the conditions constructed. There may be varying elements of predictability, but not certainty. This lack of certainty is a void that is at once epistemological and political. And it is this very lack of certainty, the void created by the displacement of arbitrary authority, that contributed to the formation of the experimental community as an ethical community. It was in this historical community that publicists of the early Royal Society located a use of free discourse, of negotiation and debate, that did not lead to the fearful Hobbsian war of all against all, but to a practice of consensus construction, a constructed consensus that rested upon

⁵ This is not a historically chronological claim that such a mode of politics did not exist prior to Boyle. This would undoubtedly be an absurd claim. Rather, the controversy between Boyle and Hobbes is but one manifestation of a conflict between attempts to eternalise knowledge and authority, and what Rancière refers to as the commencing of politics, it is but one example of a point at which the absolute authority that denies the possibility of Rancièrian politics was undone and challenged. But a moment that is particularly relevant here as it was the experiment that brought this challenge.

⁶ This void that is integral to politics is one of the recurrent points made by Slavoj Žižek—see for example *The Ticklish Subject: The Absent Centre of Political Ontology* (2008b).

dissensus, a commencing of politics. The experimental community emerged as a polis that was not dependent on the rule of the master, but employed mechanisms of self-organisation, in that it internally established rules and conventions to regulate the behaviours of its members and its community boundary.

This community was not a boundless one, open to all, but one constructed around a series of boundary conventions, one that allowed for the formation of a common space around which this community could coalesce. There is a sense in which the scientific community was not public, as observed by Hobbes (Schaffer & Shapin 1985), but rather established a common space—it was in theory open, but to those who took on, learnt and developed the values and value practices that formed the boundaries and regulated the behaviours of the community.

What this scientific community engaged with were practices of knowledge production, the construction of facts. Stengers describes the fact emergent of experimentation as “an artifact, a fact of art, a human intervention.” (2010: 50). For *The Field*, the domain of experimentation was that of political organisation, the space in which difference is encountered⁷. Its technical apparatus was the building itself, and the possibilities of encounter that it facilitated. There was a coming together of interventionist political praxis, with modalities of experimentation. In this way, the process of experimentation merged with a political praxis that sought to interrupt the regularity of everyday life and the expected, drawing on a tradition with echoes of the situationist *dérive*, “a mode of experimental behaviour linked to the conditions of urban society” (Knabb 2006: 52). What the experimental practices of *The Field* produced were also modes of knowledge here embodied not only in the discursive practices of the collective, but also in the form of the building, the codes and structures that mediated interaction and contribution to the commons, and the identity of the collectives that coalesced around the building.

But as we have already noted, these experimental interventions

⁷ See Chapter 4: *Four Fields of Politics*

took place in an environment quite different to those of Boyle's air pump and the tradition of experimental science that followed. This domain of experimentation bears some similarities to that opened by ethnographic practice. As Roger Sansi writes, "the experimental field where anthropologists work is not a controlled site, isolated from the outside, like scientific labs used to be; but it is ... the world of everyday life." (2015: 138). The field of experimentation in which ethnographers and anthropologists engage is open-ended, subject to contingency. As has been regularly observed, ethnographers begin fieldwork not knowing what they will find. The experimental field of ethnography cannot be subject to the same level of control, the same disciplining of technical apparatuses, that is sought for in laboratory conditions. Nevertheless, there remain common threads in the opening to contingency through which experimental science displaced certainty by probability (Schaffer & Shapin 1985), and in the creative construction of knowledges as facts of art, be they manifest in practices, materialities, concepts or collective formations.

The notion of experimentation that has emerged is one marked by contingency and creation. But it is a contingency that is greater than the displacement of certainty by probability, and a creation that is looser than the ordering of a technical apparatus. There is a shift in the foregrounded aspect of the experiment to "the experimental as a social process." (Corsín Jiménez 2014b: 382). We have perhaps arrived at an understanding of experimentation that, whilst sharing similarities with that of Boyle, comes closer to an artistic mode. So, we can now turn to a different domain of experimentation, whilst reminding ourselves of Stengers' (2010: 50) observation that the fact emergent of the experiment is a fact of art.

Joseph Beuys, the German social sculptor, spoke of his practice as follows,

I know a lot before a start an action. I know a lot about the necessity of the general idea of sculpture, but I don't know anything about the process in which the action will

run. When the actions runs, my preparation works, because I am prepared to do a thing without knowing where it goes. You see, it would be a very uninteresting thing – it would have nothing to do with art – if it were not a new experiment for which I have no clear concept. If I had a clear concept of solving the problem, I would then speak about the concept and it wouldn't be necessary to make an action. Every action, every artwork for me, every physical scene, drawings on the blackboard, performance, brings a new element in the whole, an unknown area, an unknown world.

(Beuys quoted in Carin 1993: 73)

For Beuys, it would not be art if it were not a new experiment. It would not be art if it did not partake in an exploration of the unknown, if it did not create something through engagement with the unknown. There are parallels here to both ethnography and *The Field*. *The Field* began knowing a lot—it followed from the long process of reflection initiated by the New Cross Commoners,⁸ but it did not know what would happen on attempting to put these ideas into practice through a building. The Commoners themselves wrote, before I had met many of them,

“To occupy a building has advantages and disadvantages that are difficult to weigh before taking action: on one side the intensity of the political engagement would increase and could attract more and different kinds of people, on the other, occupying would require more energy, involving a more continuous commitment and most probably a very nomadic and precarious existence.”

(2013: 6)

Likewise, as ethnographers we know a lot, or at least some things, about anthropology, but we do not know what we will find,

⁸ See Chapter 2: *On What Commons?*

what we will write about. A component of this uncertainty is perhaps a result of the fact that what The Field, Beuys social sculptures, and ethnography seek out are encounters, and encounters always bring with them an unknown remainder, a void, a commencing of politics. Anna Tsing writes that

“[u]npredictable encounters transform us; we are not in control, even of ourselves. Unable to rely on a stable structure of community, we are thrown into shifting assemblages, which remake us as well as our others.”

(2015: 20).

The ethnographic encounter, the encounter of the other in the common, the encounters of Beuys with visitors to the *Bureau for Direct Democracy* (Beuys & Schwarze 2006), are transformative of self and other, they engage in creative transformations emergent of experimental interventions.

My own practice as an anthropologist and ethnographer became folded into the experimental processes of The Field. My fieldsite itself was perhaps even one of the facts of art that emerged from it. To return to the example of the Fear and Anxiety group, I collaborated with one other group member to facilitate a session based on anxiety and the urban environment. We selected a series of texts exploring the urban environment, and particularly excerpts from *Pathologies of Modern Space: Empty Space, Urban Anxiety, and the Recovery of the Public Self* (Milun 2007). I had been reading this text already as part of my ongoing graduate studies, which at that time were yet to settle at The Field as a fieldsite. But the text was not the primary method of the session. We explicitly discussed ‘experimenting’ with walking as a method, with exploring “the city as a self-eliciting pedagogical form” (Corsín Jiménez & Estalella 2016: 16). We met in the middle of Fordham park. The seasonal cycle had advanced quite significantly by this point and so it was dark when we met. Two of us stood in the middle of the park’s playing field at the agreed time and as we waited, gradu-

ally around 10-15 other figures slowly joined us from the edges of the park. As each person joined we could see others progressing from the lit paths and margins of the park, to the dark centre where we stood.

Once assembled we completed a brief grounding exercise in an effort to better attune our senses to the environmental shifts through which we would be passing. Asking everyone to attempt to remain as silent as possible whilst walking, and instead focus on the environmental transformations, we set off. We walked from the park to the road running parallel to New Cross Road, passing through the edges of several housing estates on the way. The road that we walked along played host to the rears of the shops on New Cross Road. The sound of air conditioning units accompanied us as we walked, constituting a soundscape of varying yet constant mechanical singing set against the shifting roar of the traffic on the other side of the shops. Piles of boxes, stock cages and large bins lined the sides of the road. Eventually we joined the A2 before descending the hill into the car park of the commercial unit hosting Sainsbury's, one of the empty spaces Milun considered as productive of agoraphobia (2007). Leaving the car park, we continued along quieter residential roads before arriving at the busy intersection where New Cross Road meets Old Kent Road and Queens Road, the pavements lined with multiple bus stops on either side. From here we returned to The Field to discuss the experience. I sat in the middle of the circle, on the floor, with a large piece of paper and a series of pens, attempting to produce some kind of mind map on the basis of the discussion underway.

Through this process a modality of collective experimentation can be seen to be interacting with my own emerging research practice. To paraphrase James Oliver and Marine Badham in their contribution to the notion of ethnographic conceptualism (2013: 157), there was no commons to be studied; but the practice was the common(ing).⁹ My own research interests, practices and knowledges, were inescapably entangled with those of The Field—the emergence of The Field and of the field(site) were inseparable. I simultaneously engaged in the con-

⁹ The quote I am paraphrasing here is “there is no object by the practice; the practice is the object(ive) (Oliver & Badham 2013: 157)

struction of a fieldsite, and the literal bricks and mortar construction of The Field. This component of my research methodology finds parallels with Ssorin-Chaikov's fourth thesis for ethnographic conceptualism, namely that the research practice "constructs the reality that it studies, [...] this means it actually fabricates the unknown" (2013: 16). This proposal for ethnographic conceptualism develops something that anthropologists have known now for a long time—that we actively create and transform the groups that we study (Clifford & Marcus 2008; Wagner 1975). But it seeks to move beyond an acknowledgement that anthropologists depict groups, and in their depictions, transform them, and instead make this creative intervention, this experimental practice, a positive methodology available to ethnographers. In so doing, it extends an acknowledgement of the transformative and inventive character of the ethnographic encounter, to the point where it becomes "a self-conscious device" (Murawski 2013: 66) that partakes in the construction of the situations, groups and collectives that also become the focus of study.

The infrastructure of my fieldwork methodology was nested in the emergent infrastructure of The Field—both sought towards the construction of encounters that could be productive of knowledges and facts of art. There was a dimension of The Field that served as a prototype of my fieldwork, and components of my research practice that functioned as prototypes for The Field. There were attempts at multifaceted constitutions of "a culture of mutual learning" (Corrín Jiménez & Estalella 2016: 5), which would take social processes themselves as their domain of discovery. Through this dual process in which The Field (partly) infra-structured my research and my own research (partly) infra-structured The Field, there operated openings by which both The Field and fieldsite were transformed and enabled by one another. Infrastructure here takes on the characteristics of a verb, to infrastructure, thus highlighting the creative and processual nature of the interactions which became enabling of the production of facts of art. The Field emerged through this reversible infrastructuring less "as the object of [...] ethnography but as its enabling infrastructure"

(ibid: 15); it emerged not as an object of enquiry, but both ethnography and *The Field* functioned as enabling infrastructures productive of facts of art, some of which emerge as anthropological knowledge, and others as different forms of knowledge expressed in modalities other than discourse and text such as practices, objects, political organisations, zones of encounter.

These ethnographic modes such as ethnographic conceptualism (Ssorin-Chaikov 2013), ethnography as prototyping (Corsín Jiménez & Estalella 2016), and experimental collaboration (Estalella & Sánchez Criado 2018)—alongside other collaborative anthropologies and ethnographic practices—open the way to forms of constructivist anthropological practice that are not only constructivist in the epistemological sense, but also in ontological ones. They open forms of research practice where “[t]he experimental becomes a distinctive articulation of the empirical work of anthropologists shaping their relationships in the field collaboratively.” (ibid: 12). Such methods aim towards participation in the construction of the social realities in which they participate, be they experiments, prototypes, practices, collectives, situations, projects, or any number of other devices. It is not only disciplinary knowledge that is constructed alongside action in such processes, but also contexts for action and further constructive situations, and the knowledges that are constructed continue to participate in these actions and situations as well as encounters yet to come. It is not outside the realities it studies but participates in their composition. As Ssorin-Chaikov puts it, “In contrast to ethnography as participant observation of what exists, ethnographic conceptualism explicitly constructs the reality that it studies.” (2013: 8). We no longer strain to read over the shoulder of the person to whom culture belongs (Geertz 1973: 452), but interpret, discuss and re-compose our common worlds in conversation with them, we write, re-write, typeset and bind the text which we read together and then cut it up and dissemble it to initiate the experimental process again. Perhaps then, such constructivist anthropology, constructivist in this ontological sense, is also a mode of praxis. But here it is a mode of praxis liberated from the human-centric grand

narratives of Marxism and friend/enemy models of politics,¹⁰ a praxis that is the active participation of anthropology and ethnography in the composition of common worlds. It is an insurgent constructivism, but one that attempts to retain the modesty of the cosmopolitical figure of the idiot (Stengers 2005). It stays with the question, with the common exploration of the incomplete and possible, the uncertain, contingent and unknown.

COMMONING ANTHROPOLOGICALLY: ETHNOGRAPHY, THE OTHER AND THE COMMON

To conclude this chapter, I would like to state more clearly some of the points of convergence between anthropology and commoning that emerged through my engagement with *The Field*. In doing so, I am aiming towards outlining this methodological approach as a practice of *commoning anthropologically*. This conjunction of terms seeks to draw out the entanglement of the two nested forms of practice that cut across both ethnographic engagements, and the processes of commoning, as they characterised my research practice.

To begin this elaboration of the practice of commoning anthropologically, I would like to propose a recuperation of the much problematised notion that anthropology is the study of the other, or as Marc Augé puts it “anthropological research deals in the present with the question of the other” (Augé 2008:15). The constitution of the other by anthropological discourse has rightly been the subject of much critique (e.g. Minh-Ha 1989; Said 1994; Fabian 2002). But here, I would like to work with an altered conception of the other. I would like to consider that to say that the anthropologist examines the other is simply to say the experience of the anthropologist with others is the area of anthropological inquiry, it is the space of ethnographic encounter, the space through which we enter into communication with others to produce knowledge. This is an important amendment, for the other

10 See Chapter 4: *Four Fields of Politics*

in such a characterisation is not a distant other, marked by an insurmountable alterity, or inhabiting a different temporal landscape, or the bearer of an entirely unfamiliar culture, or the shadow of the same, but more modestly, the other to which we address ourselves when we speak and by whom we are in turn addressed, the other which acts upon us and upon which we act, the other which we encounter. The other then is the experience of emergent difference through encounter. It is an event. This is a conception of the other that appears as closer to the psycho-analytic other, whom through the desire of the self is mediated (Lacan 2006), or the existential other with which we come face to face (Levinas 2011) and in so doing find ourselves through communication. It is the other that is not the self but is nevertheless inextricably implicated in the formation of self.

To say that anthropos, the opening domain of anthropological enquiry, is a political animal (Aristotle 1970), is to say that it is always found entangled with others. It is to say that human-being is entangled and knotty. That being human is to be subject to infinitizing cascades of contingent relations with others. But even if anthropos is the opening domain of anthropological enquiry, this very opening, and the entanglement that it brings with it, means that anthropology does not stop at anthropos, but brings into it all kinds of other beings—objects, materials, ideas, animals, plants, chemicals, bacteria etc. For whilst we may not strictly always speak with them, we nevertheless encounter these others. These other beings are also included in the space of otherness, a space that due to the fleetingness of its horizon, resists closure. This expansive otherness, or ‘difference-writ-large’, will be returned to later,¹¹ but for now it will suffice to state that anthropos is a being that is entangled with others.

This entanglement with difference is not only the domain of anthropological enquiry, but also that of commoning. In the broadest sense, the commons concern experimental explorations of “the shared substance of our social being” (Žižek 2009), or put differently, it is the knotty space of entanglement with others, the space in which our

11 See Chapter 4: *Four Fields of Politics*

desires, thoughts, and actions are enfolded with others. In Latour's words, "there is another name for overlap, another name for fold, another name for enfolding, and that is *Commons*." (2006: 13-4 emphasis original). The exploration of the commons is the exploration of how it is possible to organise anthropos as a political animal, it is an exploration of what possible common worlds we might forge together, of how we might live together with others, what facts of art we might produce.

Such a conception of commoning resonates with a certain way of engaging with anthropology. This conception of anthropology is not an entirely new one, but one that has been expressed in numerous ways throughout the course of the discipline. We might turn to the question posed by M. F. Ashley Montagu to Melville J. Herskovits where he asks, "[s]hould anthropologists contribute their special skills and knowledge to the betterment of the world in which they live, by actively participating in the process of building a new world?" (1946: 666). The implicit response to this question appears as 'yes', but here we may want to add a minor but nevertheless important amendment, that we replace the injunctive 'should', with a softer 'can', so as not to disqualify other ways of conceiving of practicing anthropology. But the point remains, that anthropology as an exploration of anthropos can participate in the collaborative constitution of common worlds, of contributing to exploring ways of relating to the other. A more contemporary formulation of a comparable sentiment can be found expressed by Tim Ingold, who writes, "[a]nthropology is studying with and learning from; it is carried forward in a process of life, and effects transformations within that process." (2013: 3 emphasis original). Anthropology here is a collective learning process where we learn and act with others to bring about transformations, it is a form of praxis, an engaged theory which participates in the construction of common worlds.

One further example of a such a sentiment can be found in the opening lines of David Graeber's *Possibilities*, where he outlines his initial attraction to anthropology.

“I was drawn to the discipline because it opens windows on other possible forms of human social existence; because it served as a constant reminder that most of what we assume to be immutable has been, in other times and places, arranged quite differently, and therefore, that human possibilities are in almost every way greater than we ordinarily imagine.”

(2007: 1)

Here is found an expression of anthropology as an exploration of other times and places in which we find common worlds that are organised otherwise. Graeber points to the fact that anthropology can draw our attention to the full spectrum of possibilities for anthropos, that it shows us that what is presented to us as natural and eternal, is in fact historically constituted and contingent; that groups have organised themselves differently in the past and elsewhere. This realisation is an expression of what Rancière referred to as the commencing of politics, the realisation that political systems and structures are not eternal and unchanging sets of natural laws, but contingently fabricated arrangements through which the collective life of anthropos becomes organised.

The moment of the ethnographic encounter is the moment of attempting to participate in these arrangements in such a way as to better understand them. It is a communicative encounter in which we come face to face with others in an effort to engage in the common worlds in which we and they are enmeshed, and in doing so we come to participate in their fabrication and recomposition. It is the moment of finding a way to accept the invitation of “the Other as *the expression of a possible world*” (Deleuze 2011: 324 emphasis original), and so too an invitation to partake in the construction of possible common worlds. Above, when Graeber points to the dimension of anthropology that reminds us that anthropos is organised differently in different times and places, the future is not explicitly stated as one such other time and places. Nevertheless, as he continues, the aim of the essays collect-

ed in the text which these words open is to “keep possibilities open” (2007: 1). Keeping possibility open is a matter of attending to the future. Whether the anthropologist is seeking to understand a culture that pre-exists their engagement with it, or whether they are partaking in the construction of the reality that they study, there remains a futural element—there is a fact of art that they are aiming towards, and this fact of art is manifest in the ethnography. The ethnography is a fact of art emergent of encounters with others.

In returning to the proposal that both commoning and anthropology concern the question of the other, that is that they refer to the shared substance of our collective being and its possibilities, the notion of commoning anthropologically may begin to become clearer. Both anthropology and commoning concern relations to others and the manner in which these relationships to others are and can be organised. There is a sense then in which anthropology already deals with the question of the commons, the shared space of otherness in which the self is immersed. And conversely, there is a sense in which commoning already concerns anthropos, that is the manner in which the polis is organised, the manner in which life becomes structured, the possibilities for human collectivity. It is here, in this overlap, that the dimension and practice of commoning anthropologically emerges, as a mode of research which enquires into the possibilities for the construction of common worlds, one that participates in the construction of these common worlds. A mode of inquiry in which method, theory and object of study converge—I practiced commoning to learn about commoning and to participate in the construction of common worlds. There is a recursive feedback loop where practice informs theory, and each informs and guides composition, a loop in which each of these communicative relations are reversible and intersectional.

But it is not a matter of a total collapse of the two domains and practices of commoning and anthropology, a collapse where the two domains converge to such an extent as to become indistinguishable. Rather, I consider this relationship between commoning and anthropology to be better conceived of in terms of a *situated, awkward relation-*

ship. The awkwardness of this relationship I take from Marilyn Strathern (1987), the situatedness from Donna Haraway (1998). Below each component is examined in turn.

Strathern writes of an awkward relationship between feminism and anthropology, a relationship where at times the two discourses learn from one another and collaborate, and at others they enter into productive tensions and conflicts. At times they are in agreement, at others they offer challenges to one another. At times the two converge, at others they come apart, sometimes speaking together and sometimes becoming highly critical, even mocking of one another, but they remain in an awkward tension that is productive and beneficial to the development of both. This awkwardness was found also in my role as ethnographer at The Field. There were times when other members of the collective would be highly suspicious of me, and of academia more generally, particularly in relation to matters concerning the enclosure of the university through privatisation, but also through the use of theoretical terms, languages and modes of thought that appeared somehow separated and abstracted from the messy domain of lived experience.

These tensions unfolded in the first meeting at which I proposed to conduct my doctoral research at The Field. The meeting was itself at times awkward and uncomfortable, and at others took a more collaborative tone. One person at the meeting spoke up, saying—‘from what I read I see this figure of the intellectual as this kind of privileged figure that somehow has the skills to kind of provide this theoretical analysis but if I think about the reality of the field I would say, we are all able to do that’. Another responded—‘I don’t think we have to worry too much about Toby taking an intellectual’s position above because I feel like we just wouldn’t let him.’ And someone further interjected with—‘say Toby was able to get the money to do this research it also means he wouldn’t have to work and he’d be here a lot and that’s really important as well.’ An awkward shifting of positions emerges here. People are worried about the imposition of theory by a privileged figure, but equally others do not think that I would be able to enter the space

'above' as they quite simply would not let me. Subsequently a more pragmatic matter arises—if I was funded to conduct research at The Field, I would be there more, and thus be able to contribute more to the life of the project, to the composition of the commons and the care that it requires. No simple resolution, rather an awkward set of relationships—some co-operative, others antagonistic.

Now for the situatedness. As mentioned, I take this component from Donna Haraway who writes about how there is a need for knowledge to become aware of its conditions of production. The separation of knowledge from its conditions of production, as is often the case in natural sciences, does not grant it additional objectivity, but rather conceals a central component of its construction and in so doing conceals certain ideological assumptions, positionings and power relationships that may be at work within the production of that knowledge. To overcome this, Haraway proposes that knowledge producers clearly situate themselves, and do not attempt to separate the knowledge they produce from the process of production, thus including their positionality, situatedness and all the perspectival limitations this implies within the knowledge itself. So here knowledge does not function as an objective entity awaiting discovery, but as a constructed process that retains the possibility of being reconstructed or deconstructed, a fact of art. For The Field, and the practice of commoning anthropologically I am here elucidating, this manifests in an ongoing engagement with a specific set of political and ethical ideas that do not conceal themselves and remain a central component of the knowledge produced.

Finally, this awkward, situated knowledge is not limited to the written text, that is to this thesis or to any of the other texts that may emerge from the process of knowledge production, but exists in The Field itself—in the relations with others that were formed through it, in the building that was renovated through the process, in the organisational forms and practices that exist as a result of the project. Each of these, I propose, also constitute objects of knowledge and facts of art. They are simply expressed in a different mode to the text. The build-

ing itself holds knowledge in its material form, in the transformations of its body; the social relationships are forms of knowledge concerning the practices of relating to others; the organisational forms are facts of art in that they are constructed structures of facilitation. In short, I am outlining a conception of knowledge that is broader than the textual and discursive, a conception of knowledge in which concepts and facts are not only manifest through discourse but also through bodies, relationships, structures and materialities. In this conception of knowledge there is no privileging of the textual or discursive, no appeal to a superior domain of thought, ideas and intellect. In short, the text is but one result of the creative processes in which I became entangled, and by no means the most important. In this way, my participation and contribution to the composition of the common worlds that unfolded, and continue to unfold in my absence, is not only a matter of the dissemination of discursive knowledge, but an embodied result of my engagements. The effects of anthropological engagement are not here a matter to be considered only through the text and its dissemination to publics, a matter to be considered following writing up, but are more significantly the facts of art that emerged from the work of fieldwork, facts of art that were produced with others and continue to exist and be transformed through the work of others.

CHAPTER 2

ON WHAT COMMONS?

“That, said Coppi, was when they gained their advantage over us, which keeps confronting us with the fact that everything we produce is utilized way over our heads and that it trickles down to us, if at all attainable, from up there, just as work is said to be given to us. If we want to take on art, literature, we have to treat them against the grain, that is, we have to eliminate all the concomitant privileges and project our own demands into them. In order to come to ourselves, said Heilmann, we have to recreate not only culture but also all science and scholarship by relating them to our concerns. We have stated common knowledge about the shape of our planet and its position in the universe, but for us there is something odd about this simple lore... Whenever the image of the world as established by ancient scientists is taken over in its full scope, it always expresses the tie to the existing rules of social conditions. Only by realizing that we are on a rotating sphere and by forgetting all the connected things that are taken for granted can we grasp the horrors that mold our thinking.”

(Weiss 2005: 33-4)*¹

“We wanted to find out for ourselves what spoke to us and what was worn out, what was in the service of the demagogues and what might help us in our efforts to track these things down.”

(Weiss 2005: 64)*

1 Throughout this chapter, texts which I know were read directly by The Field or the New Cross Commoners are marked with an asterisk*; texts which I have come to by following, or are included in references of those texts, or were engaged with indirectly (i.e. did not form part of a specific reading group) are marked with a caret^; texts which I have introduced myself, and which as far as I know, were not explicitly engaged with by the collectives are marked with a dagger†. It is the first set of texts, those marked with an asterisk* which form the foundation of this chapter. The only references which remain unmarked are those which are direct references to the words or texts of the collectives, or members of the collectives, themselves.

These lines from Peter Weiss's *The Aesthetics of Resistance* (2005),* a novel which was read collectively by members of The Field and the New Cross Commoners, resonate clearly with the forms of study (Harney & Moten 2013)* that these collectives enacted. Through these forms of study, there was an attempt to develop a practice of self-organised learning through which theories, thoughts, texts and practices could be related to the specificities of daily life in New Cross, and to processes of commoning, and through which a specific series of notions concerning the commons and politics began to emerge. Such study, as a "a mode of thinking with others separate from the thinking that the institution requires of you" (ibid: 11)* unfolded through the practices of The Field and the Commoners, a study that sought to collectively 'find out for ourselves what spoke to us', to continually constitute this 'us' through these processes, to recreate thought and collectivity by 'relating them to our own concerns', and to facilitate a collectivity that remained shifting, open and contingent, a collectivity that attempted to remain in recomposition. As the website of the New Cross Commoners says to this day,

New Cross Commoners is permanently under construction! It will change all the time: "we" don't want to fix it before this "we" begins to recompose itself, before the "commoners" will gather and exchange ideas, experiences, desires, and before they'll learn how to do that... Still, there is somewhere and something to start with here: New Cross (the geographical boundaries of this area should remain open rather than regulated by postcodes) and commoning (a process of coming together and doing things together that differs from the private and the public/State controlled ways of doing things).

(New Cross Commoners 2017)

Before The Field, there was the New Cross Commoners (NXC).

The Commoners opened a process of inquiry into the possibility of applying ideas and concepts around the commons to daily life in New Cross, this process began well before I became involved with The Field. As such, what I draw upon in this chapter is pieced together from discussions and conversations with those who had been involved in the process for longer, the New Cross Commoners' blog and publication (2013), and through reading the texts with which the commoners initially engaged. The aim of this chapter is to offer a partial literature review of the commons but done from the basis of the readings, discussions, ideas and practices of the NXC. As such, the chapter attempts to trace the formation of particular notions of the commons developed by the NXC. It is a form of situated knowledge (Haraway 1998)[†] which speaks from a specific position and partial perspective. There are both losses and gains from adopting this method. A textual limit is imposed, one that is given to me by the collectives with which I participated. In following this textual limit, there is the potential to reproduce the omissions and silences of the discussion and processes that led to the notions of commoning explored below. But something is also gained—what is found is a specific and situated conception of commoning, one that is emergent of a specific process of study.

To some extent, this approach constitutes an ethnography of discursive formations that emerged from a process of self-organised learning, discursive formations which were, and continue to be, inextricably associated to praxis. This occurs through the lens of my own position and perspective and does not claim to speak on behalf of the Commoners, which due to the open nature of the collectivity practiced would already be an impossible task, but rather offers my necessarily partial understanding of how the commons and commoning was understood through the Commoners, and in turn The Field. It is a text which seeks to demonstrate what I learnt from engagement with the NXC, how the members of that collective and their activity enriched and directed my own understanding of the commons. In short it is about what becoming part of those collectives taught me.

As seen in the proceeding chapter, the discursive practices of the

Commoners were inextricably focused around praxis. The discursive processes were placed in direct relation to practice, to everyday life, with all its messiness. This praxis of commoning outran the concepts of the commons, that is the embodied practices of commoning extended and continually overtook the theoretical notions of the commons.

Marilyn Strathern draws our attention to a similar characteristic of anthropological writing, in that “the capacity for conceptualisation, one might say, outruns the concepts it produces” (1991: xv)†. Here too, the processes and practices, that is capacities as dimensions of possibility and potential, outrun the concepts that were produced and discussed, and so too does it out run the process of writing that unfolds now, a process that cannot help but, to some extent, make static and fixed that which was processual and shifting. There is a remainder that cannot be reduced. As Strathern continues,

While we might think that ideas and concepts grow from one another, each idea can also seem a complete universe with its own dimensions, as corrugated and involute as the last.

This may be rephrased as a matter of overlapping dimensions.”

(1991: xvi)†

To follow up this rephrasing of the singularity of each conceptualisation and capacity as a matter of overlapping dimensions may lead us to the possibility of presenting this chapter as a matter of overlap, a discursive practice overlapping with further discursive practices which are themselves overlapping with other embodied modes of praxis. This text overlaps with other texts, and with the practices and processes from which it emerges and with which it is entangled. It becomes a matter of bringing together, through overlap, heterogeneous and differentiated notions, ideas and practices in ways that resist simplification, and the connections between which are always partial. It becomes a matter of constituting a commons comprised of multiple

voices and modes of practice, for as we saw in the preceding chapter through Latour, “there is another name for overlap, another name for fold, another name for enfolding, and that is *Commons*.” (2016 emphasis original)†. Here then, this chapter functions as an attempt at enacting an unstable discursive practice, one which touches upon the overlap of different notions of the commons and commoning, and which enfolds itself into that process of conceptualisation and praxis, that does not place itself outside of, or above, the processes in which it is entangled, that does not become transcendent to the practices with which it emerges, but remains immanent to them (Stengers 2010)†. It is a mode of commoning as a practice of correspondence, of “an imaginative stretch by which I attempt to cast my experience forward in ways that can join with yours” (Ingold 2017: 15)†. The notions of the commons and commoning it presents is itself a form of commons, it is comprised of overlap and differentiation and does not seek resolution into one coherent conceptual totality.

To return to The Commoners, the process began, in part, from series of frustrations. As Paolo Plotegher states in a public lecture as part of a series on self-organisation organised by Goldsmiths Visual Cultures department,

“[w]e started the NXC out of a frustration, a frustration we had as students with the insularity of Goldsmiths and our disconnection with the life of New Cross... We wanted to break the enclosure separating the life of the campus from that of the neighbourhood, and we suspected that there was a lot we could learn from the neighbourhood as well, especially from how people in New Cross organise themselves bottom up.”

(2016: 1)

The NXC began as an attempt to move outwards from the university and explore the neighbourhood surrounding it, to extend some of the processes occurring at Goldsmiths into the surrounding

area, to start to undo some of its enclosures. To ask: what can happen when theory extends beyond the academy and into our daily lives? This frustration was inextricably linked to another frustration regarding enclosure. As Paolo continues,

“There was another type of enclosure that Goldsmiths produces and that frustrated us, an enclosure that has to do with theory and its separation from practice, understood as a practice of everyday life. We were aware of the amazing transformational potential of some of the theory we learned at Goldsmiths, but we also saw the danger of getting trapped into some kind of academic self-referential production of knowledge: what is the impact some of these amazing books we read can have, not on the writing of our essays and dissertations, but on how we organise our life, even in its most banal aspects? What can happen if we try to apply theory directly onto our lives? To rethink our lives with theory?”

(ibid: 2)*

There is a complex recognition occurring here in relation to the university. On the one hand, the university as an increasingly privatised space, is in the language of commoning an increasingly enclosed space and is caught in self-referential processes of knowledge production. On the other, there is a recognition of the transformational power of theory and some of the knowledge that emerges from universities. It is not a simple matter of enclosure in the university opposed to commoning outside of it, but of relations between outsides of different kinds, between processes of becoming-outside, that is a creation of condition in which enclosure can open up into commons. This becoming-outside will be returned to below, but for now it will be more useful to see how this emerged as a practice.

The first text read collectively by the Commoners was an interview with Massimo de Angelis and Stavros Stavrides conducted by An

Architektur (2010)*. The text was read out loud, in small groups and gradually. Each sentence was framed not only in terms of its theoretical content, but also, and more significantly, in its relation to everyday life in New Cross. In this way, a relatively short and conversationally formed text took five sessions of two hours to finish. Each statement, each idea, was examined collectively and brought into the context of the daily lives of the readers.

The interview situates, from the very beginning, the commons as the site of a struggle for a society beyond the limits of capital accumulation. De Angelis begins by describing the commons as “a means of establishing a new political discourse that builds on and helps to articulate the many existing, often minor struggles, and recognizes their power to overcome capitalist society.” (An Architektur 2010: 1)*. At the same time, it is acknowledged that the contemporary form of capitalism that is seen to be emerging locates the commons as the basis of growth. Such an acknowledgment situates the commons as sites that are potentially subject to enclosure, that is integration to the market. This harks back to Marx’s discussion of primitive accumulation and the enclosure of English common land in Part 8 of *Capital* (1986: 873-940)^. In this way the commons are situated as sites of struggle.

De Angelis goes against what he sees as the dominant Marxist tradition, which situates enclosure and primitive accumulation as a predicate to capitalism within a linear mode of development framed in terms of historical necessity, as a series of events that allow capitalism to emerge through the commodification and marketisation of that which was previously beyond capital’s reach (2007: 134)*. Rather than situating enclosure as an event that occurs on a scale of linear progression, an event that is necessary to ‘kick start’ capital accumulation, De Angelis proposes that enclosures be considered as

“a value practice that clashes with others. It is either capital that makes the world *through commodification and enclosures*, or it is the rest of us — whoever is that ‘us’ — that makes the world through counter-enclosures and

commons.”

(ibid: 135)*

In this way, De Angelis situates the commons as sites of ongoing struggle against the expansion of capital. They are not simply a prehistory to capitalism, but an ongoing site of encounter and struggle between the value programme of capital and other value practices. Commons are then not to be understood as common pool resources (Ostrom 1990)^, for De Angelis “this resource-based definition of the commons is ... too limited, it does not go far enough. We need to open it up and bring in social relations in the definition of the commons.” (An Architektur 2010: 2)*. Interrelation becomes central to the commons, constituting them less as a form of economic classification, and more as a modality of relation.

This initial reading took place in the New Cross Library, now New Cross Learning, on New Cross Road. The location of this reading was not incidental but was linked intrinsically to the process of inquiry underway. It was a site that brought the theoretical notions of commons and enclosure into the domain of life, into practices that people were engaged in in New Cross. It constituted a movement outside of Goldsmiths and into the surrounding area. The reading grounded itself in a site of struggle, a site of commoning that sought to enact value practices other than those of capital. The library had been scheduled for closure as part of the Conservative-Liberal Democrat Coalition Government’s austerity programme. As such, it constituted a movement of enclosure whereby a publicly owned and publicly accessible space was due to become privatised—in this instance it was due to become a pound shop. As Lilly explains,

“I think that it was in the process of being sold to this pound shop company and they had this huge protest, like a sit in protest, and then the council finally agreed to let it be run as a trial run for two weeks, or maybe a month, by the people who were organising the protest and organising

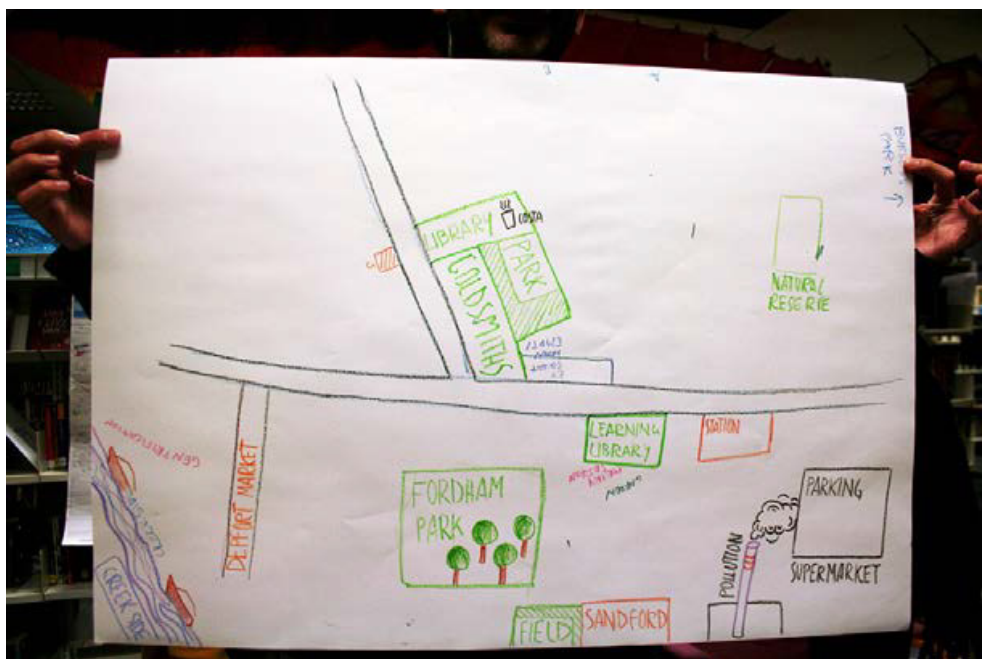
it to be run by volunteers. But then it was successful, and now being just run by volunteers its actually more successful than it was being run by the council. So it's more successful, and then it has more visitors attending groups and session and just more people coming in to the library and using it than it did before because people organised more space, more groups."



Such a process constitutes a localised manifestation of what De Angelis referred to in terms of a clash of value practices. It was a site of struggle where a self-organised common emerged rather than a transfer from the public sphere of state control, to the private sphere of the market. Conducting the reading in this space sought to enact a process of exploring the local area, as well as bringing the theory of the commons out of the university and into the everyday life of the surrounding area. A practice of commoning was introduced to a site already engaged in the commoning of knowledge. Engaging in a process of self-organised learning in a site that itself was involved in a struggle to provide common access to learning enacted an attempt to bring together theory and practice, to not only discuss the possibility of commoning, but to enact it through the discussion itself.

The situatedness of this process brings us to another salient feature of the commons as conceptualised by NXC and the authors with which they engaged—namely that all commons are localised and specific. This illustrates the principle that there can be no commons without community (Federici & Caffentzis 2014: i102; Mies 2014)*. Such a conceptualisation of the commons denies the possibility of the ‘global commons’ (Buck 1998; Goldman 1998; Vogler 2000)†. As Federici and Caffentzis write, “we cannot speak of ‘global commons’, as these presume the existence of a global collectivity which today does not exist and perhaps will never exist as we do not think it is possible or desirable.” (2014: i102)*. Each common requires a specific community which coalesces around common ground, such as that of New Cross Library which brought together a community in order to prevent a market enclosure of a publicly available service or the site of the Commoners next excursion, Sanford Housing Co-op and Deptford Creek houseboat community.

For these visits the Commoners engaged with Stuart Hodgkinson’s text *The Return of the Housing Question* (2012)*. The text draws on the work of Massimo De Angelis, as well as Peter Linebaugh and others, to consider the question of housing in relation to commoning



and the commons. In this way, the immediate question of “needs and desires” (De Angelis 2007; 2017)* and the reproduction of everyday life (ibid; Federici 2012a; 2012b; 2014)* was reintroduced through the discussion of one of the foundational cultural needs of functionalist thought, shelter and dwelling (Malinowski 1947: 124)†. The text does this through firmly “placing the housing question within this wider framework of capitalist enclosure and anticapitalist commoning”, offering “three ethical coordinates” under the headings of “prefigurative commoning: living-in-common”; “strategic commoning: housing-as-commons”; and “Hegemonic commoning: circulating the housing commons” (Hodkinson 2012: 438-9)*. Once again, these coordinates situated the commons and commoning as a process of struggle against capital. In this way it spoke once more to the theme of commoning as a process of a becoming-outside of capital (De Angelis 2007: 30-31)*, that is a process of struggle that constitutes an outside of the value systems, practices and programmes of capital in the process of struggle itself. Such a conceptualisation challenges the more totalising framework of Hardt and Negri in *Empire* (2003)^, *Multitude* (2005)^ and *Commonwealth* (2009)^ where postmodern capital is presented as having no exterior thus situating the possibility of struggle as part of a biopolitical mass “that has no “outside”” (ibid: vii)^.

The first of the three ethical coordinates concerns a prefigurative modality of politics and directly refers to Jean-Luc Nancy’s notion of *Being-in-Common* (1991: 1-12)^. This is a modality of politics through which “life *despite* capitalism” (Hodkinson 2012: 438 emphasis original)* is enacted, through which commoners “act as if they are already free” (Graeber 2009: 433)†. It establishes an ontology that asserts an inalienable “categorical imperative not to let go of sense *in common*” (Nancy 1991: 12 emphasis original)^, for which the question is that of “the community of being, and not the being of community” (ibid: 1). Such a proposal develops a ontologically primordial notion of commonality, one which designates the commons as “the shared substance of our social being” (Žižek 2009: 212)†, something in which we are always already included through the very fact of being. Through

such a modality the commons is enacted despite its attempted enclosure, which attempts to respond to needs and desires, such as those for housing, here and now through the networks and resources immediately available, within in the world as it exists prior to any revolutionary moment. In the context of daily life in New Cross, such practices were seen to be enacted at Stanford Housing Co-op and the Deptford Houseboat communities, which to some extent, created autonomous communal living situations within the individualising and disciplinary structures of capital.



The second coordinate introduces the strategic dimension, and thus shifts from a prefigurative and immanent modality of relating to the future, where the future could be enacted in the present, to one which takes a more teleological route. Such a strategic dimension is recognised as vital as “living-in-common is not enough because enclosure is always imminent, always threatening.” (Hodkinson 2012: 438)*. This principle introduces a perspective “accentuating the strategic and tactical interventions required to resist enclosure.” (Ibid: 438)*. It highlights that a prefigurative politics of the commons is not enough, that becoming attuned to the fact that we are always already in “the community of existence” (Nancy 1991: 1)^ is insufficient when

ony, it recognises the open zone of indeterminacy and struggle where determining economic forces come into play with contingent political practices and formations, where identities, values and positions are contested, opening the way for new forms of articulatory practice (Laclau & Mouffe 2014)†. Considering the practice at hand, that of housing provision, such a moment would constitute a praxis of disrupting the privatisation of housing and introducing alternative ways of providing housing. Hodkinson cites the example of Westminster based Waltherton and Elgin Action Group who, on learning that the council intended to privatise the social housing in which they lived, “decided to use the government’s privatisation legislation against itself in order to transfer ownership of the estates to the community” (Hodkinson 2012: 440)* creating a resident led housing association. As such, a process of enclosure that constituted a moment within the circuit of capital (Marx 1981)^ was disrupted and an alternative logic of circulation was introduced, that of the circulation of the commons.

Sanford Housing Co-op and Deptford house boat community are here both considered as manifestations of such alternative circulations. They are breaks in the commodification and privatisation of the housing market and attempt to establish and expand alternative ways of relating to housing. Housing, a vital component of reproduction, understood here in Federici’s sense as “all the activities necessary for the reproduction of human life (2012b: 55; see also 2012a; 2014), is brought into a cycle of value practices other than those that are primarily organised around the circulation and accumulation of capital. Through this cycle attempts are made to begin to provide for the needs and desires for shelter and community in a manner that, at least in part, departs from the circuits of capital.

Commoning then is not simply a matter of a shift in relations to production, but rather a wider shift in practices of reproduction understood in this broad sense. Continuing in this vein one of the next meetings of the Commoners took place at *Burgess Park Food Project*. Once again a text was read as part of the visit, this time an interview with Federici concerning food politics and sovereignty (2009)*.

The text extends the historical analysis presented in *Caliban and the Witch* (Federici 2014)* which showed how through the enclosure of the commons in England a process of primitive accumulation was enacted that allowed for the emergence of the capitalist market. As part of this process the domain of reproduction was separated from that of production with the effect that “only production-for-market was defined as a value-creating activity, whereas the reproduction of the worker began to be considered valueless from an economic view point and even ceased to be considered as work.” (ibid: 75*). Reproduction became concealed and subordinate to production which was the sole value producing domain from the perspective of capital.

This division between the realms of productive labour and social reproduction had a particularly adverse effect on the position of women who became “increasingly confined to reproductive labour at the very time when this work was being completely devalued.” (ibid: 74)*. Such a division has also been considered by Abdullah Öcalan as part of an ongoing process of the subjugation of women that he refers to as ‘housewifisation’ (2013; 2015). The emergent division of labour between valued commodity production and the devalued and hidden reproduction of labour-power was a gendered one. This division of labour, over the following centuries became more entrenched with the emergence of the full-time housewife and the nuclear family, functioning as a site for an accumulation of unpaid services that are nonetheless necessary for the reproduction of labour-power. Spheres of activity that became deemed as non-productive became increasingly assigned to the domestic sphere.

Food production was once such activity. With *The Expropriation of the Agricultural Population from the Land* (Marx 1986: 875-895)^ people lost access to the means of producing their own sustenance. Those who previously had been able to make use of the common land to grow their own food and thus support themselves and their families “had no access to land and had to buy the food that they had once produced” (Federici 2014: 76)*. Thus, a process of proletarianisation was enacted whereby the only means available to people to obtain the food

that they had once produced themselves was through selling their labour power on the market, an option which was primarily available to men whereas women's work became increasingly concealed within the domain of reproduction that was deemed as outside the processes of valorisation from the perspective of the emergent market.



As such, Federici identifies “a direct relation between the destruction of the social and economic power of women in the “transition to capitalism” and the politics of food in capitalist society.” (2009: 26)*. The construction of a situation of food scarcity through enclosure continues in new forms today, such as through the genetic modification of seeds and contractual agreements to prevent propagation and the increasing efforts of the world bank and development agencies to convert land used for subsistence farming into collateral for credit (ibid: 27)*. Initiatives such as *Burgess Park Food Project* can, to some extent, be seen as attempts to intervene in this logic of marketisation and enclosure by restoring certain components of food production to a more immediate scale. As Federici says of the urban gardens movement in the USA,

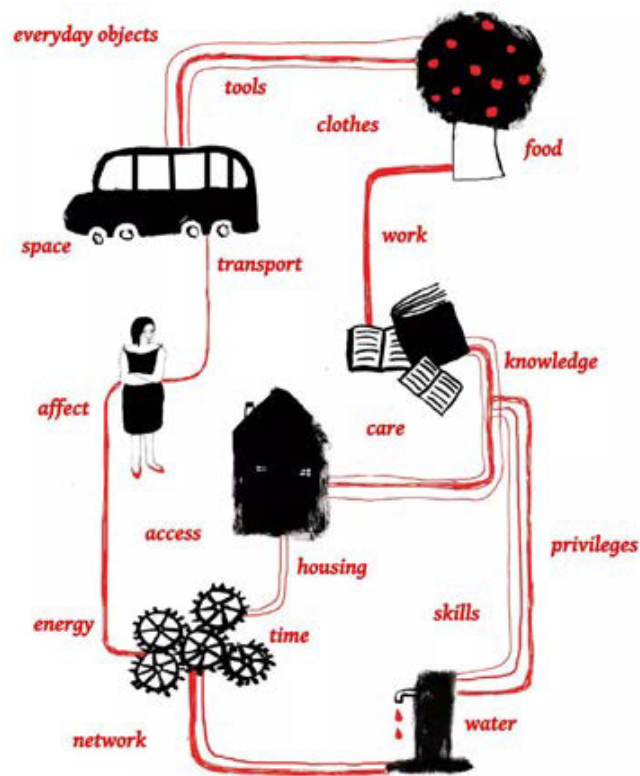
“gardens are the seeds of another economy, independ-

ent of the market. Not only do they fulfil an economic function by providing cheaper, fresher food that many could not otherwise afford, but they create a new sociality; they are places of gathering, cooperation, reciprocal education between people of different ages and cultures.”

(Federici 2009: 35)*.

Whilst still occurring within the highly commodified context of a post-industrial city like London, such practices attempt to disrupt the values and logics associated with the circuits of capital, instead introducing moments of struggle for other values and other circulations.

So far, I have discussed three meetings of the Commoners, each of which can be understood as concerning a component of the ‘means of reproduction’ as defined above by Federici. New Cross Learning was, and continues to be, commoning around knowledge; Sanford Housing Co-op and Deptford Houseboat community, around housing; and Burgess Park Food Project, around food. Each of these locations, and the set of practices engaged with constitute components of the circulation of the commons which was discussed above and formed the basis of the Commoners next meeting. This meeting took the form of a presentation by Andre Pusey, followed by a workshop led by the NXC. This focus on the circulation of the commons once again situates localised examples of commoning practices as modes of ‘micro-politics’ (Deleuze & Guattari 2004; Adolphs & Karakayali 2007)[†], that is a framing of emancipatory political process that focuses less on large scale aggregates and formations such as essential class identity, the party and historical necessity, and more on small-scale daily practices that interrupt the logics of capital. Under such a framing, moments of political struggle are not restricted to the officially sanctioned politics of the state, or of the protest or demonstration, but are found in the fine-grained daily practices that operate according to circuit other than those of capital accumulation. The possibilities of resistance and struggles are expanded, opening up the potential for a wider conception of politics as running through the value-practices of everyday life.



"The more we depend on money and markets to satisfy our needs and follow our desire, the more we are exposed to a vicious circle of dependency that pits livelihoods against each other."
(Massimo De Angelis)

Explore and expand ideas of how your everyday activities, skills and resources could contribute to a circulation of the commons. And/or imagine how a need or a lack you have in your everyday could be addressed through a practice of commoning. Be daring!

Build, draw and improvise small-scale models that make your idea tangible. Enjoy!

In such a way, as with De Angelis, the formation of new value-practices through new articulations in circular time are brought to the fore. As Pusey, Russel and Chatterton write,

"The production and 'circulation of the common(s)' is key to understanding the potential of new assemblages (Dyer-Witheford, 1999, 2006), those that promote and enhance the ideas, practices and potential common(s). The common(s) are spaces of collaboration, cooperation and community. They are process based, made and remade, through the collective act of commoning (Linebaugh, 2008)."

(2011: 581)^

The focus here becomes oriented around certain value markers—collaboration, cooperation and community—that are associated to the circulation of the commons as an interruption to the circuits of capital.

The workshops that followed the talk on the circulation of the commons oriented around:

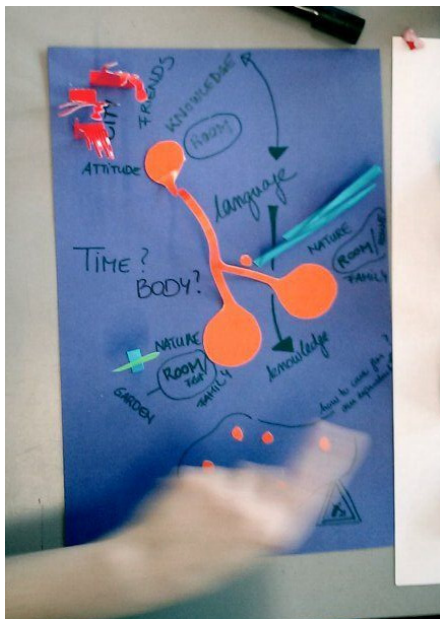
“How to construct new modes of co-production and access to means of existence? A hands-on workshop to gather, explore and expand ideas of how the creation of social commons can reduce our dependency of the markets.

Together we will generate and develop ideas of how our everyday activities and resources could contribute to value-practices that differ from those of capital. To explore our ideas, we will improvise small-scale models to see what forms our creation of commons could take.”

(New Cross Commoners 2017)

Again, a focus on everyday practices that interrupt the logics of the market is evident. But alongside this there is also an additional element that here comes through clearly, that of a creative, playful and open-ended speculative practice embodied in the small-scale models that were produced. These models play with various potential networks, or circuits, of the commons that could be imagined, or in the Deleuzian language of Pusey,

Russel and Chatterton, they reveal “the common(s) as a key strategic form of assemblage” (2011: 578)^. These models cut across various forms, constituting the commons in the idiom of an assemblage as comprised of heterogeneous com-





ponents with relations of exteriority (Deleuze & Guattari 2004; De Landa 2011)². As the models show components as various as time, language, food, bodies, housing, knowledge, skills, water and attitudes as thought of as capable of coming together in ways which constitute networks and circuits operating according to value practices other than those of capital circulation. Here, the commons extend beyond human social aggregates to bring into the fold other forms of being—materialities, knowledges, affects—that constitute a part of the commons as much as the human participants. This theme of expanding the forms of relation beyond human interrelations and beyond the economic idiom of the resource is something to which I will seek to return across the thesis.²

A subsequent meeting of the NXC brought people together to watch a series of shorts from the Black Panther Party Newsreel. There are two components of this gesture that I believe to be important for the unstable notion of the commons that I am here attempting to draw out, namely, the role of what is discussed above in terms of reproduction, or the means of reproduction, and the focus upon marginalised groups. The first, that of the place of reproduction, comes through

² See Chapter 3: *Communication*

clearly in the practices of the Black Panthers' survival programmes. The example that recurrently came up in subsequent conversations with people who had been involved the early processes of the Commoners was the Free Breakfast for Children Program. This program took the simple reproductive need for food as the basis for a practice of self-organisation. As Huey Newton said, "our children shall be fed, and the Black Panther Party will not let the malady of hunger keep our children down any longer." (1969)[^]. The Free Breakfast Program was understood as a means of meeting the most basic needs of a dispossessed community as the base line of any kind of emancipatory organisation. As explained by Alkebulan in his history of the Black Panther Party,

""Survival pending revolution" was a practical political move. Seale and other Panther leaders were convinced that a lifeline to the people must be built to enhance the party's chances for survival. Institutional survival was a necessary first step.""

(Alkebulan 2007: 41)[†].

Such survival oriented itself around the most basic reproductive practices, in this instance access to nutrition.

The second associated component of this practice was the integral focus on a marginalised social group, in this instance black people in America. The Panther's theorisation of this included within it an anti-capitalist dimension. As Stokely Carmichael states,

"We understand that a capitalist system automatically contains within itself racism, whether by design or not. Capitalism and racism seem to go hand in hand. ... The society we seek to build among black people is not an oppressive capitalist society. Capitalism, by its very nature, cannot create structures free from exploitation...We are in the cities. We can become, and are becoming, a disruptive

force in the flows of services, goods and capital”

(Carmichael 1971: 160-161)†

This perspective leads Carmichael to speak of “the system of international white supremacy coupled with international capitalism” (ibid: 150)†. A salient point is that capitalism emerged through the marginalisation and oppression of certain subjects, the concealment of this exclusion and the value produced by such communities under forms of domination and white supremacy, and that it continues to operate in this way (Mills 1999; 2011)†. Far from being a secondary cultural identity in a domain separate to that of political economy, race emerges as a crucial mechanism in the structuring of capitalism, that is “race has been fundamental to the configuration of the modern world and is integral to the very configuration of socio-economic inequalities in the present.” (Bhambra 2017: s227)†. Race is not a secondary identity in relation to the primary division of economic classes in the structure of capitalism but is a crucial mechanism in the constitution and continuation of the economic system itself.



This perspective resonates with that of Federici in *Caliban and the Witch* (2014)* where it is not only the bodies of women who become points of capital’s leverage through ascribing them to a position of reproduction outside the valorisation process of capital, or more correctly concealed within the valorisation processes of capital, but also the bodies of the colonised. As such, the perspective that emerges is one of capitalist development that is inherently racist and sexist and that makes use of race and gender as crucial mechanisms of power.

This orientation brings out the dimension of the commons that has been described as the *undercommons* (Harney & Moten 2013)*. The undercommons extends the principle outlined earlier that the circulation of capital is also the circulation of struggle, that the sites of collective alienation are also the potentialities for other forms of collectivity, that the ground of alienation is also the ground of emancipation. To inhabit the undercommons, to be part of its commonality, is “to inhabit the crazy, nonsensical, ranting language of the other, the other who has been rendered a nonentity by colonialism” (Halberstam in Harney & Moten 2013: 8)*. This constitutes the undercommons as a site of blackness. As Halberstam continues, “[i]ndeed, blackness, for Moten and Harney by way of Fanon, is the willingness to be in the space that has been abandoned by colonialism, by rule, by order.” (ibid). Part of what this strikes at is the need for commons to be sites for non-homogenous (De Angelis 2007)* communities to come together in self-organised emancipatory practices. The diversity of the community that could come together through commoning was a component that the NXC both set its sights upon, and struggled with achieving (New Cross Commoners 2017), but nonetheless remained a central component of the shifting horizons of the commons which emerged.³ This engagement with the perspectives and practices of the Black Panther Party, then, was an attempt to attend to the structural role of racism, white supremacy and white privilege in capitalism and to recognise that to develop a meaningful departure from the circuits of capital through commoning would also entail overcoming the racist and sexist structures that are vital to those circulations. It was, to borrow an apt phrase from Gregory Bateson, an attempt to examine “a *difference that makes a difference*” (2000: 459 emphasis original)⁴, that is to identify race as crucial component in the historical and structural formation of capitalism.

The next meeting of the NXC that I would like to point to here

3 This problematic will be returned to in the final two chapters, *Commoning Beyond the Commons*, and *Affective Activity and Careful Collectivity*.

4 For a discussion of the intersections between Bateson’s information theory and Charles W. Mills critical race theory see Syed Mustafa Ali’s article *Race: The Difference That Makes a Difference* (2013)†.

was organised around brewing beer. The text that was engaged with for this meeting was another of Federici's, this time *Feminism and the Politics of the Commons* (2011)*. Here Federici returns to the feminist perspective touched on above, "where 'feminism' refers to a standpoint shaped by the struggle against sexual discrimination and over reproductive work" (ibid)*. In this article Federici also briefly restates her critique of Hardt and Negri's theory of the common (2003; 2005; 2009)^, which in the accelerationist tradition which pushes Marx's proposal that "[t]he true barrier of capitalist production is *capital itself*" (1981: 358 emphasis original)^ to the end, extending the proposal of Deleuze and Guattari that the revolutionary moment may not be withdrawal from capital, but quite the opposite. In *Anti-Oedipus* they write,

"Which is the revolutionary path? Is there one?—To withdraw from the world market, as Samir Amin advises Third World countries to do, in a curious revival of the fascist "economic solution"? Or might it be to go in the opposite direction? To go still further, that is, in the movement of the market, of decoding and deterritorialization? ... Not to withdraw from the process, but to go further, to "accelerate the process," as Nietzsche put it: in this matter, the truth is that we haven't seen anything yet."

(2011: 239-40)^

Hardt and Negri extend this proposition through the line of argumentation that a new mode of social organisation structured around the common is already emerging in immaterial and affective labour and forms of production and association social cooperation which exceed capital's tendency towards commodification and enclosure. Federici's critique of this position is twofold, in the first instance that it relies on a picture of the commons that "absolutizes the work of a minority possessing skills not available to most of the world population ... [and] ... ignores that this work produces commodities for the market" (Federici 2011)* as well as being reliant on market produced

commodities such as technology—computers, microchips, etc. But more significantly for our purposes here, the theory of the commons developed by Hardt and Negri, according to Federici, “skirts the question of the reproduction of everyday life.” (ibid)*. Federici’s proposal is that rather than looking to the work of cognitive labourers in the developed world as the source of a new social organisation, it is rather “the ‘commoning’ of the material means of reproduction is the primary mechanism by which a collective interest and mutual bonds are created.” (2011)*. Through this meeting, the NXC took the production of beer as one such site of struggle over the means of reproduction.

If we are reminded of the broad definition given to reproduction earlier, as including culture, it may become clear how the brewing of beer constitutes a reproductive practice. It is commonplace for many anthropologists to point to culture as such a site of reproduction of human life. As Geertz puts it,

“[b]ecoming human is becoming individual, and we become individual under the guidance of cultural patterns, historically created systems of meaning in terms of which we give form, order, point, and direction to our lives.”

(1973: 52)†.

The process of becoming human, according to Geertz, is one in which we begin to step into culture, that is we begin to situate ourselves within the chains of significance and webs of meaning of our particular position. It is part of the reproduction of human life. For anyone who has spent time in London, or in Britain more generally, the place of beer in this process will be relatively self-evident. The public house forms a crucial site of social encounter and interaction, one which forms a central component of many people’s daily lives. In this context, the collective DIY brewing of beer can be understood as a small-scale example of such struggle over a particular reproductive process.

Further, the history of brewing and ale is entangled with the en-

closure of English common land and the separation of the productive and reproductive spheres discussed by Federici. As discussed in a small pamphlet entitled *Radical Brewing: Work, Energy, Commoning and Beer* (Stuffit 2009)*, a text which was proposed as a possible additional reading for the NXC workshop on brewing, prior to the 10th Century “[b]rewing and selling took place in domestic households normally by women called ‘alewives’” (ibid: 3)*. Alongside enclosure brewing processes shifted from the domestic sphere to the emergent market, and beer using hops, as opposed to more locally available herbs and plants such as nettles, became more prominent. As Stuffit continues,

“Between 1500-1640 hopped beer superseded ale and brewing, which had traditionally been done in villages by alewives, became a (male) urban occupation. As a consequence of the amounts of capital needed to retool hop production, breweries tended to become larger and more concentrated business enterprises.”

(ibid: 7)*.

This process demonstrates a specific instance of the enclosure of a process and practice, and alongside it a loss of local knowledge and self-organised provision.

In this way it manifests a component of the process of proletarianisation that occurred through enclosure. Such proletarianisation is not only to be understood as a separation of the worker from the means of production, as the more classical Marxian definition would present it, but can also be considered as “a process of losing knowledge” (Stiegler 2010b: 38)*, that is a loss of, in Stiegler’s terms, both *savoir-faire* (knowledge-of-making) and *savoir-vivre* (knowledge-of-living) (ibid: 33)*. In the example here of ale production, the knowledge of brewing increasingly transferred from the domestic sphere and the alewives, to commercial breweries, and alongside this loss of knowledge of the process of brewing occurs a parallel loss of the knowledge of the lifestyles that it facilitated, in this instance pushing women from the more

central position of the alewives, to that of “barmaids and landlord’s appendages.” (Easrnshaw *in* Stuffit 2009: 7)*. Such processes can be seen contributing to the creation of the proletarian condition which, as put by Bue Rübner Hansen a contributor to the *Nanopolitics Handbook* (Nanopolitics Group 2013)*, a collective in which some members of the NXC were involved previously, “is the condition of being unable to sustain one’s body without selling or submitting it” (ibid 208)*. And, as Federici shows, for women this process further marginalised their position to the reproductive sphere which became concealed and hidden behind the productive domain of labour.

So, this process of learning brewing collectively can be understood as an attempt to respond to the call for “a far-reaching process of de-proletarianisation, that is, the recovery of knowledge of all kinds.” (Stiegler 2010a: 11)*. The practice of situating self-organised processes of commoning as modes of de-proletarianisation tied into a subsequent meeting of the NXC, which took place at New Cross Cutting. This once again sought to situate commoning within the specific contexts of daily life in New Cross and the surrounding areas. As part of the visit a workshop was held on skill and resource sharing, and de-proletarianisation (New Cross Commoners 2017). Such a focus again illustrates the relationship of de-proletarianisation to commoning outlined above, that is the sharing and collective study of skills and practices. This focus developed through the Commoners was continued later at The Field where various attempts were made to establish a series of workshops based on skill sharing under the banner of course titles such as De-Prole Yourself! or After-work. Skill and resource sharing, and the self-organised collectivisation of knowledge as a process of reclaiming practices lost through enclosure and proletarianisation, constituted significant components of the commoning practices developed.

The next meeting was organised around a visit to Deptford beach. A key reference point for this meeting was the work of Peter Linebaugh who, in *The London Hanged* (Linebaugh 2006)* and *The Many Headed Hydra* (Linebaugh & Rediker 2012)*, examines the histo-

ry of commoning practices and the circulation of struggles, as well as processes of enclosure, around the Deptford area. Deptford, being one of the six Royal Navy dockyards from the sixteenth to the nineteenth centuries is easily identified as a site of capital's emergent power and British naval dominance. As such a site of power it is also, perhaps less obviously, also a site of resistance. Extending the line of thought discussed variously above, namely that the circulation of capital is also the circulation of struggle, or the circulation of the commons, Linebaugh develops a picture of the Deptford dockyard where sites of resistance do not fall into the background. One such example of a circulation of commons accompanying emergent circulations of capital was that of collecting 'chips,' a custom that allowed workers to appropriate and collect "wood scraps and waste created during the work of hewing, chopping and sawing ship timbers" (Linebaugh 2006: 378)*. Here, there is an immediate parallel to the gleaning practices of collecting the excess harvest in the open field systems (Cooke 1856), for it permitted dockyard workers "to take from thence the small Chips and Gleanings of the Yard." (Oppenheim in Linebaugh 2006: 378-9)*. Such practices granted workers a certain amount of increased class power, for whereas wages were set and often withheld or paid up to several years in arrears, the conditions regarding the gleaning of chips were ambiguous and negotiable, which often benefited the workers.



Despite efforts to limit the amount of chips that could be appropriated by workers, the workers at Deptford brought their families to help remove the chips from the site up to three times a day, and would also use the custom to limit the length of the working day by finishing early to permit time for such gleanings. Placed in the context of the terms employed thus far in this chapter, this granted the workers some control over their means of reproduction beyond complete reliance on the wage. Chips operated for dockyard workers as “an essential part of their ecology - in housing, in energy, in cooking, in furnishings”, such an essential ecological component that “Deptford workers in the seventeenth century said that they could not live without the practice” (ibid: 379)*. There is a parallel which can be drawn here to some of the commoning practices of The Field and the New Cross Commoners who, at their ‘people’s kitchens,’ made use of surplus food that was donated from local businesses, or ‘skipped’ food that was to be discarded from New Covent Garden market to provide free or cheap meals. Both practices attempt to employ gleaning as a means of empowerment and reduction of reliance on the wage for survival.

Beyond the dockyard, Linebaugh and Rediker discuss elsewhere how the ship itself became a mobile site for the dual circulation of struggles and capital. In *The Many-Headed Hydra* (2000)* they show how the ship “became both an engine of capitalism in the wake of the bourgeois revolution in England and a setting of resistance.” (Ibid: 144-5)*. This dual development they term, borrowing from Richard Braithwaite, *hydrarchy*, once again emphasising the dual gesture of the circulation of capital and struggle. The meeting of the Commoners discussed these texts and ideas situated in the locations they occurred. Lunch was had on Deptford Beach, temporarily creating a common in a marginal and predominantly unused urban space. The new forms of enclosure manifesting themselves in Deptford also constituted the basis of the discussion, particularly the proposed development on Convoys Wharf, the site of the former Royal Dockyards. Once again, there is a grounding of commoning and enclosure within a specific site.

These nine meetings and discussions are only a snap shot of

the long and extensive process of study developed by the New Cross Commoners. This open process of situated inquiry came together in the production of a publication by the New Cross Commoners, shortly before the process of renovating the building on Queens Road that would become The Field began. This publication offers a useful condensation of some of the particular notions of the commons and commoning that emerged through this practice of study. The publication's glossary offers the following definitions:

Circulation of the commons:

I) Keeping in motion what we share openly.

II) The need for different experiences of commoning to relate and sustain each other, also beyond local contexts.

III) Commons are all about the connections. When they begin to close off they easily become isolated, sterile and exhaust the people involved.

Commoning:

I) The activities through which a common is constituted and maintained, through which a resource, material and/or immaterial, comes to be used and organized collectively. These activities imply conflicts, negotiations and care. The conflicts are both antagonistic towards the market and privatization and towards the control of the State. On a different level conflicts and care take place amongst the different people using the resource.

II) Sharing a certain knowledge, thing or skill with people openly and with pleasure: Suzy thinks that commoning is not a concept but an embodied activity that needs time, space and care.

III) Any act through which you remove yourself (mentally, financially, socially) from the grips of State control and Market control.

De-proletarianisation:

I) Process that allows us to free ourselves from the slavery of the wage labour by learning how to do things together for ourselves, how to live together collectively, how to self-organise our lives.

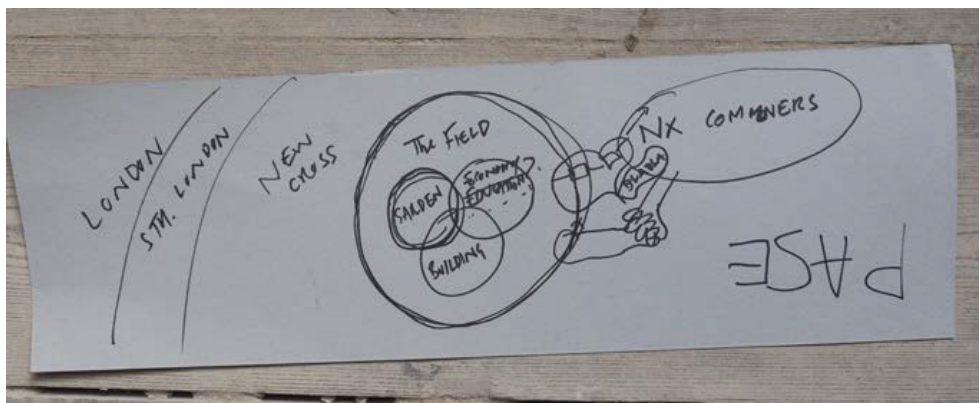
II) It is about gaining the knowledges and skills for going about our lives without constantly needing to rely on the market. In this sense, it is about taking back knowledges that we have exteriorised, but also about finding out what new knowledges and skills we need for our contemporary lives.

(New Cross Commoners 2013)

These three definitions each present components of the practice of commoning as a process which is both local and situated, and one which reaches beyond the local to interrupt the circulation of capital; a process that is located in relations, and requires care, negotiation and conflict; a process of collectively learning and studying; a process which explores new collective possibilities and forms of life.

As The Field began to take shape, the boundaries between it and the New Cross Commoners blurred and shifted, sometimes becoming clearly demarcated, other times becoming ambiguous, porous and unclear, but the relation was always intimate, and the explorations of the New Cross Commoners reverberated throughout The Field. In many respects it was these processes of study that formed some of the seeds of inspiration for The Field. Many members of the New Cross Commoners became regular members of the organising collective of The Field, whilst others continued to engage in both more sporadically. As the image here shows, the Commoners and The Field were closely bound, and yet peculiarly separate, they are seen here “as two hands clasping” (Ingold 2017: 10)[†], in a relation of correspondence emergent of “*interstitial differentiation*” through which “difference continually

arises from within the midst of joining with, in the ongoing sympathy of going along together" (ibid: 13 emphasis original)†. The two collectives and processes, blurred and yet distinct, going along together and intersecting, sometimes caring for one another, sometimes entering negotiations, sometimes in conflict with one another, continually communicated with one another.



CHAPTER 3

COMMUNICATION

WHAT IS IT?

In September 2014 a document was circulated around the twenty or so people who were centrally enough involved to be included in the e-mail discussions. The number of people included in these e-mails fluctuated, and itself often became an issue of controversy as a mechanism of inclusion and exclusion, and for a long time there remained no formalised rules for people being included in e-mail communication or not—at this time, there were around 25 on one list for The Field, and around 35 on another for the garden project, there was also an extended list of around 150 for wider communications. This document was sent around the 25 people who formed an informal ‘core group.’ It sought to outline how The Field might begin to situate itself better to open broader processes of commoning, that is the encountering of differences in the intentional attempt to construct common worlds through an ‘Initial Research Phase’. The document stated early on that,

“this is about thinking in terms of the place, both the building and new cross, and its history, to explore the needs and desires of people that live here (and our own), with an aim to come away with a clearer sense of what we’re working in and with, and how best we can utilise the resource of the field, and the collective resources we have between us, to respond to it.”

What this final ‘it’ is, to which response is sought, and in which and with ‘we’re working’, is unclear here. It could be read as referring to the place, the building, New Cross, history, a given constellation of needs and desires, or ‘The Field’ itself. The ‘it’ points towards a ‘thing,’ it points to towards some form of existential signification, that is the existence of some-thing, or a series of some-things. I have come to think that the best way to understand this ‘it’, this existential signifier whose object is unclear, is as a ‘thing’ understood in the sense of a

gathering (Heidegger 1975; 1979).¹ The 'it', that is referred to is not the place, the building, new cross, history, or a given need or desire, but rather the gathering of all of these trajectories that The Field sought to bring together. I have come to understand this gathering to be the active and recomposing assemblage that, in lieu of the possibility, or perhaps desirability, of a more specific or objective signification, was The Field. The play on the notion of a field of force, or field of play (Bourdieu 2000) is important here, for it is less in the idiom of an objective entity, as an object, that The Field emerged as a thing, but rather in the gathering and interplay of forces and trajectories that unfolded as a field of activity, a field of ongoing recomposition and encounter.

In using the term 'thing' here I am seeking to achieve several aims. First, the notion of a thing as a gathering and entanglement of various trajectories and entities that become together is useful for it manifests a key component of commoning—the bringing together, or gathering, of heterogenous entities through ongoing encounter and mutually constitutive becomings. Secondly, the term 'thing' retains some of the integral ambiguity that such encounters produce. When difference comes together in encounter, the results cannot be entirely predetermined, but remain as a question which must be continually readdressed; there remains an unpredictable remainder, one which cannot be reduced to causal or objective relations or descriptions. Finally, the term 'thing' has a significant political meaning, especially when understood as a gathering, or assembly. Examined etymologically the Old German word, *thing* or *dinc*, has the "meaning of a gathering specifically for dealing with a case or matter" (Heidegger 1975: 175), it designates an assembly that comes together to address issues and concerns. It is a space of encounter in which events and concerns are attended to. It is the site of governance of the old Germanic tribes (Jóhannesson 1974: 35). There is a particular historical site, and name,

1 The clearest expression of 'the thing' understood as a gathering is given in the following lines of Heidegger's:

"Our language denotes what a gathering is by an ancient word. That word is: thing." (Heidegger 1975: 174)

the building, places, histories, concepts, ideologies, resources, needs and desires.

The relationships between people are not secondary or ignored by this 'it', by a long way. But, significantly they are engaged with processes entangled with the building and place. That is, they are grounded and situated—it 'is about thinking in terms of place'. The commons then are not an abstract preformed social relation, but a process of encounter and communication through and with the building and the surrounding area in order to better understand what 'we' have, what 'we' need and how to respond. The positionality of the various bodies then, the 'we,' the building, the place, is not bound or fixed, but engaged in an ongoing process of composition, a mode of communication with the other which attempts to listen to things in order that it can then respond.

THE COMING TOGETHER OF (UN)COMMONS

In a gesture of insurgent posthumanism (Papadopoulos 2010), in what follows I will seek to suggest that the building was an active participant in the modes of politics that unfolded. In following sections I am proposing that we attune ourselves to the ways in which a building or material can refuse or engage with the gatherings and assemblies in which it is entangled, that we not only see it as a thing (gathering) rather than an object, but that we also listen for its call to engage in *taking care of things*, that we attune ourselves to the calls for care that things manifest. We can then see in neglected materials not only matters of fact, nor only matters of concern, but we may be able to attend to them as matters of care (de la Bellacasa 2011; 2012; 2017). If matters of concern require us to reveal and make visible modes of fabrication and mechanisms of stabilisation (Latour 2004), matters of care require us to become attuned to the practices of care involved in processes of knowledge production that contribute to the construction of common worlds (de la Bellacasa 2017). The perspective of matters of care asks us not only to reveal the broad constellations of agencies

in the emergence of a thing, but also to care for them, and particularly to care for those that are neglected by an assemblage. It brings into sight the ethical question of our obligations to the others with whom we seek to construct common worlds and mobilizes care “to serve a gathering purpose” (ibid: 45). In this section I would like to point towards the manner in which The Field sought to open forms of political practice through modes of engagement that attempted such attunement, that attempted to draw into the fold all the needs, desires and potentialities that constituted ‘it’. In this ‘it’ there are both modes of resonance and repulsion, affirmation and refusal, which formed a basis from which affirmative modes of politics could emerge—refusal was part of the uncommons (Blaser & de la Cadena 2017) that underpinned the possibility of commons.

Various trajectories came together in order to open the possibility of a shared temporality of attending to neglected things. As was explored in the last chapter, the New Cross Commoners in part emerged from a dissatisfaction with a form of enclosed and self-referential academic knowledge production and the separation of theory from practice. This feeling was shared by Matt who recounted to me some of the possible origins for the idea of The Field.

There’s lots of different moments I could sort of pick out like, one of them would be, the thing around the fees and kind of things that were coming up around that, you know the occupation of the library and the protests and the experiments in alternative education. That was definitely the first time I kind of started thinking about alternative education...

And then also just being at Goldsmiths and just looking at, developing a kind of more nuanced political critique, feeling really frustrated at the university itself as this place which felt like it was complicit somehow and even the lecturers felt like they weren’t able to support us and in

this kind of, you know, I guess Goldsmiths in itself is kind of a particular place, more so than most other universities I suppose, because you really are given the kind of space to develop an anti-capitalist critique and yet it's still so very obviously part of that so I felt kind of suffocated and I felt like I wanted to do something being in that situation and then also watching, looking at how either academics would, or people would, either go into academia and then produce work in that environment that was not really going anywhere, especially in anthropology like I remember asking Irina, who was like my favourite teacher like: *where does you work go? At what point does the change come? Where does the effect happen?*

I just felt really frustrated by that. And its probably a kind of naïve way of thinking about it but that's how it felt and how like people in my cohort, fellow students, it was either that route or going into some kind of institution that was not really trying to address the issue, so that's where the idea came from, of *well how about creating a place where this kind of continued education can happen and which can try to on a very localised level do something with this knowledge that was developed.*



In searching for a space to initiate the project that would become The Field, Matt, Jane and Dave began to scour New Cross for empty buildings, disused spaces, sites that were in one way or another passed over or neglected, that were uninhabited or unused. Their search was itself spurred on through modes of political refusal; and in this search, they attempted to attune themselves to the *call of ruins*, to the possibilities encased within sites of urban decay, neglect and abandonment. These sites were those that, in some way, did not fit within the narrow sphere of urban political economy, that were discarded by the interests of capital, sites that were deemed non-productive in the schema of the urban economy.

Whilst this search was underway, they began to attend the meetings of the New Cross Commoners. One of the meetings they attended was held in Fordham Park. At this meeting the Commoners continued the process, which had been initiated at their first coming together, of mapping places of enclosure and commoning in New Cross. This not only included looking for practices and places where commoning was already taking place, but also looking for “abandoned spaces we might consider to take care of” (New Cross Commoners 2013). This was a process of both locating alternative political practices already existent in the local area, and of seeking out spaces of possibility. There was a clear resonance between the search that Matt, Jane and Dave had been engaged with, and the forms of political exploration of the New Cross Commoners. Matt continues,

By the time we met the commoners The Field was already a kind of idea that was being developed, we actually met them, on the first time we met them we we’re like, me Jane and Dave were like—‘*we want to set up a place*’—and the first workshop we joined with them they were mapping empty building in New Cross so it was like really weird how it was kind of like this convergence of two things that felt really kind of right to come together.

Their search for a space led them to contact the owners of various unused or abandoned buildings around New Cross. Very few responded. But the owner of The Field was willing to give it to Matt, Jane and Dave on a rent-free contract. He had bought it many years ago, with the intention of developing on the land, but had soon found out that this would be more difficult than expected due to the conservation regulations which govern the area of Telegraph Hill. The building was on the border of this conservation area, and one of the last to be covered by its regulations. As the story was told, he quickly became swept up in other things, had his attention taken elsewhere, and the building was left uninhabited and unused, for the time being forgotten. It was during this time that it became squatted.

The building returned to his attention when he began to receive regular complaints. Initially the residential neighbours would contact him directly with reports of people taking drugs in the building, making a lot of noise at night, defecating in the open drains at the side of the house. Soon the doctor's surgery also began to complain about the insanitary conditions and drug use. The landlord did little in response. His attention remained elsewhere. Finally, he began to be contacted by the police attempting to put pressure on him to take action of some form or another as they were regularly being called to the site, to at the very least secure it to prevent further squatting. But he continued to ignore these complaints and requests. Gradually the complaints subsided as the building arrived at the state outlined above where it could no longer facilitate human inhabitation. But the memory and stress of this period of regular complaints, and fraught relations with the neighbours and police, remained. So, when Matt, Jane and Dave arrived at his office in 2014 he was eager to give them the place. He would no longer have this gnawing worry.

Various agencies come together in this process: the conservation rules that prevented easy development; the worry and relief of the landlord; the search for a space from which to organise; the resonance between this search and the New Cross Commoners; the collapse of the building that led to it no longer being squatted; the dual

role of Goldsmiths in being a paradoxical source of inspiration and despondency, a site of *Cruel Optimism* (Berlant 2011); the ideology of the commons and anti-capitalist critique. It was this convergence, this coming together of differential processes, that opened the possibility of locating a common time of affirmation between the building and the collective of commoners that would become The Field. But this common time of affirmation did not unify the various issues at stake for each of the participants, that is it did not homogenise them under a single banner or set of interests, but rather responded in a way that was homonymic (Blaser 2016), that is it addressed different matters of concern simultaneously—the property of the landlord was protected by inhabitation, the building was given the care for which it called, the commoners found a space from which to organise politically. On an idealist plane there is a peculiar paradox here in that two of these matters of concern, that is the protection of property and the organisation of anti-capitalist politics, could emerge as contradictory, or conflictual. And yet a common worlding could emerge through these uncommons, through a space of encounter that did not necessarily entirely merge worlds into one but facilitated their (partial) communication.

THE CALL OF RUINS

Such communication does not occur only from the perspectival side of the human participants in the commons. To take up this proposal of thinking in terms of the building and New Cross, here from the perspective of the building as a gathering, that is as a site of assembly, inscription and manifestation of the collectives in which it had been entangled, it can be seen how the building itself expressed these modes of communicative encounter. We can begin to glimpse answers to the question “might there nevertheless be a sense in which things could speak for themselves? And what might their voices sound like?” (Holbraad 2011: 3); answers which reveal the voices of things in other modes of expression.

On first entering the building, the walls were inscribed with



the traces of those who had previously dwelt within it. The writing was, quite literally, on the walls. Passing through the building, the traces of its former inhabitants, that is the squatters who had caused the landlord so much worry, surrounded us. Shopping lists, phone numbers, expressions of political discontent and pictures coated the crumbling, moulding and peeling walls. The building manifested a gathering of the forces, affects, feelings and expressions which had left their traces upon its many surfaces. The now absent people who had dwelt in this space manifested their presence through such inscriptions. The world that here revealed itself was one of discontent and neglect, one of a material malaise. The building was run through with a spatial melancholia and manifestations of ruination (Navaro-Yashin 2009), but it was not only a mediation of human melancholia through objects, although that was certainly a part of it, but a manifestation immanent to the materiality of the building itself. These traces thus seemed to point to the failure of people to construct a common world, the failure of the former inhabitants of the building to attend to their encounters with difference, resulting in the painful emergence of excessively uncommon worlds between the building and the human dwellers, that is an excessive emphasis on the uncommons—“a

condition that disrupts (yet does not replace) the idea of “the world” as shared ground” (Blaser & de la Cadena 2017: 186). What came to the foreground was precisely the uncommonality of the needs and desires of the former inhabitants in contrast to those of the building. The encounters of difference here produced divergence and repulsion, constitutive resonances that foregrounded the uncommons to such an extent that the result emerged as a form of ruination. An entrenchment of uncommonality that nevertheless came to serve as the ground and possibility of commoning.



What was read on the melancholic walls were manifestations of modes of neglect on the part of its prior human inhabitants.² And it was not only the inscriptions of the human hand that manifested this, but far more significantly the collapse of the building itself. It was this collapse that clearly manifested a symptom of modes of neglect, a symptom because it is retrospectively interpreted as a manifestation of a deferred event or cause. The floor of the building had rotted away exposing the ground beneath. The roof had collapsed inwards, and water ran from it, gathering in various corners and rivulets formed by

² The point here is not to pass moral judgement on the former inhabitants of the building. But rather to attempt to look from the perspectival position of the building itself.

the mounds of discarded materials and objects. The uncommon world that existed appeared, from the perspective of the building, a ruinous one, a decaying and melancholic one, one that had responded to an extended period of neglect on the part of the prior human inhabitants through the refusal of the possibility of continuing human inhabitation, by emerging as a milieu that was hostile to human inhabitation, and instead favouring bacterial and fungal ecologies, an assemblage that sought to exclude humans. The notion of assemblage is useful here for it allows us to become attuned to distributions of agency, will, desire and force that become spread and distributed across fields of connections. It opens up the distribution of agency beyond the limits of a specific bound agent or subject, allowing us to begin to glimpse the ways in which beings of different kinds enable and constrain one

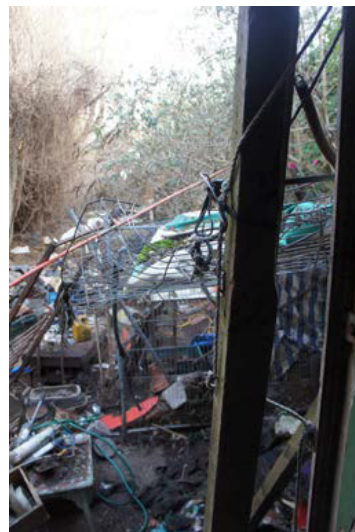


another, act upon one another, or allow one another to act in certain ways.

This ruinous assemblage could be seen as the material emergence of post-human ecologies, or to borrow from Tsing's title, a site of *capitalist ruins* (2015). Drawing on Tsing's notion of capitalist ruins is also important here for it draws attention to the 'patchy' nature of capitalism, the way in which spaces of abandonment emerge when

the perspective of capital no longer can locate assets within, or utility from, a site. In one sense, the ruination begins to emerge through the disregard of capital for sites deemed to be non-productive. In the urban setting gaps emerge in the flows of capital as it organises unevenly, skipping over certain areas or spaces, circumventing them. Sites of neglect and abandonment emerge. It was such abandonment, an abandonment of the interests of development, that opened the building as a site to be squatted. But this very inhabitation opened a different space of neglect and abandonment, one that concerned the relation of the building to those who dwelt within it in such a way as to neglect the calls for care that issued from the building. It was these modes of neglect that led to the ruination of the building, a ruination that opened the ground of possibility for it to become the site of commoning that became entangled with the searches of Matt, Jane and Dave and the New Cross Commoners.

Such ruination and collapse is emergent through failures of communication between humans and their dwelling place, failures which lead the building to instead call upon the fungi and bacteria to join in the composition of a post-human ecology that pushes away the human. In its affirmative dimension, it turned away from the speaking being and favoured other forms of life and association. Or perhaps rather, called upon the human who would wish to listen to this mode of communication, to listen to the needs and



desires that are being expressed, and offer them the imperative that should they wish to recompose a common world, should they wish to make of the uncommons the ground of commoning, a great deal of care will be required on their part. That is, the injunctive demand given by the building, by the collection of bodies that composed its localised ecology, is such that should the building be asked to care for human inhabitants once again, should it be asked to participate in the composition of a common world, those prospective human inhabitants must first reciprocate by caring for the building.

The material refusal of the building, a refusal that constituted ecological compositions that pushed away human inhabitation, manifested a form of communication that responded in silence. As Lacan writes of speech, “all speech calls for a response... there is no speech without a response even if speech meets only with silence” (2006: 206). Whilst the building cannot be said to speak in the narrow sense, it did express unfulfilled needs retrospectively interpretable as symptoms. It communicated, in response and calling for further response, the failures of its previous entanglements. The collapsed roof, the peeling wall paper, the rotting floor, and the entire assemblage of material manifestations that constituted an assemblage that sought to exclude the possibility of human inhabitation expressed the lack of care that the building had received in its prior gatherings. Its previously unfulfilled needs and desires manifested themselves as ruination, as expressions that are in a sense, symptoms of the failures of former encounters. The unfulfillment of these needs and desires, such as the need for care and maintenance that any such building possess, led to the manifestation of a call. The call is here understood as a tonality of expression, an additional plane which transforms the meaning of expression.³ It

3 Lacan speaks of the call, through the work of Karl Bühler, in his first seminar:

“In any imperative, there’s another plane, that of the call. It is a question of the tone in which the imperative is uttered. The same text can have completely different imports depending on the tone. The simple statement stop can have, depending on the circumstances, completely different imports as a call.” (Lacan 1991: 84)

is a tonality of expression which transforms meaning. To begin to extend the possibility of the call beyond human language the example used by Lacan may be instructive, where he points to the ability of a pet to draw one's attention to something that it lacks (1991: 84). To extend this possibility also to the building asks of us to become attuned to the expressions of lack, need and desire that manifested themselves through this material refusal, through the silent refusal that communicated through the rotting floors, the collapsed roof, the cracked and shattered windows. It asks us to attune ourselves to the calls for care that the other addresses to us. It asks us to open ourselves to difference-writ-large. After all, the call requires an interpretant to which its tonality is addressed, and to be properly attended to, to be responded to beyond silence, it must be an interpretant that is willing to at least attempt to hear in order to respond.

I first entered the building in February 2014. I had been on my way to Goldsmiths after work one day to visit the library. After getting off the train at Queens Road Peckham station I walked, hurriedly, along the road. On approaching Old Kent Road, I saw Jane and Matt on the opposite pavement. Crossing to speak to them I was immediately struck by the excitement that was emanating from them both. Jane was quite literally shaking with the force of the affect. They stood there,



covered from head to toe in dirt and dust, and told me "this is our place!", gesturing to the short, squat and severely run-down building behind them. They guided me towards the door, pushing it open partially before it was blocked by some unseen force on the other side. "That's as far as it will open at the moment" I was told. Peering gingerly through the gap, a gap just large enough for a single person to fit through, provided they crouched to avoid the beam hanging down



from the ceiling, I was encouraged to step across the threshold. I uncertainly did so. The stench of rotting wood was forceful.

The door would not open fully, and so our bodies had to be contorted into strange diagonal crouching positions in order to slide in sideways, adapting themselves to the spatial configuration which the new lifeworlds of the space had constructed. The floor was no longer capable of supporting human weight. The wood which had once formed the ground of the building had rotted away leaving a fine proto-soil. The fungi had taken hold. In place of floorboards were fragmented remnants of rotting timber. We stepped cautiously across this archipelago of stable foot holds, feeling our way with the weight of our feet. The roof had not fared much better. The shelter that it had once offered was now absent. Water dripped from rivulets that had formed on the surfaces of the bent, broken, twisted boards that now lent inwards towards the centre of the building, as though some large object had struck the centre of the roof, causing a crater to form and shredding the waterproof felt that now hung tassel-like from the warped and splintered panels. The thing that this building had become, the gatherings that it embodied, filled me with uneasiness, they communicated to me a profound malaise.

RECOMPOSING COMMON WORLDS

It was this very call that opened the possibility of the building being drawn into the processes of commoning that would unfold over the following years. The refusal of the building to accommodate neglectful dwelling emerged from the neglect of the needs and desires of the building itself. Here desire comes to stand for something beyond an exclusively human faculty, but rather for something of a “primordial and universal character” (Tarde 2012: 21), that is as a force that leads to affinities and repulsions, a certain force in the emergence of what William Mazzarella has called “constitutive resonance” (2017), the coming together of certain bodies in processes of mutually constitutive becoming. The proposal here then is that the desire manifest for the construction of a common world that unfolded through the process of renovating and caring for the building was not *only* a projection of human desire onto an inert object, but a mode of communication between humans and nonhumans.

I am here attempting to attend to Gabriel Tarde’s consideration that,

“if belief and desire are forces, it is probable that when they emerge from the body in our mental manifestations, they do not differ noticeably from how they were when they entered, in the form of molecular cohesions or affinities. The ultimate foundation of material substance would then be open to us;”

(2012: 21).

The point here, as I am reading it, is not to entirely efface the human subject or to deny its specificity, but to prevent its premature closure. To paraphrase Latour’s (2004) phrasing of the cosmopolitical proposal (Stengers 2005; 2010; 2011b), it is to keep the subject open to the cosmos and the cosmos open to the subject. It is then, not a refusal of the locus of human subjectivity, but a radical recognition of subject-

tivity's connection to the worlds from which it is inseparable. It is less an effacement of the subject than a radical recognition of the Freudian-Lacanian notion that "desire is always already the desire of the Other" (Thakur & Dickstein 2018: 2). Once again, here the other does not only refer to the human other, but to the experience of alterity of all kinds that is integral to the experience of sameness and self. That desire is desire of the other is to say that far from being radically separated, the human and nonhuman are integrally entangled, that the desire of the nonhuman is folded into the desire of the human and that human desire is engaged with numerous nonhumans.

In this way, the *call of ruins* that manifests a call for care is responded to here on the part of humans by the careful construction of a common world, by the opening of a process of assembling neglected things. The desire *for care*, on the part of the building, and the desire *to care*, on the part of human commoners, are continuous. Desire, as such, is not the reserve of a bounded individual agent, but is formed in the interstice between beings. It is relational. The expressions of neglect that manifested the call of ruins are then sites for the co-construction of desire, sites through which the composition of common worlds can begin to be explored.



The process of caring for the building that would become The Field made of this relational desire a positive condition of commoning. It unfolded through specific attention to what was possible and desirable given local conditions, through an exploration of the building itself, the local area, and through the skills, needs and desires of those who participated in the project. A foundation of the process was detailed attention to what was already there, to the specific conditions that already existed in that place, to the site's own desires and specificities—that is what it already had, the potentials it encased, as well as that which it desired. Materials found at the site amidst the rubbish, such as boxes of old tiles and various fancy metal finishings and adornments, were kept and used in the renovation process to tile the floor or add detail. The doors that were found in the building, but which were covered in numerous layers of peeling paint and had developed various odours of chemical decomposition, were taken off their damaged, rusting hinges to be scraped and sanded down back to the pine beneath the numerous surfaces of paint. And each surface of paint peeled back could be seen to reveal another layered sediment of the fluctuation between common and uncommon worlds, between care and neglect. The windows, old Victorian sash windows that we were



told later by a passer-by, apparently with some level of knowledge in such things, would have cost a small fortune to restore professionally, were also taken out of the frames and sanded back before rotten parts were removed and replaced with found discards of timber, and the broken glass panes replaced by ones found on the street locally. As much as could be kept was kept, and in this way the conditions of the site itself constituted an active component of the process of renovation.

The ruins themselves became the positive ground for the construction of common worlds. Not only was the call for care attended to, but also the specificities of the conditions in which the recomposition of common worlds unfolded. This practice of paying close attention to what was already present at the site sought to enact alternative forms of urbanism, forms that paid close attention to local specificities and that did not enact the urban as the masterful control and domination of the environment by human intelligence and efficacy. That is, it sought to escape from a production of the city based on what Philippe Descola has described in *Beyond Nature and Culture* as “the heroic model of creation” (2014: 323). This heroic model of creation is one based on “the imposition of form upon inert matter” (ibid) and rests on two premises:

“the preponderance of an individualized intentional agent as the cause of the coming-to-be of beings and things, and the radical difference between the ontological status of the creator and that of whatever he produces. According to the paradigm of creation-production, the subject is autonomous and his intervention in the world reflects his personal characteristics: whether he is a god, a demiurge, or a simple mortal, he produces his oeuvre according to a preestablished plan and with a definite purpose”

(ibid)

In such a model, the source of the force of desire is clearly lo-

cated in the individual intentional agent. There is no room given for an interstitial co-construction of desiring assemblages. Desire, in a heroic mode, is that of imposition and domination. The other bends to the hero's desire.

In contrast to such a heroic manifestation of the force of desire as issuing from the internality of a powerful individual agent, we can here draw on the distinction between wayfaring and transport outlined by Tim Ingold (2007). Transportation is described as a form of travelling that is characterised by departure from and arrival at static points. In transportation, both the point of origination and the final destination are predetermined, meaning the process of travelling is entirely instrumentalised and subservient to the points. Desire is a matter of absolute prefiguration. The path travelled is simply a line between two or more points that are fixed and set, and that pre-existed the process of travelling. It is the points that are important, not the journey. The ideal form of transportation would be movement as quickly as possible between these predetermined points, with no reference to the space covered in between. Transportation, then, can be compared to the heroic creation outlined above through Descola. It is destination focused and concerns only arrival at that destination.

In contrast to this Ingold speaks of wayfaring as a mode of travelling where neither point of departure nor point of arrival are predetermined. In fact, strictly speaking there can be no absolute point of arrival in wayfaring as it remains an ongoing mode of travelling, one based on exploration. In wayfaring the traveller establishes their direction as they go along, the path unfolds as the journey is made and each change of orientation is contingent on the conditions exposed and directions suggested by the conditions encountered along the path. It is a form of travelling other than that of arrival at and departure from static points. The duration of wayfaring is of absolute importance for it is the immanent factor determining the direction to be taken. The directions to be taken are established along the way. The rules of travel do not pre-exist the process of travelling itself.

Wayfaring then is a process which continually attends to the

specificities of the assemblages it constructs and becomes entangled with through its specific durations. There is an ongoing attention to the interstice. The common world that it seeks to construct is not one that is prefigured at the beginning of the journey, but one that unfolds as immanent to that journey itself. Attending to the agencies and desires that manifest through this process direct the continuation of the process itself. The commons that it seeks to construct is not a preformed relationship, but one that makes of the difference of encounter, that is the uncommons, a positive condition of composition. Each time a new entity reveals itself, or is brought into the process, the direction must shift, as do the desires that not only become manifest through process but are continually reconstructed through it.

In the following section, I will seek to tell the story of one such encounter and moment. It is an event which took place sometime after the initial process of renovation was complete. The building was once more capable of participating in common worlds with humans. But this does not mean that the practices of care had reached a closure, as though their destination had been arrived at, but rather that it had opened new possibilities for relations of mutual care. Relations which brought with them new configurations of distributed agencies and desires that called to be attended to.

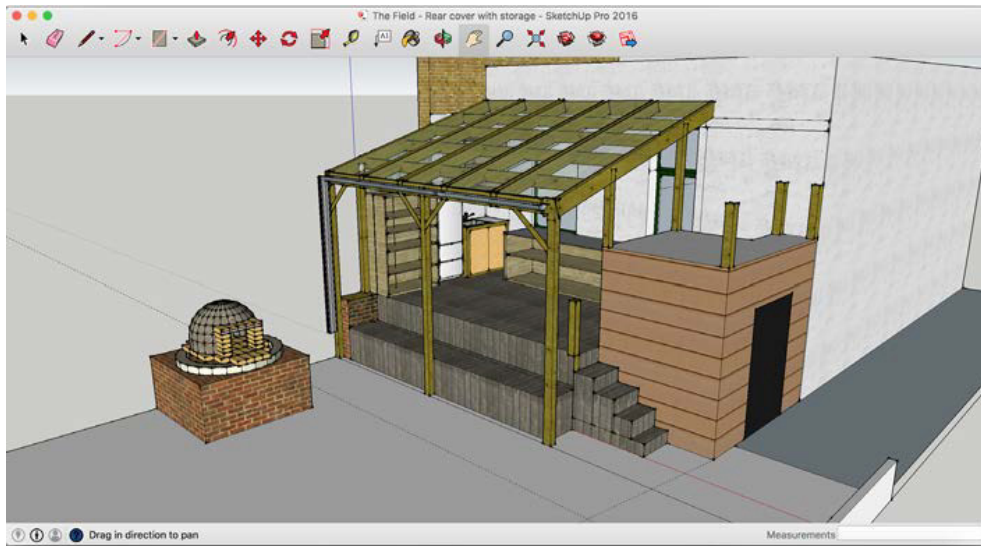
STANDING IN THE RAIN

I am standing in the rain. The hood of my worn-down raincoat is pulled over my head. Only my face and hands are exposed to the world. The cold is biting. The rain is constant but light, that kind of mist-like rain that has the effect of making everything feel humid without actually feeling like it is falling, just hanging in the air, gliding. Beneath my feet is sodden concrete. The water is mingling on the uneven surface of the concrete, running off to gather in dirty little pools dotted with cigarette butts, wood shavings, ash and rotting matter. We don't know how deep the concrete is, but it's too deep to remove. Several of us wanted to rip it all up to get to whatever was underneath, but the

cost and scale of such a project would be immense. We've drilled into it several times, but only a couple of times got through to the ground underneath, and at each time it's been at a different depth that the person holding the drill has suddenly lurched forward as the tip of the bit moves from the strong resistance of the concrete to the soft earth below. We've deduced that the underside of the concrete is uneven then. If it were turned upside down, if its upper surface which faces the sky and its lower surface which touches the earth were inverted, we might see a series of small hills and mounds, a modernist small-scale model of the contours of the North Downs that line the southern limit of London some 30 miles away and through which the ancient Anglo-Saxon Wæcelinga Stræt that is now the Old Kent Road would have passed on its way to Canterbury before heading on to Dover.

We're attempting to drill down into the concrete to use it as a foundation. There is already a wooden platform extending from the rear of the building that was built about six months ago, mostly by Jane, and we are now trying to build a lean-to structure to cover it to protect it from the weather and allow it to serve as an extension of the kitchen. We have a series of Rawl Anchor Bolts that we've learnt we can use to fix metal shoes to the concrete that will then allow us to hold three tall wooden posts in place that can serve as the supports of a lean-to structure on the back of the building. The concrete that some of us once wished we could remove to make way for planting is being put to good use, offering us a solid base on which to erect this structure. I designed the structure using Sketch Up beforehand. That model is proving of limited use now, but it nonetheless serves as a reminder of what we are trying to do, a visual aid.

There are three of us stood here in the rain. We were the only three available, out of the thirty or so people who constitute the loose groups of people engaged enough to be on the e-mail list, or perhaps the only three willing, or a combination of both. We are becoming increasingly wet as the time passes, the rain almost becoming less of a problem as the humidity of our clothing gradually crawls closer to the ambient humidity of the air. We've bought the largest drill bit the lo-



cal B&Q had to offer. It's far too large for the drill we have and keeps coming loose causing the person whose holding it's arm to shake violently and haphazardly whenever it does so. Two extension cables are running from the inside to power the drill. The point where the second plugs into the first is wrapped up in a black bin bag in a makeshift attempt to protect it from the rain. It seems to be doing the job.

The concrete is run through with little pieces of gravel, and every time the tip of the drill-bit meets one of these specks of stone its progress is halted. It is powerful enough to make it through the concrete, but not the gravel. When these tiny pieces of stone are met by the tip of the drill-bit all forward movement halts. I can feel that the tip of the drill-bit is no longer meeting resistance as it grinds through the concrete but is just spinning on top of the smooth surface of the stone, not moving forward at all, just sitting on top of it rotating like a child's spinning top or a dreidel. Each time this happens the progress halts, concrete dust stops coming up out of the newly made holes and the drill bit becomes blunter. We're fairly certain that this drill is not up to the job. It's just a pretty run of the mill corded masonry drill intended for occasional DIY jobs around the house: putting up shelves, hanging pictures, attaching flat pack bookshelves to the walls—that kind of thing. The drill keeps heating up to the point that it can no longer be touched. The plastic casing has started to melt in areas. But it's the best drill we've got.

As the rain comes down the holes that were drilling fill up with water and the dust of the ground concrete mixes with the rainwater to create a grainy dark grey paste which splashes back at us as we were working. Water is running down off the top of my hood as the rain becomes heavier making it hard to see what I'm doing and the drill bit keeps coming loose again making it very hard to hold onto the handle of the drill. Occasionally we come up against one of those pieces of gravel from a strange angle and rather than spinning against the smooth surface of the pebble the bit catches against its edge and freezes, the motor of the drill no longer being able to move the bit sends the handle flying out and my arm is jolted of in whatever direction the drill is moving, striking my elbow against nearby wooden structures or shocking my shoulder joint. Either me or the drill are not really up to this job. Maybe both of us. Probably both of us.

The three of us turn and look at each other. None of us are smiling. Shall we pack this in? One of us says. Yeah, this is grim, the response comes. From who I don't remember, but it hardly matters—the looks on our faces make clear we are all thinking it. Relieved, we all bundle inside rummaging around in the kitchen for whatever food might have been left lying around, hoping for some of the almost-stale 'artisan' bread the local industrial bakery gives us every Wednesday for the pay-what-you-can kitchen. There's half a loaf. It's no longer almost-stale. It's stale. We find a few worse-for-wear vegetables lying around the place and chuck them into a pot, longing for any kind of warm food to counteract the hours we've spent in the rain drilling into the concrete. We made little progress in that time.

These small pieces of gravel sitting inside the concrete surface that covered the entire garden functioned as feedback points, moments where environmental conditions make themselves heard and express their agency. They revealed moments of encounter whereby entities and processes that would often be placed in the category of inactive matter forced themselves to be attended to. The will of the drill-bit and its user, the will to create a hole in the concrete of 5cm depth, encounters the resistance of a small piece of gravel embedded in the concrete

since it had been laid many years or decades ago—when, we are not sure. This resistance, this blockage, is powerful enough to prevent the will of the drill and its user being realised. The path of action is forced to change—the hole must be drilled elsewhere, meaning the shoe that holds the post in place must be moved with it and in order for these shoes to be secure a minimum of two holes diagonally opposite one another (there is one at each of the four corners of the square shoe’s base) so a place must be found on the concrete where it is possible to drill at least two diagonally opposite holes in order for the shoe to sit securely. And if the shoes move too much the distance between each support will be too long meaning the cross beam that they will hold will have too much overhang making the entire structure unstable. Unable to see where the gravel rests below the surface of the concrete we are left to find such a location through trial and error, through an ongoing process of exploration of the material, of the environment, of our own knowledge and capabilities, and of the tools and resources that we have available to us.

COMMUNICATION

These pieces of gravel operate as feedback points through which the materiality of the concrete, its physical and historical composition, become active within the processes underway. This modality of encounter reveals a relationship to things that I would like to explore as a mode of *communication*. There is an intimate link between commoning and communication which is outlined by Tim Ingold (2018), through the works of John Dewey. “Following the medieval precedent, one could turn ‘common’ into a verb; to communicate would then be to common,” and through these communicative-commonings “we come into a concordance that is new to both of us” (ibid: 4), that is transforming and novel common worlds emerge. Communicative-commoning, is then a creative process, a process of constructing new arrangements that may facilitate possibilities of care and co-flourishing. It is a practice of attempting to listen and respond to the articulations of the un-



commons as sites of emergent difference. Here, as with the other, difference does not only refer to human or cultural differences, but rather refers to differences emergent between beings. It is once again ‘difference-writ-large,’ whereby human and nonhuman encounter one another. The ‘other’ of such difference is not the cultural other, but a situated and perspectival other that constitutes the moment of encounter as such and the components of “constitutive resonance” (Mazzarella 2017) which draw entities together in mutual becomings.

Crucially, following Eduardo Kohn (2013), such communication extends the domain of thought and the semiotic beyond that of the human, that is it is not only in the more narrowly defined domain of ‘speaking beings’ (Lacan 2006) that communication unfolds, but also through the interplay of bodies, materialities, affects and forces, through domains and entities that we would not usually recognise as participating in speech. Through such communication agencies, desires and needs encounter one another ontologically, constructing common worlds through encounters that confuse the domineering opposition between the thinking and speaking mind over mere matter. What is the subject and what is the object is by no means clear in such an encounter. But this does not mean that subject and object entirely dissolve, but rather that they are not the essential starting point. The division between subject and object shifts and slides, opening spaces of interaction, call and response, where the boundaries between beings and difference become unclear in the interstice of encounter. As

speaking communication emerges that we begin to glimpse modalities of communication that open up the composition of common worlds to a greater multiplicity of agencies and desires. The commons emerge as an interplay of beings that become attentive to one another's needs and desires, that care for one another's realities.

This communication then, is a process of attending to and caring for the gathering of a broad range of agencies. It is a process by which the uncommonality of difference is engaged with, a process by which the space of the commons is founded on the acceptance and interfacing of differences. It is a mode of communication which attempts to listen to that which does not speak, to that which has been covered over or neglected. It is for this reason that the entities I am here highlighting as engaged in such communicative encounters are nonhuman, for it is these beings that can often constitute the other to which no responsibility of response is expected or offered. Thus, it is perhaps most clearly glimpsed in those interstices between human and nonhuman, for it is in these interstices that we often see forms of interaction where the other is reduced to a static, inactive object, a mere matter. That said, it does not exclusively concern the interstice between the human and nonhuman. The neglect of others occurs in many political modes, including systems of domination such as white supremacy and *The Racial Contract* (Mills 2011) that excludes non-whites from the formation of a polis, or through the patriarchal division of labour that assigns women to a concealed position of domestic reproduction (Federici 2014). Some of these other modes of neglect will be explored in the following three chapters. But here, what I am seeking to approach is the dimension of communication that is the process of listening, hearing, speaking, acting and attending in such a way as to permit the needs and desires of others to participate in the constitution of the commons, that makes of others components of the polis without resorting to simple assimilation to a pre-established system of meaning that claims universality. It is a warning against the premature closure of the polis in such a way that would define what is object and in so doing exclude those objectified beings from participa-

tion in the composition of common worlds. It is a relationship to difference which does not only accept or tolerate difference but attempts to actively engage and work with it in such a way as to allow others to be carefully attended to and be included in the fields of politics.

PARASITE

***THE COST OF
CUTTING CORNERS***

The air is thick with plaster and brick dust. Five people stand, a large metal object lies across the floor, and several tall poles support a surrounding structure.

^^^

I think, like, we don't have to d-o it right now... If it doesn't work at all then...

We'll just test run it

WAH_OO—wait

Are you taking a lot of weight?

No the wall's taking the weight

We're waiting to...

No-no, just wait

Hold it against the wall.

If you hold it here then I can go...

I think we're alright this end.

Just make sure you're steady...

Do you want to go?

Are you too close to it?

1...2...3...

[metal grinds against concrete]

GRSHHHHHHHH

Got it? GOT IT?

We got it, we got it

How are you down there?

We're alright, we're alright

WE'RE FINE
Just don't let it slip over..

Yeah, don't let it roll

Are you OK there?
We're alright
YEA IT'S FINE
It's blocked by...

They both need to go in at the same time don't they
It can't go in any further?

They both...
IT'S BLOCKED...

If you lift it from there does it go in straight?

Can we try and do the same now with this side?

OK I DON'T THINK THAT
SHOULD BE UP THERE BECAUSE THAT'S REALLY...
On the edge of what?

...THAT'S REALLY STILL ON THE
EDGE
WELL, AS IT. IT COULD REALLY JUST
FALL OFF THE EDGE
And get on the...

Just make sure it doesn't fall off

YEAH, YEAH
I don't think it will.
When you do the same on that side...
If you hold it there it's not going to roll

...DO YOU RECKON...
'COS IT'S NOT GOING TO
GO STRAIGHT IN

Just give it a tap there

[a hammer strikes]

HH-HH-HH-HH-HH-HH-HH-HH-HH-HH-HH-HH-HH

HH

...It goes to there...

HH-HH-HH-HH-HH-HH-HH-HH-HH-HH-HH-HH-HH

[rubble falls]

GRFTK_LL_KL_L_GR_L

HH-HH-HH-HH-HH—HH—HH—HH

LL_L_K_GRFKLT

H—H

LL_gr_g

Got it

HH—HH—HH—H

GRLK_tt_l

Is everyone steady?

y...yaaaah...

Just two seconds

Maybe...

Do you think it's possible to lift it all in one go now?

I think it's worth trying it...

Yeah

GO ON, WHAT'S THE ALTERNATIVE?

To get some pieces of wood that are. just a longer bit of wood to support it that way so we can go up

I THINK AS THEY GOT IT
IN, SO I THINK WE JUST... WITH 3 OF US LIFTING WE
SHOULD BE OK

But you're not going to have as much err ability
to lift on that ladder

HOW DO YOU MEAN?

You can't push from the bottom can you
in the same way

I think we should get you up off that ladder over to that and swap
round with this.

WHAT YOU DON'T THINK
THIS IS GOOD?

I THOUGHT THIS WOULD
BE THE BEST WAY

Shall we try?

LET'S JUST TRY

YOU'RE WORRIED ABOUT ME BEING BEHIND?

On that ladder lifting this

I'm a bit worried that this is basically supporting
(ha—hehe)

.. the whole fucking thing

YEAH. YEAH, YEAH.

I think

Don't worry about that,

worry about the box underneath it

Yeah

YEAH

I think we should tie a rope around it at that end and pull it that way

So it can't fall that way onto you, [hah]..

If that makes sense

Yeah.. Or now can we.. Can we not put that, over there?

Lift it?

Shall we not just try and...
 I'm scared that...
 if we get it in won't that solve a lot of the concerns
 It could work
 I JUST...
 IF WE GET IT INTO THE...
 If we get it up
 EXACTLY
 Once it's up there these issues.. that means
 there's a lot less issue right?
 I have the impression that if we
 lift it a little bit, we might be able to
 Yeah yeah
 If we're closer up we might be able to get it in.
 It's a 2mm gap, is it a 2mm gap?
 If we put that over then we'll be able to put it in the hole
 Once this is level
 so it'd be good if you... if you
 As a precaution we should get another piece of wood that's a bit
 higher
 Yeah?
 So that if you drop it you need to come back down, you won't need
 to come back down to
 YEAH YEAH YEAH OK

I'll just take this one

DA.
 Yeah.
 CAN I JUST TAKE ALL OF
 THIS STUFF OR?
 No. Don't. Can I just.
 I think probably
 WE'LL BECAUSE THAT'S

GOING TO. IF THAT'S

Take that out.

DUN

TAK

THTAK

THU

THTAK

Alright?

Alright?

Yeah, alright.

SHKGRHHK

HAH .. THIS IS KIND OF STRESS-
FUL

There was me, just practicing piano this morning
How are you planning on doing it?
WHAT?

This bit?

Up and in...

'Cause we're not. We're only just going to be supporting it,
you need this one, that's..

No?

There's two of us here. Is that?
Do we need three people on this side?
And then one keeping the rope like A keeping the rope so we
can pull it.

This isn't really doing it.

It would be nice if we could

We don't want to take that of now

NO

In case that all goes wrong then

WE JUST NEED TO TRY AND GET IT

Then we'll have to take that down again

DA I DON'T THINK IT'S GOING TO
NEED MUCH MATE

Yeah I think we should just try and lift it in

Can you?

We've got a bigger piece of wood

Yeah

I'm just worried

Can you use that one?

It's fine on there..

SCHRRRRRHHH

KLHK

KLHKKKKTING

CHAPTER 4

FOUR FIELDS OF POLITICS

If the last chapter concerned the possibility of drawing so-called ‘objects’ into politics, that is of thinking in terms of things as gatherings rather than in terms of inactive objects, then this chapter opens the question that the previous chapter already began to address—namely: what is politics? The chapter is structured around four fields of politics that manifested at The Field. These four fields are not to be understood as separate and bounded domains, but perhaps are better understood as tendencies that overlap and intersect. In intersecting and interacting these fields transform one another, give shape to one another, and temporarily fix meanings and values. They also do not, by any means, exhaust the political field.

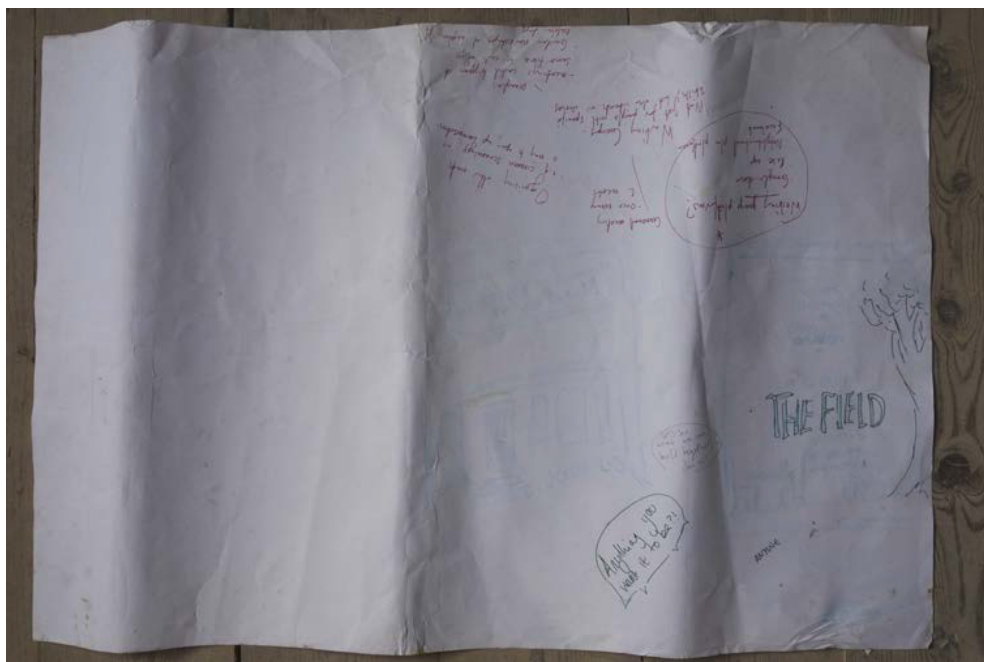
FIELD ONE: TRANSVERSAL RADICAL DEMOCRACY

The opening field is that of transversal radical democracy. Each of these terms—transversal, radical, democracy—come together to give the outline of a field of politics that potentially underpins the very possibility of politics. This particular political field in many ways underpinned The Field and was the gesture of its opening towards differences. I will seek to outline why each of these terms are used to characterise this political field, and how it manifested through the processes of The Field.

As stated above, the field of transversal radical democracy corresponds to a gesture of opening. In the early discussions of how to organise The Field, there were ongoing debates which revolved around the opposition of open-closed. It was an ongoing site of tension amidst the discussions. On the one hand, the practice of commoning was understood as an effort to build a heterogeneous community, an attempt to create a community articulated around transforming and transformative value practices. As such, many of the discussions focused on the extent to which The Field should be open to a broader public, that is to what extent it should, in certain aspects, be a public space accessible by anyone, and to what extent meetings, events, or projects that required a level of privacy should occur. There was a recognition

that different events, practices and groups required different degrees of openness and closure. For instance, a number of the events organised by the Mental Health Resistance Network required a level of privacy in order to establish a sense of security and a defined supportive collective, and likewise certain organisational meetings of The Field itself, as well as other groups, would be significantly slowed down by the presence of people who had not attended prior meetings or were not aware of the history of the issues being discussed. As such, these discussions regarding openness and closure engaged with the need for the polis and community that was coalescing around The Field to be open to newcomers, and to difference, but the need to also maintain some kind of consistency that would allow for cumulatively developed structures and practices to emerge, as well as to develop strong interpersonal relationships. In short, forms of both openness and closure were required to develop communities capable of caring for the commons.

Below is an unfinished sketch that emerged from a discussion conceptualising what The Field would become, and who should be able to access it and how. In the bottom right-hand corner, we see a number of statements leaning towards the extreme of openness—

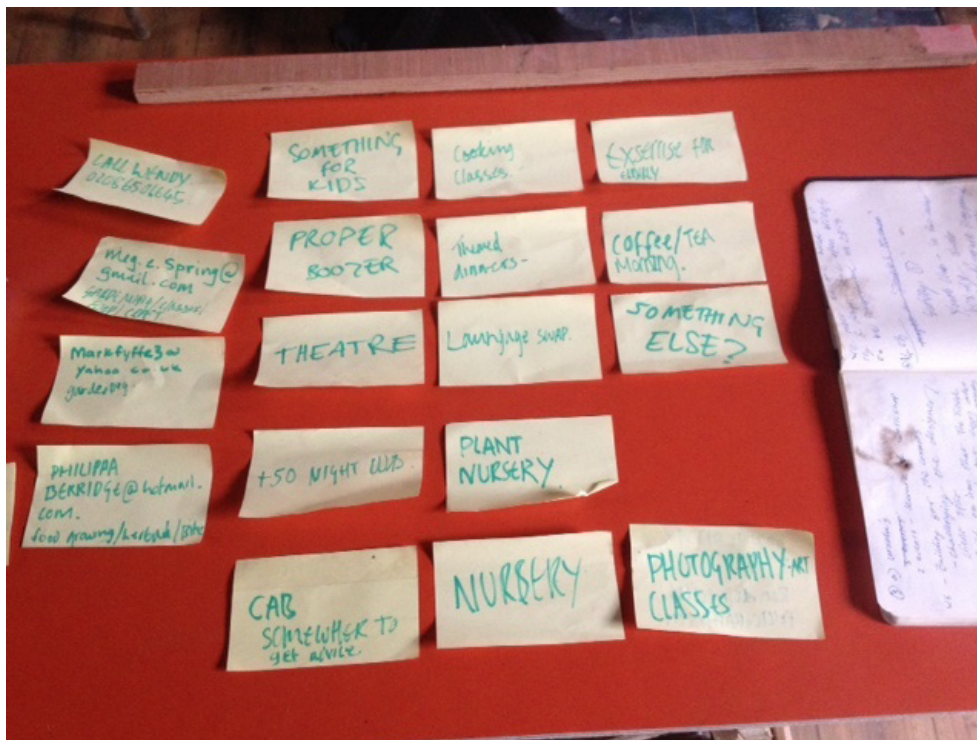


Anything you want it to be!?!; ANYONE; Let's see what we can build together! Join us!. Each of these fragments express a tendency towards openness, or better a movement of opening. Here, there are echoes of Giorgio Agamben's *Coming Community*, the community that is not under the banner of one unitary identity or set (nation, class, religion, etc.) but is open to "whatever singularity." (2007: 1). There is a gesture towards a horizon of absolute openness—The Field could become anything you want it to be, it could be built by anyone.

This was an ongoing theme of certain components of the building process. During the renovation of the building, and afterwards, people would regularly wander in off the street and engage in conversations with us about what the place was, and what it would become. The aim was to attempt to find ways to allow these conversations and encounters to shape the direction of the project, to build it together. A number of these people would also contribute to the physical work that was underway, engaging directly with the process of material construction that would renovate the building to the point of allowing it to become usable.

This process sought to introduce a radically democratic component in The Field's practices. Radical here takes on its etymological meaning, of 'at the root of something'. At the root of the democratic ideal, and running through these encounters that it was hoped could feed into the process of self-organisation, rests a displacement of the rights of a privileged individual or group to control or govern. Jacques Rancière writes of democracy as being "characterised by the drawing of lots, or the complete absence of any entitlement to govern" (2010: 31); this is also the dimension of what was referred to earlier as "the commencing of politics" (Rancière 2006: 46).¹ It is this field of radical democracy that for Rancière underpins the very possibility of politics. It is such a field of politics that The Field sought to construct through gestures towards the horizon of openness, of drawing others into the processes of organisation that were underway—be they the material organisation of the building, or the conceptual and institutional struc-

1 See Chapter 1: *The Field and The Field*



tures of the project—and that are found in the inscriptions of Anything you want it to be!?!; ANYONE; Let’s see what we can build together! Join us!

However, total openness was less of a pragmatic possibility, than it was a utopian horizon. Utopia here is not intended to mean unrealistic in any kind of sense that would disqualify its usefulness. Rather, it functions as an important component of “a certain utopian social imaginary” (Graeber 2007: 327), that orientates actions and practices towards possible futures. In this sense it takes on a horizontal quality in that it is continually receding, but nevertheless being travelled towards. At The Field, such futures were re-imagined, recomposed, and practices realigned, through such opening gestures that provided the project’s radically democratic ground. In this sense, then, the utopian imaginary of ANYONE, of whatever singularity, also took on a pragmatic function—it adjusted the course of travelling, it engaged in the practice of wayfaring² and continually intervened in the formation of the community.

It is important to note, however, that the prospect of absolute

2 See Chapter 3: *Communication*

inclusivity and transparency was not what was aimed for through this process. These terms—inclusivity and transparency—often function in the discourses of the state, appearing to assume that they are attainable goals, that democracy functions by acting as if everyone were equal. This is one of the salient aspects of Nancy Fraser’s critique of the Habermasian conception of the public sphere, “the assumption that it is possible for interlocutors in a public sphere to bracket status differentials and to deliberate ‘as if’ they were social equals” (1990: 62). The gesture towards opening that The Field sought to enact was tempered, or contextualised, by an awareness of such a critique, and a concerted effort to practice gestures towards openness that did not ignore or conceal the different barriers and challenges that different groups or people might face in interacting with the project.

What this critique of the universal conception of the public sphere makes clear is that, as Bateson eloquently puts it, “there are differences between differences. [...] In other words, differences are themselves to be differentiated and classified.” (2000: 463). The marking of differences by the system of white supremacy that Mills identifies in *The Racial Contract* (2011), are not the same as those marked by the patriarchy of the wage (Federici 2014), nor are those that are marked by the division into economic classes. And within those systems of differences themselves (race, gender, class, sexuality, etc..) the specificities of each body are themselves marked by further differences that singularise it. The affections, in the Spinozan sense of a body’s power of action and capacity to affect and be affected (Deleuze 1988; Spinoza 1992), brought about by each difference are themselves different and are marked by the historical construction and transformation of those differences. The barriers to participation that are marked by the system of racial differences, for instance, manifest in specific ways.

Paul Gilroy’s classic *There Ain’t no Black in the Union Jack* carefully examines how racism has developed and manifested in the UK showing that “Britain’s ‘race’ politics are quite inconceivable away from the context of the inner-city which provides such firm foundations for the imagery of black criminality and lawlessness.” (2002: 311). Sev-

eral of the areas surrounding The Field are the historic site of such manifestations of these 'race politics' such as the Battle of Lewisham of 1977 which saw National Front members clash with anti-racist protesters. Four years later the New Cross Massacre occurred which saw the deaths of 13 young black people in 1981 a fire on New Cross road which many suspected to be started by National Front members who had been active in the area at the time, and which contributed towards the Brixton riots of 1981. Further riots occurred in Brixton in 1985, 1995 and 2011 each of which were instigated by the deaths of young people of colour at the hands of the Metropolitan Police. Racism and white supremacy are also inscribed in the architecture of New Cross itself. The facade of Deptford Town Hall, now owned by Goldsmiths, plays host to three figures from British naval history as well as a fourth archetypal figure of a generic British admiral, and is adorned by a weather vane in the shape of a galleon, attesting to the imperialistic history of the area, its position within the constitution of British naval dominance, colonisation and the slave trade (Back 2007; Hendrich 2008). All of these events and histories come into play in situating the specificities of how race manifests, "[t]hey are unresolved injuries spewing back in a layered poetics, revealing the connections and parallels between many different histories of power and domination" (Lepselter 2016: 67). Thus, the task of composing a heterogeneous site of commoning requires attending to the specificities of differences, that is the differences between differences.

It is here that the question of transversality emerged. Early in the process of defining The Field, the collective spent a long series of discussions outlining a series of principles that could aid in directing the project and communicating its aims.³ One of these principles came under the heading of transversality.

Transversality

We aim for this project to be a place that anyone can

3 See Appendix 1 *The Field Principles*

use, and anyone can participate in running, though we know that there are many barriers to people being able to participate equally. We aim to be an actively inclusive group, challenging discrimination of any kind, with the hope to generate a space where differences can be recognised, respected and explored. We also seek to encourage ways of working together that avoid rigid hierarchical structures, whilst remaining conscious of the power dynamics inherent to collective work.

Here again, the horizon of anyone emerges, but it is qualified. The Field aims to be a place that anyone can use, that anyone can contribute to, but equally acknowledges that people's ability to do so varies and is impeded by different factors emerging from histories of domination and struggle that constitute differences in specific ways. As such, inclusivity is active. It is not a matter of assuming it is possible to act 'as if' participants are equal, but requires a process of recognition, respect, and exploration of difference and the differences between differences. Transversality intervenes in openness to anyone in order pay attention to the specificities of the one, the singularity. For anyone to participate, requires a recognition of the specificities of differences in a way that is not predetermined.

The notion of transversality that emerges here is one influenced by Félix Guattari. Several members of the early collective had engaged significantly with Guattari's thought, and it was through such engagements that the term was introduced. Guattari's concept of transversality initially comes from his engagements with institutional⁴ therapeutics (Guattari 2015). Much of Guattari's work in this area is concerned with the regulatory function of psycho-analysis and therapeutics, the manner in which it functions to maintain pre-existent social orders and hierarchies of authority. This maintenance of authority emerges

⁴ It is perhaps useful to note here a discrepancy between the English term institution and the French equivalent. The French *institution* refers in the first instance to the practice of instituting, the work of human fabrication. What is commonly understood in English as institution would better be covered by the French *établissement*. (See Goffey 2016).

in Freud's characterisation of the super-ego (or ego ideal) as that component of the psyche which "retains the character of the father" (2001: 34). In this way the super-ego installs in the psyche the persistence of normative social structures in the determination of identity through the regulatory function of moral injunction and prohibition. This authority persists beyond the familial realm and extends into other collective relationships in which "the role of the father is carried on by teachers and others in authority; their injunctions and prohibitions remain powerful in the ego ideal and continue, in the form of conscience, to exercise moral censorship." (ibid: 37). Here we see the movement of the figure of the father from the immediate family to the broader symbolic order. This expanded role of the signification of the father was characterised by Lacan as the *name of the father*.⁵

Guattari sees in this an "unconscious function of social regulation" (2015: 105) which, in line with Guattari's broader corpus, is not located exclusively at the level of individual subjects, but rather forms a mechanism of subjectification—that is of the production of subjectivity—which operates across various domains and levels. The extension of this authoritative role across collective fields is attested to in *Anti-Oedipus*, where Deleuze & Guattari write of "the phenomenon of group "superegoization"" (2011: 382). Through these vectors of subjectification and superegoization identity becomes caught in normative hierarchical structures that are determined by higher authorities. Here emerges a hardening of identities that are organised under the banner of a centralising authority or value system. It is such a process that can lead to what Guattari termed "*subjugated groups*: groups that receive their law from the outside" (2015: 64 emphasis original). An example of such a group could be said to be found in the phenomenon of social and psychic subjugation explored by Frantz Fanon in *Black Skin, White Masks* (2008), where "[t]he colonizer's violent and cruel super-ego is forced onto the colonized to produce an inferiority complex" (Oliver 2017: 293). Here, "the super-ego of racist imperialist ideology" (ibid)

5 "It is in the *name of the father* that we must recognize the basis of the symbolic function which, since the dawn of historical time, has identified his person with the figure of the law." (Lacan 2006: 230 emphasis original)

becomes a principle of authoritative organisation through the floating signifier of race (Hall 1997) and blackness becomes subordinated and inferior to whiteness, the latter violently structuring the system of differences. In this way, whiteness assumes the place of the super-egoic *name of the father* as the transcendental ideal which all fail to attain, and which imposes its principles of judgement upon the system of racial classification (Seshadri-Crooks 2000). Such subjugated groups, however, are equally found in other processes of subjectification that are structured around unitary and normative hierarchies of value that become transcendent in their injunctions and prohibitions such as those produced through patriarchy. The produced groups and subjectivities are ones that “remain locked into pre-established identities, types of speech and sets of desires.” (Eng 2015: 455). Such a group is one that does not speak for itself and cannot determine its own identity as it is caught in a refrain hardened by the past and by the judgement of normative authority.

As opposed to subjugated group, a group bound by pre-determined normative identities, Guattari introduces the term ‘group-subject’ —a group able to determine its own needs and desires and speak with its own voice. Such a group-subject is future orientated, rather than bound to the traumas of the past, it “is a group whose libidinal investments are themselves revolutionary; it causes desire to penetrate into the social field” (Deleuze & Guattari 2011: 382). The group-subject is one that is capable of degrees of self-organisation, of positing and expressing their own needs and desires independently of the regulatory ideals of the super-ego and the name of the father, it is a “subject-group (of transversality), a group that carries within itself the law of its own end” (Guattari 2006: 92).⁶ It is here that the dimension of transversality emerges. For Guattari, such groups require high “coefficients of transversality” (Guattari 2015: 113), they require the instituting of certain forms of openness that allow them to disrupt the rigid and hardened structures of identity. Crucially, however, it is not

6 I am here assuming (perhaps wrongly) that the reversal of ‘group-subject’ to ‘subject-group’ in this quote is not significant and that they refer to the same concept as the context suggests.

a simple flattening of identity, the 'as if' that Fraser critiqued. Rather,

“[t]ransversality is a dimension that tries to overcome both the impasse of pure verticality and that of mere horizontality: it tends to be achieved when there is maximum communication among different levels, and above all, in different meanings”

(ibid).

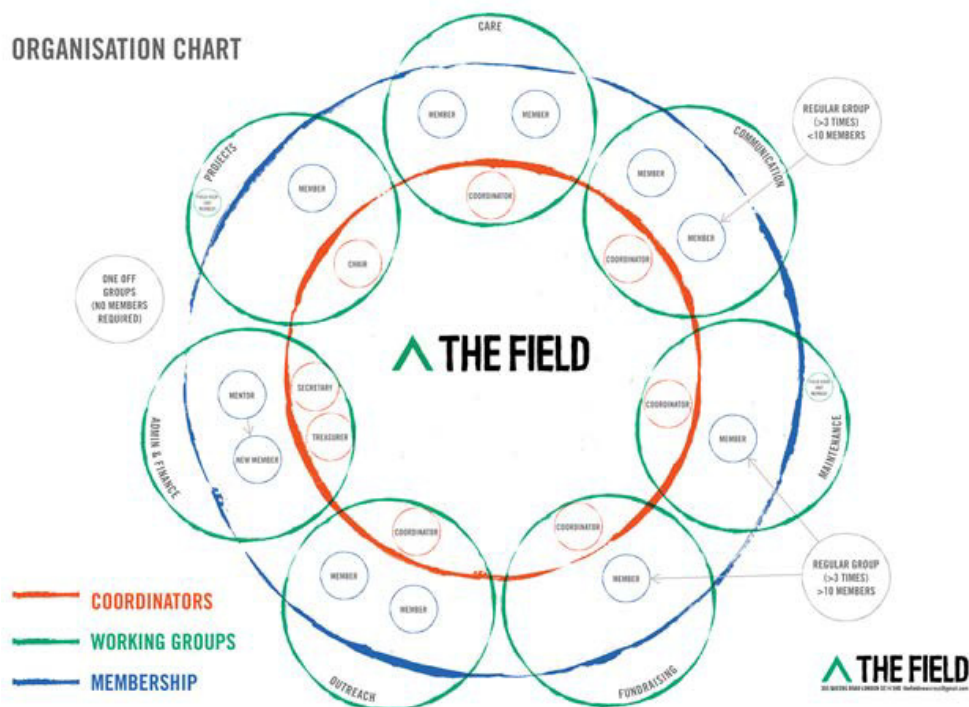
The practice of transversality is one that engages difference in such a way as to not homogenise it, unify it or assume its equality, but attempts to establish modes of communication that do not require a meta code.

This, characteristically of Guattari's concepts, has become quite abstract. To attempt to clarify how transversality emerges as a practice it may be useful to examine how the notion was applied in the therapeutic community at La Borde clinic, before linking this practice explicitly to The Field. One of the practices that was introduced in 1957 at La Borde was the use of what was referred to as 'the grid.' (Dosse 2010: 56). The grid was a mechanism for distributing work and rotating roles in such a way as to undo rigid specialised hierarchies and roles. Through the grid, tasks were assigned across all members of the community—doctors, nurses, patients, cleaners, administrative staff, etc. Doctors would be assigned to dishwashing and housekeeping, cleaners to aid in the distribution of drugs and other medical tasks. The grid functioned as “a tool for heightening and maximising an institution's therapeutic coefficient – which exists in its bureaucracy and officialdom, structures, roles and hierarchies”, allowing members of the community at La Borde to “traverse different levels, segments and roles” (Genosko 2002: 55). This mechanism sought to prevent overly fixed hierarchies of specialisation, opening a field of practice attempting to respond to one of the questions Guattari asked in his inquiries into institutional therapeutics—“is it possible to operate a transfer of responsibility, of replacing bureaucracy with institutional creativity?”

(Guattari 2015: 62). The practice was one that sought to open additional ‘coefficients of transversality,’ through the traversing and intersection of different positions within the clinic.

A similar practice was found in one of the organisational mechanisms of The Field. For a long time there operated a system of rotating roles that sought to distribute work on a monthly basis. These roles came under the headings of finance, bookings, info, communications, maintenance, and meetings. The aim was to include the different daily tasks that were required to keep The Field running under these roles, and to rotate them amongst members of the collective to allow different people to learn different skills, and to prevent fixed hierarchies of power emerging. Similar to the way ‘the grid’ was initially practiced at La Borde, the rotation of roles occurred during regular meetings, based on people’s availability and willingness to take on work. Such rotation introduces a component of transversality through the rotating identities. It aimed to prevent such identities from becoming fixed and opened each member of the group to new dimensions of the group-subject.

This practice was not about absolute openness, but about



avoiding the pitfalls of rigid identification under a normative principle of judgement, it is about the shifting fluidity of group identity, about finding modes of practicing politics that are open to transformation and not bound to essentialist identities. Identities were recognised, but efforts were made that they did not become overly static, overly fixed. There is here a clear resonance with the notion of radical democracy introduced above through the question of openness, and through Rancière. As was said above, the commencing of politics emerges as the displacement of any absolute right to govern, and fixity of the name of the father. This is what Rancière takes democracy to mean, namely “anarchic ‘government’, one based on nothing other than the absence of every title to govern.” (2006: 41). Thus, for democratic spaces to emerge, it is not enough to act ‘as if’ all can participate equally, the specificities and historical formation and manifestation of transcendental titles to govern such as whiteness and masculinity need to be challenged, acknowledged and worked upon rather than merely ignored or wished away. As with the drawing of lots that opens the ground of radical democracy, the instituting of transversal practices, or at least practices that aim towards a degree of transversality, seek to dislocate fixed positions of authority, opening up the possibility for new modes of group identification and organisation outside of the structuring powers of normative super-egoic determinations. Thus, the ANYONE, that is the utopian horizon of the gesture towards openness, refers not only to the empirical invitation open to any individual, but also to the absence of every title to govern, the dismantling of the transcendental position of super-egoic determinations. In such a field, then, politics is not the exercise of power (Rancière 2010: 27) but is the ground of dissensus and difference, the coming together of heterogenous terms, relations and identities in a manner that resists the subordination of differences under a normative signifier.

FIELD TWO: CONSTITUTIVE OUTSIDES: WE/THEY | FRIEND/ENEMY

The second field of politics that I would like to sketch is a field which orients itself around *we/they* distinctions. It is a field that constructs of the space of dissensus, the commencing of politics, a site of conflict between positions and values. It is a field in which the opening towards ANYONE closes, and the limit of the commons emerges at the point at which reconstructing the commons around an altered value system appears to become an impossibility. Commons, in such a mode, assert identities which necessarily produces exclusions. In a sense, this field concerns the relationship to the outside, but through a gesture of partial closure, it concerns a relationship to ANYONE in which not-ANYONE can become part of a commons. It is a limit of commoning practice, in the sense of attempting to rearticulate a collective around an altered value practice, but it is also an establishment of autonomy, the delimitation of a space that can resist external determinations, that allows for the formation of the collective identity of a group-subject. It is then, both a limit and constitutive possibility for commoning.

Around eighteen months after detaching from my engagement with The Field, I was sat with Lilly in a park in Southwark. We sat, eating lunch, and discussing times at which The Field had encountered moments of friction or tension.

I suppose the difficulty was in trying to be more open to the community and trying to say, *hey we're not just a group of friends*, we're also open to people coming and using the space and then doing—I know that Jane and Matt did a lot of outreach type work, where they would find groups that they thought fit the values and then invite them into the space.

Matt and Jane, as well as others, had spent a significant amount

of time attempting to seek out groups who could diversify the collectives using The Field, particularly focusing on black groups. A number of groups, such as London Black Atheists, Fruitvale Film Club, the London African Gospel Choir and Yoga for Women of Colour, were encouraged to use the Field in an effort to better incorporate the needs and desires of the local non-white communities that were not engaging with the project. For the most part, this was welcomed by members of the collective, but there were instances when tensions arose from the introduction of new people and groups. Lilly continues,

But maybe they didn't make the right call on some of the people, and there was definitely someone who joined and started trying to encourage us to have leaders and kindly offered to do workshops, but the workshops were all about basically how we could become more like some kind of top down work place with a boss who would be the one calling the shots, and a lot of us were very resistant to this as you can imagine, but there was definitely at that time a tension between inviting new people in who might have differing viewpoints but then also trying to stay true to our original values, and not trying to let the whole thing get ruined just because we were trying to be so welcoming and nice to people. Yeah, it's like when you tell someone actually that's just not what we're trying to do here and maybe you've come here with the wrong, maybe you haven't understood the premise of what we're trying to do, I don't know how specific you want to get.

Lilly kept who she was referring to vague, and in respect of that, although we did later explicitly state who it was, I will not identify the person, even using a pseudonym. Nevertheless, the significance of what is being discussed is clear without individual identification. There were moments in the formation of The Field, where the collective encountered practices, ways of thinking and ways of speaking

that held the potential to undermine the value practices and systems that had been developed. She continued,

I don't know, we didn't obviously have the structures in place to say you can do x, y and z, and therefore you can continue using The Field or if you are exhibiting these behaviours then you can't be at The Field. We didn't have clear boundaries about, this is the structure and you're in it but you can't try and make changes within it, but you can't try and change our entire value system

Here, the tension point between the gesture of opening, and the possibility of maintaining and reproducing a value system is clearly stated. There are practices that are not compatible with other practices, values that do not co-exist well together. The gesture towards ANYONE closes as a dimension of not-ANYONE emerges. As De Angelis clearly expresses—commoning is an attempt to re-articulate a group around a set of values and value practices that are other than those of the dominant hegemonic structures, they in this sense emerge as an outside of capital, a *Beginning of History* (2007). As such, this outside of capital that is found in the commons relates to the hegemonic regime as its own constitutive outside, it is the point of exclusion that make possible the exploration of an alternative identity. Here, we see expressed Laclau's proposal that exclusion and antagonism are necessary components in the formation of identity (2007: 52); it is an articulation of "the power of exteriority as constitutive of interiority" (Derrida 1995: 313). The outside of the commons, as expressed in the understanding of commoning as a practice antagonistic to state and capital,⁷ is a negative space of exclusion which, in part, allows for the positive formation of the commons. But this negative space of exclusion is also the very possibility of autonomy, of the attempt to form a group-subject, it is

⁷ See Chapter 2: *On What Commons?*

“first of all the establishment of an autonomy in relation to heteronomous pressures coming from outside in terms of measures, in terms of cultures, in terms of what and how production processes and ways of life should be.”
(De Angelis 2017: 226).

The possibility of autonomy requires constitutive exclusions.

Lilly and I continued to discuss this one particular example, that of a series of workshops discussing The Field’s organisational structures. This series of workshops were experienced by some members of the collective as antagonistic to the values, aims and practices that The Field sought to embody.

... he was the one that was sort of, *‘taking time out of his busy schedule’* to do this workshop about leadership and how we needed to change our structure. And actually, there was quite a lot of sense in a lot of what he was saying because it was in a complete mess but we were very resistant to the type, his terminology. Maybe if he’d said you can have rotating leaders or, people can be leaders in different ways then it’d be like *yeah, sure, ok, great* but the way he was talking about it was *there’s one leader* and he was always implicitly saying, and that’s Matt, and Matt obviously didn’t really want to be seen like that, he still doesn’t, well he’s not really involved anymore to be honest. And yeah, so it’s also about the terminology, he was, he is a neo-liberal in essence, that man; and he’s worked for—he’s headed big departments in councils and things and he’s, we’re just too scatty and ridiculous for him, he just wanted to shape us all up. It wasn’t through malice that he was trying to help us, he was just coming from a completely different political spectrum to us.

Commoning at The Field and for the New Cross Commoners

was understood as a practice antagonistic to the hegemonic structures of state and capital. In the conversation above, the person being discussed is identified as a representative of the hegemonic structures of neoliberalism. The value systems, and value practices, he is proposing are not compatible with those of The Field—he comes from *a completely different political spectrum*. The hierarchical models being proposed at these workshops were seen to be incompatible with the value practices The Field was attempting to construct.

We here approach a field of politics in which antagonism and conflict are central, but in a different modality to that of the dissensus of radical transversal democracy. A far clearer boundary is asserted—*he is neo-liberal in essence*. This dimension, however, is not as extreme as the friend/enemy distinction that Carl Schmitt presents as the necessary horizon of the political. For Schmitt, the friend/enemy distinction is “[t]he specific political distinction to which political actions and motives can be reduced” (2007: 26). The ever-present horizon for such a mode of politics is war (ibid: 34-5). Such a characterisation of the political leads to a place where the validity of the other, here reduced to the figure of the enemy, is not recognised. In contrast, the situation described above is marked with recognition of the validity of the other who is nevertheless excluded from the common—*there was quite a lot of sense in a lot of what he was saying; it wasn't through malice that he was trying to help us*. Such a field of politics is structured around a far less extreme polarisation than the one presented by Schmitt, but it is nevertheless a field that is conflictual.

One of the questions asked by Chantal Mouffe (2005) is the extent to which we can conceive of modes of politics that escape the reductive and totalising Schmittian formula, and consider ways of engaging in politics that retain the conflictual nature of certain political fields (for Mouffe all politics) without arriving at a situation where the validity of the other is discounted as ‘enemy.’ In an effort to both account for the political field of friend/enemy as a possible horizon for politics, and to find other ways of conceiving of politics that do not have war as their potential end-point, Mouffe proposes the no-

tion of agonism. The political field of agonism is one which recognises antagonistic modes of politics but rather than making the opposing position that of the enemy, the relational horizon of which is marked by war, agonism focuses on the figure of the adversary—the one with whom we disagree, but who’s perspective and right to speak is nevertheless recognised. This is not, however, a Habermasian model of rational communication (2007) in which politics unfolds as a practice of rational discussion which can ultimately be rationally unified. Rather, this is a political field which, like Arendt’s characterisation of the *polis*, is “permeated by a fiercely agonal spirit.” (Arendt 1998: 41). It is a field of politics in which conflicts emerge, but conflicts that resist the reduction of the other to the figure of the enemy against whom the violence of war is justified.

Such a field of politics is important to not lose sight of. It reminds us that the common is not a sphere of absolute inclusion, it is open to not-ANYONE. As is regularly cited in various manifestations of the commons movements, there can be no common without community (Mies 2014), and for a community to exist there must be systems of interaction, conventions and accepted behaviours that characterise inclusion with the boundary of that community. This strikes at the heart of Garrett Hardin’s misunderstanding of the commons (1968), in that the commons are integrally not unregulated or open to use by anyone, but are regulated, maintained and cared for by a defined community. The boundaries of this community may be flexible and open to expansions and adjustments, but even in their flexibility they are boundaries. This boundary work, which was also the work of defining the practices of care that the project required, was expressed well in a document that was circulated in April 2015 proposing some basic rules and structures. The document read,

The Field is a resource

It needs to have a structure in place to allow it to be used by groups and individuals.

The community that uses The Field can be understood as participants, users, members as individuals and groups. The community should have a say in the organisation of the resource.

There are rules for using the resources (principles) as there are for any common, and expectations on the community in relation to the resource such as coming to meetings which will arrange the maintenance and organisation of the space, making financial contributions if appropriate (i.e. If it is a funded project),

Each proposal, if it happens, requires signing up to what it means to use the space—the expectations and principles. You have to come to an admin meeting that will collectively determine how groups and individuals contribute to the maintenance, care and running of the space.

This document outlines potential basic rules for the use of the commons. It draws a boundary which determines which value practices and behaviours are necessary for participation in the commons. It is not-ANYONE who can use The Field, but those who are willing to contribute to its maintenance and care, those who are willing to participate in the formation of a group-subject. There is a boundary that is necessary for the formation of autonomy, and for the maintenance and continuation of The Field itself.

Here, there are resonances with the conversation I had with Lilly in that park in Southwark. What that conversation makes clear is that there are certain values and value practices that are incompatible with one another, contrary to the liberal utopia of public multiculturalism. The moments in which contradictory values encounter one another are moments characterised by *“conflict among social forces and corresponding value practices running in different directions”* (De Angelis

2007: 71 emphasis original). Such conflict cannot be ignored, but neither does it necessarily lead to absolute closure of the community. It is such moments of conflict that attempt to re-articulate the commons around an altered set of value practices, moments in which explorations of the possibilities of transforming the values of the commons to extend their reach occur. Inevitably, such exploration is sometimes successful, and sometimes fails. This practice of rearticulating the commons around altered value practices, and its potential failure will be returned to in the following chapter.⁸

FIELD THREE: FUTURES: BETWEEN WHAT-IS AND WHAT-SHOULD-BE

The third field emerges through orientations towards the future that manifest and project desires entangled with a rejection of the existent state of affairs. In order to sketch the outlines of this field I would like to refer to one of the early attempts to produce a document outlining the principles of The Field. This document, which is reproduced in its entirety in the appendix,⁹ was the result of a collective process which attempted to establish a set of principles to communicate the aims of The Field. It may be useful to turn to this appendix first, or to read it alongside what I sketch below. As the website stated at the time at which the document was first published, it was “written collectively by the group and represents our shared hopes and vision for this project.” Already the dimension of the future is clear—the document represents hopes and visions. As the website continues the document attempts to map out “the starting points from which we hope to begin.”

The document speaks of six interlinked areas under the headings Local, Direct Participation, Transversality, Un-work/De-money, Commoning and Creativity. In this document, the language of desire recurs repeatedly. Numerous sentences begin with the word “we want,” “we hope” or “we aim”, creating the discursive conditions for

8 See Chapter 5: *Commoning Beyond the Commons*

9 See Appendix 1: *The Field Principles*

desire to be articulated. Through phrases such as these, the will towards an alternate situation and a series of possibilities becomes expressed. Under each of these principles the language of desire can be identified through the simple phrases which orient the entire document towards the creation of conditions and futures other than those that are understood as currently existing.

Alongside the production of this document, ran a series of workshops inquiring into needs and desires. From early on The Field was framed as an attempt to interrogate and find alternative ways to provide for the needs and desires not only of the members of the collective, but also of the local area. The needs and desires workshops interrogated the relationship between individual desires and collective situations, blurring the boundaries between individuality and collectivity in the process. Asking participants to identify desires that were and weren't being met by The Field at the time, the workshops interrogated the possibility of using the building and collective to allow the creative impulses of desires to be realised. The desires expressed were numerous—working less; the creation of supportive emotional networks; the development of relationships with others; the creation of alternative spaces, economies and practices; the exploration of different possibilities for life.

Desire was articulated as a creative orientation towards the future, the will to alter, to change, to move beyond, and to bring about a different set of conditions. In this way the mode of desire expressed was one that opened towards real and active creation, reiterating the influential recharacterisation of desire by Deleuze and Guattari in *Anti-Oedipus* where they write that “to desire is to produce, to produce within the realm of the real.” (2011: 29). This domain of the real does not exclude the possible, for, as they continue, “within the real everything is possible, everything becomes possible.” (ibid). This grounding in the real, this “passion for the real” (Badiou 2007: 47), found clear expression in Jane's desires to not explore the whys but the hows, to get started; in Dave's focus on the physicality of space, the architecture and process of building; in Matt's will to build relationships and learn

skills.

The expression of desire as an active force of creation was articulated again clearly in the principles document under the heading of the Creativity principle which states, “[w]e think creative practice holds within it the potential to build new worlds and shatter old ones, to learn to see new possibilities and work through old traumas.” In this statement the place of creativity as a temporal orientation towards the future is outlined. Creation is expressed as the emergence of the new, the constitution of difference. The desire for the creation of a new world, of new conditions is expressed clearly. In this way one of the movements that opens the contested space of politics is found—the articulation of an imperative. This temporal orientation of desire towards the future, towards creation as the emergence of the new, is one component of the dual gesture that opens the contested spaces of politics. It is the expression of desire in the form of the will for an alternative future, to open “the future as an opening onto the radically new.” (Augé 2014: 6). It manifests injunctions and imperatives to engage in the construction of alternative futures, that is it operates in the deontic mode of *what should be*.

But the text includes a second temporal dimension that forms a counterpart to that of the futural imperative. It is a gesture that establishes the reciprocal possibility of the imperative or injunction, of the demand or forward orientations of desire in a deontic mode. Not only does it speak of the potential to build new worlds but also the need to shatter old ones, it does not only speak of the need to learn of new possibilities, but also the necessity of working through old traumas. It is this movement that grounds the political in the present reality, and the historical formation of that reality. This is the gesture of analysis and recognition, the moment of establishing the current state of affairs. This gesture does not belong to the deontic domain of the imperative or injunction, but to the realist mode of the statement, of *that which is*.

It is the expression of the statement that feeds the imperative, and likewise it is the expression of the imperative that feeds the statement. Whilst of different orders, they are endlessly intertwined. *What*

should be feeds *that which is*. That which is feeds *what should be*. The moment of the statement is one of recognition, of experience, of something being seen, exposed or discovered. This is the moment of analysis—it is the moment of identification, the moment of facing the old world and traumas. In this way it is the gesture that belongs to the order of ‘apophantic’ discourse, that is to the domain of discourse to which truth and falsity may be applied. Such a gesture acts to uncover a reality that can be hidden or exposed, that can be masked or revealed; it is “to take beings that are being talked about in λέγειν [*legein*/discoursing] as ἀποφαίνεσθαι [*apophainesthai*/apophantic] out of their concealment; to let them be seen as something unconcealed (ἀλητές); to *discover* them.” (Heidegger 2010: 31 emphasis original). Through confronting beings, through the experience of coming face to face with actualised realities, a process of recognising the collective conditions of existence occurs. The collective and individual identifies components of reality as they are revealed to them.

Such moments may bring forth experiences of anomie and alienation, experiences of dissatisfaction with the world as it is found. They hold temporal dimensions. As Derrida writes in his discussion of the spectre of Hamlet in the writings of Marx, and quoting Hamlet addressing the spectral presence of *that which is* but *should not be*—“‘Time is out of joint’: time is *disarticulated*, dislocated, dislodged, time is run down, on the run and run down [*traqué et détraqué*], *deranged*, both out of order and mad. Time is off its hinges, time is off course, beside itself, disadjusted.” (2006: 20 emphasis original). There is something wrong in the state of affairs as they are experienced in the present. As Derrida continues, “‘The time is out of joint’: something in the present is not going well, it is not going as it *ought to go*.” (ibid: 27 emphasis original). In this latter expression, the movement from the statement (time is out of joint) to the imperative (it is not going as it *ought to*) is clearly articulated.

The moment that reveals the ‘old world,’ the moment of analysis and the statement, does not occur in isolation. The coming out of concealment of beings, the recognition of conditions that classical

Marxism might have called the formation of class consciousness, the recognition of the prominence of work, the endless accumulation of capital, the withdrawal of the public sphere through privatisation, occurs alongside a non-apophantic moment. There is not only the statement, here the analysis of political and economic conditions, but also the imperative, the identification of *what-should-be* against *what-is*. It is alongside the statement that the imperative is articulated. There is a dual movement of contradiction and paradox by which the statement has always already been realised in relation to the imperative, but equally by which the imperative is always already at work in delimiting of the statement, in the confronting of conditions, in becoming-unconcealed.

Neither the statement nor the imperative is prior to the other. Both are operative in the formation of the other. As Giorgio Agamben puts it,

“Western ontology is in this sense a double or bi-polar machine. We must [accustom ourselves to] the idea that the ontology, not simply, doesn’t have only the form of “is”. This is like this. There is another ontology which has the form of the imperative.”

(2011).

On the one hand there is the ontology of being, of ‘is’, of the apophantic statement. The ontology of the imperative on the other hand, rather than speaking of truth speaks in a different manner—it concerns potentiality and utopian horizons. This potentiality that is found in the imperative is no less real, but rather concerns a different ontology. Whereas the apophantic ontology of the statement would be that of science, analysis, empiricism and traditional philosophy, the non-apophantic ontology of the imperative would be that of the commandment, injunction, and moral or ethical imperative, an ontology of the potentials for the creative projection of desire, the domain of “law and religion—and we can add magic too.” (ibid). This ontology

is the domain of what could-be, what should-be, what must-become, a deontic ontology.

It is in the attempt to traverse the chasm that emerges between these two ontological orders that this field of politics can be thought. Between that which is, and that which could- or should-be, a conflictual space emerges whereby the spacetime of the statement does not match up to the spacetime of the imperative. It is precisely this uncanny space of uncertainty, disjunction, contradiction and ontological confusion that continually opens up between *what-is* and *what-ought-to-be*. The Field sought to “create new worlds and shatter old ones to learn to see new possibilities and work through old traumas”. It is these old worlds and residual traumas that are the sediments of historical materialism that Walter Benjamin’s angel of history finds colliding at its feet in the form of a storm (1999: 249). Situated in the present, and always facing the past the catastrophe that falls at his feet inescapably forces him forward towards the future in an effort to put right the catastrophic storm that propels him onwards. In this way it is the analysis of the current condition, the domain of the statement, that when compared to the domain of possibility and desire, tears open the chasm between *what-is* and *what-could-be*. It is this chasm that holds the storm at the angel’s feet and that endlessly recreates these fields of futural politics. It is the effort to traverse this space, to weather the storm, that marks the shifting horizons of this field of politics.

Such a political field is characterised by John Holloway phonically, in terms of *the scream*. He writes,

“[t]he scream is ecstatic, in the literal sense of standing out ahead of itself towards an open future. We who scream exist ecstatically. We stand out beyond ourselves, we exist in two dimensions. The scream implies a tension between that which exists and that which might conceivably exist, between the indicative (that which is) and the subjunctive (that which might be).”

(2002: 6).

It was this ecstatic movement that The Field engaged in the expressions of desire as a creative force, a movement from what was seen to be, what was stated to exist, to what could- or should-be. And it was this ecstatic orientation towards the future that opened an ever-transformative space of politics through the disjunction between the ontology of *what-is*, the ontology of the apophantic statement, and the ontology for *what-should-be*, the ontology of the non-apophantic commandment. This scream is the reflection of the commandment upon the statement, the negation of reality as it is, “the rejection of a world that we feel to be wrong, negation of a world we feel to be negative.” (ibid: 2). In this way this field of politics is opened through the disjunction of *what-is* and *what-should-be*, through the dissonance of two orders facing one another in conflict.

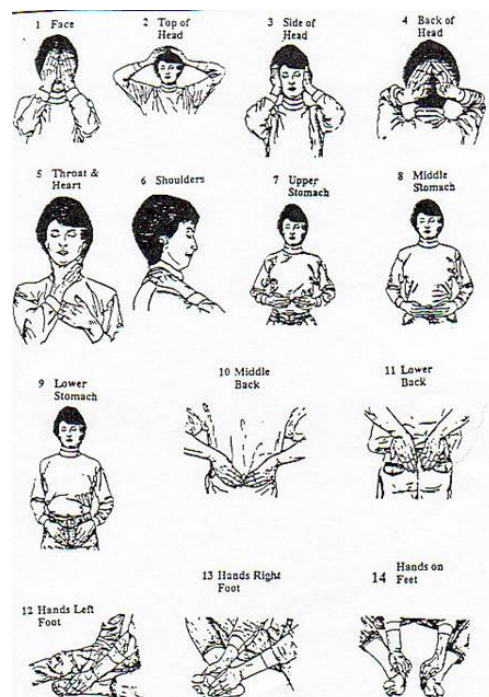
We can here return once again to Rancière’s characterisation of politics as the disjoining of governance from natural and unquestioned rights and hierarchies, the moment of uncovering that what-is could be otherwise. This political field which is opened in the gap between the apophantic and non-apophantic, between the statement and imperative, creates itself in the very act of declaring it to be other than the existent social or so-called ‘natural’ order. It emerges in the very act of declaring the possibility that something could be otherwise, it is the striving for that otherwise—thus it is a space that is continually remade and opened whenever someone claims that something could be different, its boundaries are not predefined—it is the disjunction of the way things are, and what they could be, it is the disjunction of the apophantic and non-apophantic ontologies, the space in between the statement and the commandment, the attempt to move the commandment into statement. Ethics and politics here begin when we abandon notion that what is good is predetermined or transcendental, and accept that the attempt to define and bring about the good is itself political, not only the striving towards a good that is already established as a metaphysical idea, form or essence, as a gift of some modality of divinity or nature. Such a political field emerges in the space opened

up by the very contestation of any natural good or right to govern, of any one path, it is a space opened up by the conflict of competing ontologies and utopian projections, it is a space that emerges through the absence of the title to govern in that there is contestation, uncertainty or ambiguity over the place of sovereignty.

FIELD FOUR: COSMOPOLITICS

In January 2016 a course of reiki training was run at The Field. Francis, a founding member of the New Cross Commoners who had been engaged with The Field from the beginning, had recently met a reiki master and had a long conversation with her about setting up a community reiki practice. Part of the idea was to experiment with forms of mutual care that could be self-sustaining, and through which knowledge about practices of care and associated skills could be shared. It was conceived of as having the potential of also opening new ways of thinking, producing new subjectivities, as well as decommodifying a practice of care that was generally based on monetary exchange. The reiki master, Katie, agreed to train a group of people at a highly reduced rate which would be obtained through donations. Those who could afford to would pay more, opening the possibility for those who could not afford to pay to participate. The aim was also to establish an ongoing practice of reiki, and other forms of mutual care at The Field.

The first event was attended by around ten people of mixed backgrounds, genders and ethnicities. Francis and I were the only Field regulars who attended. As we sat in a circle, Katie in-



troduced us to the ideas underpinning reiki, and asked each of us to share what had drawn us here. The responses ranged from interests in witchcraft, shamanism and alternative practices of healing to personal experiences that had introduced them previously to reiki at different points of their lives. Katie went on to introduce various aspects of reiki in more depth. She explained the shakras and the way the practice of reiki channelled universal energy through the body of the healer and into the shakras of the person receiving the healing. She brought out a series of crystals and explained their relations to different parts of the body and the shakras. Following this, a number of crystal pendants were produced and people held them whilst asking questions—a circular movement indicated a positive response, and a horizontal movement a negative one. At one point, Ninon, burst out laughing and grabbed the pendant as it moved. After a momentary pause, she explained that she had heard the voice of her mother—a strong African Christian—telling her this was witchcraft.

Following this, we sat and chatted, whilst individual people went with Katie into the greenhouse for one on one taster sessions. As we chatted everyone agreed that they would like to do this again. E-mail addresses were taken and the intention was set that the group would meet again over the next coming months to complete the level one training.

Throughout this evening I had a strong conflictual inner dialogue underway. On the one hand, I sympathised with Francis's aims with this project, to explore new paths of subjectivity and mutual care, and strived to keep an opening mind. On the other hand, there persisted a forceful voice of rationalisation, one that looked at these practices as dangerously non-scientific and making claims that could not be verified and could be potentially politically obfuscatory. This latter internal voice sought to disqualify the entire system of meaning, the entire practice. Chatting with Francis about this internal conflict afterwards he agreed with me in part, but said that he had learnt from Starhawk at a workshop at Grow Heathrow that even if the method was 'crazy', what comes out of it could still be interesting and politically effec-

tive. Francis told me that there had been some rumblings of discontent among some people around the fact that it was not a political practice and so not in line with *The Field*. Francis had found this frustrating, as a close reader of Félix Guattari and Silvia Federici, the collective practice of reiki was not only a way of opening new passages of subjectivity, but also constructing a politics of care that was de commodified and collectivised.

The conflict between the two internal dialogues I experienced reveals the field of politics that I am here discussing as cosmopolitical. The term cosmopolitics, I take from the work of Isabelle Stengers (2005; 2010; 2011). There are various aspects to this cosmopolitical field, and I will not have space here to discuss them all, but I would like to focus on the tension between these two inner dialogues—that of disqualification, and that of an opening of subjectivity. One of the problems that Stengers identifies with modern science is its tendency to disqualify all other modes of knowledge, to discount them as erroneous, non-empirical and simply false. In so doing it adopts an authoritative stance, one which seeks to establish itself as the ultimate and sole bearer of truth, it attempts to adopt the place of the super-ego. It is this stance that I suggest was found in the inner dialogue that sought to disqualify reiki as a valid form of political practice, and even as a valid practice at all. Such a stance is not entirely dissimilar to those found in the writings of early anthropologists, ethnologists and ethnographers who turned their attention to magic. As Ernesto de Martino writes of Edward Tylor,

“he soon begins to pass judgement upon all animistic and magical ideology, calling it ‘subjective’, ‘superstitious’ and ‘savage’, and then proceeds to discredit modern spiritualistic ideology, saying that it is merely a derivation of the former.”

(1972: 180).

In short, Tylor disqualifies magic as a way of knowing and expe-

riencing the world.

In an attempt to avoid such disqualifications that would exclude certain forms of knowledge and certain beings from participation in the production of knowledge, and also in politics, Stengers proposes that we develop an *ecology of practices* which “requires that we do not view ‘value’ as that ‘in whose name’ something can be imposed or must be accepted” (2010: 37). Such an ecology of practices seeks to open means of creating systems of meaning, knowledges and forms of practice that do not relate to one another in such a way as to disqualify them and are not antagonistically oppositional to one another. But it is not merely a matter of tolerance, as she writes elsewhere the implication of tolerance is that a form of knowledge is deemed to be false, but tolerated nonetheless— “[w]hoever is endowed with ‘tact’ knows, or thinks she knows, what the other’s problem is, but she also knows that this knowledge will be worthless if it is delivered to the other.” (Stengers 2011: 307). Tolerance maintains the relation of disqualification to other forms of knowledge, or other practices, but conceals it under the guise of tact. An ecology of practices, on the other hand, would seek to find ways of opening practices to one another, of asking questions of and with one another, in a way that does not presume to know the truth of the other.

Cosmopolitics then, is a matter of resisting the premature closure of the polis. It is a matter of attempting to keep politics open to the cosmos and the cosmos open to politics, as Latour writes of the conjoining of cosmos and politics, “[c]osmos protects against the premature closure of politics, and politics against the premature closure of cosmos.” (Latour 2004: 454). Politics transforms and remains open to transformation. It is not an established and delimited domain reducible to a friend/enemy opposition as with Carl Schmitt, or the progressive development of class war as in traditional forms of Marxism. As Stengers writes in *The Cosmopolitical Proposal*, “[p]olitics is then disentangled from any reference to some universal human truth it would make manifest.... Politics is an art, and an art has no ground to demand compliance from what it deals with.” (2005: 1001). Politics is a

matter of opening to the creation of new and unexpected values, it is a matter of fabricating systems of meaning and value practices. Such a form of politics requires that quick resolutions or judgments are resisted. It requires that we slow down.

To draw out this element of cosmopolitics that requires slowing down Stengers draws on the psychosocial type of 'the idiot', developed from Deleuze and Guattari's reading of Dostoyevsky's *The Idiot* (2013) which is discussed in *What is Philosophy?* (1994). Here Deleuze and Guattari contrast Descartes conceptual personae of the idiot, the one who doubts everything and submits all these doubts to processes of reason, to Dostoyevsky's idiot who "wants to turn the absurd into the highest power of thought—in other words, to create" (ibid: 62). This figure of the idiot, which is not here a derogatory term, is the one who "will never accept the truths of History" (ibid: 63), they remain opening to a questioning that is not reductive and essentialist in its relation to rationality, but constructive and creative in its relation to the absurd. Thus, its orientation towards other practices is not one of disqualification, but one of an open inquiry. The speculative, creative dimension remains open. This cosmopolitical attitude is one that remains open to as wide a range of practices as possible, attempting to locate the possibilities of interaction between them, rather than disqualifying them as irrational, non-scientific, or false.

In this way, cosmopolitics concerns an idiotic encounter with difference-writ-large. In its political practice it does not delimit what beings—people, animals, plants, minerals, tools, technologies, ideas, facts—are permitted to partake in the polis. It seeks to open a dimension of possibility that Guattari referred to as "axiological creationism" (2006: 28). Here, the axioms of a polis are not determined in advance, and do not become fixed or static, but remain open ended—they remain questions rather than statements. They are continually recreated as they encounter other beings and other practices.

My inner dialogue concerning the validity of reiki expresses the problematic of cosmopolitics—a part of me sought to disqualify it as a practice, whereas another sought to remain open to the possibilities

that it might open. These possibilities could be numerous including, but not limited to, the emergence of communities of care and the establishment of new forms of interaction with others. It is this latter attitude, that of remaining open to possibility, to questioning, exploratory and open attitudes, an attitude that does not discount other ways of knowing and experiencing the world and other forms of being, that characterises cosmopolitics as it here manifests. Such a problematic was also found in the discontent among some members of the collective that the reiki classes were not political, as well as the spectral voice of the mother who declared the practice to be witchcraft—such an attitude has the effect of closing the possibilities of the polis, of delimiting them, and thus excluding other forms of participation in politics.

Through this field of politics, the practice of attempting to find modes of communication with difference-writ-large that may facilitate the construction of common worlds emerges again. The cosmopolitical attitude, and it does often appear as an attitude or stance, requires means of locating mechanisms of communication across difference, communication with other kinds of beings, practices and knowledges. It is a field of politics that attempts to maintain openings to possibilities other than those that can be predetermined, predicted or expected, it requires a loosening of identity in a manner that intersects with transversality. Identities of individuals, collectives, knowledges, practices, must remain open to recomposition, realignment and transformation through communication.

THE INTERSECTION OF FIELDS

The four fields of politics I have outlined here are by no means intended to be exhaustive, or to offer any kind of definitive definition of what politics is. They are rather four fields that I have found useful to think politics at The Field with. They are not meant to define all political worlds, for perhaps if political worlds were as simple as four-fold, we would have no need for politics in the first place. And neither

are they intended to be understood as four domains that are bounded and separated from one another. Each of these fields fold into one another, become entangled with one another, and come together in varying ways that enact transformative articulations upon one another. At times the accent may be more heavily on the dynamics of openness and radical transversal democracy, at others they may shift towards closure and agonism, all of the while maintaining relations to both and being transformed by orientations towards the future and varying degrees of idiotic cosmopolitical attitudes. Nevertheless, these four fields have proven useful tools for thinking politics and thinking politically, provided they do not become static, absolute or definitive.

In the two chapters which follow, *Commoning Beyond the Commons* and *Affective Activity and Careful Collectivity*, we will see these four fields intersecting in a variety of ways—cosmopolitical attitudes overflow into agonisms, agonisms are rearticulated around attempted openings onto spaces of transversal radical democracy, and the gap between the apophantic and non-apophantic which reveals a time out of joint remains ever present. I will not continually refer back to these terms throughout these coming chapters but would ask the reader to take them forward with them. However, they must be taken forward gently, for as has already been stated, they cannot by any means encapsulate the complexities of politics and attempts to force their imposition will undoubtedly fail. They are, as the common paraphrase of Lévi-Strauss (1963) goes, good to think with but, like Wittgenstein's ladder (1974: 74), they must be discarded when they are no longer of use, when they restrain thought rather than enable it. For where their limits are reached, or where they intersect in innovative ways, it is likely they must be discarded in order to facilitate the expression and emergence of other fields. In short, they open fields, they do not delimit them.

PARASITE

***A VISUAL RECORD
OF THE FIELD***























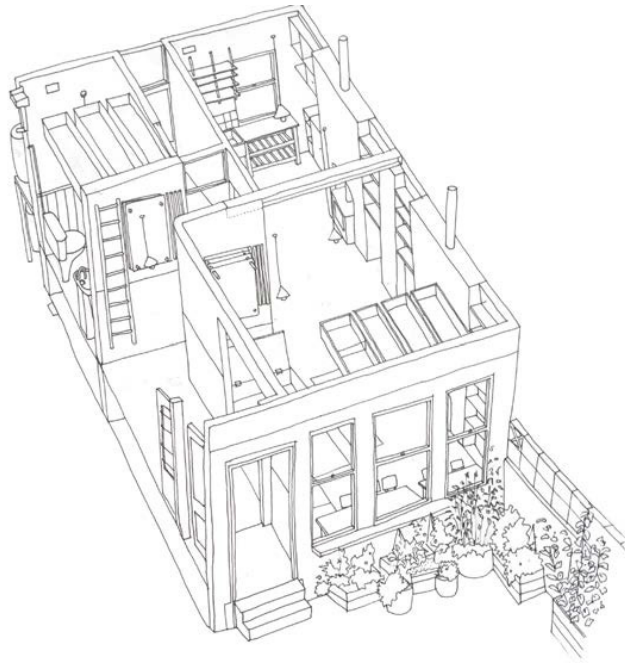












STRUCTURES



TODAY

- removing paint, priming + filling front, back + sides
- getting paint off window frames inside.
- getting tomato plants from ^{Old This}
- making planter boxes
- research plant guilds
- trellis - get + put
- window locks

TODAY

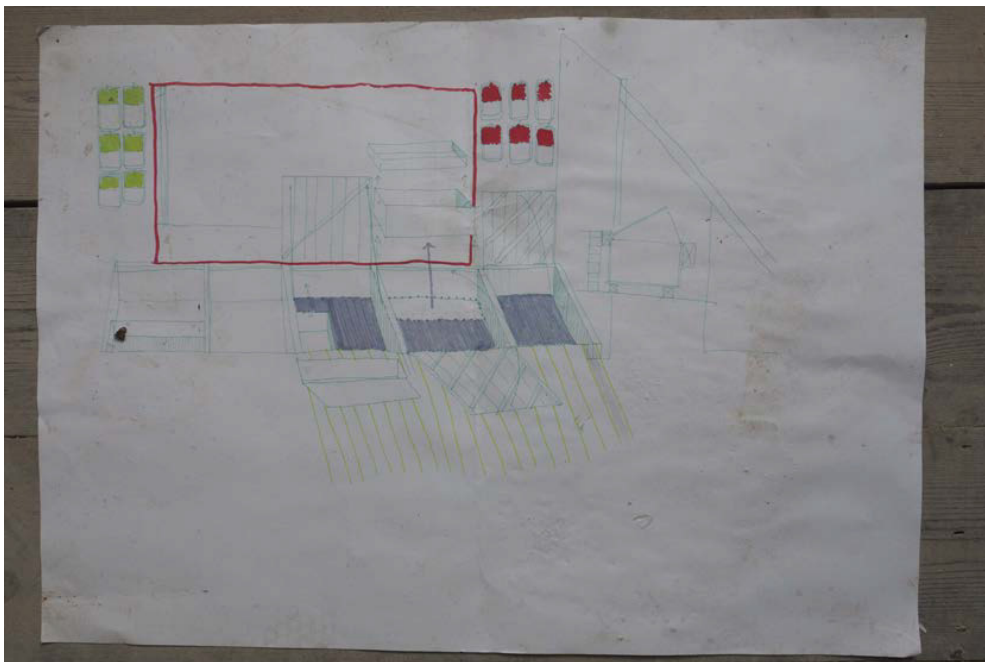
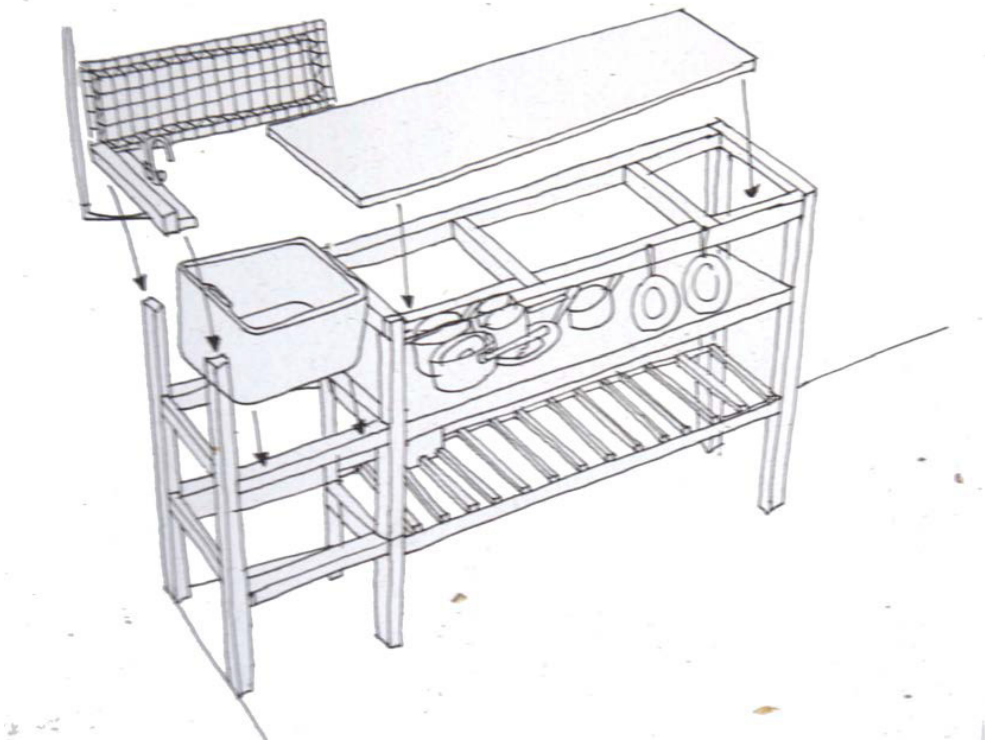
- WINDOWS
- Getting paint off front
- Plan for Saturday
- Scaffolding board planter.
- 8 PICK UP SOIL.

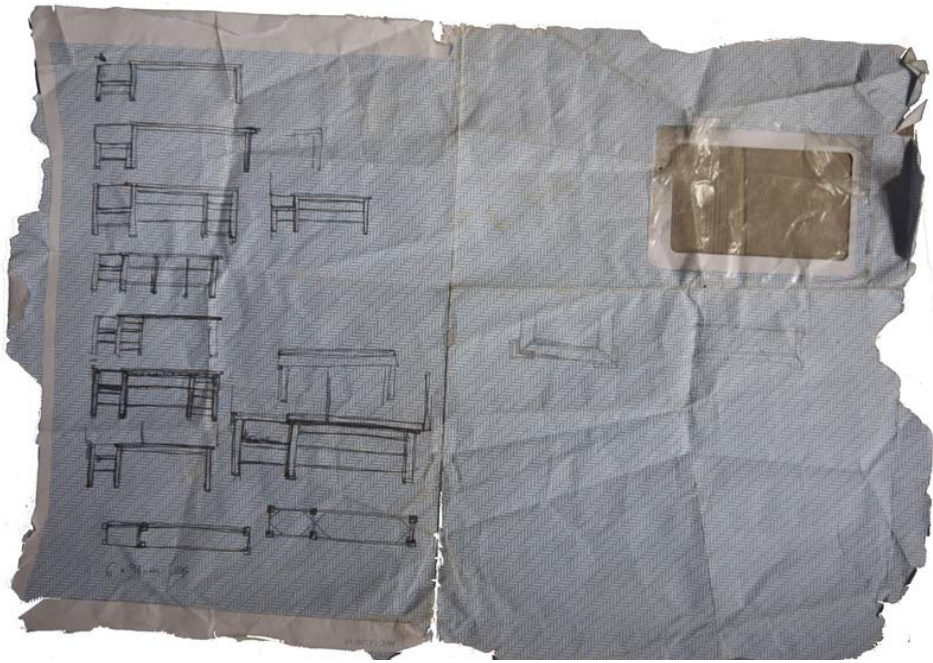
TODAY

- Build bed in front garden
- Finish stripping window frames
- Cutting glass + re-glazing windows
- Cutter
- Stripping paint from front.

TODAY

- Fill/SAND ^{FRONT} (get some paper)
 - RENDER SIDE + BIG HOLE ON FRONT.
 - SCRAPE REMAINING paint off side + glue with PVA.
 - Remove last bits of paint from WINDOWS.
 - MASK WINDOWS
 -
- ↓
+ moss from top/parapet







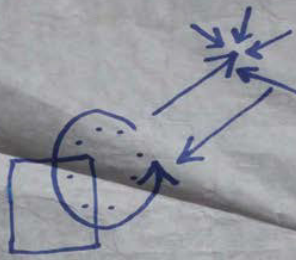






5

THE ACTIVIST INSTITUTION



WHO WE ARE - one group
 - a collective with internal ~~of~~ process
 - The field is defined by its engagement with the area + by its actions

WHAT WE DO - ~~our~~ our focus now is beyond the building.
 - we still program events/projects, ~~with~~
 - the building is a base f.
 - we are active in the area
 eg. in a conversation about housing
 - we build a house
 - we visit Pepys estate
 - we organise a direct action with other in the area

WHATS HAPPENING
 - internal
 - events at the ~~of~~ space, we also go out
 - practical
 - action
 - production of material - knowledge - website

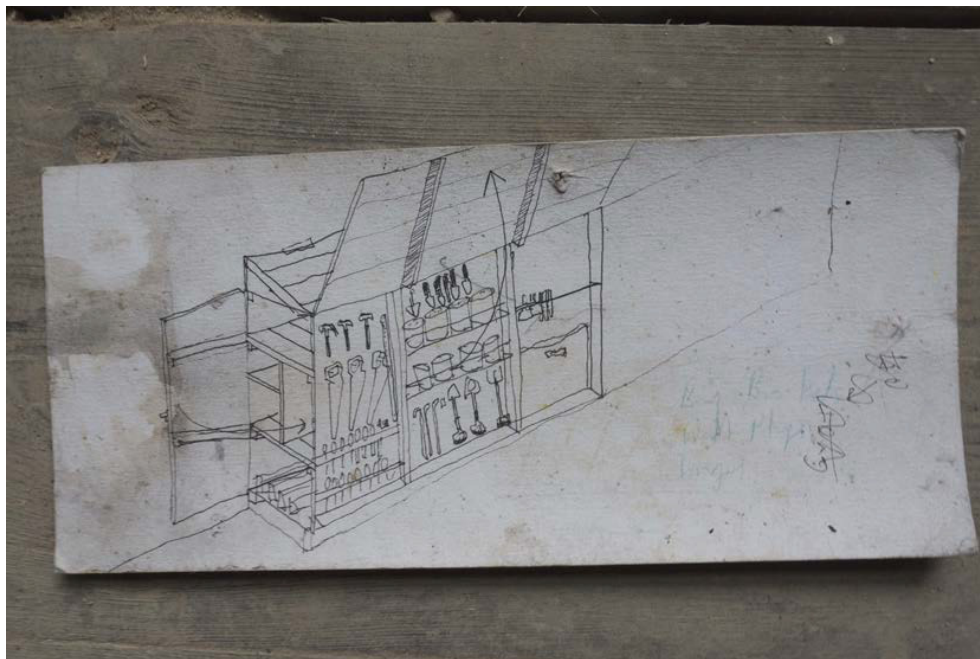
HOW WE'RE STRUCTURED
 - one group
 - process to join
 - participation from the public happens at actions + events.
~~the~~ ~~the~~ ~~the~~

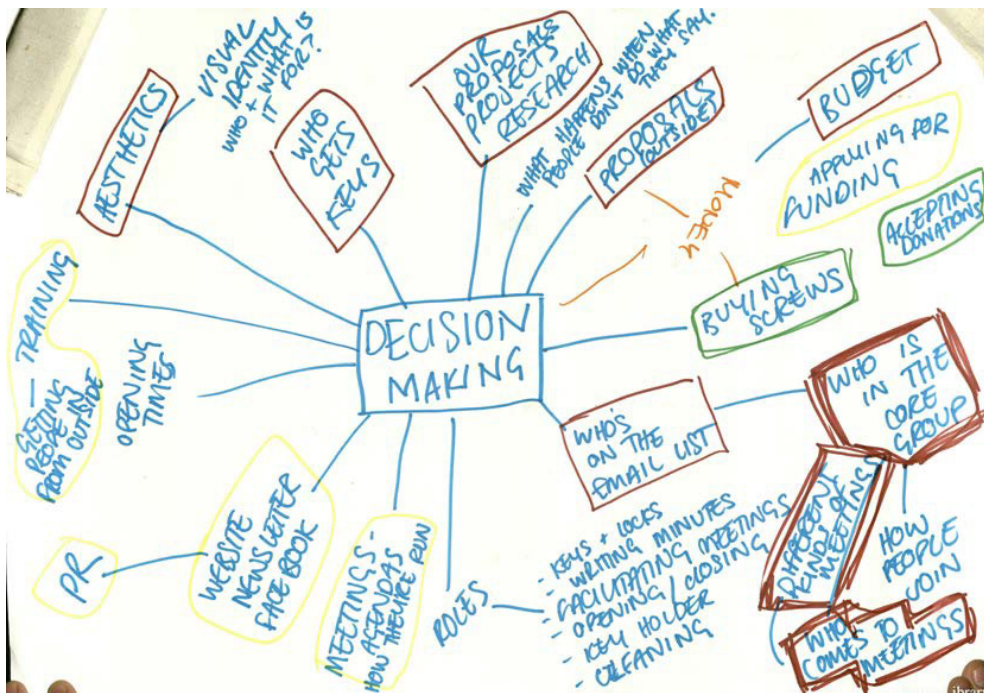
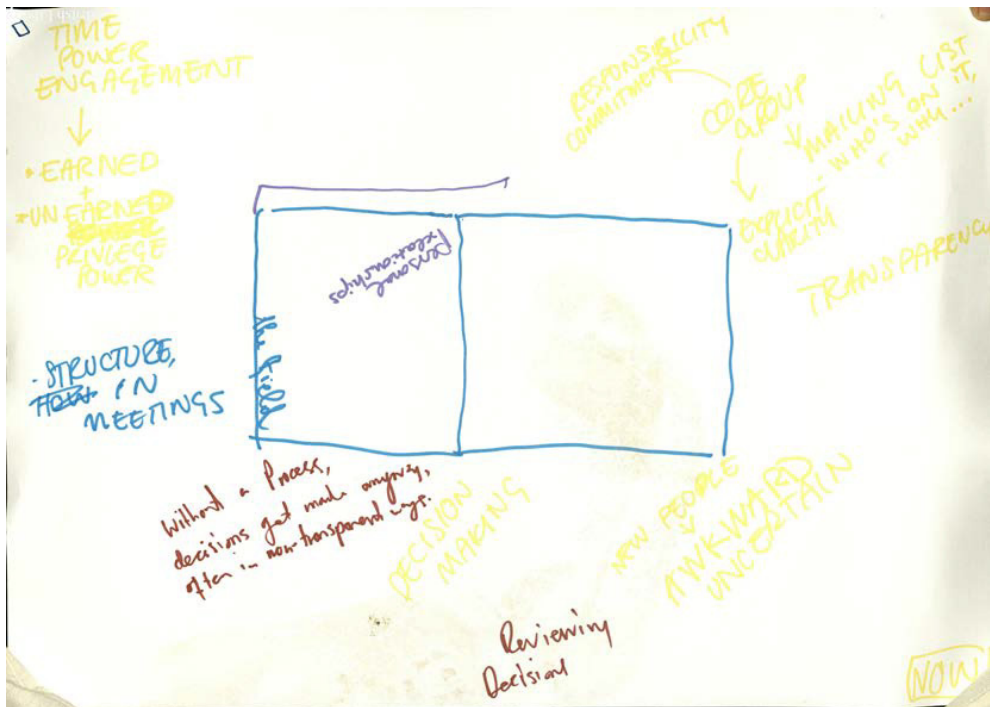
EXAMPLES -

Release
 Trust
 Communication
 define and space
 Understanding
 I think I know
 the negative better
 NOT THINK, BE?
 be ahead
 hurt
 Not understanding
 to what extent
 I can dictate/
 have a say
 in what
 happens
 decide to take
 part or be
 a spectator
 being ordered
 given orders
 can make us go
 round in circles
 rather than letting us
 go in different, new
 directions
 new world
 is that to give
 into someone
 else's plan
 ALLENATION
 A Machine -
 things coming in,
 going out
 USING THE
 SPACE NOT JUST
 TO THINK AND
 WORK!
 A desire to overcome
 physical boundaries / obstacles
 to connect
 AND WORK TOGETHER?
 Feeling uneasy
 with instruction / imposing my ideas

blindness
 motivation
 proposing
 teaching out
 peace struggle
 resistant
 complexity
 depondancy
 a work in
 money
 uncertainty
 security
 shared
 struggle of collective
 ownership
 in depondancy
 internal dialogue
 oppression
 period
 anxiety
 holding
 protect
 focus
 transition
 fear
 inclusivity
 chemistry
 physics
 support
 for help
 working alienation
 balance
 questions
 production
 pressure
 roots
 delusion
 anxiety
 collective
 ownership
 sustainability
 non-human
 relationship
 working alienation
 balance
 questions
 depondancy
 production
 roots
 delusion
 anxiety
 collective
 ownership
 sustainability
 non-human
 relationship
 working alienation
 balance
 questions

feeling in love
 learning and teaching
 variety
 communication
 what I intended them to do
 focus
 greeting
 jumping into action
 'nice to meet you'
 'what's going on?'
 'let's see what happens?'
 agreement
 uncoordinated
 not knowing what's next step
 relax
 fun
 fusion
 equality
 open // engagement
 chill
 thoughtful
 welcoming
 thinking
 aspiring
 anticipating
 imagining
 warm
 bliss
 optimistic
 questioning
 falling in love
 'notice me'
 anticipation
 didn't watch force positive
 skill
 at peace
 bounded
 questioning
 connected
 want to make connections
 enjoy the moment and the space





TYPES OF DECISIONS

① EVERY DAY eg. BUYING SCREENS, TAKING DONATIONS FROM INDIVIDUALS,
PROCESS - MAKE THE DECISION YOURSELF, OR WITH WHOEVER IS AROUND
 - CHECK AT A MEETING OR EMAIL IF YOU'RE UNSURE

② NAMED PERSON HAS RESPONSIBILITY eg. FUNDING APPLICATION, UPDATING WEBSITE, FB, REPLYING TO EMAILS
PROCESS - ~~NAMED~~ CHECK DECISION WITH NAMED PERSON
 - NAMED PERSON REPORTS TO MEETING

③ WHOLE GROUP DECISION eg. ~~GETTING~~ GIVING OUT KEYS, AGREEING BUDGET,
PROCESS - ASK WHOLE GROUP AT A MEETING OR OVER EMAIL
 - CONSENSUS - TIME LIMIT DECIDED BY FACILITATOR
 * OBJECTIONS - QUESTIONS - MODIFICATIONS
 GO VOTE AT END OF MEETING

④ IMPORTANT WHOLE GROUP DECISION eg. BIG PROJECTS, CORE GROUP MEMBERS, STRUCTURE, CHANGING PROCESS
PROCESS - ~~PROPOSE~~ PROPOSE DECISION TO BE MADE OVER EMAIL BEFORE MEETING, 1 WEEK IN ADVANCE.

- CONSENSUS AT MEETINGS - FACILITATOR DECIDES TIME LIMIT.
 - IF A DECISION CAN'T BE MADE IT RES VOTE: IF A DECISION CAN BE MADE BY THE END OF THAT MEETING (60%)

① MAKE AN INITIAL PROPOSAL TO A CORE GROUP MEETING.
 - IF THERE IS SUPPORT -
 ② FOR PROPOSALS THAT REQUIRE MANY PEOPLE
 60% OF PEOPLE NEED TO BE PRESENT FOR VOTE
 OR
 ② FOR PROPOSALS THAT YOU ALONE WILL REQUIRE COMMITMENT

WHY HAVE A CORE GROUP?

- ACCOUNTABILITY
- EFFICIENT USE OF TIME - DECISION MAKING
- CONTINUITY
- STABILITY
- TRUST + RELATIONSHIPS
- SUSTAINABILITY
- BOUNDARIES
- HOW CAN WE MAKE BEST USE OF OUR RESOURCES
- LEARNING - DEVELOPMENT -

~~PROBLEMS~~ WHAT YOU GET FROM BEING IN THE CORE GROUP

- DECISION MAKING + VOTING RIGHTS
- HAVING A CENTRAL ROLE IN DIRECTING THE PROJECT
- USING THE RESOURCES - THE BUILDINGS, TOOLS,
- BEING PART OF A SUPPORTIVE GROUP
- GETTING SUPPORT FOR PROJECTS YOU WANT TO INITIATE

WHAT IS EXPECTED OF YOU BEING A CORE GROUP MEMBER

- COMING TO A WEEKLY MEETING - MON EVE.
- REPLYING TO + MAKING DECISIONS OVER EMAIL
- BEING INVOLVED IN REALISING PROJECTS + PROPOSALS - GIVING A MINIMUM COMMITMENT OF TIME TO RUNNING THE SPACE + FACILITATING EVENTS, ACTIVITIES









CHAPTER 5

COMMONING BEYOND THE COMMONS

----- Forwarded message -----

From: [REDACTED]
Date: 2014-12-09 13:32 GMT+00:00
Subject: Re: Communized library
To: [REDACTED]

Hey [REDACTED]

Attached is the list. I look forward to hearing your ideas on how the library could work and if you'd like to fill your shelves with any of the books listed.

I can deliver all the books to you. They will come with my ex libris and I do expect them back at some stage, possibly when I decide to make a common library in Glasgow :)

[REDACTED]

p.s. Your site is lovely, but if I can offer a word of criticism: using terms like "transversality" and "commoning" really means nothing to most people and can be off putting. Paradoxically, I think the practice of transversality and commoning involves rethinking those terms and how they are used.

[REDACTED]

TRANSVERSALITY BEYOND THE COMMONS

As the post-script indicates, the practices of transversality and commoning involve rethinking those terms and how they are used. It is paradoxical. Or at least seemingly so. The very terms designate

modes of political practice that entail their own deconstruction, their own abandonment. These terms, central to various formulations of The Field's aims and principles during the time which I spent there, include within them their own deconstructive principle. It is as though some parasitic kernel at the core of these notions sought to consume them from the inside out. The practice of commoning requires a gesture beyond the signifier commoning. The practice of transversality requires a mode of speaking that does not utter its own name.

This e-mail was sent by an outsider. The sender was, by no account, part of the core collective that formed The Field. But that does not mean they were not part of it. They certainly contributed. As the e-mail makes clear—they donated on loan a selection of books that formed a large part of The Field's library. Books that themselves one day became the subject of a brief and minor controversy concerning the boundary work of commoning.

I was sat inside with Horatio one day, someone we will hear more of later in this chapter. We had been discussing some of the problems that Horatio identified as existing at The Field. He was, at that time, a strong critic of many of the practices and boundaries of the project. We were discussing how The Field was, in many ways, separate from many local communities, how it was not offering events or activities that would be of interest or use to those who lived in the poorer areas at the foot of Telegraph Hill. Two passers-by came in, middle aged women who we learnt had been in New Cross their entire lives and now lived in one of the council estates behind the building. We were both talking to them about what The Field did. One of them was drawn to the library that covered part of the wall and I told her she was free to borrow any of the books. In response she asked if there were any novels—I'm always looking for new novels. Immediately embarrassed, I gestured towards a small corner at the bottom of the shelves where a mix of mass market paperbacks that people had left on the door step were sitting neglected—books like *The Da Vinci Code*, and *The Girl with the Dragon Tattoo*. Horatio looked at me smirking. This is what I'm talking about, he laughed at me, what's anyone

going to with this kind of stuff. His hand reached out to the prominent middle shelf and drew out a copy of Alain Badiou's *The Theory of the Subject*. No one round here's got any use for this, he laughed.

I tried to offer a justification: we try to get books that aren't easily accessible at New Cross Learning, or the public library; and look, I pleaded, a lot of them are about practical stuff, gesturing towards the skills section including a motley assortment of how-to and DIY books. But I could see the knee-jerk justification was futile. His point was clear enough. What good would *The Theory of the Subject* do in this particular interaction with two women who had grown up in New Cross and had wandered into the building for the first time simply out of curiosity. As he said—what's anyone going to do with that.

The books had been selected for a number of reasons. There were conflicting thoughts regarding what should be included in the library, but regularly it was expressed that it would be good to keep books that were not easily accessible elsewhere. There were also a number of more thematic criteria—books to do with politics, alternative economies, and various forms of self-organised learning or DIY manuals were considered to resonate well with the aims of The Field. In some senses, these thematic selections set a certain boundary to the community that was imagined by The Field. They were markers of what could or could not be included within its polis. Equally, the selection of books that were not easily accessible elsewhere marked a certain preference for alternativeness and forms of political counter-culture. They asserted a series of (political) positionings.

What do moments like these have to tell us about practices of commoning and transversality, those practices which require their own deconstruction? Apropos commoning, in *The Beginning of History* Massimo de Angelis writes,

“The production of commons occurs at the point of division within the struggling body, precisely because it is a proactive creation to resist the division of the social body on the basis of immediate material interests. The produc-

tion of commons can overcome these divisions not by ignoring them, but by rearticulating them around new value practices. Indeed the production of commons to recompose a divided struggling body coincides with what might be called articulation, that is the production of new meanings.”
(2007: 239)

The practice of commoning occurs not at the point of a coming together of similarities, that is of articulations that are in agreement with one another, but rather at the moment of their disjunction. The work of commoning unfolds on the ground of the uncommons. It is the attempt to bring into conversation value practices that are not immediately reconcilable. Commoning occurs at the point of division.

It is here that commoning and transversality fold into one another at the point where they possess a comparable modality of immanent parasitic deconstruction. Their practice is their own undoing. Transversality is not a coming together that would unite multiplicities or monads, here understood in the Tardian sense as composite (Tarde 2012; Marrero-Guillamón 2014), under a unifying identity, or bring articulations into a univocality that is homogenous. It is rather an interfacing of difference in such a way as to retain their specificity and multiplicity. It is, as defined by Francis— difference coming together without being flattened out. This sentiment is also expressed, anthropologically, by Viveiros de Castro in his description of transversal shamanism where he characterises transversality as

“The relation between points of view (the relation that is a point of view qua multiplicity) is of the order of disjunctive synthesis or immanent exclusion, and not of a transcendent inclusion. In sum, the perspectivist system is in perpetual disequilibrium”
(2014: 158).

The transversal component of the practices of shamanism de-

scribed by Viveiros de Castro are those of “communication that occurs between heterogeneous terms” (ibid). It is a practice of communicating across difference without translating, and thus transforming or destroying, those differences into a transcendent code or meta-language. Transversal communication remains in disequilibrium, for the incommunicable remainder continually displaces the possibility of entirely transparent communication. The practice of rearticulating around new value practices remains ongoing and displaced. And it is this ongoing displacement and tension that commoning practices continually attempt to overcome, not in the sense of reaching a teleological unification but rather in the sense of ongoing rearticulation, negotiation and communication. As de Angelis writes, “[d]ifference within a struggling movement is also the condition for the production of new common values” (2007: 32). The disjunctive synthesis of difference is the very possibility of commoning, the uncommons the ground of commons.

To illustrate this further it is useful to return to Viveiros de Castro’s discussions of transversality. Elsewhere in *Cannibal Metaphysics* he quotes from François Zourabichvili’s work on Deleuze where he writes, ““common” does not have the sense of a generic identity, but of a transversal, nonhierarchical communication between beings that are only different.” (Zourabichvili in Viveiros de Castro 2014: 105f.58). Commons, then, are not the site of a shared self-same identity, or of unification of difference under a univocal articulation, but are the site of the encounter of differences and the transversal site of communication between these differences.

In what follows I would like to examine a number of moments where The Field encountered certain limits to its collectivity, that is where it encountered divisions and disjunctions. These are moments at which commoning was attempted, but in some senses failed. They are attempts at *commoning beyond the commons*, in the sense that the body of the commons sought to or was pushed to recompose and rearticulate itself around conflicting value practices. They are, I believe, some of the moments at which commoning reveals its ground of

practice to be the uncommon. These points of difference are complex and overlapping. There is no simple way to resolve them, and that is not the aim here. Rather, I am hoping to draw out a few of the complex entanglements that were not overcome during my time at The Field, and equally cannot be overcome in the medium of the text.

COLLABORATION WITH THE ENEMY?

The first instance revolves around a conflict that emerged regarding whether or not a particular project, and with it a particular individual, should be allowed to use The Field. On the recommendation of one of the early members of the collective who had since left, the UK chapter of the Regional Alliance Forging Organisation (RAFO) approached The Field to use the building as office space and for hosting workshops. RAFO is an international organisation which works on issues around identity and difference. They host workshops on diversity and inclusion, gender and sexuality, contemporary masculinity, faith and belief, income, wealth and class, mental health and identity, and difference. Harlow, the director of RAFO London, is a black man who migrated from Grenada to London in his 20s. He is now in his early 60s and has worked with a vast range of organisations including local government, probation service, crown prosecution service, police, NHS trusts, and the voluntary and private sector, including large financial organisations in the City of London. His work often focuses on understanding identity and difference, and how we perceive others and ourselves, and the power relations at work in the inter-relation of identities. Often the work focuses around ideas of leadership and empowerment through raised awareness and self-esteem. The request to use The Field as an office was presented flexibly, stating that they were open to sharing the space with others in a co-working space arrangement, and that they were willing to participate in the organisation and life of The Field, as well as offering free or reduced cost workshops, or other activities organised and run by them.

Following his request to use The Field as office space during the

week many questions were raised by those who were on The Field's e-mail list, which was at the time the main collective decision-making platform aside from meetings. Various questions were raised. The relationship of RAFO to the state and large corporate organisations was one issue. They had worked with the Home Office, the probation service, Vodafone and with the London Metropolitan Police force offering workshops and training on identity, difference and racism. For some people, this was a problematic issue. As expressed in the commoning principle, an aim of The Field was to experiment with alternatives to state and market, and some found this direct interaction with the state and private sector potentially problematic. Some were concerned that they might be receiving funding from the Home Office for the Prevent anti-terrorism program which was described as 'essentially racist.' Receiving such funding was seen as an endorsement of these State apparatuses and indicated complicity. In addition, the question was raised as to 'the politics of it,' and if the "purpose is to turn people into 'good citizens'? From whose point of view?" reiterating the aversion to the state apparatus of good citizenship and "the disciplinary order of the citizen" (Hardt & Negri 2003: 95). This position was articulated by several people at The Field in the concerns regarding the extent to which RAFO was engaged with the disciplinary apparatus of the state, the apparatus that moulded people to become functional citizens. As one person put it, "I mean it's still encouraging, y'know, work and that sort of participation in capitalism." The concern was expressed that RAFO functioned within the apparatuses of the state and capital, it was neither explicitly anti-capitalist or anti-state, which would potentially put them at odds with the aim towards "experimenting with the commons as an alternative to the institutions of both the market and the state" that was a component of the commoning principle.

Further, the question was raised as to whether they were organised collectively or hierarchically. Harlow fully assumed the role of the director of the company, and the website was read as indicating a preference for hierarchical forms of leadership that sat within this structure. It was also asked if they always charged for their work-

shops, and what it meant for them to explore contemporary masculinity and “their approach towards gay, bisex, queer etc “men”, how do they deal with this, what do they mean by “men” and so on.” Consistent charging for workshops was deemed, by some, unacceptable as it functioned as a clear barrier to participation. The focus of some of their workshops on masculinity was also deemed problematic, as it could potentially reinforce dominant, patriarchal gender roles. Several of the key words, such as ‘celebrating masculinity’ and ‘discussing what it means to be men’, were seen as problematic. Questions were also raised about their involvement with the New Cross/Deptford area, in accordance with the ‘Local’ principle of The Field, and the extent to which they were led by groups ‘facing oppression or injustice’.

All these concerns outlined a political position that was occupied collectively by The Field. Although the boundaries and limits of the political position were flexible and ambiguous, they none the less marked a political position that could potentially exclude RAFO and others from becoming part of The Field. And this very flexibility and ambiguity wrote into the position a barrier to the encounter of difference because as it was not clearly defined it was necessary for those who would be able to occupy it, and so join The Field, to already have a certain kind of unspoken knowledge of what that position entailed, to be able to recognise it and occupy it without the presence of a clearly defined, publicly available discourse that set its parameters. So, it was marked by what could be described in terms of a certain political *habitus* (Mauss 1973; Bourdieu 2010), in that it revolved around a set of behaviours and embodied knowledges that were not always clearly and immediately available in discursive form.

This ambiguity that became particularly apparent when confronted with an external difference, was expressed by one person through the statement “I’ve had dealings with Harlow and RAFO and couldn’t work out exactly why I didn’t like what they do, but I just didn’t, not a strong feeling but just a discomfort.” What it was about RAFO that did not fit perfectly with The Field was not entirely clear, it was more part of an entire constellation of approaches, world views,

knowledges and practices. The aim of The Field to create radical political alternatives became clear at the moment when it was confronted with what one person described as, in direct reference to RAFO, “the hegemonic political model.” This hegemonic political model was constructed of an array of components including, but by no means reducible to, complicit working with state and market institutions, service provision, charity, hierarchical working arrangements and a focus on masculinity that could potentially lead towards the perpetuation of patriarchy. In contrast, the political position articulated by The Field favoured participation, horizontal working arrangements, localism, immediacy, and non-capitalistic modes of exchange. In many senses the political position that The Field articulated overlapped with components of what has been described as the folk political common sense of today’s left (Srnicsek & Williams 2015) which favours horizontalism, local and immediate relations, and participation rather than representation.

The proposal was discussed over a couple of projects meetings. Many of the objections and concerns were raised across the course of these two meetings and following this it was requested that Harlow attend a projects meeting to discuss these issues in person. At this point, Matt and Jane, who had been talking to Harlow personally up until that point said that they felt uncomfortable brining him to a projects meeting to be ‘interrogated’ by the entire group, expressing instead a preference for more personal interaction outside a formal meeting setting which might allow a more flexible form of communication that could take place “in an environment slightly less intimidating and conducive to dynamic conversation as is often the case in a typical meeting.” A number of people objected, as this would ultimately bypass the collective decision-making processes. Harlow was asked to attend a projects meeting, but could not make the date of the next one set and asked for a representative of the collective to meet him instead.

Jane and Matt met him and reported back to the group with his responses to the questions raised. Concerning the relationship with the Met, he said that his engagement with them came from a long

experience of being a black man in London, and that he hoped to be able to offer training programs to them as a means of reducing oppression towards communities, adding the addendum—‘still a long way to go.’ In relation to the concerns regarding masculinity and how it related to LGBTQ, he said that many of his workshops explored these issues extensively, saying ‘several of our primary leaders hold that identity and sexual orientation is a key feature of all our workshops.’ Matt and Jane made clear that they thought that it would be great to have his project using The Field, as well as the suggestion of running a co-working space that could be used by other groups—Jane saying “I see it as more important to get people using the space, to make it a genuinely useful place for people in the area than a bastion of political purity.” There were very few replies to the e-mail that reported back and proposed that RAFO begin to use the space during the week, the two that did reply responded affirmatively, but many of those who had expressed concerns and had asked for Harlow to attend a projects meeting remained silent. Shortly after RAFO began to use the space three days a week as part of a co-working space which was open to use by others.

Talking to Harlow around a year later in a cafe in Tottenham, it became clear that he had never fully been aware of the controversy that had surrounded his introduction to The Field.

When you first encountered The Field what understanding did you have of its aims or what it was trying to achieve?

My understanding was that it was aiming to be an inclusive place for the community and a place that would be predominantly free or at not much cost for the community and it is a great model the truth is that there are so many people in the community and/or groups in the community with nowhere to go and nowhere to take what it is they need to take to go forward

...

Did you find the process of entering into The Field fairly easy?

For me it was easy. I think because I've been through and understand the dynamic of bureaucracy top-down, bottom-up, etc. so actually the gateway into The Field was easy I think in trying to create an infrastructure that is enabling what we've arrived at is something that becomes more and more complex particularly as there is almost an unspoken place where part of the strategy is, how do we keep that lot out and no one being brave enough to say well, actually we don't like you or we don't like the look of you therefore, you can't use it so we, and that's what governments do we legislate and we legislate to exclude rather than have a straight conversation.

When you joined, were you aware of any level of controversy about different groups using the space?

I think because of what I do I got an automatic pass in terms of what I do and it's a demonstration of what I'm doing is being inclusive to people etc. so, there was no question about my intentions if you like and how I can put into The Field so, I get an automatic pass because of what I do even today I think I would still get an automatic pass because of what I do.

As far as Harlow was concerned there was no controversy about him joining The Field. He got a free pass, because of what he did. But the story above shows that was far from the case. The free pass he got was given by the action of Matt and Jane who, from their perspective,

engaged in a more flexible process of negotiation with him in order to bring him into The Field. But, from the perspective of many other members of the collective who were more uncertain of RAFO and *'its shaky liberal politics,'* Matt and Jane bypassed the collective decision-making process. This divergence caused elements of division and mistrust to continue within the group, something that will be returned to in the next chapter.

Harlow also describes how, in relation to other people or groups joining The Field, there was an unwillingness to tell them directly that they could not join. This also manifested in Harlow's introduction to The Field. The controversy remained, as far as Harlow was concerned, within that *'unspoken place'* of *'how do we keep that lot out'* that he mentions above. A series of divisions and concealments occur here in this attempt to common beyond the commons, that is to rearticulate the commons around altered values. These divisions and concealments were only partially overcome, and here transversality and commoning approached certain limits, certain boundaries where the recomposition of the commons faltered. The uncommonalities persisted, shifting in and out of unspoken places depending on who was speaking and who was listening. The unspoken haunted the spoken as the background static that both made communication possible and obstructed it.

In that same conversation with Harlow we moved onto the topic of another area of conflict and controversy, part of which will be discussed in the following two sections.

I think now, If I'm really candid, I think there's some passive-aggressive racism going on which is specifically directed at Mmandu and more and more people don't like her and a lot of people don't like her because they don't understand her and it's a place where through her hurt and her experience she hasn't learnt how to win friends and influence people and there's a place where I can talk to you in a really straight way and you won't like me but because

I have learnt how to be inclusive I can talk to you in a way that allows you to feel part of my conversation and my agenda quite simply Mmandu hasn't learnt that it almost comes from or my surmisation or guess is if you've given if someone's had a brutal upbringing it's hard for them to be loving or enduring because they can still feel their pain in a way that I'll say 'middle class Britain' don't have those experiences and pain.

UNSPOKEN PLACES

Before moving onto the conflicts pointed to above concerning Mmandu's engagement with The Field, I would like to momentarily think with the notion of the *unspoken place* which emerged in conversation with Harlow that day. The aim here is to give this idea the status of a concept, that is to put it on the same plane as anthropological theory and the other forms of conceptual work that run through this text. In doing this I am following Viverios de Castro's proposal for an anthropology that treats the ideas of our participants as concepts (2014: 187-196). This would be an anthropology that thinks with and alongside our participants. Such an approach would start from the possibility of equality between anthropological theories and "the intellectual pragmatics of the collectives such theories take as their object." (ibid: 189). The claim is not to think *like* Harlow in this instance, to claim to be able to have access to the reality of his thought or meaning, but to think *with* him, that is to take the concepts emerging from our conversation as precisely that—concepts, and to place them into conversation and interaction with other conceptual planes. It is an assumption of the possibility of *reason between equals* (Rancière 1991). It is to accept the invitation of the other to think with them, to attempt to open to "the Other as *the expression of a possible world.*" (Deleuze 2011: 261 emphasis original). In doing this, the hope is that we can take forward the notion of the unspoken place as a concept that helps us to think alongside the following conflicts.

The *unspoken place*, that Harlow speaks of is one that has a strategy, and a strategy that asks *how do we keep that lot out?* The unspoken is a place, a place with a strategic positioning of exclusion. But it is a strategy of exclusion that is not brave enough to speak itself. It legislates to exclude, rather than having a straight conversation. As a place, the unspoken takes on a spatial reality. One that marks out a series of co-ordinates, that draws a boundary of identity. It is one means of defining group limits and horizons. It is spatial for the boundary “defend[s] against external and internal threats to ensure that the language of identity retains a meaning.” (Augé 2008: 45). The place marks a position, a position with a boundary that perpetuates a spatial identity. It is then, the marking of a territory.

But the place is unspoken. There are refrains¹ that marks this territory, that rearticulate and recomposes its boundaries, but they are unspoken ones. It is a refrain as “*any aggregate of matters of expression that draws a territory*” (Deleuze & Guattari 2004: 356 emphasis original). That they are unspoken refrains perhaps reveals that they could be spoken but are not, or alternatively that they are of a different order of expression to speech. As Harlow says, they are unspoken through a lack of bravery to state *you can't use it*. Common transversality approaches an impasse where effort is made to communicate with the other but falters. Here, the lack of bravery could be understood as the fear of the collapse of the territory, the fear that a particular opening to the other, that is to difference, may fail “to ward off chaos” (Zourabichvili 2012: 205), that a particular opening may be so severe as to result in the collapse of identity. It is not that a clearly defined identity meets non-identity (chaos), and is thus threatened, but that the interstice of encounter between identities may trigger one of them

1 Whilst the concept of the ‘refrain’ is initially drawn from music, the use of the concept by Deleuze and Guattari is expanded beyond an audible context and instead, as they write in *A Thousand Plateaus*, applies to “*any aggregate of matters of expression that draws a territory and develops into territorial motifs and landscapes* (there are optical, gestural, motor, etc., refrains) (2004: 356). The refrain refers to repetitive expressions, such as gestures, rituals, images or sounds (Young, Genosko & Watson 2013: 254), that delimit and maintain a territory. This expansion of the refrain beyond the musical and auditory is further developed by Guattari in *The Machinic Unconscious* (2011) and *Chaosmosis* (2006).

to deterritorialise to such an extent that all territory is lost and cannot be recomposed. And with this collapse of identity would also come the collapse of the possibility both of commoning and transversality in that the communication between heterogeneous terms (Viverios de Castro 2014: 158) may fail to persist as terms. But this fear fails to be spoken for to be spoken would appear to undermine the motives of transversality and commoning—it would admit defeat and limit, the failure to recompose around common values.

So there is a strategy, it is a strategy to keep that lot out, to keep out those who would undermine the territorial principles that both make commoning and transversality possible, and obstruct it. It is a strategy of “[d]rawing up and inhabiting the territory that filters chaos” (Zourabichvili 2012: 205). Again, the chaos that threatens and is filtered out is not that of non-identity but is emergent of the encounter of identities. The chaos would be not that which is encountered, a non-identity of chaos in distinction to the order of identity, but rather the potential state of extreme deterritorialisation that could be emergent of encounter. Thus, the unspoken place legislates to exclude. But it legislates to exclude in as much as it fears that it cannot make the leap “out of the territory or deterritorializing oneself towards a cosmos distinct from chaos” (ibid). This cosmos distinct from chaos would here be the possibility of rearticulating around an altered set of common values, of bringing into being another composition of a common world. At times though, the fear is too great, the bravery is lacking, for there is always the risk that the common world will falter, decomposing back into the background static of the uncommons, the uncommon static of chaos as “the primary matter of virtuality, the inexhaustible reserve of an infinite determinability” (Guattari 2013: 103). The chaos will not be filtered, and the leap towards a cosmos will fall short. The identity of the commons, and with it the possibility of articulation, will collapse.

Here comes the strategy of the *unspoken place*, which “assumes a place that can be circumscribed as *proper* (propre) and thus serve as the basis for generating relations with an exterior distinct from it” (de Certeau 1988: xix emphasis original). The *unspoken place*, in its lack of

bravery to speak straight, devises a strategy the goal of which is to *keep that lot out*. It is a place which constitutes a relation to the other in which transversality cannot be achieved due to the potential of collapse, that is of the values being so entirely deterritorialised as to lose all consistency and continuity with their former state. It is this gesture that reveals a limit and impasse on the part of commoning, a moment where the attempt to rearticulate around common values falters, reaches too far, or does not even have the bravery to start for fear of total loss of territory.

WHO ARE THESE PEOPLE?

Mmandu initially approached Matt wanting to set up a cafe in the building during the week. She wanted to run it as regularly as possible. Having run various catering projects before, she was looking for an affordable place to set one up again, and owning a large amount of catering equipment, she was ready to start as soon as possible. Her focus was very much on running the catering—she said she could take care of the food herself. She said she wanted to sell good quality food in a nice environment. The issue of money was never properly resolved. Although approached several times it was never engaged with in any kind of depth or with any kind of clarity. When the possibility of offering food by donation was approached, Mmandu appeared agreeable in principle, but would pass over the issue finishing with statements such as, ‘we’ll I’ve got to get paid somehow.’ It was implicit that Mmandu was not happy with a blanket food by donation policy for everyone. Yet at this point no one involved in the process clearly stated that food by donation was a key necessity for The Field, or that running a business was not an appropriate activity for The Field, one that had in fact been turned down on a number occasion previously through the collective decision-making processes. She was very eager to start immediately and had a lack of interest in collective decision making concerning her project—she could not see how it was justified or why it was necessary.

Mmandu's project did not fit comfortably with the political territory marked out by The Field. For many people attending the project meetings it was too close to a business. She wanted to charge money, pay herself and was unclear about if she would give any money to The Field and also unclear about how things would be priced. She was also seen to demonstrate unwillingness in working with other people, or having her project bent, changed or shifted to fit with the positions marked out by The Field. Her main engagement with The Field was through Matt, myself and Jane as we were the ones who were primarily there during the day when she would pass by. She had met very few of the other people who attended meetings or contributed to the decision-making processes. She showed little interest to become involved in other elements of the project such as meetings, decision making processes or contributing to the everyday life and maintenance of the space—all of which were considered central to the possibility of participating in The Field, and key to collaborative working methods and principles of self-organisation. Yet she also wanted to make significant changes that would affect the entire project. She spoke of painting the walls, redecorating entirely and installing equipment permanently, all of which would require the collaborative decision-making processes and discussions that she did not want to participate in. When it was stated to her that in order to make decisions like this, they would need to be discussed and engaged with by the wider collective using the space, she would respond saying—'who are these people, who I never see when I'm here, but are able to make a decision about my project?' As far as she was concerned it was myself, Matt and Jane who she saw there every day and so we should be the ones to who she should address her proposals to. The unspoken place of potential exclusion converged with an unseen collective of people.

In the course of these discussions she had also raised many concerns that were difficult and uncomfortable facts, concerns that several of us had also been worrying about and which we had been trying to address for a while. She pointed to the fact that the space was always closed during the day, that this resource was just another community

centre that was locked up and inaccessible to those who needed it, that the local community couldn't get in there, and that an elite group of white folks were holding it to ransom. She made clear that there were not enough people of colour using the space, that it was a space for 'white people and their posh mates,' that she had heard people refer to it as 'that weird white people place,' and that if we were serious about the project being in anyway community focused, this could not continue. As far as money was concerned, she made it clear that she was someone who was economically excluded, and so she should have access to the space for business purposes. She did not have access to resources elsewhere which was supposed to be a criteria for people using the space.

A clear and constructive course of action did not emerge, although many of us agreed fundamentally with the points that had been raised. Matt had said that if she wanted to make a proposal for running a cafe from The Field on a regular basis, outside of a process of collaboration, she would need to put together a proposal and bring it to one of the Monday meetings in order that a collective decision-making process could take place through the meetings, e-mails and the online decision making platform that formed components of the collective processes The Field had established at that point. But she quite simply did not see why anyone else should have a say on whether or not her project could happen. No proposal was ever received.

Mmandu was asked to engage with The Field in a particular way, a way which also demanded that she communicate in a certain way by participating in a consensus-oriented meeting, engage in a collaborative process, respond extensively over e-mail, and write and present proposals. These channels of communicative practice were established by those operating within a culture of activism, one which has an entire constellation of practices and modes of behaviour associated with it. Such insistence on these means of communication can be seen as one manifestation of a failure to find means of enacting transversality, they formed markers of the unspoken space of exclusion, the space that demanded people act, speak and relate to The Field in

certain ways. The commons could not extend to Mmandu, because she could not communicate in the modalities that it required, and, in spite of efforts, the channels of communication failed to transform to accommodate her. The unspoken place marked a territory through exclusion that required people speak in a certain way and fit within its territorial modes of expression.

It is here that part of the problematic of passive-aggressive racism candidly spoken of by Harlow emerges. Mmandu had not, in Harlow's words, learnt how to make friends and influence people. Her communicative style was often experienced as aggressive and violent, confrontational and challenging. This was, at times, seen as an unwillingness to engaging in collaborative or cooperative processes, a principle which underpinned the processes and structures of The Field. This clash of communicative practices brought about an impasse. People did not understand her, and the more she was misunderstood, the greater the unspoken space of exclusion operated in such a way as to perpetuate the polarisation which cast her as an external threat to The Field.

In such moments, stumbling blocks to transversality and commoning were approached. The commons could not be reformed around a new set of value practices that could incorporate Mmandu, her needs and desires, or her communicative modalities. There are echoes here which resonate with Nancy Fraser's critique of the Habermasian conception of the public sphere. This would be a sphere which fails to recognise "informal impediments to participatory parity" (Fraser 1990: 63), that is it would fail to become attuned to the unspoken places which legislate to exclude, that form discourses and behaviours in such a way as to allow some to speak and be heard, and force others into silence or miscomprehension. One such echo can be discerned in the conflict between the individual needs and desires of Mmandu, the need to "get paid somehow," and the demand for collaborative working practices as well as alternative economic models that harbour aversions to commercial activity.

Chatting with Horatio one day, the question of why he thought

The Field wasn't more useful to the local communities arose.

The way politics are rolling here it's a barrier I think the way the place is being run you know the politics that people are applying to this place its being a barrier. That's what I think.

What do you mean by the way it is run for example or the way that politics are actioned here do you have any examples?

Yes, I think you guys have this idea of trying to keep money away of everything and I don't think that that's being helpful. I think if you had money involved it could be, maybe if people here also made the other things like I said before. Ok, so I think money could help but because you guys are from the party of *I don't believe in money* or, like *I don't want to work with money in this place* or you believe in that for this place and you have this belief and people don't want to give it up you know. So even like other things, like the way we talk to people and the way people talk to us and that's politics so we are in a party, you guys are in a party that okay we talk in this manner and we believe in this but actually to help the society or to help the poor community we have to give up some of our ideas in order to help them and I don't think that that has been done successfully.

The way we talk to people and the way people talk to us — that's politics. Horatio makes clear that communicative modalities are part of politics, they are integral to encounters with difference, of the experience of the other, of both attempting to listen and attempting to speak. Communication as the attempt to attend to and care for gatherings of heterogenous entities and agencies is politics, a process of bringing together differences without acting 'as if' those differences do not exist.

Continuing, he starts to speak of society, but corrects himself, replacing it with more specific designation 'the poor community.' That is, as we had been discussing previously, the primarily black communities that live at the bottom of Telegraph Hill rather than the students of Goldsmiths or the rich, predominantly white, communities that populate the Hill. To aid these communities, *we have to give up some of our ideas.*

The resonance with Fraser's critique of Habermas is powerful. "What is at stake here is the autonomy of specifically political institutions vis-à-vis the surrounding societal context" (1990: 65). The surrounding societal context in which The Field finds itself enmeshed, is not a homogenous one, it is not one that has only one modality of communication, only one public. The sphere of community invoked is not one that can act as if they were equals in the common space of negotiation and deliberation, but must take account for *the way we talk to people and the way people talk to us.* It is not a matter of addressing society, as a singular, univocal discourse or mode of communication, but a matter of engaging with the specificities of difference on the terms immanent to those differences. The aggression that some experienced in Mmandu's communicative practices, that lead to the unspoken place of passive aggressive racism, was also a practice of making a potentially marginalised voice heard.

This is, itself, a component of the problematic of commoning and transversality—how to bring difference together without erasing them under a banner of universality. How can communication occur through a practice of controlled equivocation (Viverios de Castro 2004), in which communication occurs in such a way as to retain the differences of the webs of meaning and worlds that are brought into relation; it must acknowledge that "[n]othing comes without its world, so trying to know these worlds is crucial" (Haraway 1997: 37). There is a component of commoning and transversality, two notions which become deeply entangled in their practice, that remains tentative. There is a not-quite-yet, an only-partly-seen, remainder in the attempt to transversally understand others. In short, transversal com-

moning remains a continually deferred process of becoming-with.

As a tentative experimental practice, failures, stumblings, blockages and impasses are inevitable. Moments where the part glimpsed is taken for the full picture, or moments where the practice becomes too much to bear, the chaos too hard to ward off, the fear too great, the bravery lacking. At these moments, the plunge into the “cosmos distinct from chaos” (Zourabichvili 2012: 205) falters, and the recomposition of common value systems cannot be fully achieved. Such frictions can be painful. Misunderstandings of other worlds proliferate, and exclusion becomes the unspoken legislative practice. Sometimes, *giving up some of our ideas*, leads to a territory undesired, or threatens the hard-made common world at its very core.

VEGANISM OR CHICKEN?

I would now like to turn to one further instance of what I am here seeking to outline as *commoning beyond the commons*, that is those moments where commons attempt to reform themselves through tentative practices of commoning that remain in ongoing composition. These tentative practices are the moments whereby attempts are made to reform commons around altered value systems in order to become-with differences that were previously outside the commons. Such moments and processes have the dual status of collective boundary-making and boundary-collapsing. Far from being exceptional moments, they are the possibility and limit of commons and commoning. I am here focusing on moments where such recomposition faltered, as it is at such moments of failure that the modalities of these practices are clearest, in a certain Heideggerian fashion—it is when a tool breaks that we become most aware of what it enabled us to do.

The moment I would like to now turn to is a brief conflict regarding whether or not meat should be served at the Wednesday night kitchen. As it became clear that there was a significant amount of resistance to Mmandu establishing *Well Being Kitchen* at The Field, she sought other means of engaging with the project and influencing

its direction. The Wednesday Kitchen was one of the routes that she chose. Generally, the cook at the Wednesday kitchen changed each week—people would sign up to lead the preparation of food each week. It was framed as a collaborative process, in which food could be used as a gathering device and people who might not attend specific events or projects or admin meetings, could contribute to the life of The Field. Eschewing the unspoken expectation that the cook each week would change, Mmandu put her name down for every slot that had not yet been taken. Fragments of discussions I had with her during this period are scattered across the final entries in my notebooks.

Black folk like chicken.

You need something for the chicken heads.

Black people don't want chickpeas and flavourless mush, they ain't going to come in here for that.

Black folk ain't going to come here if you don't have something for them.

Mmandu was very clear about the fact that, as she put it, black folk want chicken. The rule for the Wednesday kitchen up until that point had been that food would be vegetarian, and where possible within the budget and capacities of the relevant cook, with a vegan option. Mmandu challenged this rule, refusing to not serve meat. She prepared vegetarian food, but not exclusively. This sparked a brief controversy in the extended collective around The Field. Some took the position that vegan food did not exclude meat eaters, whereas conversely the presence of meat at the kitchen did exclude vegans and vegetarians—“there’s the smell and ethics behind it,” as one person put it in the e-mail thread.

Vegan and vegetarian meals were here assumed to be more inclusive. “Vegetarian/vegan food is more inclusive and cooking the food at the Field promotes collaboration - all values that the Field wants to promote.” The introduction of meat was then seen as a potential

mechanism of exclusion, as well as a ground of ethical transgression. Vegetarian/vegan food on the other hand was cast as a mechanism of inclusion, a gathering device, and an assertion of ethical solidarity with nonhuman entities—both animal, and environmental. But a more complex sentiment that was shared by several members of The Field collective was encapsulated by the line: “Food politics are a lot more complicated than simple ethics unfortunately - and for me (this is my personal position), it’s more important that a more diverse group of people come together on the Wednesday dinner, than it is adhering to an ethical standard shared by some.” The problematic, then, partly unfolded as a question of which specific communities, should be catered for by The Field.

Mmandu’s claim was that *black folk ain’t going to come here if you don’t have something for them*. The first night that she cooked at the Wednesday kitchen seemed to give weight to her statement. The building was packed with a more diverse mix of people than had, at times, previously been present at the event. That evening I met many people who were attending the kitchen for the first time, who had been specifically invited by Mmandu. The promise of having *a more diverse group of people come together* seemed to have been realised. Subsequent nights on which she cooked did not maintain this diversity. At the next kitchen I attended at which she cooked, Mmandu herself observed, *the crowd tonight is more of the... well—you know*. The unspoken rose its head again in this observation, the implicit meaning which I understood from this unspoken place of *well—you know*, and which was communicated by the mutual look of recognition that we shared, was that this kitchen was, for the most part, attended by young, white, middle class people, many of whom had connections to Goldsmiths.

This question of the politics of food and the community which it is capable of gathering around it is, however, far more complex than the simple question of *Veganism or Chicken* which titles this section. On the one hand, Mmandu’s belief that *you’ve got to have something for the chicken heads* did, at times, appear to ring true—the kind of food that was served did facilitate different gatherings. As Williams-For-

son explores in her study of African American women's experiences and stories of chicken, this food "has served as a tool of self-expression, self-actualization, resistance, even accommodation and power." (2006:2). But the story is not so simple, for just as chicken functioned as a gathering device for power and resistance, so too did it function in the discourses of white racism, through the stereotypical portrayal of black people as chicken lovers as "one of the linchpins with which white racists claimed black inferiority" (ibid). *Food politics are a lot more complicated.*

Whilst there are instances in which Mmandu's claim appears to ring true, we should resist easy, stereotypical, and potentially racist characterisations. The other side of this potentially simplifying and essentialising discourse would be the association of veganism exclusively with white middle classes. Rather, it is perhaps more useful to accept, with no need for paradox, that both veganism and chicken can be intersectional gathering devices and potentially exclusive and divisive. Whilst Mmandu's claim that *black people don't want chickpeas and flavourless mush*, may hold truth in specific instances, there are others in which veganism unfolds as a practice of decolonisation (Harper 2010). Again, *food politics are a lot more complicated.* Neither chicken, nor veganism, is essentially associated to race.

WHAT IS IT THAT (UN)SPEAKS?

The question of how certain practices, certain foods, certain modes of speech, intersect, reject, or become drawn to one another cannot take place on a plane that would draw generic equations (vegan=white; chicken=black) which would ascribe identities inescapably to causes, and would understand identities as bound universals. Rather, the planes on which such interactions occur remain as tentative exploratory planes, ones which seek mechanisms of inclusion/exclusion around common value systems. It is this seeking of mechanisms of inclusion/exclusion that draw the boundaries of the commons, before once again decomposing them, taking the plunge towards the

other as an invitation to another possible world.

Sometimes, in this effort there are moments where the political field of transversal commoning overflows into political fields that structure themselves according to the territorial opposition of friend/enemy. This field of friend/enemy² politics is not external to that of transversal commoning, but rather a matter of its very formation, that is of its boundary-limit, for it is an integral component of the distinction that forms the commoning community and that is integral to the proposal that there can be no commons without community (Mies 2014). Commons require a *specific* community, including its boundary, that cares for and is cared for by the commons with which it gathers. Such boundary work requires exclusion as much as inclusion. To deny the boundary of the commons, even if it is a tentative boundary would be to fall into the same conceptual traps that Fraser located in the Habermasian conception of the public sphere. It would be to confuse the common with the public.

Fields of politics intersect and overlap,³ the transversal encounters of commoning falter, overflow into territories in which they must deploy the field of friend/enemy. It is a matter of how others are constituted, how they are experienced, how they are cared for or neglected, how they are communicated with and the extent to which their invitation is responded to. The formation of the polis, around food or otherwise, is never a simple process. And identities are not secondary to these processes. Intersections of race, gender, class and sexuality are not merely secondary entities in the emergence of political realities, they do not only add a particular tone or accent to encounters but are inextricably implicated in the formation of realities and encounters. As Mills writes on the role of race in social contract theory, “race is in no way an “afterthought,” a “deviation” from ostensibly raceless Western ideals, but rather a central shaping constituent of those ideals” (2011: 14); and in a similar vein Bhambra writes that “[c]lass is not the operation of a race-neutral economic system, but part of an

2 See Chapter 4: *Four Fields of Politics*

3 See Chapter 4: *Four Fields of Politics*

economic system which is deeply racialised” (2017: s227). Identities do not merely constitute a ‘subjective’ domain of self-identification but are fundamental components of the ‘objective’ construction of political and economic communities, and their force is observable in very concrete manifestations of inequality that are the result of specific historical trajectories, as well as in specific modes of speech and communication that carry with them the layered poetics of these historical trajectories.

Commoning attempts to attend to these differences that make a difference, but it is not always successful. These falterings and failures of the processes of commoning, are both its limit and its ground of possibility, they are the *unspoken places* that form the background from which the territory of the commons emerge, they are the exclusions and distinctions which make possible the emergence of community, the forgettings that give form (Kohn 2013), the parasitic static from which the articulation of the system emerges (Serres 2007) before it falls back into itself and new systems emerge. In short, they are the un-commons that make commoning possible, the moments of difference that open the possibility of communication. But it is never as simple as the privileging of one mode of identity over the others. Intersections of identities are intersections of identities in contradiction internally and externally.

The problematics that emerged around Mmandu and Harlow’s engagements with The Field were remembered very differently by others involved. Speaking to Lilly a year or so after these events unfolded, she gave a very different account to the one above.

It was very emotionally draining. I remember crying about it once because it just felt like this whole project was just sort of being destroyed by this one, by this character who kind of shed the light on all our flaws as an organisation; but who also wasn’t really wanting to help us in any way or help the organisation. It was more just deciding – *burn it down and then it will maybe be mine* – type thing. That

seemed to be her objective. I'm sure she even threatened to burn it down once

For many members of the field collective, who had been working there for a long time, this conflict was intensely emotionally draining, myself included.⁴ The common world that had been difficultly constructed was under threat. I also recall Mmandu expressing sentiments along the lines of *burn it down* in several of the many e-mails sent to the group, often written in ALL CAPS, and confronting many difficult issues that, whilst many efforts had been made to address them, remained areas of worry and concern. The well-meaning intentions of creating a diverse community appeared to have reached a limit, and it often felt as though the effort to maintain a level of openness, to avoid rigid structure, had led to the possibility of its manipulation. What structure there was, seemed incapable of providing any support to help engage with the conflict. The already over-worked and tired group of people who had been working hard and poured a lot of themselves into the project felt as though all that work could be for nothing, could disappear, through this one conflict.

People were quite up in arms about it because there had been a Loomio poll where people had said: *no I don't want Mmandu doing things at The Field. We've met her and we don't think she's a very nice person. She's not going to work. We think she's manipulative. And she's not going to work well with us.* So people had literally said that.

People had voted against Mmandu using The Field. But the reality of being there day to day did not reflect the simplicity of an outcome of a majority vote. Several people, myself included, who spent most days at The Field felt that Mmandu was already part of the project—she was there, she was coming to open events, and it was not feasible to attempt to block her from entering. There was a gap be-

⁴ This emotional and affective dimension will be explored further in the following chapter

tween the everyday relations, of which Mmandu was already a part, and the decision-making process which could vote against her using the space. It did not seem possible to simply say—this meeting or this event is open, but not to you.

Then she was like: *right, well I'm in*, And Mmandu is a very strange character. Because she could be extremely friendly and pleasant to you one minute. she would do it to me all the time. She would, she'd say like—*Lilly you're so beautiful*. I'd be like you're weird. She'd just like try and butter me up in different ways, you know. And she'd say things like—*I'm just talking to you right now Lilly Because I know that you're so intelligent*. Just things like this where you'd be like, *oh what does she want from me why is she doing this*. It wasn't particularly subtle. But at the same time, sometimes the way she would talk to you, you'd forget, oh yeah, she's trying to get people on board. I don't know, I would forget.

I also experienced these potential shifts in attitude and stance on the part of Mmandu. But considering this afterwards, I also think that there was a sense in which this ambiguity was mirrored by The Field and its decision-making processes. At some points, Mmandu would come and we would welcome her and talk openly with her, on an interpersonal level, encouraging her to become involved in the project, whereas at other she would come and encounter certain blockages to engagement—the need to submit proposals, decision making processes that were not entirely transparent even to those directly engaged in them. This shifting of positions and stances, that Mmandu manifested, was also manifested by The Field. Such shifts are crucial to commoning as a process of negotiation, and that is clear for someone engaged in those notions and discussion, but for someone who has no way of relating to those concepts, who has not engaged in extensive discussion of these ideas, the shifts and instabilities may have

appeared peculiar, dishonest, unclear.

She just sort of started doing her dinner. It wasn't very popular. People would arrive at the dinner, and they would be told that they needed to pay for the dinner if they were white, and anyone else who she deemed as being 'from the community'—in inverted commas. So, she had a very set idea of what being from the community was, and that seemed to be you had to be black.

Again there is a manifestation of Fraser's critique of the public sphere—which community, which polis? Mmandu had a specific community in mind when she spoke of 'the community', and it was not the same community as that imagined by others, it appeared to be associated closely to race.

And you had to be maybe like born in New Cross or something. But we weren't really sure exactly what it was. But she decided, for example, that the poetry group that are very New Cross-esque, like they've been around for years and years and years. And they're not even particularly sort of middle class, but they, I'd say they're a big mixture. But a few of them are quite sort of working class and, not that we can talk about class in such a binary thing, but basically she decided that they needed to pay for their dinner, they didn't even think it was a very good lunch, what she was making. She was charging them but she wasn't charging other people, and they took offence at this, as you might.

The poetry group had for a long time been engaged with the New Cross Commoners. It was a group that often seemed to serve both as a collective interested in poetry, and as a support group. Many of the members had difficult challenges in their lives, related to family or mental health or the transformations of New Cross they had wit-

nessed. But for Mmandu it did not fall within the limits of what she considered to be the community in need, the community she sought to reach, and she made an individual judgement to ask them to pay for food whereas others were fed for free or by donation.

And there were just lots of issues where she would rile people up at meetings. But, because she was black, and because she would talk about being black and the fact that we were mostly white, we just felt really, really uncomfortable I guess, because we weren't used to being hit with that kind of accusation, you know. *You're a racist institution* she was basically saying to us, and she would often say things like—oh, at *the Wednesday dinners you're all white*—which just weren't true.

There was an immense sense of discomfort, in being confronted with the race politics that had long been a subject of discussion in the group but remained a persistent issue. Many people wanted to do something to increase the racial diversity of the collective, and several groups, such as London Black Atheists, the African Gospel Choir and Yoga for Women of Colour had been encouraged to engage with The Field by Jane and Matt in particular in an effort to aid the emergence of a more heterogeneous collective. But the problem persisted, and whilst Mmandu often made points that were true, they often also seemed to spill into generalisations.

She was right about the fact that there were more white people on the, you know, the people coming to meetings, they were a lot more white people. And we were in an area that's very racially diverse. So she sort of shed some light on that as a failing of ours because she didn't seem to want to sort of, she was just very destructive I guess, in terms of people's relationships. And even Harlow didn't think she was, like Harlow's also black, and Harlow once described

here as: *a boulder coming down the hill, and we all just have to get out of her way.* And so Harlow was not a fan of Mmandu, even though she would have thought that she was, she had sort of decided it was an us and them situation. It just was really really horrible.

The perspective given here, by Lilly, is very different from the one given by Harlow, or Horatio, or by Mmandu herself. Again, the point is not to decide on one perspective as correct, but to illustrate the complexity of conflicts such as these, and how they are inescapably entangled with affective and emotional contents which speak and remain unspoken yet still communicate, push the conflict into different directions, transform its experiential and interpersonal dimension. Others become constructed in varying ways, in ways that are themselves not simple or stable, that are run through with affects and unspoken places.

CHAPTER 6

AFFECTIVE ACTIVITY & CAREFUL COLLECTIVITY

Monday May 2nd

I went down to The Field today at around 12pm.

I had spent the weekend ill at ease & uncomfortable - The weight of the situation with [redacted] had been weighing heavily upon me & I had spent most of the weekend worrying about the week would pan out - how the kids would go with [redacted] & how the organizational review meeting would work - particularly if [redacted] arrived & introduced what would ~~not~~ undoubtedly be a disruptive element into the project meeting.

I had taken the situation with [redacted] some what to heart - not only had she brought up some very difficult questions in a way that was non-abstract but embodied, affective & self, but I had also put myself in the middle of the conflict - on the one hand there was

Aspect

Can my own emotional affective state be considered a source of 'data'? It certainly reveals a lot about burden, momentum & the culture of activism - what was registered to in Nanopolitics as the 'transcendent form of the project' - Rosaldo - grief etc. Exhaustion & depression as a field site or as field data - Bgr & depression in Capitalism

a group of people with whom I'd been working for a while & on the other there was a new comer - [redacted] - who was very aggressive & could potentially disrupt & upset a lot of people. I had made a concerted effort to bring [redacted] into the project & so had introduced this conflict further - I felt vulnerable from either side: open to criticism from [redacted] & open to criticism from the others. At the same time I had become increasingly exhausted & fed up with The Field, wishing I could withdraw altogether but recognizing that I could not because of my central role in this conflict & in the admin of the place. I felt back in a cabin 22 where I worked by Lisa back from The Field.

Arriving at The Field at 12 after rushing to Goldsmiths

to print agendas & organizational review docs after waking up late at Nancy's, I found no one there. I cleaned up the place, a bit & sorted the kitchen out. After an hour I text [redacted] to see if she was coming - she only replied "Bank Holiday."

Deciding that I did not want to sit there alone & run the Solidarity kitchen I sent votes up on the board that we were closed for the Bank Holiday Monday & went home. There was a great sense of relief that I felt, knowing that I had reclaimed several hours back that would otherwise have been spent at The Field.

After a couple of hours at home [redacted] rang me at about 5pm asking if there was a meeting tonight. I said there was &

that we would be spending the entire meeting looking over the organizational review document which I could send her - she said she would try to come before asking if she had to as she was very tired & felt like she today had a weekend. I said that of course she didn't hoping in part of me that she wouldn't to allow the already hickey Org review discussion to take place, another part hoping that she would so that the process of me being in the centre of things could begin to change by the rest of the group engaging with [redacted] or [redacted] engaging with the rest of the group engaging with [redacted] without my mediation.

I arrived again at The Field at 18:45 & set the agendas out, people gradually

a collision of modalities
→ 2 ways of being without
the computer ground & must
in place necessary to accommodate
it.

arrived. All in all it was the usual faces, plus [redacted] & [redacted] from London Black Artists & [redacted] from Queer Cass. The meeting over all went smoothly & people agreed with the proposal as laid out in the document with a few minor changes. (see notes & amendments)

The meeting was only disrupted somewhat by [redacted] arrival about 50 mins before the meeting was due to close. She regularly interjected with points disconnected to the discussion, points similar to those we had spoken about over and over again. She would also make this point in the middle of a discussion about something else - she was clearly not impressed with the situation & proved some what disruptive. My facilitation quite difficult & causing me to be quite stressed & uncertain of how to

They found engaging with the space difficult & just before we went to a vote they asked for clarification saying they didn't know what they were voting on, they also left when [redacted] arrived.

The modality of the meeting favours a very specific way of thinking & mode of interaction - one based on process a certain mode of discussion & a mode of consensus/consensus that to some extent is based on the pre-existence of common ground & concepts.

proceed - we rushed few in final points leaving some un-discussed.

After the meeting people split off & I went & spoke to [redacted] we joked & chatted & she was amiable & friendly. She said that to be honest this kind of thing put her off. She said that [redacted] quite clearly didn't like her, that he made wild eyes at her to which I said that she must know she is quite intimidating - she began to disagree but quickly acknowledged that she could be & that people didn't easily forget that & carried it with them, laughing about it. She then said that she was very tired & hadn't properly been home & cooked at home for ages, & that she had to go to court tomorrow as she was a mental health advocate, &

told her I could take care
of the food tomorrow &
that she could just leave
some time away. [redacted] &
others were splitting up blood
off by the kitchen & [redacted]
asked for some, it seemed
like she did it to mark
a point & break up their their
small group but she was
happy & surprised when
a quarter of a loaf was
brought to her. She [redacted]
[redacted] telling us a story
of her dancing at the
weekend.

Outside I stopped & spoke to
[redacted] for a while - he said it
looked like me & [redacted] got
on which was good a said that
he had signed up to do the
kitchen role to aim to get
to know her better. He
also said he had written a
text to [redacted] about carrying
on the keiki at the field [redacted]

the course ends - he said
he'd send it to me.

I returned home feeling
[redacted] than I had
all weekend.

Tuesday May 3rd

I slept in & went to
The Field at 12 - I opened
up & cleaned up & put
some tea, coffee & music on.
I then sat down to write
up the meeting minute notes
- several people stopped to look
at the board but I did not
go out to talk to them as
I was keen to get some of
this work done!

[redacted] came in & we
chatted for a while. Seeing an
elderly Indian man looking at
the board I went to speak
to him but he was [redacted] &
did not want to come in for
tea - he had been at the

Dr's Surgery next door.
I went back in & cooked.
[redacted] came & helped with
the pooping in the garden
& [redacted] came & finished the
cooking that I started.
As we ate [redacted] came
& ranted about how some-
one had messed up her hanging
bushes which she'd left to
water in the garden.
At 4 [redacted] arrived for
Dr Bike & [redacted] arrived
shortly after - I overheard
them talking about ways
to make it possible for the
event to still happen if
he couldn't make it as
he was regularly unable to
& this had been causing people
disappointment.
After making a deposit
in the bank I left for
home.

→ Self-organization with
no organization
↳ the lack of communication
& structure creating a
context where collaboration
is impossible - to participate,
one must participate 'in' something

Monday 9th May

I woke this morning feeling dispondent
& depressed - having been worrying
about a lot of the issues at
The Field, particularly [redacted]
& how to take it forward, I
was tired & lacking motivation.
Having a long conversation with
[redacted] on Sunday about the
whole situation I had been
trying to figure out what I
could do & how responsibility
would work - ie. how I
could try & engage with the
process whilst also not taking
it all on personally & how
this system could become something
productive.

On Monday morning I, as I said,
awoke depressed & dispondent
rang at about 9.30 & I
let the call ring out
as I had not prepared myself
for the day Peter brought.
I left [redacted] & I rang
back.

→ My own emotional state is once
again revealing as to the level
of attachment & overengagement
with The Field - the extent
of my over involvement &
entanglement with the place

The conversation began by [redacted] saying that now she had seen & the Field more & had tried to engage with it she now understood that The Field was a political organization & that she believed that Goldsmiths would eventually buy out the building as they had a "90% share in the building" - when I disagreed saying that they didn't she said that they did as that was the crowd that was seen there & that Goldsmith would tell people to go there to see examples of things. [redacted] said now the Field had become too emotional for her & that she needed to take care of herself is she was to help others that her she was becoming fixed & upset by it & that she didn't think it would be fair for her to do it on her own, that people would need to work with her at which point she

said that this was probably not what I had been trying to say all along, that the work of the Field needed to be collaborative & done it was not quit to be working alone.

She said that on Wednesday she had been in the kitchen & that everyone was gathered outside leaving the wheelchair user inside alone - she said she went outside & people made her feel very unwelcome, that those who had been welcoming & bubbly before (she used the example of [redacted] now were unwelcoming - you can't trust people like that, she said, they'll throw you to the wall. - she said "You guys don't care you aren't welcoming!" & when I said I didn't think that was fair of everyone she said no, of course it isn't - I'm talking to you after all.

She said that she was becoming busier & increasingly didn't have time or energy for The Field. Having is

She wanted to do the Monday & Tuesday she said no & that she would help out when she could.

She also said that she had sent an e-mail to [redacted] in response to the union vs unity e-mail thread describing what she thought was going on in terms of the segregation that was happening at The Field. She said this wasn't only happening in New Cross, but all over the place & in Brixton where a black person can't get anything because there are now so many white girls everywhere.

She also mentioned how she had heard that [redacted] had rented a space in Chelsea for a course that was over £200 & get then used The Field for her group to meet.

As the conversation ended [redacted] said that she always enjoyed talking to me & that she imagined me as one of those guys on horse back with all the greyhounds around

them - "Young master Tony" adding that it wasn't derogatory - that some of those organic guys were nice & that they couldn't help being borne into that world. Laughing we said good bye & I got on the train.

I arrived at The Field at 12 & [redacted] was there working on his computer on various stuff such as Russ work.

I cleaned up the kitchen which had been left in quite a mess & found a jar full of food that had been left there for several days. All of this added to my feelings of disappointment & frustration as I had to clean up yet again the mess left by others. I felt the sense of great frustration at again being left alone dealing with these things & with all the evidence

[redacted] I had thought got a long time
→ that [redacted] saw in us an articulation of the British class system & this only legitimized it through

pointing to that [redacted] would not be coming (it was as my [redacted] said) [redacted] birthday, but he had not told me he would not be coming). Feeling alone & feeling like I had no support I was left to do all this work alone as well as being on the long side & problem with [redacted] I could feel the resentment & arrogance increasing within me. Speaking to [redacted] & [redacted] who were both making various suggestions my arrogance with both of them rose rapidly as I felt hampered & obstructed by people. Evergreen from [redacted] complaining about the garden not being watered to the gate being left too close to the doorway annoyed me & my arrogance was not only damaging to me, but to my relationships with others & by extension the project & the space itself. Post Agor [redacted] & [redacted] left I

my over attachment ^(zen) but so to how the space should be & my central involvement with it as a destructive & reactive force (Nietzsche)

worked with what was left over in the fridge got lunch.

While the veg for the pasta sauce was cooking [redacted] unexpectedly arrived & I sat down to talk to her about what she was up to. She began talking to [redacted] & very quickly to [redacted] being quite confrontational and aggressive to him saying that (after he had said he just wanted to get on with some work) it was people like him that were what was wrong with The Field that people weren't made to feel welcome. [redacted] kept looking to me as [redacted] told him she could help him but she he would just have to trust her & then when [redacted] looked away saying that all white folk didn't trust black people's business, but I felt unable to intervene as I didn't want

how I could do so in a positive way & in a way that would keep good relationships with everyone & in a way that might have positive results. Feeling powerless & trapped in the middle of a difficult situation with little support.

After a while [redacted] & I all sat down for lunch & whilst the atmosphere improved a bit there were still strong undercurrents of anger & the relationship between [redacted] & [redacted] remained tense.

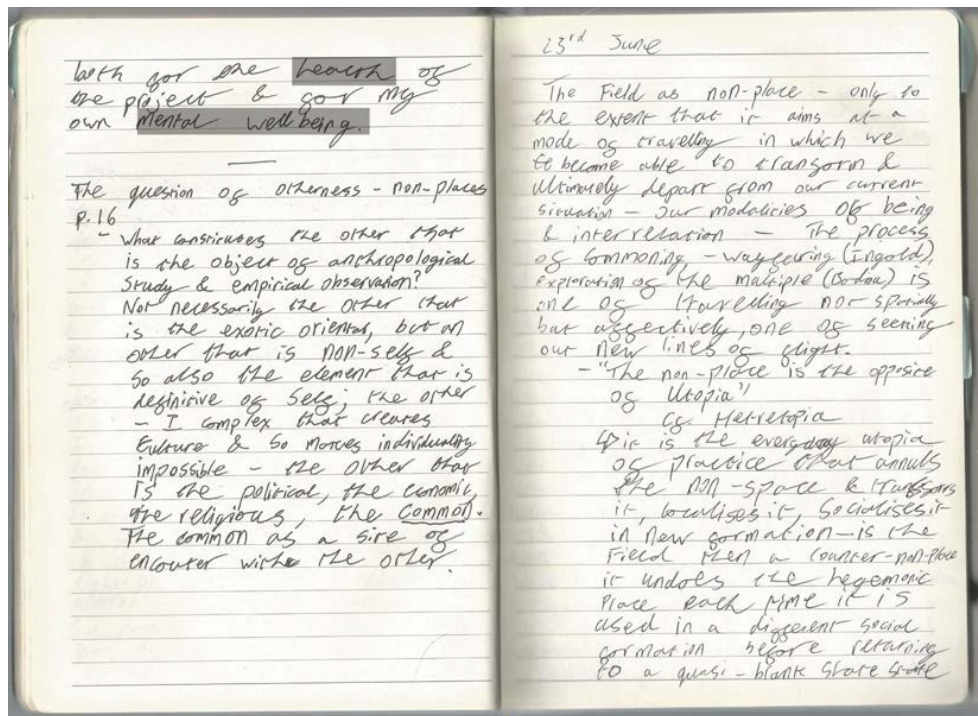
I left shortly after [redacted] left feeling awful & feeling [redacted] I just had to get away from the place.

Leaving reinforced for me the need to separate myself from the field - I had had an emotionally demanding day & no longer felt

that I had anywhere to go as far as the conflict with [redacted] was concerned. I got into I had tried to make openings for her to become positively involved & that she had passed them up generating further conflict. I was no longer sure what she wanted & was worried that in fact she had become stuck in a destructive pattern of long-term reproducing behaviour where negative responses produced more negative behaviour entrenching an episode of marginalisation & conflict. I felt unable to respond & I felt trapped in the field, caught in the midst of a project that I often became the fall of & get could not carry & control & did not have the power, right or authority to direct or control - I felt the time had to come where I let go of the project & removed myself from it.

aggressive behaviour that causes people to become wary that they are then accused of not being welcome.

Both R.D. Laing's 'knots' comes to mind & Nietzsche's reactive forces that more more reactive forces come to mind.



These notes have taken me a long time to return to. They were written in the closing period of my full-time engagement with The Field which lasted around two and a half years. During this final period many of the conflicts and tensions that had been existing within the collective for a while reached a point at which, for me and several others, they became unbearable. For many months after, around 11 in total, I was unable to return to these notes and this period of field-work. Attempting to turn my back on the affects that swell from these notes, the violent surges of force and intensity that rest between the words, letters and lines has been a dissociative process, one that has created distance. Not only a spatial or temporal distance, but more significantly, an affective one.

In this chapter I will start from my own personal experience in order to attempt to bring to the surface the "quality and intensity" (Rosaldo 1989: 11) of the affective experience that ran through this period. The aim is to draw upon and emphasise the results of one of the strengths of anthropological methods, that is the extended engagement of the practitioner with their field sites that makes its positive

condition the inescapable entanglement of participation and observation (Ingold 2013: 5). Far from being an analytic weakness, the presence of personal experience within anthropological methods and the intense affective engagement this demands can be seen as one of the discipline's strengths. To draw on this strength, parts of this chapter attempts forms of "ethno-self-analysis" (Augé 2008: 32). Such methods toy with the already unclear boundary between ethnography and auto-ethnography, particularly when dealing with a collectivity to which the anthropologist is 'indigenous,' and draws on the strength of being able to make the affective, emotional and experiential components of collective experience "more readily accessible to readers than certain more detached modes of composition" (Rosaldo 1989: 11). It is an attempt to attend to individual affective experiences ethnographically.

But personal experience and analysis is here only a starting point to begin to speak about a collective situation in which care, neglect, affect and value became organised in such a way as to produce the phenomenon that is commonly called burnout. After outlining my own experience, I will seek to sketch some of the intersections between care, value and affect through a discussion of some theoretical models for understanding these terms. It is hoped that this discussion will aid in opening interfaces between my own experiences and those of others. Finally, the conclusion of this chapter will attempt to reconfigure what is commonly called burnout as an emergent result of specific relations, rather than the depletion of a pre-existent source of energy. My experience then, is only a starting point to discuss a series of experiences which extended well beyond me but in which I was inescapably entangled. In beginning with my own experiences in this manner I am attempting use them as thresholds through which to talk of collective experiences.

It is, in some sense, a question of shifting scales, but scales that are not vertically or hierarchically organised, that is where the smaller, individual, or psychological, scale is encompassed by a broader, and hierarchically higher, social or collective scale. Rather the movement between scales here seeks to unfold in a horizontal manner, one that

sees “every part containing information about the whole and information about the whole being enfolded into each part” (Strathern 1995: 17-8). It is less, then, focusing on the individual as a privilege site of analysis that might be considered self-same and bound and then moving outwards and upwards to a collective level of analysis, that is moving up scales. Rather it is a matter attending to the affective flows and forces that traverse individuals as sites of intensive contraction and concentration of monadic entanglements. It is perhaps better phrased as a matter of position and perspective than one of scale. This is a further means of pursuing a Tardian monadic ethnography (Marrero-Guillamón 2015) which does not separate the ‘social’ from other forms of relation, in this instance the psychological and affective, domains that Tarde consistently refused to separate out from others (social, physical, biological, economic, political, religious, etc.). Position then, in this instance, is less a matter of traveling up and down along vertically organised nested hierarchies, but more a matter of shifting perspectives “at perpendicular angles” (Corsín Jiménez 2013: 24), that is of shifting what it is possible to see from a given point within a network.

It should also be said, that this affective, experiential and emotional strength of ethnographic method that is described above, however, requires its counterpoint—that of detachment (Yarrow et al 2015). Far from being exclusive binary opposites, distance and engagement, participation and observation, are tendencies which require one another in a continuum that is far more nebulous, unfinished and complex than a choice of either/or.

The notes that open this chapter were written during a period which preceded a process of detachment. It was not only the detachment that separated the field site from the place of writing, but importantly it was a process of affective detachment, one which allowed me to become disentangled from The Field. These notes speak of various stances and processes: feeling trapped, powerless, stuck; feeling as though I had become the face of a situation over which I had little control; feeling helpless, unhelped and unhelpful. Many of these stances

speak of situations caught in flux between forms of over identification and loss of identity. Being at The Field every day and being various people's points of contact at The Field meant that I increasingly began to identify with the project. What were perceived as failures of The Field would verge on becoming personal failures and it would often be to me that complaints would be addressed. I felt as though, at times and for certain people, I was the face of The Field as I was the one who they would see there every day. I was over-identified with the project. My own position, perspective and identity became engulfed by the nebulous and unstable positions of The Field.

In *The Divided Self*, R.D. Laing speaks of engulfment as a source and form of ontological insecurity. He writes,

"A firm sense of one's own autonomous identity is required in order that one may be related as one human being to another. Otherwise, any and every relationship threatens the individual with loss of identity. One form this takes can be called engulfment."

(Laing 1970: 44).

To put this in the language of monadic ethnography, for a monad to interface with another without becoming its subordinate, or vassal, it must have a certain level of self-possession. There is an important lesson here for commoning practices which is partly encapsulated in the description of transversality given by Francis. In an e-mail which was written in response to a conflict resolution meeting which occurred at around the time the notes which opened this chapter were written, transversality was described as "difference coming together without being flattened out." What both Laing's outline of engulfment, and Francis's description of transversality point to is the way in which, at times, forms of detachment are required in order for sustainable forms of attachment to be maintained. Put differently, the common world is not a homogenous world in which difference is reduced to a unifying identity. Commons are entangled with uncommons, networks are run

through with breakages.

This distance opens as a counterpart to the methodological approach I outlined in the first chapter as *commoning anthropologically*. This is a point I will return to in the conclusion of this chapter. Briefly however, it is, in a sense, a signal of the limit of such a method, the point where the awkwardness of the relationship (Strathern 1987) became too much. If commoning anthropologically is a process of participating in the construction of common worlds, that is engaging in a collective exploration of the possibilities for anthropos and relations to the other and difference, there may come a time when this participation, for whatever reason, must desist; if it is about the ongoing and exploratory construction of networks, relations and associations, there may come a time when it is necessary for the network to be cut (Strathern 1996), but in this instance not only for the interpretation of relations to end, but more for their construction to cease.

BEFORE DETACHMENT

The notes which opened this chapter come from a particularly intense period at the Field. I would spend every day there. The roles I had adopted were many. I was effectively managing all administrative processes, and with that all financial processes. I was regularly cleaning and attempting to organise the place. I was working on several of the building projects in the garden—finishing the workshop, unblocking the drain, building the shelter for the rear platform. I was meeting the people who would come to the space on a daily basis, the passers-by. I was supporting the other roles when they needed help. I was managing, attempting to improve, and encouraging others to use the digital platforms that I had helped to set up in an effort to share information more effectively. I was, with Matthew, attempting to initiate Solidarity Kitchen—a project which due to its very nature attempted to intervene in the way the whole of The Field was organised and structured, opening it up to wider engagement but running a regular cafe and social space from the building during the weekdays

when it was often closed.

Above my desk at home, directly opposite my bed, a piece of string hung from two picture hooks. Along this string various bulldog clips and clothes pegs hung sheets of paper to do with *The Field*—mind maps, flyers, reminders, notes, unfinished projects, unpaid bills, letters requiring a response or action, meeting minutes. Each night and morning as I sat up in bed in the minutes just before I slept and just after I woke, I would be sat opposite this clothesline of unfinished work. Letters from Companies House warning us of the upcoming annual accounts deadline. Another letter from HMRC telling us when the tax return was due. A bill from Virgin Media. An e-mail about the drains. Some bullet points scrawled on a scrap torn from a notebook. Henry Miller's *11 Commandments of Writing*—no. 8: 'don't be a draught-horse! Work with pleasure only'—scrawled on another page torn from one of my notebooks.

At *The Field* I was the only person who knew where the HMRC reference numbers were kept as well as other irritating but inescapable bureaucratic identifiers, or at least how to find them. I was the only person who could refund someone for expenses made with their own money. I was the only person who would regularly make deposits in the bank. I knew all the logins for the digital platforms, how to edit the website, how to send out the newsletter, how to add people to the Google Group, how to edit the wiki which had in itself been set up to provide people access to information about these organisational processes but was primarily used by me. I knew the processes for book-keeping, where the receipts should go, how the annual report should be created, where the monthly statements should be kept in case of inspection, the relationship between the accounts, the pin numbers for the Alto cards, where the cheque book was kept. I knew the laws concerning the CIC report, the time it needed to be filed, and what needed to be included in it as well as the difference between the CIC34 report, the annual accounts and the annual return. I knew what building projects underway, which tools were needed, and which lengths of timber or other materials were reserved for certain projects, what materials or

tools we were lacking and how much they would cost. I knew where groups of us had decided the chairs should be kept in order to maximise the use of space, where the heaters should be put away, what each of the underground storage boxes were meant to contain, how the kitchen had been organised, how to refill the gas canisters, how to connect the hobs to the canister, how to connect the canisters to the heater, the fact that having these canisters violated any possible insurance. I knew the nuances of the legal grey areas which we toyed with the edges of, the limit on the regularity with which food could be served before we would have to comply with FSA regulations as specific, and for us unworkable, as the temperature the fridge would need to be kept at and the regularity with which this would have to be checked. I knew the code for the key safe each time it was changed and how to change the code itself and when it was agreed that it should be changed and how it should be changed. I knew what items in building and garden were used regularly and would be sorely missed if they were to go and what items were rarely if ever used. I regularly found myself called upon to resolve some impasse someone had reached or to find some vital piece of information for someone, information as simple as the code for the door or whether or not there was a meeting occurring that night. Some people who were relatively new to the project would at times send me updates on what they were working on or the role they had been assigned at the monthly meeting or would forward me on problems that they had encountered in the organisational processes or elsewhere. Several major conflicts that were playing out at that time became mediated through me.

To me, all these positions, practices and forms of knowledge constituted some of the means by which I sought to care for the project, to help it grow, to sustain and nourish it. The regularity with which I was able to be at The Field, having the privilege of an AHRC grant to support me, meant that I was able to immediately experience the necessity of what might appear like the most minor piece of knowledge. This could be knowledge as prosaic as the fact that Virgin Media had when we first set up the account mistakenly charged us £800 mean-

ing that every month we received a first bill telling us we owed this amount, and then a second one with the correct amount on it a day or two later. For someone not knowing about this and opening the letter, the day between receiving the first bill for £800 and the second for £30 would be a stress filled day of phone calls to unhelpful customer service departments.

Equally however, the fact that I knew all of this and had at my disposal the time to engage with it made it difficult for me to communicate to others, who had less time and less immediate engagement with these day to day issues, why a certain issue was urgent or important, why something needed to be done a certain way, or precisely how I thought or had decided something should be done. And equally it became very frustrating having to explain once again something that I had written out on the wiki, e-mailed round the group, or explained in several other instances to several other people or at several other meetings. When self-organisation appeared to me to be failing, it was far easier to step in and do something myself. In addition, the injunctive component of how something *should* be done grew in magnitude the longer I spent time in such a central organisational position. I felt with a powerful affective force, the implications of the leading question that Gregory Bateson's metalogical father-figure makes to his metalogical daughter, that "[i]t's the same for all the things, isn't it, that each thing has only a very, very few places which are "tidy" for that thing?" (2000: 5). And It was not only because doing things a certain way made other tasks simpler and easier for me and others, but also because through this process of becoming so entangled in the organisational processes of The Field the image of what I thought the project was, what it could be, and how we could get there intensified.

Additionally, being there every day and being various people's points of contact at The Field meant that I increasingly began to identify with the project. What were perceived as failures of The Field would verge on becoming personal failures and it would often be to me that complaints would be addressed. I felt as though, at times and for certain people, I was the face of The Field as I was the one who they

would see there every day. I was over-identified with the project. My own position, perspective and identity became engulfed (Laing 1970: 43-5) by the nebulous and unstable positions of The Field. My efforts to care for The Field began to enter an injunctive zone, a zone that bordered upon a normative morality defining what mattered, what was valued, and what should be prioritised for collective attention.

It was a result of an excess in a certain modality of care. It is not only that I was caring too much in my over-identification with the project, with its failures, its successes, even its most bland and mundane organisational deficiencies, but it was equally a result of a particular modality of care, a particular embodiment, one based on excessive attachment and normative injunctions as to how things should be.

AFFECT, VALUE, ACTION, AND CARE

The role of care in commoning has emerged across the preceding chapters. I would now like to draw attention to some intersections and entanglements between concepts of care, value(s), affect and action that might open the way to the conclusion. It is already clear above how my own attachment to a certain image of The Field led towards normative injunctions concerning how things should be done. I cared excessively for a particular image of The Field. I was caught in a relation of *Cruel Optimism* (Berlant 2011), an optimistic attachment to a particular thing, here a particular gathering of relations,¹ that is maintained at the expense of the experiential well-being of self and others. I cared about a particular image of The Field, and in an effort to realise this image enacted various modalities of caring for it.

I am taking 'caring *about*' to be a signalling of intention, a stance that may or may not also be articulated in the form of practice. This is care as "*affective concern*" (de la Bellacasa 2017: 162 emphasis original). If caring *about* is manifest as caring *for*, if care as affective concern is expressed as a doing, it is a shift from a stance to a practice. Caring *for* manifests as practice, it is contingent and shifting in its attending

1 See Chapter 4: *Commonication* for a discussion of things as gatherings.

to bodies, and an affective practice that aims towards the nurturing, flourishing and maintenance of bodies. Care is then relational. Due to this relational nature of caring for, its status as a practice concerning the engagement and entanglement of bodies, it is an open-ended, speculative and experimental practice (Mol et al. 2010). It must shift according to the needs, desires and dispositions of the bodies towards which it is oriented. This is also a matter of affect, understood as the transformation of bodies in the broadest sense, “human bodies, discursive bodies, bodies of thought, bodies of water” (Stewart 2007: 128). Caring for unfolds as a practice of transforming, attending to and nurturing bodies in various forms.

Caring for, then, is an action. It is an attempt to enact practices aligned with what is cared about, what is valued. It is through practices of caring for that values are created through action. It is a form of work, a practice of attempting to create the conditions under which bodies can flourish. When this fails, when the practice of caring enters a deficient mode, we speak of neglect. Neglecting is the failure of a practice to facilitate the flourishing of bodies.

What is cared *about* is valued and this evaluation is made manifest in the practice of caring *for*. This practice of evaluation is what Deleuze’s Nietzsche sees as the ground of values, evaluations are “ways of being, modes of existence of those who judge and evaluate, serving as principles for the values on the basis of which they judge” (2006: 1). Here, the practice of evaluation precedes values. The embodied practice of caring *for*, comes prior to the existence of metaphysical or abstract values or principles that manifest in caring *about*. The ways of being and modes of existence of a body create values through action. The orientations of a body, collective or individual, form its capacities for affection, that is its capacities for transforming itself and other bodies. A body is repulsed, attracted, compelled, disgusted through certain affections, and through these affects it is able to produce evaluations from which are drawn values. Such evaluations and the systems of meaning they create open the possibilities of inter-action between bodies in the practices of caring for. In this way,

“[v]alue emerges in action” (Graeber 2001: 45). And further, values as “systems of categories, or knowledge, are really just one side of a system of action” (ibid: 254), but they are systems of categories and meanings that are cyclically created by action and in turn give meaning to those actions. It is the actions and dispositions of bodies that create systems of value and systems of value that in turn communicate the meaning and value of action inter-relationally.

Commoning, particularly as it is conceived of by the New Cross Commoners and The Field, is an attempt to expand the possibilities of value beyond the structure of state and capital,² it is also an attempt to establish practices that might create novel values that can facilitate new contexts for inter-action. It is an attempt to constitute new systems of meaning and categories, new common senses, that can recognise other values in action. In order to illustrate the significance of this, and how this creation of novel values emerges as a practice, it will be instructive here to briefly discuss some of the conceptions of value that emerge from political economy and how commoning practices diverge from these conceptions of value and turn against them.

For capitalist political economy, the determiner of value in the singular is the market economy. Value is ascribed in terms of exchangeability. For classical Marxian theories, value emerges as the symbolic measurement of labour embedded in objects. As Mandel puts it, “[f]or Marx, *labour is value*” (1990 emphasis original). Labour is the domain of action through which capital attributes value judgements, it is the capitalistic mode of evaluation. Such value produced through labour is ascribed to the products of that labour through the cipher of general equivalency which finds its highest, and most abstract, embodiment in “the germ of the money form” (Marx 1986: 163). However, labour is objectified and ascribed the abstract symbolic measure of value that it has itself produced. Thus, the source of the evaluation that is the action of labour becomes concealed through a form of fetishism that treats value as metaphysically independent to its process of production, as a virtual, symbolic entity that claims to pre-exist and prefigure

2 see Chapter 2: *On What Commons?*

its own process of production. Capital relies on bodies that create value through action, but it conceals their role in the creation of this value and subordinates them to a metaphysical determiner of general equivalency. This constitutes the domain of the market economy as a domain that seeks to hold a monopoly on value, as the domain of a unitary and universalising cipher of exchangeability. And as has been discussed, this domain of value is limited to what is determined as the productive sphere, consigning reproductive action, that is the action necessary for the continuation of human life (Federici 2012b), to a position of exclusion in relation to the metaphysical determiner of value.

Capital, then, enacts a kind of double vision or strabismus, “the effect of each eye looking in different directions” (Corsín Jiménez 2013: 52), concerning value and action. It holds one domain of value clearly in sight, that of the traditionally masculine domain of labour and production, whilst other domains of human activity become blurred and pushed outside of clear purview. Caring action is concealed and presented as independent to the metaphysical determiner of value that is capital, and thus outside the system of value. Those areas of work which Federici describes as reproductive, are excluded from the domain of unitary value attribution. In *Caliban and the Witch*, Federici shows how this gendered separation between the productive and reproductive ran alongside the enclosure of the common land in England, and how “the separation of commodity production from the reproduction of labour-power also made possible the development of a specifically capitalist use of the wage and of the markets as a means for the accumulation of unpaid labour.” (2014: 75). This double vision then holds the domain of capital accumulation in clear view, under the heading of value, whilst pushing other activities and actions into blurry, and unclear domains, and “it is precisely here that one hears about “values” in the plural sense” (Graeber 2001: 56). The sight that clearly perceives *homo æconomicus* can only do so by obfuscating all other systems of evaluation and activity. It must obscure the fact that beneath metaphysical value in the singular, is the domain of action and care.

In his *Economic Psychology*, Gabriel Tarde points to one of the mechanisms of how this perspectival illusion is maintained, that is

“[i]n conceiving of the homo æconomicus economists have engaged in a double abstraction. First, the unwarranted one of having conceived of a man with nothing human in his heart; second, of having represented this individual as detached from any group, corporation, sect, party, homeland, or association of any sort.”

(2007: 631).

At first sight, we may want to challenge Tarde’s use of the term ‘man’ in this description as an outdated use of gendered language. However, bearing in mind Federici’s observations concerning the marginalisation of women in the constitution of the strabismic illusion that splits production from reproduction, it is precisely the masculine domain which has been conceived of with no heart, whereas the feminine has been assigned to the practices of caring, nurturing and affective work. Whilst this is probably not how Tarde intended it, this is a useful retrospective addition. There is a dual effect pointed to here by Tarde, that of excluding the work of the heart, and the conjoined movement of dislocating the heartless from their community, shifting them onto the market as atomised individuals competing against one another. These two gestures are parallel because it is in the spaces of collectivity, that is in the constitution of common worlds, that the domains of the heart and affective care are most called for. And it is these domains that become devalued and marginalised by capital leading to the situation described by Graeber (2018) in which those caring domains that produce the most social value receive the lowest evaluation, and monetary compensation in the form of wages.

In order to sustain and propagate this fetishised and strabismic monopoly on the production of value the market must also continually subsume that which lies beyond the limits of its symbolic order. The enclosure of the commons is itself one such mode of expansion, a

mode of primitive accumulation which draws into the domain of commodified general equivalency that which operated outside of its logics and excludes or, in the language of caring action, neglects that which it must conceal in order to maintain the unitary rule of value. This process of continual expansion seeks to expand the remit of the market's monopoly on the symbolic attribution of value. It is this expansion of the interpretative apparatus of capital that constitutes economism, the attempt to interpret as much as can be interpreted, with an unbounded horizon, through a narrowly constituted economic lens of general equivalency. As such, the economic reason of the market constitutes a specific form of value program that is unable to tolerate systems of value that lie beyond the limits of its perspective. In its universalising attempt to ascribe value and determine what is valid action, economic reason seeks to define the limits of what is important, what is desired and desirable, of where human activity should focus its attention, of what people should care about. In so doing, other value systems, that is other modalities of determining what is desired or desirable, what should be cared about and for, are diminished and marginalised, often under the categorical figure of the economic externality, the non-productive or, we can now add, the Tardian domain of heart.

Massimo De Angelis puts it as follows,

“While the general term ‘value’ is something that we consider important, desirable, a priority or valuable (and that in our economic life we measure in terms of money), when values are joined together into an overall structure of thinking, they give rise to *value systems*. A value system thus is a conceptual grid through which we see the world; it defines (even unconsciously) what is good and what is bad, what is normal and what is abnormal, what we must resign ourselves to, and what it is possible to change... it provides the grid, the principles of selection of what is ‘good’ and what is ‘bad’, within which singularities *measure* and order things, and, consequently give a reference point to their ac-

tion. A value programme, on the other hand, is a value system that cannot *conceive* an outside beyond itself.”

(2007: 26)

Capital constitutes such a value programme, a system of evaluation that cannot tolerate, or at least seeks to marginalise, that which is beyond it. It is a normative modality of evaluation that seeks totalisation. Thus, commoning understood as a gesture seeking to move beyond the limits of economism is a struggle for the possibility of other value systems, other values. It is a struggle to allow for the self determination of what is important, what is significant and meaningful, what is cared about and for, beyond the unitary lens of general equivalency. It is an attempt to expand possibilities of recognising value producing action, a struggle at the level of bodies concerning the possibilities of care.

Commoning, then, is an attempt to expand the possibilities of taking care, of opening up the remit of what is cared for and about, of what can be valued. The action of evaluation is no longer limited to the domain of labour, the domain of action narrowly defined by capital as valuable but is expanded across the spectrum of possibilities of taking care of the reproduction of human life. Thus, the propositions that all commons require care takes on a new dimension. Not only is a matter of caring for an objective entity or resource labelled ‘the commons’, nor even of caring for one another in the process of commoning, but more crucially it is an exploratory process that seeks new modalities of taking care, that opens up new value systems that determine what is cared about and for, and how this care can be enacted and practiced. Commoning then is not a matter of caring for something preexistent, but of creating new evaluations and modes of care. This returns us to the dilemma of the excess of a certain modality of care that manifested itself through the detrimental affective states that led me and others to withdraw from The Field, but it does so with an altered perspective.

In the effort to practice commoning as an exploratory process of locating new modes of taking care The Field required the constitution

of alternative value systems, that is alternative lenses and contexts for inter-action through which we could mutually support and aid one another beyond the cipher of capital. This especially included a focus on what Federici called reproduction, those practices which were obfuscated and hidden by the strabismus of capital. Thus, there was no preordained set of rules governing the process of commoning. Various processes at The Field sought to establish common ground in the form of shared 'principles' or 'aims', as anchors through which new value systems could emerge and through which we could come to a shared understanding of what we sought to achieve. These processes were often understood as modes of self-organisation. However, they often ran up against significant differences in perspective. They created proliferations of new value system which were not always shared or communicated; they had their own ocular illusions. It is these differences in perspective, that are also differences in orientations of values and evaluation, that I will now turn to.

KNOTS

Around nine months after disengaging from The Field, I sent a piece of writing to a friend who had been involved at The Field early on but had stepped back from the project quite quickly. The writing was the first substantive piece of work I produced after leaving the project as a result of some of the issues I am now outlining. In this paper, I had made a case for a limit of horizontalism generally being its inability to create structures to distribute work fairly and appropriately leaving most of the burden on the shoulders of a small few. In response to this rather critical and quite gloomy piece they responded,

"I understand that this is a short paper but i would firstly give a little more acknowledgment of its success and of people's willingness to give their time, recognition of what is offered goes a long way. The other conflicting side to this narrative is that people end up holding/bur-

dened with responsibility is not as a passive act done to them but as an active engagement in the process. I will just use a crude analogy of traditional old fashioned idea of the Mother who is burdened and suffers with all the house-work cooking, cleaning etc but when someone attempts to 'help' she struggles to let that go as responsibility however that relationship is complicated as she does not really have the power in the house as she receives money from the husband and ultimately he will have the final say, this results in her controlling what she can and taking autonomy in ways that she can. So that domestic dance goes on and on, one which is actually an unrecognized power struggle. I don't know if this makes sense I am not saying you did this however that was very much part of Matthew and Jane's story at the same time as having the other stuff thrust upon them."

(2017 Pers. Comm.)

There are multiple dimensions to the passage above, but three that I have chosen to draw attention to here: the manner in which this process constituted an active power struggle; the fact that this was not limited to my experience, but also at least Jane and Matthew's; and the underlying problem of resentment, that is the lack of acknowledgement of other people's contribution and the tendency to seek external points for the attribution of blame. The first issue, that has been partly discussed above, is the way in which the modality of care that I was engaged in throughout these final months at The Field constituted an active engagement on my part. In this sense, it was not merely a case of me being over-burdened, but also of acting in such a way as produce the affects associated to this perceived over-burdening. I was not a passive actant in this burdening, but actively constructed and seized the burdens that I then felt to be imposed. What I experienced as burdens were taken as much as they were imposed or given. The action in which I was engaged led me to a situation in which I had

taken on responsibility to such an extent that it was difficult for others to take on responsibilities, and yet I resented others for not taking on responsibilities. But this does not go far enough, for it was not simply a process of me taking on something that was pre-existent, but an active process in which conditions were constituted in which the affects associated with what I perceived to be over-burdening could emerge. I was engaged in a power struggle, partly wittingly and partly unknowingly. A power struggle in which giving up my control over certain components of The Field would also constitute giving up what autonomy and power of action I had.

In addition, this power struggle became repressed, or hidden. Not only for myself but for others. Within my own experience of self and body the fault lines of this power struggle were felt intensely, resonating with the notions of the self as a battleground, or site of struggle between social forces (Laing 1970). And likewise, the body and self of The Field experienced these tensions and conflicts. Modes of shared affect, resonated through The Field's bodies, and my experience was but one articulation of this shared inter-corporeal affect. Relationships became stretched and fractious, even with those with whom I had worked the closest.

Inescapably, everyone understood this power struggle differently. In that moment, I experienced the lack of structure and failure of shared responsibility through a sense of frustration and exhaustion with others, senses conducive of modes of resentment. I felt caught and trapped in a situation that had been collectively constituted and yet was now weighing excessively on me. As I discovered later others had a very different understanding. They saw the lack of structure that I, at that time, experienced and understood as a collectively constituted and imposed burden, one that restricted my ability to act whilst simultaneously placing the responsibility for action on me, as something that I had actively created. I had entered The Field with certain ideological presuppositions concerning commoning and its relationship to structure, ones which favoured continual recomposition, the avoidance of rigid group identification and boundaries, and

a continual engagement with experimental processes and structural organisations. The presuppositions acted as ideological nodal points (Laclau & Mouffe 2014), or quilting points (Žižek 2008a: 95-7) which fixed other ideological signifiers in place.

What is more, I had close friendships with several key people in the collective, people who were so central to the process that their name was on all the official paperwork. These close friendships gave me, and those with whom I was close and likely to agree with or with whom I shared similar ideological dispositions based on extensive conversations, forms of additional 'social power.' And further, in supporting these friends and their positions in meetings, particularly those that would resist the formation of a clear, or in my view at the time 'rigid' and 'inflexible' structure, I would use white male privilege to direct, dominate and control the conversation. In meetings I would use an 'authoritative male voice,' one which presented things as common sense in such a way as to make arguing with the points I was presenting seem absurd. Such an unconscious, or partly-conscious tonality to my speech and action, could be said to form components of my own *habitus* (Mauss 1973; Bourdieu 2010), which gave me particular privileges and powers of action and communication, ones which received their power from the hegemonic structures centred around masculinity and whiteness. I was told later, that with several of us in a meeting who communicated in this manner, resisting our opinions became difficult and people quickly gave up. I can recall, in a conflict resolution meeting, stating that I found structure to be oppressive and that I considered the experimental practices of commoning to be an attempt to remain fluid, the response came quickly from another member of the collective that this was, of course, because I was a "tall, blond, beautiful white man." At the time I felt affronted but allowing the point to settle in gradually I could see how my own preference for a lack of structure resided partly in the fact that I possessed a *habitus* and identity that would allow me to operate successfully in such unstructured environments. Empowerment would be easier for me in such situations, possessing the characteristics and identity markers

which are already empowered.

The disjunctions between my own experience and the experience of others reveals the friction resultant of different value systems, that is different positions concerning what should be cared about, what should be considered important, what should be valued, different practices of evaluation. Both my experience of imposition, and the experience of others of my use of white male privilege did occur and cannot simply be ascribed to the internality of a bounded subject but rather operate across common affective spaces. And it is in part because both occurred simultaneously, and without full recognition or understanding on the part of the other that their simultaneous existence produced such detrimental and powerful affects.

Below are two narratives from two different members of The Field, both discussing what took place around the time during which the notes which opened this chapter were written.

It generated resentment, on our part. And also, because we were in the middle of it, the only people who could have done that would have been us, really. Because we were in the middle of it, it was only us who were seeing the whole thing. At the beginning I'm talking about, us as in—you included. But we were so worn down by the realities of it: the relationships, the maintenance, the kind of business, that it was really difficult to also remain open to all of the nuanced stuff that was going on, to have a kind of more abstracted kind of relationship to it, to draw out some of the

We made a decision, there was a vote, and it is not respected as a group, and the trust is broken down. I mean there is not trust at that point that's a problem because in breaking down these barriers you have to have some kind of trust, if you try to build some trust and then we explicitly don't care about what we say as a group, even if we don't agree personally and then, you know, it becomes complicated. Trust is a very important thing in this project because, I think, as I was trying to say before, we are not trying to fight within The Field in some sense were trying to

themes and bring that into the collective conversation. In that sense, we were not structured in a way that allowed that to happen...

There's still this difficulty about the tension between having an idea, having a sense of where things could go and how you might get there, and then having a collective process. Like having, like the tension between strategy, forward thinking, planning and then the messiness of people coming together sharing their, views and ideas, all with fluctuating degrees of interest, or involvement with the project. That was continually a frustrating thing. That was a frustration that I feel like if I was allowed to focus on this fully, get money, pay myself, do that with a core group of people who were on side this could have a direction and a clarity...

But it felt like, because there was a need to be open, and allow people to have as much say, it was just frustrating because it felt like, that was, it's partly inexperience, like

make different groups working together and you need to build a sense of trust with that ...

You need trust in a structure that can work for everyone.

It's important. Even if you don't think the same, we don't agree the same thing, but if we know that the decision we take influences everyone is going to be respected, I feel: *ok actually my vote is counting*. First, I'm more involved in the project. Secondly, if we have an agreement me and you, I can trust that if you can't do it at least you'll tell me, or you'll be accountable. There is a communication in place. And the second problem that that we saw was that we couldn't enact things together. But there was also some sort of competition. Also, in being part of the group, or feeling maybe we wanted to display that we were valuable enough to be part of the group, or, you know, all sorts of psychological things that start happening when we form a new culture of the space or way of being in the space...

not knowing how to play this enabling, but also proactive role in the centre of a project like that. Like, that's quite a hard role to play. You know? To feel like you can get on with things, but try to get people's permission along the way and try and keep the speed up, not slow it down to the pace of whoever is least involved. So, the resentment came out of that, trying to take on that role, not knowing how to do it, feeling like nothing could ever happen, having ideas for things that we thought could happen but people not even understanding them. Remember the Office idea? To me that was an idea that potentially encapsulated what this place could be, this kind of unit, this responsive unit that engages outwardly and then comes back in and does stuff as a response to the stuff it finds out that as a kind of idea that encapsulates what The Field exists for is very close to what we felt it could be, and people didn't even understand where it was coming from. You know, challenging the word office as if they're not understanding that its playing

but no there wasn't a specific event, I mean that Harlow thing was quite visible in how it happened, but also explicit.

I brought it up when we had the London Root Collective. I remember the mediation because it was so visible to say the way that Matt and maybe Jane did, took the decision without everyone else's consent. Maybe they were feeling trapped in this consent thing we talked quite a lot about, you know *they were there, part of the project, putting a lot of work and then couldn't do actions*, basically. And that's something that could happen again and I think it's happening in some sort of ways, that people do more work, are more present even if they don't think they are in some way. The co-op is run by members, each member has equal vote and so on and so on, but at the end of the day the people who have put more work, have put more time into it, either feel entitled or are given more power by other people, either social power or decision-making power. And therefore, they always and probably will always influ-

around with being formal and informal. So that kind of thing. You know, you've put in lots of work, you've literally worked for a year to build a thing from scratch with these kind of like ideas that aren't fully formed but they're there in the background that are driving your actions and then you put a thing forward and then other people who maybe haven't been involved, have not had that kind of hunger to do that, have the power to be like—*that thing doesn't work, or I don't get or like that thing so it can't happen, or we're not going to help you make that happen and if you do make it happen we're going to be uncomfortable and that won't be democratic.* So that's an example of a moment where a real deep frustrating would emerge.

ence the discussion, influence how we decide things. So that's something that's happened but that way, that time with Harlow it just happened in a conversation where everyone was trying to ask us what we thought, and everyone said no clearly and they said: *ok—its still going ahead,* after we were asked what we thought, and that was something unacceptable in some sense, you know

Action is constrained. The trust is gone. The trust was important. It was important precisely because the practices of 'breaking down boundaries' entails stepping into uncertainty, into the unknown, it entails experimental attempts at composing common worlds. So, trust is needed, it is the trust that "tenses itself *at the margins* of an expanding sociality," the trust which "emerges as the forever self-eclipsing relationship through which people re-place themselves into new relationships" (Corsín Jiménez 2011: 190 emphasis original). It is when stepping into the unknown, the uncertain, the unformed, that trust

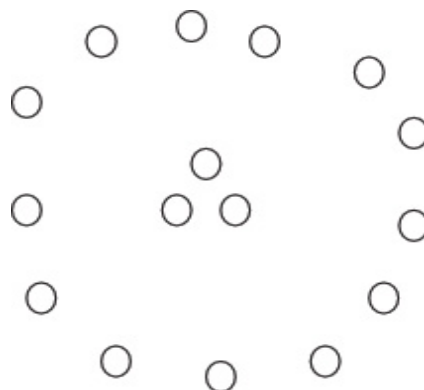
tenses, becomes tightened, and so also becomes brittle, strained, possibly broken. But this step into the unknown requires action. And action is constrained.

The trust in the other to act a certain way involves a gamble, a risk that the other “may act contrary to my expectations” (Ingold 2011: 70). Action requires trust. Action contrary to expectation breaks the brittle trust at the margins of expanding sociality. The gamble fails. Participation is lost. Communication breaks down.

Disengagement and over-engagement mirror one another, mutually reinforcing their positions. Detachment and attachment reflect one another. The more those at the centre engage, the more those on the periphery feel excluded, the more those in the centre feel they are not participating, the more they feel forced to take on work, the more they engage, the more those at the periphery feel excluded.

The more the centre formed, the more it pushed the periphery away, the more the periphery pushed in on the centre, forming it tighter, the more the centre continued to push the periphery away. Trust decreased. Resentment increased. Power and work centralised. Detachment and a sense of non-engagement increased at the periphery.

There was an exercise conducted at the mediation meeting held by London Roots Collective pointed to in one of the narratives above. We were asked to organise ourselves according to who had power at The Field. Those with more power were asked to move towards the centre, those with less were asked to stand further out. The result looked something like this:

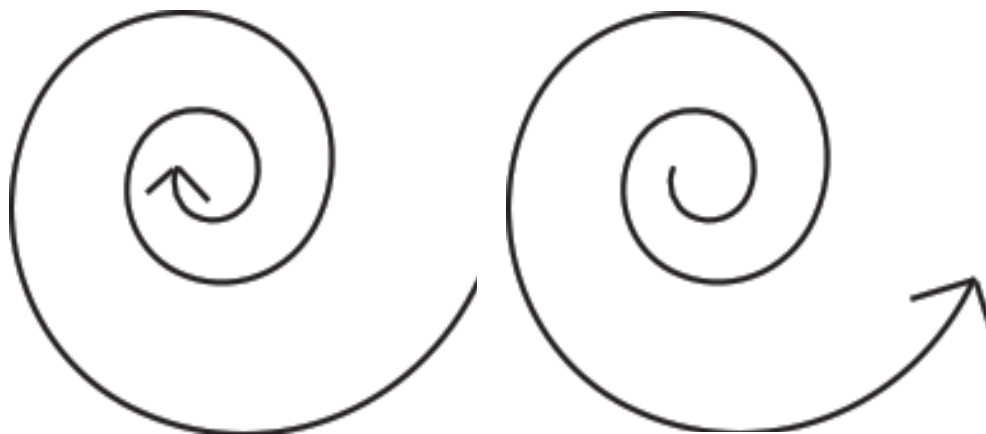


In the centre stood, Matt, Jane, and myself everyone else organised themselves around the edges, forming a clear centre and periphery.³ There were minor variations in this outer circle, and when asked if anyone would change anything, a few people moved others to tentative halfway points between the two, but by and large the split into two power groups was apparent.

The forming of the centre could be said to emerge through opposing yet reinforcing movements. The centre emerged through centripetal spirals accompanied by their centrifugal counterparts.

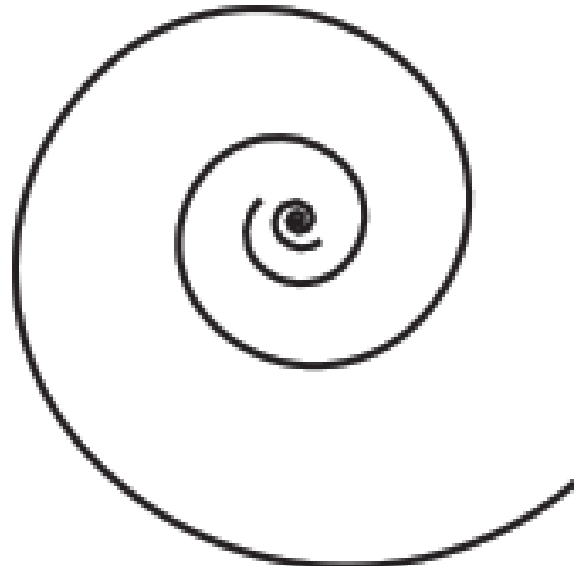
FORMATION OF CENTRE

FORMATION OF PERIPHERY



From the point of view of some of those in the centre, there was an inwards movement of constraint, and burden, and the need for action; this was accompanied by a centrifugal movement of exclusion, detachment, and resistance to participation. As more action was taken on in the centre, the less people on the edges felt involved, the more they experienced resistance to participation. The centralisation of power in the centre had its parallel in the disempowerment of the periphery. The result could be seen as dual coils which mutually constitute one another, and yet never fully come into contact. The two

³ I am using the terms 'centre' and 'periphery' tentatively and flexibly here. I do not mean to say that there was an essential and unchanging centre or periphery. It may be better to consider that these groups emerged around different issues and that they were shifting and flexible.



coils form parasites in relation to one another, that is sites of adjacency which interfere with one another's communicative modalities.

These cyclically reinforcing entanglements bear structural resemblances to R.D. Laing's *Knots* (1971). They are cycles of reinforcing affects whereby actions, attitudes, stances and positions begin to reinforce their own origins. They become caught in an impasse, a cyclical reinforcement that is difficult to brake. Both the narratives running parallel above recognise that other see things differently, that those at the centre 'see more' or see something other than those at the periphery, that those who are given or who take on more work influence things more, and yet there is still an impasse when action/constraint becomes 'too much'. The additional influence leads to disempowerment, detachment, mistrust, which reinforces the need for those with additional influence to act more as others disengage. One acts beyond the expectation or trust of others, and simultaneously feels constrained by the need to be open to everyone. There is a form of transparency of action that is run through with mistrust—action must be transparent,

must be run through everyone, precisely due to the risk that the action may be contrary to expectation.

There are many passages from *Knots* that reveals parts of these cyclical impasses, but one in particular that may be instructive here:

- Jack can see
1. there is something Jill can't see
 2. and that she can see there is some thing she can't see
 3. but that she can't see what she can't see
 although
(Jack can see that)
 4. she can see Jack can see whatever it is
 she can see she can't see
 but can't see what.

(Laing 1971: 58)

People at the periphery can see that those at the centre can see something they can't see, but they can't see what they can't see, and even though those at the centre can see that those at the periphery can see that those at the centre can see whatever it is, that is that they know there is something they don't know, they can't see what it is. The reverse is also true: People at the centre can see that those at the periphery can see something they can't see, but they can't see what they can't see, and even though those at the periphery can see that those at the centre can see that those at the periphery can see whatever it is, that is that they know there is something they don't know, they can't see what it is. There is a cycle of static, of interference, of affects that cannot be transmitted and perspectives that cannot fully be communicated, that get caught and lost in self-fulfilling cycles. Each perspective makes efforts "[t]o see one's self seen by them" (Serres 2015: 12), but something gets in the way. An uncommonality surges up, a divergence, a shift, one run through with back ground noises that prevent clear articulation of what it is that can be seen.

A NOISY CLAMOUR OF PARALLAX SHIFTS

What can't be seen by the other who also knows that they cannot see? It is not simply a failure of vision, of perspective, of the shortcomings of a particular subject. It is rather something contained in gatherings and worlds themselves, something that creates shifts in such ways as to disrupt any neat separation between subject and object. It is not merely that the subject perceives differences in things due to the distortions of their own lens, but that the things that they perceive are different. It is not a result of the endless failure to reach the thing-in-itself, the endless distortions of the biases of subjectivity that forbid access to a reality position behind a distorting vale. It is that things⁴ are themselves different.

During my time at The Field, I helped to organise a reading group through the New Cross Commoners on a text by Gustavo Esteva entitled *Commoning in the New Society* (2014). In this text Esteva writes in polemic against the term 'common pool resources' used by Elinor Ostrom (1990) and other economic thinkers. Esteva argues that commons cannot be thought of as resources for this transforms them to the status of a good or commodity and so introduces them to the logics of economism with its public and private domains and laws of scarcity. In this process, he argues they lose the relational and process-based characteristics that make them commons in the first place. As he writes, "resource is the opposite of commons...the transformation of commons into resources dissolves them" (2014: i148). To think of commons as resources subjects them to the kind of economic determinism that reduces a series of social relations to instrumental, economic ones. It is to interpret a process that is antagonistic to economic logic in economic terms.

Rather than considering commons in terms of resources Esteva

⁴ it is important here to remember that 'thing' is not taken as a place holder for 'object', but rather refers to a gathering, or, in more Tardian language, a composite monad.

draws on the writings of Ivan Illich to suggest that we instead begin to think of them in terms of tools. In *Tools for Conviviality* (2009) Illich begins to call for the development of relationships between humans and tools that move beyond the economic logic of dominance, extraction and manipulation. He applies the term convivial to relationships between humans and tools rather than simply between humans. At the reading group held at The Field, which was also attended by many of the people involved in Old Tidemill Wildlife Garden, a community wildlife garden opened in the abandoned Tidemill School behind Deptford High Street, we sought to follow this suggestion. One of the outcomes was the consideration that one of the fundamental characteristics of a tool is that they transform what it is possible to achieve. They enhance powers of action.

This dimension of the commons, that of their tool-being (Harman 2002), can be drawn into the discussion of value, care and action above. If value is the importance of action, and a tool transforms our power of action, then commons, as tools, reflect back to us the transformations that take place in the values ascribed to things and with it the possibilities of action and evaluation that they enable. What is more, they also expand the possibilities of action at the same time. They reflect back to us our value forming practices of taking care and the affective fields of care, neglect, resentment, empowerment and detachment that these carry with them. Affective fields here are not only fields of experience. They are crucially not bounded to an individual experience but are caught and mediated in the reflective force of tools, those beings which encase and reflect back possible transformations in powers of action. In this way, they become enabling or constraining. If tools are broken, if they cannot fulfil their promise to enhance our power of action, we are constrained; when they can fulfil their promises, we are empowered. Commoning expands the capacity to transform bodies whilst reflecting back the value practices that brought them into being. Commons change what it is possible to achieve and have these transformations inscribed within in them.

The value of action is in this way reflected back. The signifi-

cance of David Graeber's assertion that it is value that brings universes into being (2013b) takes on a further dimension. The reflective force of tools creates a spiralling proliferation of novel possible common worlds and modes of evaluation. Powers of action swell or diminish in this hall of mirrors. Value, care, neglect and action, in their relation to things, are not simply projected onto things but are inscribed within them in a dizzying entanglement. The differences in caring *about*, when translated into different and contingent practices of caring *for*, are not external to 'objects', but inscribed within in them in such a way as to make untenable any firm attempt to maintain a split between them and 'subjects'. This is the cycle of the parallax, which means that "an "epistemological" shift in the subject's point of view always reflects an "ontological" shift in the object itself." (Žižek 2006: 17). It is not simply that things are *seen* differently but that things *are* different—the gathering has been transformed through different practices of evaluation which create different values. The apprehension of something, in a certain way, transforms the thing itself. What is cared *about*, the values that are created along with common worlds, are inscribed in things themselves through the specificities of caring *for*. This caring *for* constructs new affective fields and common worlds which, as tools, enable expansions of the possibilities of action.

So, it is not that The Field was only seen or understood differently, but that The Field itself and all the fields included in its gatherings (problematic fields, political fields, caring fields, etc.) were themselves different. The gatherings were evaluated, and so also cared for, differently. In this composition of common worlds there is then a continual oscillation between ground of commonality and uncommonality. Caring for different gatherings is action, and that action transforms the gatherings themselves. The practice of caring for creates a proliferation of transformations, it is productive of differences in practices of care and so too in the values produced. At the moment when the emergence of difference ceases, the practice of commoning has also. An ongoing component of the practice of commoning, then, is the attempt to establish means of communication between the diverging common

worlds that are in an ongoing process of composition through divergent practices of care and evaluation, and so also divergent systems of value. At the point where this communication fails, the affective fields become run through with mistrust, experiences of neglect, disempowerment, exclusion, repulsion.

Such failures in communication are inevitable. But one of the practices that is engaged with carefully in commoning is that of attempting to listen, of attempting to attune oneself to others, constituting “listening together as itself an object/scene of desire” (Berlant 2011: 224). It becomes of particular importance for commoning practices to carefully listen to the other precisely because of their hopeful, optimistic and future-oriented effort to bring new common worlds into being through ongoing explorations of caring practices. But there must be a pragmatic dimension to this, a dimension which counters the optimism of commoning with an acceptance of inevitable failure, that is of failing to hear or discern a voice amidst the clamour. As Bateson wrote at the conclusion of his essay on *Cybernetic Explanation*, “[a]ll that is not information, not redundancy, not form and not restraints— is noise, the only possible source of *new* patterns.” (2000: 416 emphasis original). Commoning attempts to step forward into this noise, to find new means of communication, new possibilities for value and care, new possibilities for affective transformation and ecologies of life.

We have now left the ocular paradigms that have run through this chapter into a potentially deafening one. Static, after all, can be both audible and visual. But static, far from being an obstacle to be overcome in the composition of the common world leaving us with a final univocality, a total commonality, is in fact the positive possibility of commoning. But this does not make it any less of an obstacle. It has the dual role of condition and obstacle. It has the place of Michel Serres’s *Parasite* (2007), particularly in the sense of modes of static and noise, but also in the sense of sites of adjacency. The composition of the common world opens the attempt to engage positively with the double bind that “systems work because they do not work. Nonfunctioning remains essential for functioning... Relation is nonrelation.

And that is what the parasite is.” (ibid: 79). What Serres paradoxical intervention reminds us of is that there is always at least a minimal tension that maintains relations, that were differences to be entirely related, they would disappear amidst unitary identity. Commoning does not strive for the unification of differences but attempts the difficult, unfinished practice of attempting to discern voices amidst the noise, of bringing into focus that which the parallax excluded, or strabismus left blurry.

This is, of course, easier said than done, as the experiences running through this chapter show. By way of conclusion I would like to propose an altered understanding of the phenomenon of ‘burnout.’ Shortly after I detached from The Field there was a discussion on some of the problems the collective was currently facing. In one of the e-mails that included in this discussion, the following was written,

“I don’t think the problem was self-organisation in itself but a lack of care in the way we self-organised or in other words a lack of collectivisation of the process. Also, I don’t think the problem has been simply that individual people have been working too much, I think the reasons for “burning out” are more complex than simply too much work, and they are different in each case.”

Perhaps the resonance with what has been said so far is already clear. Burning out is framed as an event which is different in each case. It is not simply a matter of a quantitative mismatch, of working too much, or taking too much on. It is more a matter of a lack of care and collectivisation. It is the failure of care to be heard and seen amidst the clamour of noise, the noise that is the uncommon possibility of common worlds.

The object/scene of desire (Berlant 2011) fails to match up to that which is cared *about*, the practice of caring *for* becomes caught in the knots and cycles of resentment, and as these practices of caring *for* create values and in turn worlds this resentment, constraint,

hopelessness becomes mirrored back. The gathering itself becomes run through with modes of neglect. The dizzying hall of mirrors and clamour of noise becomes run through with resentment. It becomes overwhelming, and detachment follows. But this detachment is itself a painful process and further source of resentment for the object/scene of desire, the attachment of which gave the desirer a purposeful orientation towards the future, is lost, or rather transformed through an endless series of reflections into something monstrous. The cruel paradox is that both attachment and detachment become a source of shame, a source of resentment, and both fail to offer the optimistic vision of the future once sought in the evaluative practices of caring *for*.

But it is not simply a case of an internalised, individual pathology. In the endless cascade of reflections that emerge from the entangled cycles of care-action-value-world, the resentment, neglect, blame, despair and hopelessness become entangled within the commons themselves. These affects then are not the preserve of a bound individual subject but manifest in cascades of ontological transformations which are entangled in things themselves. Bodies become strained, and what manages to articulate itself against the noise is signs of neglect, blame, mistrust and despair. It is an isolating and terrifying experience, one in which the optimistic practices of caring *for* become mirrored back as manifestations of neglect. What one perspective cared *for* in their action is mirrored back to them by another perspective as a form of neglect.

This experience has the potential to be particularly acute in commoning. As observed by Pines and Aronson burnout often manifests in those who were “expecting their work to give their lives a sense of meaning” (1989: 10). The composition of common world, as the exploration of new modalities of care, of new value practices, entails such a search for meaning as an intrinsic component. When this fails to occur or practices of caring *for* have had a detrimental effect, being mirrored back from an altered perspectival position as manifestations of neglect, the experience is acutely painful. Such an experience is a forceful manifestation of *cruel optimism* (Berlant 2011), of a hopeful

vision of the future becoming reflected back as an image of despair. The potential for this experience becomes particularly acute in commoning practices due to the fact that the conditions for the production of meaning and value are themselves in a process of composition and that difference itself is the foundational possibility of commoning. Care, action and value(s), as well as their counterparts such as neglect, constraint, and worthlessness become inscribed in the commons themselves being mirrored back to participants through a cascade of transformational lenses. Care then, as a process of negotiation which remains open-ended, becomes a central modality of the composition of common worlds, but one that is not without its potential failures and deficient modes of neglect.

CONCLUSION

ANTHROPOLOGY AND THE COMPOSITION OF (UN)COMMON WORLDS

I would now like to open a series of problematic fields that emerge through the active engagement of anthropology in the composition of common worlds. One such problematic was glimpsed in the concluding words of the preceding chapter—the inclusion of my own presuppositions and assumption into the construction of the realities that this thesis has engaged with. But this, in itself, is a problematic which could produce affects that could be identified positively or negatively. It is an ambivalent problematic. Anthropologists have known for a long time that the other perspectives that they describe are better considered as our perspectives on those perspectives, leading Roy Wagner to consider “we do not learn a “culture” or its re-projection within the “given” or natural world of fact, or even learn about them, so much as we teach ourselves to them.” (2001: xiii). Anthropologists are not outside of the realities that they study, and participate in them—we teach ourselves to the world and often learn as much about ourselves as we do about others. This has certainly been my experience. I have learnt much about myself or have perhaps taught myself to myself through teaching myself to others, I have transformed myself, as much as I have transformed the realities, textually and ontologically, in which I have participated. But I have not necessarily transformed myself in the ways that I hoped or intended, I have not necessarily realised what I thought possible. The collapse of the object/scene of desire that was a site of cruel optimism has led to affects which whilst they include growth and transformation, also include guilt, shame and failure to live up to the ideals and expectations I placed upon myself, upon anthropology, and upon The Field; or more appropriately, the multifaceted relationships between The Field, myself and anthropology.

In what follows I would like to engage in a partial discussion of the long-standing debate of anthropology’s application and practice before continuing ethnographically with a few moments which

brought out these problematics. Early debates concerning applied anthropology often based themselves on the objective and distanced authority of a certain image of science. For instance, Evans-Pritchard marked a clear distinction between the scientific field of anthropology, which concerns itself with “the solution of scientific problems,” which would include “the nature of human society and of social development.” (1946: 93). Within this field, it was necessary for the anthropologist to assume an objective distance in which their own personal presuppositions were excluded. In contrast to this field, Evans-Pritchard speaks of “the non-scientific field of administration” including “the arts of politics” (ibid). Application could only occur in this latter, non-scientific field, and would be based on the insights gained in the former anthropological field. There is a clear demarcation between the anthropological field, in which scientific insights about fundamental questions can be gained, and the outside of that field, in which those insight might be brought to bear on practical issues. The two domains are complementary, but clearly demarcated.

The non-scientific field including the arts of politics, for Evans-Pritchard, primarily concerns colonial administrations, and the formation of the policies of those administrations. In this, he followed Herskovits who in his discussion of applied anthropology in the context of colonial administration also marked a distinction comparable to the one above, “between the scientist and the engineer, the thinker and the doer, the planner and the executive” (1936: 215). Again, Anthropologists fall sharply on the side of the scientist, for whom “the search for truth must come before all else.” (Ibid: 222). The figure of the anthropologist here sits comfortably within the realm of the orthodox ‘image of thought’ described in *Difference and Repetition* (Deleuze 2011), which reaches honestly, transparently and straightforwardly towards reason and truth. Elsewhere, in his review of Montagu’s *Man’s Most Dangerous Myth: The Fallacy of Race* (1997), Herskovits warned against taking “the dim, treacherous path of what is coming to be termed the “social engineer.”” (1946: 268). The path into the non-scientific space of action, of politics, is clouded, turning away from the noble project

of the truth-speaking anthropologist. Ashley-Montagu's response is illuminating:

Should anthropologists contribute their special skills and knowledge to the betterment of the world in which they live, by actively participating in the process of building a new world, or should they leave that task to others, their own role, so far as the social scene is concerned, being limited, as Herskovits puts it, to making "known the testimony of the expert on the facts concerning" social problems?

The question is usually posed in disjunctive form, "either/or," as a choice between alternatives. I think the disjunction a false and a harmful one, since it produces a false dichotomy. It should be remembered that a question can be so structured as to determine the answer which is made to it.

(1946: 666)

Much has of course changed within the discipline since these debates took place. Numerous reappraisals of the discipline have reconsidered the status of anthropology and its relationships to the realities that it studies (e.g. Geertz 1973; Wagner 1975; Clifford and Marcus 1986; Abu-Lughod 1996; Fabian 2002). And today, development of new methods and approaches appears to be one of the current trends of anthropological thought and practice, such as the current *commoning anthropologically*, A-N-T (Latour 2007), ethnographic conceptualism (Ssorin-Chaikov 2013), art-based or influenced anthropology (Wright & Schneider 2006; 2010; Sansi 2015; Ingold 2013; 2017; 2018b), recursion (Holbraad 2012; Corsín Jiménez 2017), controlled equivocation (Viveiros de Castro 2004), experimental collaboration (Estalella & Sanchez-Criado 2015; 2018), ethnography as prototyping (Corsín Jiménez 2014b; Corsín Jiménez & Estalella 2016), para-ethnography (Holmes & Marcus 2008b) and collaborative anthropologies (Holmes & Marcus 2008a). Some questions, it seems, do not find resolutions but

proliferate productively into further lines of inquiry, further openings.

Anthropologists are increasingly concerned with how they contribute to the construction of the worlds in which they participate, not only textually, but beyond the representative practices of ethnography. But for all this concern, my experience has presented further questions. The first experience, discussed below, resonates profoundly with the very debates of Evans-Pritchard, Herskovits and Ashley-Montagu. It concerns the conflicts that The Field, and myself, had with Mmandu.

We had many long conversations together, Mmandu and I, and on a personal level were friendly towards one another. But the agonistic dimension of our debates did not diminish. I recall one conversation in particular when we were sat outside in the garden of The Field one evening—the conversation was heated, but amicable. At one point I explained to her that I was a funded research student at Goldsmiths, and I was engaged with The Field partly in this capacity. She was shocked, and told me that it was fine for us, we'd do our experiment and go off, leaving all the people who had lived here in the same state as before. A friend of hers added in that they used to play football here as kids, gesturing beyond the garden to the newly built block of flats, but now there was nowhere left for their kids to go. It was unfair, they said, that I had access to all these resources when I clearly didn't need them whereas those who had been living here for years had nothing. I could always go off back to the country side and have champagne and strawberries with grandma.

In moments such as these, I became aware of how I might appear to Mmandu. I recalled another conversation we had over the phone, where at the end she said that she always enjoyed talking to me, and then putting on an affected posh English voice—*Master Toby, I always imagine you like one of those pictures you see in pubs of guys surrounded by dogs and horses*. I was taken a back. Laughing, I asked if that was really how she saw me. She assured me that she did. In this moment, I stood clearly in the position of an incoming class of gentrifiers—white, educated at Goldsmiths, middle class, with high access to

a range of resources. In participating in the construction of The Field, the renovation of the building, caring for the project, I had embarked on the dim path of the social engineer, and in this dimension, in this relationship, it had proved treacherous—our experiment was here not well received or appreciated. I belonged to a class of professionals who had not grown up here, an incomer, a coloniser, meddling where it was not wanted. The problematic is not entirely beyond the terms of the debate amongst Evans-Pritchard, Herskovits and Ashley-Montagu, I belonged “to a political entity which has taken away the right of self-direction from the very people he is studying” (Herskovits 1936: 217). In another conversation I had with Mmandu, she stated this even more clearly—we had stolen this building from the community. I was taken aback: but the building was empty before, there was no one here, no one using it, it was collapsing. But for Mmandu, it had become what she told me people had described as another weird white people place, cut off from those who she identified as needing it.

Sitting with Horatio one day, another friend of Mmandu’s, I asked him who he thought managed or ran The Field, hoping to open a route to a discussion about horizontal organising and self-organisation—his response was disarming. *Anthropologists from Goldsmiths*, he laughed. Later in the conversation he asked me what anthropology was—I tried my best to explain, but I felt fairly sure the message didn’t make it across. It fell to static. I received back an inquiring and searching look.

In moments such as these, I was reminded of Lucas Bessire’s introduction to fieldwork with the Ayoreo. Early on, he found that the *abujá*, the Ayoreo term for anthropologist, were considered *Satana utocaidie*—helpers of the Devil. These *abujá* were considered to be trickster figures, hard to spot, disguised, with unclear and dishonest intentions, only interested in capturing things, recording them, and “said to possess hidden stacks of money “as long as their beards” and nefarious powers of persuasion” (2014: 24). In these relationships, I occupied a similar space—I had money, from my research grant, and what I and The Field was doing, the experiment, was not immediately

clear.

It wasn't only in relation to people such as Mmandu and Horatio, that my position as anthropologist became problematic. A number of the members of the collective were uneasy with me conducting my PhD research at The Field. They were concerned about how being engaged in a research project such as this put me in a different position to everyone else—I had another motive. And what is more, I wasn't only a participant observer—I was actively changing the shape of the project through interventions. I was extracting and intervening. Tim Ingold has insisted there is no contradiction between participant and observer (2017), and I am inclined to agree. But these other members of the collective certainly saw potential problems. A while after detaching from The Field, I had an e-mail exchange with one of these people. Again, it was amicable but not without its agonistic dimension. They made it clear that the role of participant observer has always been problematic, but even more so if the participant observer is transforming the realities they're studying. And, they went on, they did not like the prospect of a process of individual writing now taking place outside of the collective processes in which they were based—there was too much demand to integrate it into frameworks to make it interesting to others, to extrapolate and generalise, to create facts that happened rather than events that were experienced.

A problematic is pointed to here, one that it seems to me partly stems from the central importance that institutional academia and anthropology places upon text. This problematic is not one that is unrecognised by the discipline at large, but there is still a difficult problem—if we are to engage in the collaborative construction of common worlds, and call that anthropology, then should those common worlds not to some extent be valued in themselves without the authority of the text, or monograph, or article to justify them? Many practice-based disciplines (e.g. design, art, architecture), include within their mode of assessment the realities that have been fabricated through the research. Anthropology, on the other hand, continue to primarily rely on modes of representation such as visual materials, exhibitions and

text as their primary means of attributing value to a project. The reality itself, beyond its representation, is in this institutional sense, secondary—it becomes subordinate to the production of anthropological knowledge. So, in engaging in a project such as *The Field* that also became my PhD an imbalance was introduced whereby the institutional demands of anthropology were very different from those of the life processes in which I participated. I, in the end, found meeting the demands of both too overwhelming. Others, in different places, working on different projects, and with different personal characteristics, may be better able to balance the vast multiplicity of demands that participating in the textually output-focused academy and the composition of common world beyond it, but I was not. The process of writing required a severance from the realities that I had participated in creating, and a turn towards the insular, introspective and centrifugal flow of the text. Producing a work of anthropology and continuing to partake in the construction of those common worlds was too much.

Ingold has also asked us to stop “worry[ing] obsessively about what counts as ‘anthropological knowledge’, and what it means to produce it” (2018b), and to take our lead from artists rather than scientists. In so doing, we might focus more on attending to correspondences *with* others, rather than studies *of* others, and in so doing come closer to an anthropological art which joins “with the forces that give birth to ideas and things, rather than seeking to express what is already there” (2018a: 65 emphasis original). In the language of Donna Haraway, it would be an anthropology focused towards a practice of becoming-with (2008), a collaborative exploration of the possibilities of human life and its relationship to all kinds of others, all kinds of difference, a practice that I attempted to encapsulate here through the notion of *commoning anthropologically*. I am again inclined to agree with this hopeful and romantic vision. Romanticism after all held close to the bright, sublime and beautiful. However, it is not without its frictions that we might embark on this route, it is not without the possibility of agonism, friction and static, it is not without the affective surges of resentment, neglect and blame. For anthropologists to engage in

the construction of common worlds, to care for those worlds, we must also go forth knowing that sometimes we will get things very wrong, sometimes we will fail, sometimes our common worlds will collapse, or turn on us, or us on them. Sometimes, commoning will overflow too far into uncommoning, into static and noise.

In some senses, however, there is nothing so different about this and the rest of political life. Foucault once aptly remarked “people know what they do; they frequently know why they do what they do; but what they don’t know is what what they do does” (Dreyfus & Rabinow 1983: 187). In commoning, in attempting to find new ways of living together, we do not know what we will find—the contingency of the encounter, the proliferation of difference, will make sure of this. We can, however, attempt to remain open and honest and not close ourselves to the other. This stance, I have attempted to introduce through the cosmopolitical figure of the idiot—the one who does not know the answers, the one who stays with the question. For in the end, commoning, and anthropology, remain open questions, they remain open to transformation, open to difference—without that questioning, inquisitive openness, the common falls to the identity of the same, and fails to remain open to the other as a threshold to another possible world.

MAKING-SENSE

To remain open to the other in this way is an existentially constitutive gesture. It constructs the other not as threat, or enemy, or as marked by absolute alterity, but as an invitation. Thus, the other emerges as an opening onto other values, other practices of care, other possibilities of communication, other ecologies of life. And it is not only the other who is existentially constituted in this gesture, for the relationship to the other is also implicated inextricably in the formation of self. To open to the other as invitation does not only existentially construct that other, but also forms the self through a cosmopolitical attitude of openness to other possibilities. And further, this opening

towards other possible common worlds is also an opening towards other systems of sense, that is other systems of making-sense. Such making-sense does not only concern making-sense of the other, that is understanding their forms of expression and their needs and desires, but more crucially, concerns the creation of new systems of sense, new common senses. Without that creation of sense communication with others would remain an impossibility.

It is this creation of new systems of sense that allows for the possibility to accept the invitation of the other, for to open to the sense of the other, to their modes of expression and needs and desires, requires the constitution of new modes of communication. The sense of the other cannot be simply 'translated' into a pre-existent system but must be drawn into the creation of new systems that are capable of retaining the differences of expressions. It is here that commoning engages in practices bearing similarities to "controlled equivocation", in as far as "[e]quivocation appears here as the mode of communication par excellence between different perspectival positions" (Viveiros de Castro 2004: 5) whereby the differences of those perspectival positions are retained and contribute to the constitution of new systems of making-sense. This strikes at the centrality of communication as a creative process to commoning. In his engagement with John Dewey's discussion of the etymological links between community, communicate and common, Ingold draws attention this creative process,

"having things in common is not a prerequisite for communication but its outcome; not what allows us to communicate but what it achieves. To have in common is not to look inside ourselves, to regress to a set of baseline attributes with which we are similarly endowed from the start, but to reach out to others who are – at least initially – different from us. To communicate with people is then to common with them, in the participatory process of living together."

(2017: 14-15)

Common worlds are not pre-existent entities that simply expand as others enter into them, rather they are created through a process of reaching out towards difference; they are created through communication and the construction of new systems of sense, they are created through sense-making practices. In this way communication is an existentially constitutive practice, one which transforms those who communicate in attempting to create novel correspondences. It is partly for this reason that commoning and communication, remain contingent practices, ones which cannot not know their destinations in advance, and ones which must be continually revised, revisited, recomposed.

I am drawn here to Horatio's thought that we encountered in *Commoning Beyond the Commons*, that *the way we talk to people and the way people talk to us—that's politics*. That day we had been discussing why The Field, in his view, had failed to become more diverse and to engage with the needs and desires of the poorer, predominantly black, communities in New Cross. As he continued, *you guys are in a party that okay we talk in this manner and we believe in this but actually to help the society or to help the poor community we have to give up some of our ideas*. Certain modes of speech carry with them ideas that have not been given up and are creating a barrier. *The way politics are rolling here it's a barrier*. Politics is the way we speak and the way we are spoken to, and the way that is rolling at The Field is a barrier. A blockage springs up, transversal commoning falters, and ideas and values are clung to too tightly to be recomposed through communicative encounters. And the greater they are clung to, the tighter the affective knots become. The possibility of creating new systems of sense is thwarted by an unwillingness to give up ideas. The needs and desires of others cannot be attended to without allowing for the recomposition of common worlds through encounter.

Modes of expression are not secondary to politics, they are its possibility. As was seen in the first field of politics, it is when any title to govern, any overarching system of meaning and sense, is abandoned, that politics begins (Rancière 2006). It is only by allowing ideas,

values, principles, practices and modes of expression to become transformed that politics can be practiced for to deny this transformation would be to deny the possibility of communication as a creative practice of sense-making. It is difference then, difference in ideas, values, modes of expression, identities, needs and desires, that makes possible communication and commoning. Attending to these differences is the practice of composing new systems of common sense that can facilitate correspondences without erasing the very differences that made them possible.

The ideas that are not being given up and are becoming a barrier are themselves not separate from their expression. They themselves come with their worlds. As stated in the lines of *Difference and Repetition* that precede one of the motifs that has run throughout this thesis, that of the other as an expression of a possible world, “the expressed has (for us) no existence apart from that which expresses it” (Deleuze 2011: 261). The expressed and expresser come with their own worlds, for “[n]othing comes without its world, so trying to know those worlds is crucial” (Haraway 1997: 37). To know the expressed, one must come to know also the expresser, for they are both continuous components of the entangled gatherings that form their worlds. Ideas then, do not exist independently to their embodied expression, they are run through with affective dimensions that transform bodies, their dispositions and powers of action.

That the expressed cannot be separated from the expresser attests to the importance of bodily dispositions in communicative encounters. The way bodies express their needs and desires, their values, their ideas, is transformed in the expression. Common systems of sense, or common senses, cannot be created without coming to know the bodies that are gathered with them. In Michel Serres’s *The Five Senses*, it is the skin that becomes the figure of a common sense, a sense that reveals the link between sense and sensation and the unity of the senses. He writes, “[t]he skin, multisensorial, can pass for our common sense” (2008: 81). The skin, the boundary of the body, the point of contact, of coming to-

gether, of encountering difference, is where the field of a common sense emerges, a common sense that is not on a plane of metaphysical knowledge, but one that is embodied, felt, experienced; a common sense that concerns affect and sensation as much as it does discourse and sense, a common sense that refuses to separate mind and body just as it refuses to separate the senses. Making-sense is not only a matter of the intellect, of a thought outside of bodies—rather, “[t]he thinking I quivers along the spine, I think everywhere.” (Serres 2008: 76). This is where thought emerges, in the contact of bodies, across the skin, becoming a matter of encounter, of bodies and sensations coming together revealing “a kind of original unity of the senses” (Deleuze 2012: 30). Making-sense is a bodily encounter which compels thought in a range of affective tones, it compels a thinking that does not leave the encounter, but goes along with it.

Values, sense, concepts, bring with them affects, orientations, sensations. The anxiety, resentment, despair and depression that surged throughout *Affective Activity and Careful Collectivity*, and the refusal, neglect and care that run through the communicative encounters with the building, with things as gatherings, in *Communication* are as much a part of the search for common worlds, as are concepts and discourses. Concepts run through bodies, they quiver along spines, surge as hope and despair, jolt as shock and fear. Bodies come together, attract one another, resonate with one another, repulse one another via the inter-mingling of a common sense.

I am drawn here, once again, to the reiki classes that were briefly held at The Field, and through which we glimpsed the outlines, the skins and surfaces of cosmopolitics.¹ The interesting question is not—is reiki true or false? Does the healer channel universal energy through shakras or not? It is not a question of an apophantic attribution of falsity or truth. It is rather a question of what it does, how it compels us, what its non-apophantic

1 See Chapter 4: *Four Fields of Politics*

commandment is. It is a question of magic.² Reiki as a practice and an exploration of that recurrent Spinozan question of what a body can do manifests so many of the properties of the mingling of bodies in the creating of common senses through contacts with a common sense. Reiki, as in the tending to the building run through with years of neglect and the communication with the stubborn and wilful gravel in the concrete, brings bodies into contact through practices of care. Through the exploration of a contact zone of a common sense, common senses can be rethought, reimagined, opening other possibilities for being together.

Taking care, once again here is an embodied practice, one that brings differences together in relations of co-flourishing. It is, like communication, an existentially constitutive gesture that orientates towards the other and so also forms the dispositions of self. It is an exploration of what values can be shared, nurtured and grown. And values again become embodied in the materialities themselves, in skins, gravel, walls and affects, values become “collective ventures embodied and embedded in prosaic material everyday agencies, contingently becoming vital to situated relationalities that ground them in a living web of care” (de la Bellacasa 2017: 119). In some senses, reiki stands for so many of the practices of commoning that unfolded at The Field—the intermingling of bodies in a contingent exploration of relationships of caring for; the encounter of bodies in the attempt to find correspondences through practices of taking care. Such encounters bring out modes of communication that do not only convey information, but create systems of sense and sensation, they create common worlds.

2 Magic here is certainly not a term of disqualification, a term that denotes a non-scientific and therefore false practice, a term that disqualifies. It is rather a signalling of the relationship to the non-apophantic that was discussed in chapter 4, a dimension of the imperative, the commandment, a dimension that compels orientations towards unknown futures. In this regard the words of Felix Guattari may be useful:

“As far as I’m concerned, in principle I am not all hostile with regard to magic. I even think that, in many cases, it constitutes a mode of mapping of psychic Assemblages of great interest, sometimes capable – in the context of traditional medicines – of setting up an opposition to the sterile and reductionist approaches of the shrinks in white smocks!” (2013: 32)

CASCADES OF (UN)COMMON WORLDS

At this point, we can state simply what has already been stated: commoning does not diminish difference but continues its proliferation. In the words of Marilyn Strathern, “[d]ifferentiation is not after all contained—it runs riot” (1991: xxi). The final chapter showed how different practices of evaluation and taking care created new value systems that became inscribed in the very gatherings that produced them³—the commons and the values they produce emerge through transformative practices of care and communication. These practices of care and communication do not care for something that pre-exists, or communicate information already held, but create new relations that are themselves creative. There is an ongoing process of variation by which commoning is always differentiated from itself, always producing new value practices, new contexts for action, new systems of meaning. In reaching out towards difference, that which reaches cannot itself remain the same. Commoning is in this way, uncommon to itself.

It is this process of continual variation that is the motor of commoning and was outlined previously as *commoning beyond the commons*. Now, it is clear that the notion of *commoning beyond the commons* is already included in that of commoning. The process of ongoing variation creates a situation in which commoning is always beyond itself, always differentiated from itself, always uncommoning. As an exploratory field, commoning is continually establishing new systems of meaning and value, new practices of evaluation, which become differentiated from the processes that created them and in turn reflect back upon and transform those very processes. Here, both care and communication return as contingent practices of attending to needs and desires. Bodies come together, mingle, attract one another, resonate with one another, repulse one another in encounters.

Both resonance and repulsion are constitutive of difference. Bodies that are repulsed are not the same bodies that existed prior

3 See Chapter 7: *Affective Activity and Careful Collectivity*

to repulsion, they take on new stances, new attitudes, new positions. And likewise, the resonance between two or more bodies does not leave them unchanged but transforms them and introduces them to new constellations of sense. Difference, then, is both the possibility and limit of commoning; commoning remains with difference, it does not work through it to arrive at the unity of the same. Whether the encounter of difference triggers the creation of new common worlds, or the divergence of uncommon worlds, in both cases differentiation continues.

In this endless cascade of differentiation, sites of resonance or repulsion can come to function as nodal points (Laclau & Mouffe 2014), or quilting points (Žižek 2008a: 95-7), that is points which come to retrospectively organise systems of sense and meaning and grant temporary consistency to common worlds. The importance placed upon a certain value or principle comes to transform the other values associated to it, thus acting as a nodal point which temporarily fixes other meanings in place. Such a moment can be found in one of the conflicts touched upon in the fourth chapter.⁴ A number of people committed themselves to attempting to diversify the community that participated in *The Field* by inviting groups such as London Black Atheists, London African Gospel Choir and RAFO, which was done on the basis of the transversality principle. During one meeting, however, it transpired that other people in the group considered that this focus on diversifying the collective had occurred at the expense of the other principles that were intended to guide decisions on who could use the space, resulting in the inclusion of a number of groups that were 'not political', or who had politics complicit with the hegemony of state and market. An excess of focus on one principle had led to a lack of attention to the others, an excess of care at one point leads to neglect for others. The fixing of one nodal point transformed the others associated to it, moving them into the background.

Here, we see a divergence of common worlds, a moment where an excess of a care for one principle leads to neglect for others. The re-

⁴ See Chapter 4: *Four Fields of Politics*

sult is not simply a divergence on one particular issue, but a transformation of the entire value system, the entire common world. Different nodal points, different loci for the attribution of value, create variant common worlds which partly overlap and partly diverge. Transformation of one point of a gathering, brings about transformation in all other components of that gathering giving it a new sense.

Another such a moment was encountered in the controversy concerning chicken or veganism. For one side it was clear that *[v]egetarian/vegan food is more inclusive and cooking the food at the Field promotes collaboration - all values we want to promote*. But it was not so simple, as the response came: *[f]ood politics are a lot more complicated than simple ethics unfortunately - and for me (this is my personal positions), it's more important that a more diverse group of people come together on the Wednesday dinner, than it is adhering to an ethical standard shared by some*. Differences in what is cared about and for, in what is valued, bring about differences in action. And as was seen in chapter seven it is action itself that, being the source of values, transforms what is valued and brings worlds into being. Shifts in the attribution of value have corresponding shifts in action, and the temporary settlement that a common world may have arrived at is disrupted, differentiating itself from itself and bringing about a proliferating cascade of common worlds.

So common worlds proliferate according to the nodal points which come to temporarily fix systems of common sense through the practice of evaluation. But this is not the only source of proliferation. The very practice of communication, as we have seen, produces difference as novel systems of sense are created, but it also results in differentiation through the ongoing interference of static. In relation to one another, divergent common worlds become parasites, sites of adjacency and otherness that intervene, overlap and interfere with one another. As these divergent common worlds come together, "[c]ommunication is effective, the circuit so to speak operates, but the 'messages' are only partially transferred." (Strathern 1991: 84). There are always components of the 'messages,' the constellations of meanings, values and practices, that fall to static, that cannot make sense when

interfaced with other systems of sense. Positions within a network established through the temporary settlement of a shared system of meaning also establish horizons—points beyond which it is not possible to see from a given perspective. The defining of a position in relation to a matter of care (de la Bellacasa 2011; 2012; 2017), of what should be cared about, or for, when brought into relation with another perspective creates friction and static. The two don't always match up. An excess of care in one point of the network leads to an excess of neglect in another. Matters of care emerge as partially connected. Some of the urgency, of the injunctive, is communicated, but a part falls to static, to noise. From one point of view reiki is unpolitical, for another it is; for one the book keeping is a matter of great urgency, for another it is a nuisance and obstruction to the real work of living otherwise.

These are the moments of interruption, the moments of noise, clamour and static. Serres called these interruptive moments the parasite. *Para*—beside, abnormal, other, adjacent. *Site*—a space, domain, area of distribution. A parasite is an other, a third, an unknown, uncertain disruption. Momentarily, the system of differentiation becomes common. “The difference becomes static” (Serres 2007: 31). But is it static in the sense of stable, or static in the sense of white noise? The uncommons that can enable the possibility of commoning overflows, difference surges into noise. The difference is in the excess, in the contingency of the encounter. The communication falters. There is only noise. But, “the parasite invents something new” (ibid: 36). The other-domain (parasite) brings something new into being. The site encounters its other through the emergent contingency of the encounter. Through commoning a new site, a new territory, a new common world emerges. But the distribution is once again disrupted, divided, split. It is back with the uncommons and commoning starts again, the questioning starts again, this time from a different and differing position. “Nothing seems to hold the configurations at the centre—there is no map, only endless kaleidoscopic permutations” (Strathern 1991: xvii). But the permutations and the division bring new possibilities, new questions. “The division surges up and makes a system very quickly”

before once again that system plunges into “[t]he noise of the world, the sounds of birth and of transformations” (Serres 2007: 37-8). In the shifting of scales, the oscillations between positions, paradox, contradiction abound. Common sense is interrupted by nonsense.

Sometimes the static and noise is deafening. This was what was found in the closing chapter. The experience and sense of neglect and ontological insecurity was in part a plunge too far towards chaos, too far towards clamour. The uncommons abounded. There is something of a little Clastrian machine at work in the continual recomposition of commoning, “a “machine” that operates according to its own mechanics” (Clastres 2007: 212). A machine that sets and continually reset its functioning, that jolts off towards the outside, turns back on itself, takes itself apart and puts it all back together. A machine that spills into nonsense in order to find sense and that has its own perpetual motion. A machine that sometimes deafens itself, sometimes speaks clearly. Sometimes it’s as though those celebrated two poles of *gumsa* and *gumlao* (Leach 1986) are at work at once, shifting between a clear domain with a set of rules for caring for the commons, and the flight towards the uncommons. But it is not a swinging between two poles, a dialectic, but more of a machinic fractalisation, a cascade of differentiation. We are back with Bateson (2000: 416)—noise is the very possibility of a new system and the background against which that system emerges.

DIFFERENCES THAT MAKE A DIFFERENCE

Bateson’s systems theory, as well as Serres’s discussion of parasites, reminds us not to try and wish away the static, noise and interferences that are integral to communication. For whilst they become obstructions to communication it is this very obstruction and interference which makes possible the formation of new systems. But there is also another problematic raised by an observation of Bateson’s that must be attended to here, and that is how, amidst this proliferation of differences, is it possible to identify “a *difference which makes a differ-*

ence.” (2000: 459 emphasis original). Without doubt, the differences encountered across each of the preceding chapters are themselves different—the problematics and poetics of communication with difference-writ-large, with the gravel in the concrete, the rotting floorboards and the material manifestations of ruination are by no means the same as the encounters of differences that became structured around race and food. “[T]here are differences between differences” (ibid: 463), and the work of commoning cannot only be to remain open to difference generically but must also be to attend to these differences between differences.

For Bateson, once we enter the world of communication we enter a world in which ““effects” [...] are brought about by *differences*” (ibid: 458 emphasis original), and these differences that bring about differences, constitute ‘information.’ As such, Bateson’s theory of information “is fundamentally both contextual and causal in nature — a fact that can be shown to have widespread and profound implications for its application in the social world.” (Ali 2013: 101). The implication of this includes that differences both bring about transformation and change, something that we have already seen, and that they cannot be understood apart from the specificities of their formation and position. In short, attending to differences requires attending to the differences that constituted them as such as well as the effects that they bring about.

There is then, a reiteration of Nancy Fraser’s critique of the Habermasian conception of democracy—it is insufficient to act ‘as if’ participants in democracy are equal rather, the specificities of the barriers different people face to participation in politics must be attended to, including variations in modes of expression and communication (Fraser 1990). There are layered and complex histories that lead to the formation of certain differences and the specificities of each difference cannot be understood apart from them. Modes of expression can also not be understood apart from the complex histories that contribute to their formation, that is neither expressed nor expresser can be understood without attending to these histories. As Susan Lepselter writes

of the persistence of narrative poetics of colonisation in contemporary America,

“[d]ifferent troubled American histories layer up inside the uncanny iterations, the implicit feelings of their parallelism between other histories of violation, transport, domination, colonization. They are unresolved injuries spewing back in a layered poetics, revealing the connections and parallels between many different histories of power and domination.”

(2016: 67).

Modes of expression are run through with the histories with which they resonate and from which they emerge, they manifest unresolved traumas, injustices and injuries in their poetics.

Let us turn once again to the conflicts that we encountered in the latter half of this thesis. When discussing the controversy around Harlow and RAFO joining The Field with one long term member of the collective, the conversation turned to his mode of expression—*he was extremely charming and could very much sort of make you change your mind in one conversation, or not change your mind necessarily but make you sort of come round to his way of thinking, I wouldn't go so far as to say manipulative but he definitely had a lot of training in that form of diplomacy or how to get people to do what you want them to do. Which I guess, is manipulating people.* Harlow's ability to be persuasive here emerges as a problem, it is a matter of manipulation. But this mode of communicative practice cannot be understood apart from the processes that formed it and with which it is continuous. Harlow himself acknowledged that he adapted his communicative style depending on who he was talking to—*there's a place where I can talk to you in a really straight way and you won't like me but because I have learnt how to be inclusive I can talk to you in a way that allows you to feel part of my conversation and my agenda.* In that conversation with Harlow he made it clear that to be inclusive meant adapting communicative styles—*you won't like me if I talk to you*

in a really straight way.

The practice of shifting communicative styles that Harlow used was part of the way in which he understood and sought to practice inclusivity— you have to communicate differently, you cannot simply act ‘as if’ we are all equal. Sitting with him one day I asked him if he saw it as a problem that he had to change his language all the time to communicate. The response came back:

But I’ve had to do so all my life. The place I was clumsy was when I came to this country at 11 and someone called be a black bastard and I’d hit them, and I’d fight, because I didn’t have the words. But becoming an adult I learnt how to articulate and, you know, and actually I can beat you up with a smile on my face if I choose to but that’s not my heart’s desire so I won’t do it, but I could because I’ve learnt, I’ve worked 30 years in town halls yeah, so I have an infrastructure understanding that a lot of people like me don’t have.

Harlow has come to possess *an infrastructure understanding that a lot of people like him don’t have*. This understanding facilitates his communicative practice, and cannot be separated from his experiences as a black child arriving in the UK from Granada and the racism this entailed, as well as the thirty years of coming to learn the mechanisms of town halls and the infrastructure of the state

The story with Mmandu was, of course, different. Whilst also involving race as a difference that makes a difference, it is involved differently. Harlow himself touched on this in that conversation— *there’s some passive-aggressive racism going on which is specifically directed at Mmandu and more and more people don’t like her, and a lot of people don’t like her because they don’t understand her and it’s a place where through her hurt and her experience she hasn’t learnt how to win friends and influence people.*

The encounter of The Field with Mmandu was also affected by

the floating signifier of race (Hall 1997), but it shifted its location. For all the declarations of anthropologists since Boas and Benedict that the system of differences that is race has no reality, the effects produced by race continue to manifest, race continues to be a difference that makes a difference. Race ran through the encounters with Mmandu—they carried with them the long histories of British imperialism, colonialism, and economic dispossession and segregation. When she described me as *Master Toby*, one of those *guys surrounded by dogs and horses*, the parallels and resonances with specifically British race and class hierarchies are clear. I assumed the position of a privileged white benefactor of *The Racial Contract* (Mills 2011), through the imagery of British aristocratic traditions, here fox hunting. It, as she said, was not my fault, some of those aristocratic guys were nice and they couldn't help being born into that world. But not being a signatory to The Racial Contract and the system of white supremacy does not mean that I am not its benefactor (ibid: 11). Running through my encounters with Mamandu were layered poetics that resonated with long histories of colonisation, domination and dispossession which found parallels in the white-washing effects of urban gentrification.

At times, this was clearer than others. I recall one day Mmandu specifically telling me that The Field was engaged in segregation—it wasn't only happening here, or only in New Cross, she said, In Brixton a black person can't get anything because there are no so many white folks everywhere. Processes of segregation and dispossession driven by racialised urban economics carry forward resonant parallels with the history of British Imperialism and these racialised histories form the present down to its most basic components. As we saw, the very architecture of Goldsmiths and New Cross carries with it these imperialistic histories that persist in the structuring of political and economic hierarchies today.⁵

The work of commoning, then, cannot be content with a stance or attitude of remaining open to difference. Whilst this is a necessary starting point, it is not in itself sufficient. The practice of remaining

5 See Chapter 2: *On What Commons?*

open to difference remains contingent, for to truly attend to difference requires also attending to the differences that make a difference, that is attempting to attend to the specific histories, modes of expression and forms of practice that are encountered. Whilst a cosmopolitical attitude of openness is the ground of this possibility, the true work begins when the specificities of each encounter are brought into the picture and attended to. Different beings require different modes of communication and care—opening to the needs and desires of the building, the neglectful manifestations of ruination, requires a quite different mode of practice than attempting to construct systems of sense that account for the long histories of racialised dispossession and domination. What both share, and start from, is a stance of attending to differences on their own terms, a stance of tentative uncertainty that reaches out towards the other as an invitation to the constitution of another possible world, an invitation to the construction of new values, senses and practices of care and communication.

AND NOW FOR SOMETHING COMPLETELY DIFFERENT...

Much has changed since my encounter with The Field began. In 2014 the Liberal Democrat-Conservative coalition government remained in power, the Labour Party was led by a centre-left epitome of a career politician—Ed Miliband, the idea of Brexit seemed to be only taken seriously by the right wing of the Tories and UKIP, and the concept of a Trump presidency only appeared to be conceivable in the context of a cartoon like *The Simpsons*. Mainstream party politics seemed stagnant, with a meaningless choice between parties that were barely distinguishable and continued to perpetuate neoliberal austerity policy programs. At that time, the possibility of social transformation through mainstream political channels appeared a lost cause and many turned instead to anarchist and autonomist infused forms of political practices that sought to withdraw and recreate, “what Paolo Virno has called “engaged withdrawal,” mass defection by those wishing to create new forms of community.” (Graeber 2004: 60-1). The

protests against austerity and tuition fees, Occupy, the movement of the squares and the riots of 2011 all pointed towards a shift in political practice away from stale and outdated institutional structures towards immediate, participatory and spontaneous resistance.

The Field fitted comfortably within this political moment, it was engaged in many practices that Srnicek and Williams have called part of the left-wing folk political common sense of the times (2015). This folk political common sense focused on immediate, authentic relationships, forms of horizontal organising, direct action, participation in favour of representation, local engagement and grounding, temporary structural arrangements, and a deep distrust of hierarchies and formal institutions. All tendencies which were found on The Field.

By 2015, the picture began to shift. After the Conservative Party obtained a majority in the 2015 election, giving them a strengthened mandate to continue and deepen the George Osborne led austerity program, the Labour party began the process of electing a new leader. In September of that year, to much surprise, Jeremy Corbyn became the new leader of the opposition with campaign support from the newly formed organisation Momentum. Corbyn had spent most of his political career as a marginalised backbencher. His politics sat close to the radical Labour tradition of the likes of Tony Benn, a tradition that many had thought had been more or less expunged from the party since Blair. He was anti-austerity, anti-war, anti-nuclear weapons, and in favour of nationalisation, regulating financial markets and expanding public services. Sat at his right-hand side was his shadow chancellor John McDonnell, someone who would over the course of the next couple of years publicly declare to the media that his job was overthrowing capitalism (BBC 2018), and quote from Mao's *Red Book* in the House of Commons (Mason 2015). It started to seem that "[t]here is a chance for radical politics to make an utterly unexpected rebirth" (Seymour 2016). But it was not only changes in the UK that seemed to mark a shift in the political terrain.

In Spain, Podemos became the third largest party only shortly after being founded in the aftermath of the 15-M movement standing

on a platform of anti-austerity, direct democracy and anti-corruption. In Greece Syriza became the largest party on the back of an anti-austerity campaign and Yanis Varioufakis, a self-confessed 'erratic marxist' (Varoufakis 2015) became the finance minister. Even in America, a country in which left-wing politics are excluded from mainstream discourse, a socialist was making waves as Bernie Sanders ran a strong campaign against Hilary Clinton for the leadership of the Democratic Party. The common sense of the left appeared to be shifting, as many of the movements that had turned their back upon the mainstream political institutions began to find their voices within those very structures.

At The Field, several members of the collective became members of the Labour Party and Momentum, shifting their political activism to also engage with these new possibilities for bringing about social transformation. I recall sitting at The Field one day, idly chatting, when one person jokingly said—*now we've got Corbyn, your PhD is pretty much irrelevant, right*. We laughed, but there was a kernel of truth in this statement: whilst it was certainly not entirely 'irrelevant,' from the renewed standpoint that we found ourselves in it no longer seemed sensible, or even feasible, to consider a social movement seeking something akin to a post-capitalist society only operating through local, immediate, and horizontal forms of folk politics—radical politics had changed. But it was not so simple as a total shift from a participatory and horizontal mode of practicing politics to a representative and vertical one—both forms of politics were, as Srnieck and Williams put it, "necessary but insufficient" (2015: 12). The picture had changed, complexified, opening onto the possibility of a more varied set of political strategies, it had become differentiated.

There is, peculiarly, a resonance with commoning here—the practices at work in the attempted composition of common worlds have shifted as they encounter a different set of demands, a different set of needs and desires, different forms of communication, a different political terrain and different channels for action. Rather than being a departure from the contingent and tentative work of commoning,

this shift towards mainstream institutional politics is its continuation, it is part of the adaptive and responsive practice of wayfaring. The expresser and expressed transform in the expression, common worlds are departed from and new possibilities emerge, the focus of caring practices shifts and at this moment, at this time, with these needs and desires to attend to, the tactics change. But still, the destination cannot be known in advance.

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APPENDIX 1

THE FIELD PRINCIPLES

A group of us have been meeting over the last few months to discuss how we can best use the space. Below is the first document to come out of these discussions. These were written collectively by the group and represent our shared hopes and vision for this project. They are to be read as starting points from which we hope to begin.

LOCAL:

The Field is an independent project that is created and run by people that live in the local area. We want the things that happen here to be relevant to the people who live, work and study in New Cross. We want to build a community around the field, as well as make connections and alliances to other initiatives with the hope to work together on actions, projects and experiments both within The Field and the local area.

DIRECT PARTICIPATION:

We want anybody who comes to The Field to be able to contribute to what is created here. We welcome people joining in with decision-making, events, plans and ideas, physically building and shaping the space and asking questions of what is happening here. This project is not about charity or provision – where one group provides a service for another – but about working together to identify our own needs and provide solutions for ourselves. Our hope is that the Field can serve as an open public space, that we work together to maintain and manage.

TRANSVERSALITY:

We aim for this project to be a place that anyone can use, and anyone can participate in running, though we know that there are many barriers to people being able to participate equally. We aim to be an actively inclusive group, challenging discrimination of any kind, with

the hope to generate a space where differences can be recognised, respected and explored. We also seek to encourage ways of working together that avoid rigid hierarchical structures, whilst remaining conscious of the power dynamics inherent to collective work.

UN-WORK/DE-MONEY:

We want to explore ways of lessening our dependency on money and work, to give ourselves the time to work together to respond to our individual and collective needs and desires, and to the shared problems we face as a neighbourhood. We hope to establish an alternative economy around The Field, based on relationships of solidarity, collaboration, interdependency and care, and for us to explore together ways of sustaining ourselves through the Field.

COMMONING:

We aim to build a social and economic environment of greater interdependence, controlled by ourselves. We are interested in experimenting with the commons as an alternative to the institutions of both the market and the state, and aspire towards The Field becoming a base and catalyst for commoning practices in the area.

CREATIVITY:

We're interested in creativity as a collective, everyday activity, rather than something institutionalised and individualised. We think creative practice holds within it the potential to build new worlds and shatter old ones, to learn to see new possibilities and work through old traumas. We want to reclaim our ability and time to be creative, and use it as a means to experiment with and artistically reorganise our lives.

APPENDIX 2

LIST OF IMAGES

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57	Collective mindmap
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60	View out of back door during renovation
64	Front piece of Leviathan, engraving by Abraham Bosse Drawing of Boyle's air pump
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91	Map of New Cross (NXC website)
93	Visit to Deptford houseboat community (NXC website)
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97	Visit to Burgess Food Project (NXC website)
99	Flyer for workshop on circulation of the commons (NXC website)
100	Model from workshop (NXC website)
101	Model from workshop (NXC website)
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109	Visit to Deptford beach (NXC website)
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191	writing on the wall in 2014 Clearing the garden
192	Unidentified chemicals The side gate Xylene
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194	Writing on the walls in 2014 (x4)
195	Writing on the walls in 2014 Back of front door
196	Front of building during renovation Interior during renovation
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200	Mixing cement Rendering
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222	Regular events board
223	The garden with oven, greenhouse and workshop
	Front of building
258-	Fieldnotes
267	