On the Commons

Triggered by the current financial and real estate crisis, which has increased the urgency to challenge capitalism's mode of operation and develop alternative models of society, there seems to be a growing interest on the part of the left to find concepts that criticize and question capitalism and, at the same time, point beyond it.

It is against this background that we became interested in ideas of the commons, which promise to contain these manifold capacities: to oppose the capitalist production of space and its commodification of ever new fields of former public goods, to reject the dominance of private ownership and to set limits to capitalist accumulation, but also to develop alternatives. Although at first sight the notion of the commons appears to focus mainly on alternative modes of ownership – on collectivity and common use, rather than on private property and exchangeability – the commons have to be understood as more than a radical form of collective dealing with resources. Exceeding notions of peer-to-peer networks (with their emphasis on the free exchange of information within the digital network) or the current interpretation of the commons as a remedy for a readjusted capitalism, the commons are less an economic dimension or good than a set of social relations and a process – commoning.

It is in this notion of the commons as social relation and common practice that we are most interested. Rather than focusing on familiar examples of commoning, be they in the realm of farming and agricultural activities or in the free software movement, this *An Architektur* issue intends to correlate the commons with current social movements in the urban sphere and wants to explore its capacity for furthering societal transformations and developing non-capitalist models of urbanization. The concept of the commons is an optimistic opposition to capitalist society, a grounded vision embedded in Marxist thinking and vocabulary, focusing on the potential of already existing struggles and practices. It can be used to support strategies of de-commodification and re-appropriation, to articulate and conceptualize their potential and develop a process in which the relationship between production and reproduction has to be renegotiated and new forms of decision-making have to be found.

This *An Architektur* issue revolves around a public interview and workshop that we organized in July 2009 in conjunction with the Athens Biennial to which we invited Massimo de Angelis, a political economist based in London and editor of the journal *The Commoner* and Stavros Stavrides, an architect and activist based in Athens, whose academic work focuses on urban spatial theory. How can the commons be related to today's struggles and contribute to the current search for alternatives to capitalism? Can we use this idea to build a new political discourse, to – in Massimo de Angelis' words – move from movement to society, and what would be the spatial implications of this shift?

To contextualize this discussion, the central interview is complemented with excerpts from related texts, deepening some aspects of the discourse on the commons, as well as with material on three cases that came up several times during the discussion and that exemplify different aspects of practicing the commons: First, the early thirteenth-century English commoners who made an argument for people's rights in relation to the authorities, and who by carrying out a certain practice of commons, forced the king to recognize them as legal rights in the Charters of English Liberties. In this case it is important to emphasize that rights were not granted but were recognitions of what had already been taken or practiced. Second, we show the case of the Navarinou Park in Athens that was squatted after the 2008 December uprising, turning a vacant lot into a public park, the claiming of which initiated a long-term process of negotiations about sharing public space. Our final example is the Oaxaca rebellion in Mexico, in which people who started out protesting against authoritarian politics eventually gained control over the entire city center and operated it for half a year in all its complexity.

Athens, July 2009

Beyond Markets or States: Commoning as Collective Practice

Public Interview with Massimo De Angelis and Stavros Stavrides

The term commons occurs in a variety of historical contexts. First of all, it came up in relation to land enclosures during pre- or early capitalism in England; second, in relation to the Italian autonomia movement of the 1960s; and third, today, in the context of file sharing networks, but also increasingly in the alterglobalization movement. Could you tell us more about your interest in the commons?

Massimo: My interest in the commons is grounded in the desire for the *conditions* necessary to promote social justice, sustainability and happy lives for all. As simple as that. These are topics addressed by a large variety of social movements across the world that neither states nor markets have been able to tackle, and for good reasons. State policies in support of capitalist growth are policies that create just the opposite conditions of those we seek, since they promote the working of capitalist markets. The latter in turn reproduce socio-economic injustices and hierarchical divisions of power, environmental catastrophes and stressed out and alienated lives. Especially against the background of the many crises that we are facing today – starting from the recent global economic crisis, and moving to the energy and food crisis, and the associated environmental crisis – thinking and practicing the commons becomes particularly urgent.

A new political discourse: from movement to society

Massimo: Commons are 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. One of the most important challenges we face today is how do we move from movement to society? How do we dissolve the distinctions between inside and outside the movement and promote a social movement that addresses the real challenges that people face in reproducing their own lives? How do we recognize the real divisions of power within the "multitude" and produce new commons that seek to overcome them at different scales of social action? How can we reproduce our lives in new ways and *at the same time* set a limit to capital accumulation? The discourse around the commons, for me, has the potential to do those things. The problem, however, is that capital, too, is promoting the commons in its own way, as coupled to the question of capitalist growth. Nowadays the mainstream paradigm that has governed the planet for the last thirty years – neoliberalism – is at an impasse, which may well be terminal. There are signs that a new governance of capitalism is taking shape, one in which the commons are important. Take for example the discourse of environmental global commons, or that of the oxymoron called sustainable development, which is an oxymoron precisely because development understood as capitalist growth is just the opposite of what is required by sustainability. Here we clearly see the smartest section of capital at work that regards the commons as the basis for new capitalist growth. Yet you cannot have capitalist growth without enclosures. We are at risk to get pushed to become players in the drama of the years to come: capital will need the commons and capital will need enclosures, and the commoners at these two ends of capital will be reshuffled in new planetary hierarchies and divisions.

The three elements of the commons: pooled resources, community and commoning

Massimo: Let me address the question of the definition of the commons [1]. There is a vast literature that regards the commons as resources which people do not need to pay for. What we share is what we have in common. The difficulty with this resource-based definition of the commons is that it 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.

Commons are not simply resources we share – conceptualizing the commons involves three things at the same time. First, all commons involve some sort of common pool resources, understood as non-commodified means of fulfilling peoples needs. Second, the commons are necessarily created and sustained by communities – this of course is a very problematic term and topic, but nonetheless we have to think about it. Communities are sets of commoners who share these resources and who define for themselves the rules through which they are accessed and used. Communities, however, do not necessarily have to be bound to a locality, they could also operate through translocal spaces. They also need not to be understood as homogeneous in their cultural and material features. In addition to these two elements – the pool of resources and the set of communities – the third and most important element in terms of conceptualiz-

❶ **Stefan Meretz on:**

The Commons in a Systematics of Goods

"Commons in einer Gütersystematik", in: *Contraste. Monatszeitung für Selbstorganisation,* Dezember 2009 (translation: *An Architektur*)

Commons are common resources, commons are common goods, commons are social relations. All three of these notions can be found. But which one is correct? All of them are true and always simultaneously!

It is best to take the word "common" as the starting point. What is common to the commons are the resources that are used and cared for, the goods that result from this process, and the social relations that develop thereby. What is common to all commons is the fact that these three aspects are so different with regard to the respective commons that nobody could even approximately describe them.

Commons therefore run counter to the commodity, although the commodity is also a good that is produced in a distinct social form and that in this process of production uses resources. With regard to the commodity, however, traditional economics usually consider the resources from which it is produced and the social form of its production only marginally, or not at all. With the following systematics of goods, I attempt to change that. I thereby choose to put in center stage the qualities of goods that result from the triplet good-resource-social form.

The figure shows the five dimensions of a good. In addition to the already mentioned dimensions *resource* and *social form*, these are *composition, mode of use*, and *legal form*. First, I will present these dimensions. Subsequently, I will emphasize the particularities of the commons.

Composition
The composition describes the sensuous concreteness of the good. Goods can be divided into *material* and *non-material goods*.

Material goods have a physical shape; they can be consumed or destroyed. Their purpose and physical composition are interlinked. Material goods serve their purpose only by means of their *physis*: if their *physis* dissolves, their purpose will also get lost.

Non-material goods, however, are independent from a particular physical shape. This sub-category includes *services*, in which case production and consumption coincide, as well as *preservable non-material goods*. Services often lead to material outcomes (e.g. haircuts, conceptual texts, etc.). They themselves, however, are complete when the product is produced, which means they have been consumed by this point. The material outcome is then included in a material category of goods.

Preservable non-material goods need a physical bearer. With regard to non-digital (analog) goods, the connection between the good and the particular material composition of the bearer can still be close (for example, an analog piece of music on a cassette or LP), whereas digital goods are largely independent from their bearer medium (for example, a digital piece of music on any digital medium).

Use
The notion of use consists of two sub-dimensions: *exclusivity* and *rivalry*. These allow us to grasp issues of access and simultaneous usage.

A good can only be used *exclusively* if access to it is refused to some (e.g. a purchasable good, such as a sandwich). It can be used *inclusively* if access is possible for everybody (e.g., Wikipedia). The use of a good is *rivalrous* or *rival* if one person's use constrains or prevents the possibilities of use of another person (e.g. an apple). A use is *nonrival* if it does not involve constraints (e.g. a formula).

The scheme of use is considered by classical economic theory as the most important characteristic of goods. But it falls short. It puts together two aspects that, although both part of the use, have completely different causes. Exclusion is the result of an *explicit action of exclusion*, thus closely related to social form. Rivalry, however, is closely related to the *composition* of the good: an apple can indeed only be eaten once. For the next delight, another apple has to be found.

Resource
The production of goods requires resources.Sometimes, however, nothing is produced. Instead, already existing resources are used and cared for. In this case, the existing resource itself is the good that has to be preserved (e.g. a lake). More common are mixed cases because no good can be produced without the knowledge resources that others have already created and provided. Resources, in this context, refer only to sources other than human beings.

The figure differentiates between *natural* and *produced* resources. Natural resources are *found* and *unprocessed*, though seldom in completely untouched natural conditions. Produced resources are material or non-material conditions *created* by human beings for future use for the production of goods or resources in the broadest sense.

Social form
The social form describes the mode of re-/production and the relations that human beings form therein. Three social forms of re-/production have to be distinguished: *commodity, subsistence*, and *commons*.

A good obtains the *commodity form* if it is produced for exchange (i.e. sale) on the market in a generalized way. There must be exchange because in capitalism production happens in a disconnected way, privately. The measure of exchange is value, the average socially necessary abstract labor that is needed for the production of the good. The medium of exchange is money. The measure of use is use value as the "other side" of value. The commodity form of goods is thus a social form. It is the indirect way, mediated by exchange, in which goods obtain general, social validity. Scarcity and restriction of access to the good are the preconditions of exchange.

A good obtains *subsistence form* if it is not produced for others in a generalized way but rather for people's own use or for the use of personal others (family, friends, etc.). There is no exchange involved, or only in exceptional cases. Instead, goods are passed on, taken, or given according to socially agreed-upon principles. A transitional form to the commodity form is barter, the immediate exchange of goods, which is not mediated by money.

A good obtains the *commons form* if it is produced or maintained for general others, but if the good is not exchanged, and if the use is usually bound to strict socially agreed-upon principles. It is produced or maintained for general others insofar as these do not have to be personally defined others (as in case of the subsistence form), or only abstract others, to whom there exist no relations (as in case of the commodity form), but specific communities, which agree upon the principles of use and thus the care of the commons.

Legal form

The legal form indicates the possible legal codifications that a good can be subject to: *private property, collective property*, and *free good*. Legal codifications are necessary social principles that are assigned the central role of providing the regulating framework under current conditions, in which social mediation is dominated by partial interests. As soon, however, as general interests are part of the mode of re-/production, the general legal form can step back in favor of concrete socially agreed-upon principles, as is, for example, the case with the commons.

Private pvroperty is a legal form that defines the exclusive access of an owner in relation to a thing. Property abstracts from the composition of a thing, as well as from concrete possession. Private property can be a trading good. It can be sold or valorized.

Collective property is collective private property, or rather private property for collective purposes. Examples include common property and public (state) property. All regulations of private property apply here on principle. The forms of collective property are very varied, for example, stock companies, homeowner communities, state-owned enterprises (such as VEBs in the former GDR).

Free goods (also, no man's lands) are juridically or socially unregulated goods with free access. The often cited "tragedy of the commons" is the tragedy of a no man's land that because of the lack of principles of use becomes overused and destroyed. Such no man's lands still exist today, for example, in the high or deep seas.

Commons – producing life in the commons

Peter Linebaugh expresses the inseparable connection between goods and social activities with the phrase: "There is no commons without commoning," which means that common goods cannot exist without the respective social practices of a community. The size of the respective community is not determined thereby. It depends considerably on the re-/produced resource. The re-/production of a local piece of woodland will probably be undertaken by a local community, while the maintenance of a sound world climate certainly needs the constitution of a global community. Thereby the state *can* take the place of the community and hold the re-/production of the resource in trust. But this is not the only possible way.

Both the size of the community and the principles of use depend upon the qualities of the resource. For a piece of woodland under threat it makes more sense to agree upon more restrictive principles of use than for a resource that is copyable with little effort. In the case of software, one can without hesitation agree upon free access, a principle of use that explicitly does not exclude anyone.

The "freedom" to loot and exploit that often comes with the regime of disconnected private production of goods as commodities finds its limit in the freedom of the others who want to permanently use the respective resource. It is exactly in the prevention of the indiscriminate looting of a resource that the needs of others, who do not currently use it, are integrated. The community is thereby always only the agent that – because of its close connection with the resource – can produce and reproduce it in a way that will ensure that it remains generally useful. It is its "task" to pass on the resource in an improved condition to the next generation. There is, however, no guarantee that the destruction of the commons will never occur. Not least, the history of capitalism is also a history of the often violent destruction and privatization of the commons.

With regard to the commons, it is difficult to distinguish between production and reproduction. Production also contributes to the maintenance of the commons. The principles of use above all ensure that the resources to be consumed will be able to regenerate themselves, or that the social community that produces the copyable digital goods and cares for them will be maintained. One has to, however, differentiate between the common resource as such, and the goods that are produced on the basis of these common resources. Produced goods can take the form of commodities if they are sold on the market. The aim of the socially agreed-upon principles of use created by the community is to limit the usage of the resource and to prevent its overuse and eventual destruction.

Commons – common goods – have always been there. Their historical role and function, however, have dramatically changed. While in the past, they were the general basis of people's activities, they became with the emergence of class societies entangled in different regimes of exploitation. The culmination of the exploitative relationship of the general conditions of life is capitalism, which – supported by an abstract notion of freedom – is not able to ensure the general survival of the human species. This is due to the fact that the general interest is not part of the mode of production but instead has to be additionally imprinted by law and the state onto the blind functioning of partial private interests. It is for this reason that an orientation towards a new, socially-regulated mode of production, in which the general interest will be part of the mode of production itself, is necessary.

Even more. Capitalism has split off crucial moments of the production of social life and dispelled them into the sphere of reproduction. Production as "economy" and reproduction as "private life" have become separated. Structurally blind and only mediated in retrospect, private production was able to expand only because it, on the one hand, permanently did so at the expense of subsistence and commons production and, on the other, was still able to refer to a complementary production of subsistence and commons that could compensate for the (physical and psychological) consequences of the "economy," and indeed had to do so. Commodity production permanently takes from the sphere of the commons but does not give anything in return.

The commons provide the potential to replace the commodity as determining social form of the re-/production of life's social condition. Such a shift, however, will only occur if all spheres of life constitute communities that take back "their" commons and join them with a new logic of re-/production that is oriented towards real needs.

ing the commons is the verb "to common" – the social process that creates and reproduces the commons. This verb was recently brought up by the historian Peter Linebaugh, who wrote a fantastic book on the Magna Carta of thirteenth century England, in which he points to the process of commoning, explaining how the English commoners took matters of their lives in their own hands. They were able to maintain and develop certain customs in common – collecting wood in the forest, or setting up villages on the king's land – which, in turn, forced the king to recognize these as rights. The important thing here is to stress that these rights were not *granted* by the sovereign, but that already existing common customs were rather acknowledged as *de facto* rights.

Enclosures, primitive accumulation and the shortcomings of orthodox marxism

We would like to pick up on your remark on the commons as a new political discourse and practice. How would you relate this new political discourse to already existing social or political theory, namely Marxism? To us it seems as if at least your interpretation of the commons is based a lot on Marxist thinking. Where would you see the correspondences, where lie the differences?

Massimo: The discourse on the commons relates to Marxist thinking in different ways. In the first place, there is the question of interpreting Marx' theory of primitive accumulation ❷. In one of the final chapters of volume one of Capital, Marx discusses the process of expropriation and dispossession of commoners, which he refers to as primitive accumulation, understood as the process that creates the precondition of capitalist development by separating people from their means of production. In the sixteenth to eighteenth century England, this process which became known as enclosure – the enclosure of common land ❸ by the landed nobility in order to use the land for wool production. The commons in these times, however, formed an essential basis for the livelihood of communities. They were fundamental elements for people's reproduction, and this was the case not only in Britain, but all around the world. People had access to the forest to collect wood, which was crucial for cooking, for heating, for a variety of things. They also had access to common grassland to graze their own livestock. The process of enclosure meant fencing off those areas to prevent people from having access to these common resources. This contributed to mass poverty among the commoners, to mass migration and mass criminalization, especially of the migrants. These processes are pretty

much the same today all over the world. Back then, this process created on the one hand the modern proletariat with a high dependence on the wage for its reproduction and the accumulation of capital necessary to fuel the industrial revolution on the other. Marx has shown historically how primitive accumulation was a precondition of capitalist development. One of the key problems of the subsequent Marxist interpretations of primitive accumulation, however, is the meaning of "precondition". The dominant understanding within the Marxist literature – apart from few exceptions like Rosa Luxemburg – has always been of considering primitive accumulation as a precondition fixed in time: dispossession happens *before* capitalist accumulation takes place. After that, capitalist accumulation can proceed, at most exploiting people, but with no need to enclose commons since these enclosures have already happened. From the 1980s onwards, the profound limitations of this interpretation became obvious. Neoliberalism was rampaging around the world as an instrument of global capital. Structural adjustment policies, imposed by the IMF (International Monetary Fund), were promoting enclosures of commons everywhere: from community land and water resources to entitlements, to welfare benefits and education; from urban spaces subject to new pro-market urban design and developments to rural livelihoods threatened by the "externalities" of environmentally damaging industries and development projects to provide energy infrastructures to the export processing zones. These are the processes referred to by the group Midnight Notes Collective as "new enclosures".

The identification of new enclosures in contemporary capitalist dynamics urged us to reconsider traditional Marxist discourse on this point. What the Marxist literature failed to understand is that primitive accumulation is a continuous process of capitalist development that is also necessary for the preservation of advanced forms of capitalism for two reasons. Firstly, because capital seeks boundless expansion, and therefore always needs new spheres and dimensions of life to turn into commodities. Secondly, because social conflict is at the heart of capitalist processes, this means that people do reconstitute commons anew, and they do it all the time. These commons help to reweave the social fabric threatened by previous phases of deep commodification and at the same time provide potential new ground for the next phase of enclosures.

Thus, the orthodox Marxist approach – in which enclosure and primitive accumulation is something that only happens during the formation of a capitalist system in order to set up the initial basis for subsequent capitalist development – is misleading. It happens all the time, today people's common resources are also enclosed for capitalist utilization. For example, rivers are enclosed and taken from local commoners who rely on these resources, in order to build dams for fuelling development projects for industrialization. In India there is the case of the Narmada Valley; in Central America there is the attempt to build a series of dams called the Puebla-Panama Plan. The privatization of public goods in the US and in Europe has to be seen in this way, too. To me, however, it is important to emphasize not only that enclosures happen all the time, but also that there is constant commoning. People again and again try to create and access the resources in a way that is different from the modalities of the market, which is the standard way for capital to access resources. Take for example peer to peer production happening in cyberspace, or the activities in social centers, or simply the institutions people in struggle give themselves to sustain their struggle. One of the main shortcomings of orthodox Marxist literature is not seeing or devaluing the struggles of the commoners. They used to be labeled as backwards, as something that belongs to an era long overcome. But to me, the greatest challenge we have in front of us is to articulate the struggles for commons in the wide range of planetary contexts, at different layers of the planetary wage hierarchy, as a way to overcome the hierarchy itself.

The tragedy of the commons

The notion of the commons as a pre-modern system that does not fit to a modern industrialized society is not only used by Marxists, but on the neoliberal side, too. It is central for neoliberal thinking that self-interest is dominant vis-à-vis common interests and that therefore the free market system is the best possible way to organize society. How can we make a claim for the commons against this very popular argument?

Massimo: One of the early major pro-market critiques of the commons was the famous article "The Tragedy of the Commons" by Garrit Hardin from 1968 [4] [5] Hardin argued that common resources will inevitably lead to a sustainability tragedy because the individuals accessing them would always try to maximize their personal revenue and thereby destroy them. For example, a group of herders would try to get their own sheep to eat as much as possible. If every one did that then of course the resource would be depleted. The policy implications of this approach are clear: the best way to sustain the resource is either through privatization or direct state management. Historical and economic research, however, has shown that existing commons of that type rarely encountered these problems,

❷ **Karl Marx on:**

Primitive Accumulation

"Capital, Vol. 1, Ch. 26: The Secret of Primitive Accumulation", London 1976 (1867), pp. 873-875

We have seen how money is transformed into capital; how surplus-value is made through capital, and how more capital is made from surplus-value. But the accumulation of capital presupposes surplus-value; surplus-value pre-supposes capitalist production; capitalist production presupposes the availability of considerable masses of capital and of labour-power in the hands of commodity producers. The whole movement, therefore, seems to turn around in a never-ending circle, which we can only get out by assuming a primitive accumulation (the "previous accumulation" of Adam Smith) which precedes capitalist accumulation; an accumulation which is not the result of the capitalist mode of production, but its point of departure. (…)

In themselves, money and commodities are no more capital than are the means of production and of subsistence are. They need to be transformed into capital. But this transformation can itself only take place under particular circumstances, which meet together at this point: the confrontation of, and the contact between, two very different kinds of commodity owner; on the one hand, the owners of money, means of production, means of subsistence, who are eager to valorise the sum of values they have appropriated by buying the labour-power of others; on the other hand, free workers, the sellers of their own labour-power, and therefore the sellers of labour. Free workers, in the double sense that they neither form part of the means of production themselves, as would be the case with slaves, serfs, etc., nor do they own the means of production, as would be the case with self-employed peasant proprietors. The free workers are therefore free from, unencumbered by, any means of production of their own. With the polarization of the commodity-market into these tow classes, the fundamental conditions of capitalist production are present. The capital relation presupposes a complete separation between the workers and the ownership of the conditions for the realization of their labour. As soon as capitalist production stands on its own feet, it not only maintains this separation, but reproduces it on a continually extending scale. The process, therefore, which creates the capital-relation can be nothing other than the process which divorces the worker from the ownership of the conditions of his own labour; it is a process which operates two transformations, whereby the social means of subsistence and production are turned into capital, and the immediate producers are turned into wage-labourers. So-called primitive accumulation, therefore, is nothing else than the historical process of divorcing the producer from the means of production. (…)

The economic structure of capitalist society has grown out of the economic structure of feudal society. The dissolution of the latter set free the elements of the former. The immediate producer, the worker, could dispose of his own person only after he had ceased to be bound to the soil and ceased to be the slave or serf of another person. To become a free seller of labour-power, who carries his commodity wherever he can find a market for it, he must further have escaped from the regime of the guilds, their rules for apprentices and journeymen, and their restrictive labour regulations. Hence the historical movement which changes the producers into wage-labourers appears, on the one hand, as their emancipation from serfdom and from the fetters of the guilds, and it is this aspect of the movement which alone exists for our bourgeois historians. But, on the other hand, these newly freed men became sellers of themselves only after they had been robbed of all their own means of production, and of all the guarantees of existence afforded by the old feudal arrangements.

❸ **Karl Marx on:**

Enclosures

"Capital, Vol. 1, Ch. 27: Expropriation of the Agricultural Population from the Land", London 1976 (1867), pp. 878-895

The prelude to the revolution that laid the foundation of the capitalist mode of production was played out in the last third of the fifteenth century and the first few decades of the sixteenth. A mass of "free" and unattached proletarians was hurled onto the labour-market by the dissolution of the bands of feudal retainers, who, as Sir James Steuart correctly remarked, "everywhere uselessly filled house and castle". Although the royal power, itself a product of bourgeois development, forcibly hastened the dissolution of these bands of retainers in its striving for absolute sovereignty, it was by no means the sole cause of it. It was rather that the great feudal lords, in their defiant opposition to the king and Parliament, created an incomparably larger proletariat by forcibly driving of the peasantry from the land, to which the latter had the same feudal title as the lords themselves, and by usurpation of the common lands. The rapid expansion of wool manufacture in Flanders and the corresponding rise in the price of wool in England provided the direct impulse to these evictions. The old nobility had been devoured by the great feudal wars. The new nobility was the child of its time, for which money was the power of all powers. Transformation of arable land into sheepwalks was, therefore, its slogan. (…)

The process of forcible expropriation of the people received a new and terrible impulse in the sixteenth century from the Reformation, and the consequent colossal spoliation of church property. The Catholic church was, at the time of the Reformation, the feudal proprietor of a great part of the soil of England. The dissolution of the monasteries, etc., hurled their inmates into the proletariat. The estates of the church were to a large extent given away to rapacious royal favourites, or sold at a nominal price to speculating farmers and townsmen, who drove out the old-established hereditary sub-tenants in great numbers, and threw their holdings together. The legally guaranteed property of the poorer folk in a part of the church's tithes was quietly confiscated.[1] (…) These immediate results of the Reformation were not its most lasting ones. The property of the church formed the religious bulwark of the traditional conditions of landed property. With its fall these conditions could no longer maintain their existence.[2]

Even in the last few decades of the seventeenth century, the yeomanry, the class of independent peasants, were more numerous than the class of farmers. They had formed the backbone of Cromwell's strength (…). By about 1750 the yeomanry had disappeared,[3] and so, by the last decade of the eighteenth century, had the last trace of the common land of the agricultural labourer. We leave on one side here the purely economic driving forces behind the agricultural revolution. We deal only with the violent means employed.

After the restoration of the Stuarts, the landed proprietors carried out, by legal means, an act of usurpation which was effected everywhere on the Continent without any legal formality. They abolished the feudal tenure of land, i.e. they got rid of all its obligations to the state, "indemnified" the state by imposing taxes on the peasantry and the rest of the people, established for themselves the right of modern private property in estates to which they had only a feudal title, and, finally, passed those laws of settlement, which had the same effect on the English agricultural labourer, mutatis mutandis, as the edict of the Tartar Boris Godunov had on the Russian peasantry.

The "glorious Revolution" brought into power, along with William of Orange,[4] the landed and capitalist profit-grubbers. They inaugurated the new era by practising on a colossal scale the thefts of state lands which had hitherto been managed more modestly. These estates were given away, sold at ridiculous prices, or even annexed to private estates by direct seizure.[5] All this happened without the slightest observance of legal etiquette. The Crown lands thus fraudulently appropriated, together with the stolen Church estates, in so far as these were not lost again during the republican revolution, form the basis of the present princely domains of the English oligarchy.[6] The bourgeois capitalists favoured the operation with the intention, among other things, of converting the land into a merely commercial commodity, extending the area of large-scale agricultural production, and increasing the supply of free and rightless proletarians driven from their land. Apart from this, the new landed aristocracy was the natural ally of the new bankocracy, of the newly hatched high finance, and of the large manufacturers, at that time depending on protective duties. The English bourgeoisie acted quite as wisely on its own interest as did the Swedish burghers, who did the opposite: hand in hand with the bulwark of their economic strength, the peasantry, they helped the kings in their forcible resumption of crown lands from the oligarchy, in the years after 1604 and later on under Charles X. and Charles XI.

Communal property – which is entirely distinct from the state property we have just been considering – was an old Teutonic institution which lived on under cover of feudalism. We have seen how its forcible usurpation, generally accompanied by the turning of arable into pasture land, begins at the end of the fifteenth century and extends into the sixteenth. But, at that time, the process was carried on by means of individual acts of violence against which legislation, for a hundred and fifty years, fought in vain. The advance made by the eighteenth century shows itself in this, that the law itself now becomes the instrument by which the people's land is stolen, although the big farmers made use of their little independent methods as well.[7] The Parliamentary form of the robbery is that of "Bills for Inclosure of Commons", in other words decrees by which the landowners grant themselves the people's land as private property, decrees of expropriation of the people. Sir F. M. Eden refutes his own crafty special pleading, in which he tries to represent communal property as the private property of the great landlords who have taken the place of the feudal lords, when he himself demands a "general Act of Parliament for the enclosure of Commons" (thereby admitting that a parliamentary coup d'état is necessary for its transformation into private property), and moreover calls on the legislature to indemnify the expropriated poor.[8]

Whilst the place of the independent yeoman was taken by tenants at will, small farmers on yearly leases, a servile rabble dependent on the arbitrary will of the landlords, the systematic theft of communal property was of great assistance, alongside the theft of state domains, in swelling those large farms which were called in the eighteenth century capital farms,[9] or merchant farms,[10] and in "setting free" the agricultural population as a proletariat for the needs of industry. (…)

The spoliation of the Church's property, the fraudulent alienation of the state domains, the theft of the common lands, the usurpation of feudal and clan property and its transformation into modern private property under circumstances of ruthless terrorism, all these things were just so many idyllic methods of primitive accumulation. They conquered the field for capitalistic agriculture, made the soil into capital, and created for the urban industries the necessary supply of free and rightless proletarians.

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1 The right of the poor to share in the tithe, is established by the tenour of ancient statutes." (John Debell Tuckett: "A History of the Past and Present State of the Labouring Population, Vol. II.", London 1846, pp. 804-805)

2 Mr. Rogers, although he was at the time Professor of Political Economy in the University of Oxford, the very centre of Protestant orthodoxy, emphasized the pauperization of the mass of the people by the Reformation in his preface to the "History of Agriculture".

3 "A Letter to Sir T. C. Bunbury, Bart., on the High Price of Provisions. By a Suffolk Gentleman", Ipswich, 1795, p. 4. Even that fanatical advocate of the system of large farms, the author of the "Inquiry into the Connection between the Present Price of Provisions, and the Size of Farms, etc." London, 1773, (J. Arbuthnot), says on p. 139: "I most lament the loss of our yeomanry, that set of men who really kept up the independence of this nation; and sorry I am to see their lands now in the hands of monopolizing lords, tenanted out to small farmers, who hold their leases on such conditions as to be little better than vassals ready to attend a summons on every mischievous occasion."

4 On the private morality of this bourgeois hero, among other things: "The large grant of lands in Ireland to Lady Orkney, in 1695, is a public instance of the king's affection, and the lady's influence... Lady Orkney's endearing offices are supposed to have been — fœda labiorum ministeria." (In the Sloane Manuscript Collection, at the British Museum, No. 4224. The Manuscript is entitled: "The Character and Behaviour of King William, Sunderland, etc., as Represented in Original Letters to the Duke of Shrewsbury from Somers, Halifax, Oxford, Secretary Vernon, etc." It is full of curiosa.)

5 "The illegal alienation of the Crown Estates, partly by sale and partly by gift, is a scandalous chapter in English history... a gigantic fraud on the nation." in: Francis William Newman, "Lectures on Political Economy", London, 1851, pp. 129-130 (For details as to how the present large landed proprietors of England came into their possessions, see Howard Evans "Our Old Nobility. By Noblesse Oblige", London, 1879. -- F. E.)

6 Read for example Edmund Burke's pamphlet on the ducal house of Bedford, whose offshoot was Lord John Russell, the "tomtit of liberalism".

7 "The farmers forbid cottagers to keep any living creatures besides themselves and children, under the pretence that if they keep any beasts or poultry, they will steal from the farmers' barns for their support; they also say, keep the cottagers poor and you will keep them industrious, etc., but the real fact I believe, is that the farmers may have the whole right of common to themselves." ("A Political Inquiry into the Consequences of Enclosing Waste Lands", London 1785, p. 75)

8 Frederick Morton Eden: "The State of the Poor, an History of the Labouring Classes in England", London 1797, Preface

9 "Two letters on the Flour Trade and the Dearness of Corn. By a Person in Business", London, 1767, pp. 19-20

10 "An Enquiry into the Causes of the Present High Price of Provisions", London, 1767, p. 11. Note. This good book, published anonymously, was written by the Rev. Nathaniel Forster

because the commoners devise rules for accessing resources. Most of the time, developing methods of ensuring the sustainability of common resources has been an important part of the process of commoning.

There is yet a third way beyond markets or states, and this is community self-management and self-government. This is another reason why it is important to keep in mind that commons, the social dimension of the shared, are constituted by the three elements mentioned before: pooled resources, community and commoning. Hardin could develop a "tragedy of the commons" argument because in his assumption there existed neither community nor commoning as a social praxis, there were only resources in open access.

Furthermore, it is important to note that the problem of the commons cannot be simply described as a question of self-interest versus common interests. Often, the key problem is how individual interests articulate themselves in a way to *constitute* common interests. This is the question of commoning and of community formation, a big issue that leads to many open questions. Within Marxism, there is generally a standard way to consider the question of common interests: these are given by the "objective" conditions in which the "working class" finds itself vis-à-vis capital as the class of the exploited. A big limitation of this standard interpretation is that objectivity is always an inter-subjective agreement. The working class itself is fragmented into a hierarchy of powers, often in conflict of interest with one another, a conflict materially reproduced by the workings of the market. This means that common interests cannot be postulated, they can only be constructed.

Conceptualizing the subject of change

This idea of the common interest that has to be constructed in the first place – what consequences does it have for conceptualizing possible subjects of change? Would this have to be everybody, a renewed form of an avantgarde or a regrouped working class?

Massimo: It is of course not possible to name *the* subject of change. The usefulness of these usual generalizations – working class, proletariat, multitude, etc. – may vary depending on the situation, but generally has little analytical power apart from indicating crucial questions of "frontline". This is precisely because common interests cannot be postulated but can only be constituted through processes of commoning, and this commoning, if of any value, must overcome current material divisions within the working class, proletariat

or multitude [6]. From the perspective of the commons, the wage worker is not *the* emancipatory subject because the capitalist relations also passes through the unwaged labor, often feminized, invisible, and so on. It is not possible to rely on any "vanguard", for two reasons: Firstly, because capitalist measures are pervasive within the stratified global field of production, which implies that it hits everybody. Secondly, because the most "advanced" sections of the global working class – whether in terms of the level of their wage or in terms of the type of their labor (it does not matter if these are called immaterial workers or symbolic analysts) – can materially reproduce themselves only on the basis of their interdependence with the "less advanced" sections of the global working class. It has always been this way in the history of capitalism and I have strong reasons to suspect it will always be like this as long as capitalism is a dominant system.

To put it in another way: the computer and the fiber optical cables necessary for cyber commoning and peer to peer production together with my colleagues in India is predicated on huge water usage for the mass production of computers, on cheap wages paid in some export processing zones, on cheap labor of my Indian high-tech colleagues that I can purchase for my own reproduction, obtained through the devaluation of labor through ongoing enclosures. The subjects along this chain can all be working class in terms of their relation to capital, but their objective position and form of mutual dependency is structured in such a way that their interests are often mutually exclusive.

The commons as community versus the commons as public space

Stavros, what is your approach towards the commons? Would you agree with Massimo's threefold definition and the demands for action he derives there from?

Stavros: First, I would like to bring to the discussion a comparison between the concept of the commons based on the idea of a community and the concept of the public. The community refers to an entity, mainly of a homogeneous group of people, whereas the idea of the public puts an emphasis on the relation between different communities. The public realm can be considered as the actual or virtual space where strangers and different people or groups with diverging forms of life can meet.

The notion of the public urges our thinking about the commons to become more complex. The possibility of encounter in the realm of the public has an effect on how we conceptualize commoning and sharing. We have to acknowledge the difficulties of sharing as well as the contests and negotiations that are necessarily connected with the prospect of sharing. This is why I favor the idea of providing ground to build a public realm and give opportunities for discussing and negotiating what is good for all, rather than the idea of strengthening communities in their struggle to define their own commons. Relating commons to groups of similar people bears the danger of eventually creating closed communities. People thus may define themselves as commoners by excluding others from their milieu, from their own privileged commons. Conceptualizing commons on the basis of the public, however, does not focus on similarities or commonalities but on the very differences between people that can possibly meet on a purposefully instituted common ground.

We have to establish a ground of negotiation rather than a ground of affirmation of what is shared. We don't have simply to raise the moral issues about what it means to share, but to discover procedures through which we can find out what and how to share. Who is this *we*? Who defines this sharing and decides how to share? What about those who don't want to share with us or with whom we do not want to share? How can these relations with those "others" be regulated? For me, this aspect of negotiation and contest is crucial, and the ambiguous project of emancipation has to do with regulating relationships between differences rather than affirming commonalities out of similarities.

Emancipatory struggles: the relation between means and ends

How does this move away from commons based on similarities towards the notion of difference influence your thinking about contemporary social movements or urban struggles?

Stavros: For me, the task of emancipatory struggles or movements is not only what has to be done, but also how it will be done and who will do it. Or, in a more abstract way: How to relate the means to the ends. We have suffered a lot from the idea that the real changes only appear after the final fight, for which we have to prepare ourselves by building some kind of army-like structure that would be able to effectively accomplish a change in the power relations. Focused on these "duties" we tend to postpone any test of our values until after this final fight, as only then we will supposedly have the time to create this new world as a society of equals. But unfortunately, as we know and as we have seen far too often, this

❹ **Garrett Hardin on:**

The Tragedy of the Commons

"The Tragedy of the Commons", in: *Science*, Vol. 162, No. 3859, 1968, p. 1244

The tragedy of the commons develops in this way. Picture a pasture open to all. It is to be expected that each herdsman will try to keep as many cattle as possible on the commons. Such an arrangement may work reasonably satisfactorily for centuries because tribal wars, poaching, and disease keep the numbers of both man and beast well below the carrying capacity of the land. Finally, however, comes the day of reckoning, that is, the day when the long-desired goal of social stability becomes a reality. At this point, the inherent logic of the commons remorselessly generates tragedy.

As a rational being, each herdsman seeks to maximize his gain. Explicitly or implicitly, more or less consciously, he asks, "What is the utility *to me* of adding one more animal to my herd?" This utility has one negative and one positive component.

1. The positive component is a function of the increment of one animal. Since the herdsman receives all the proceeds from the sale of the additional animal, the positive utility is nearly +1.

2. The negative component is a function of the additional overgrazing created by one more animal. Since, however, the effects of overgrazing are shared by all the herdsmen, the negative utility for any particular decision-making herdsman is only a fraction of -1.

Adding together the component partial utilities, the rational herdsman concludes that the only sensible course for him to pursue is to add another animal to his herd. And another; and another... But this is the conclusion reached by each and every rational herdsman sharing a commons. Therein is the tragedy. Each man is locked into a system that compels him to increase his herd without limit – in a world that is limited. Ruin is the destination toward which all men rush, each pursuing his own best interest in a society that believes in the freedom of the commons. Freedom in a commons brings ruin to all.

idea has turned out to be a nightmare. Societies and communities built through procedures directed by hierarchical organizations unfortunately exactly mirrored these organizations. The structure of the militant avantgarde tends to be reproduced as a structure of social relations in the new community.

Thus, an essential question within emancipatory projects is: Can we as a group, as a community or as a collectivity reflect our ideas and values in the form that we choose to carry out our struggle? We have to be very suspicious about the idea of the avantgarde, of those elected (or self-selected) few, who know what has to be done and whom the others should follow. To me, this is of crucial importance. We can no longer follow the old concept of the avantgarde if we really want to achieve something different from today's society.

Here are very important links to the discussion about the commons, especially in terms of problematizing the collectivity of the struggle: Do we intend to make a society of sharing by sharing, or do we intend to create this society after a certain period in which we do not share? Of course, there are specific power relations between us, but does this mean that some have to lead and others have to obey the instructors? Commons could be a way to understand not only what is at stake but also how to get there. I believe that we need to create forms of collective struggle that match collective emancipatory aims, forms that also can show us what is worthy of dreaming about an emancipated future.

Commoning inside the capitalist structure

Massimo, you put much emphasis on the fact, that commoning happens all the time, also under capitalist conditions. Can you give a current example? Where would you see this place of resistance? For Marx it was the factory, based on the analysis of the exploitation of labor, which gave him a clear direction for a struggle.

Massimo: The factory for Marx was a twofold space: It was the space of capitalist exploitation and discipline – this could of course also be the office, the school, or the university – but it was also the space in which *social cooperation of labor* occurred without the immediate mediation of money. Within the factory we have a non-commoditized space, which would fit to our definition of the commons as the space of the shared at a very general level.

Why non-commoditized?

❺ Elinor Ostrom, Joanna Burger, Christopher B. Field, Richard B. Norgaard, David Policansky on:

Local Lessons and Global Challenges of the Commons

"Revisiting the Commons: Local Lessons, Global Challenges", in: *Science*, Vol. 284, No. 5412, Apr. 1999, pp. 278-282

Thirty years have passed since Garrett Hardin's influential article "The Tragedy of the Commons".[1] At first, many people agreed with Hardin's metaphor that the users of a commons are caught in an inevitable process that leads to the destruction of the very resource on which they depend. The "rational" user of a commons, Hardin argued, makes demands on a resource until the expected benefits of his or her actions equal the expected costs. Because each user ignores costs imposed on others, individual decisions cumulate to a tragic overuse and the potential destruction of an open-access commons. Hardin's proposed solution was "either socialism or the privatism of free enterprise".[2]

The starkness of Hardin's original statement has been used by many scholars and policy-makers to rationalize central government control of all common-pool resources[3] and to paint a disempowering, pessimistic vision of the human prospect.[4] Users are pictured as trapped in a situation they cannot change. Thus, it is argued that solutions must be imposed on users by external authorities. Although tragedies have undoubtedly occurred, it is also obvious that for thousands of years people have self-organized to manage common-pool resources, and users often do devise long-term, sustainable institutions for governing these resources.[5-7] It is time for a reassessment of the generality of the theory that has grown out of Hardin's original paper. (…) An important lesson from the empirical studies of sustainable resources is that more solutions exist than Hardin proposed. Both government ownership and privatization are themselves subject to failure in some instances. (…)

To better understand common-pool resource problems, we must separate concepts related to resource systems and those concerning property rights. We use the term common-pool resources (CPRs) to refer to resource systems regardless of the property rights involved. CPRs include natural and human constructed resources in which (i) exclusion of beneficiaries through physical and institutional means is especially costly, and (ii) exploitation by one user reduces resource availability for others.[8] These two characteristics – difficulty of exclusion and subtractability – create potential CPR dilemmas in which people following their own short-term interests produce outcomes that are not in anyone's long-term interest. When resource users interact without the benefit of effective rules limiting access and defining rights and duties, substantial free-riding in two forms is likely: overuse without concern for the negative effects on others, and a lack of contributed resources for maintaining and improving the CPR itself. (…)

Four broad types of property rights have evolved or are designed in relation to CPRs. When valuable CPRs are left to an open-access regime, degradation and potential destruction are the result. The proposition that resource users cannot themselves change from no property rights (open access) to group or individual property, however, can be strongly rejected on the basis of evidence: Resource users through the ages have done just that.[5-7, 8, 9, 11] Both group-property and individual-property regimes are used to manage resources that grant individuals varying rights to access and use of a resource. The primary difference between group property and individual property is the ease with which individual owners can buy or sell a share of a resource. Government property involves ownership by a national, regional, or local public agency that can forbid or allow use by individuals. Empirical studies show that no single type of property regime works efficiently, fairly, and sustainably in relation to all CPRs. CPR problems continue to exist in many regulated settings.[10] It is possible, however, to identify design principles associated with robust institutions that have successfully governed CPRs for generations.[11] (…)

The prediction that resource users are led inevitably to destroy CPRs is based on a model that assumes all individuals are selfish, norm-free, and maximizers of short-run results. This model explains why market institutions facilitate an efficient allocation of private goods and services, and it is strongly supported by empirical data from open, competitive markets in industrial societies.[12] However, predictions based on this model are not supported in field research or in laboratory experiments in which individuals face a public good or CPR problem and are able to communicate, sanction one another, or make new rules.[13] Humans adopt a narrow, self- interested perspective in many settings, but can also use reciprocity to overcome social dilemmas.[14] Users of a CPR include (I) those who always behave in a narrow, self-interested way and never cooperate in dilemma situations (free-riders); (II) those who are unwilling to cooperate with others unless assured that they will not be exploited by free-riders; (III) those who are willing to initiate reciprocal cooperation in the hopes that others will return their trust; and (IV) perhaps a few genuine altruists who always try to achieve higher returns for a group.

Whether norms to cope with CPR dilemmas evolve without extensive, self-conscious design depends on the relative proportion of these behavioral types in a particular setting. Reciprocal cooperation can be established, sustain itself, and even grow if the proportion of those who always act in a narrow, self-interested manner is initially not too high.[15] When interactions enable those who use reciprocity to gain a reputation for trustworthiness, others will be willing to cooperate with them to overcome CPR dilemmas, which leads to increased gains for themselves and their offspring.[16] Thus, groups of people who can identify one another are more likely than groups of strangers to draw on trust, reciprocity, and reputation to develop norms that limit use. In earlier times, this restricted the size of groups who relied primarily upon evolved and shared norms. Citizen-band radios, tracking devices, the Internet, geographic information systems, and other aspects of modern technology and the news media now enable large groups to monitor one another's behavior and coordinate activities in order to solve CPR problems. (…)

The farmer-managed irrigation systems of Nepal are examples of well-managed CPRs that rely on strong, locally crafted rules as well as evolved norms.[18] Because the rules and norms that make an irrigation system operate well are not visible to external observers, efforts by well-meaning donors to replace

primitive, farmer-constructed systems with newly constructed, government-owned systems have reduced rather than improved performance.[19] Government-owned systems are built with concrete and steel headworks, in contrast to the simple mud, stone, and trees used by the farmers. However, the cropping intensity achieved by farmer-managed systems is significantly higher than on government systems. In a regression model of system performance, controlling for the size of the system, the slope of the terrain, variation in farmer income, and the presence of alternative sources of water, both government ownership and the presence of modem headworks have a negative impact on water delivered to the tail end of a system, hence a negative impact on overall system productivity.[18] (…)

The empirical and theoretical research stimulated over the past 30 years by Garrett Hardin's article has shown that tragedies of the commons are real, but not inevitable. Solving the dilemmas of sustainable use is neither easy nor error-free even for local resources. But a scholarly consensus is emerging regarding the conditions most likely to stimulate successful self-organized processes for local and regional CPRs.[6, 17, 20] Attributes of resource systems and their users affect the benefits and costs that users perceive. For users to see major benefits, resource conditions must not have deteriorated to such an extent that the resource is useless, nor can the resource be so little used that few advantages result from organizing. Benefits are easier to assess when users have accurate knowledge of external boundaries and internal microenvironments and have reliable and valid indicators of resource conditions. When the flow of resources is relatively predictable, it is also easier to assess how diverse management regimes will affect long-term benefits and costs.

Users who depend on a resource for a major portion of their livelihood, and who have some autonomy to make their own access and harvesting rules, are more likely than others to perceive benefits from their own restrictions, but they need to share an image of how the resource system operates and how their actions affect each other and the resource. Further, users must be interested in the sustainability of the particular resource so that expected joint benefits will outweigh current costs. If users have some initial trust in others to keep promises, low-cost methods of monitoring and sanctioning can be devised. Previous organizational experience and local leadership reduces the users' costs of coming to agreement and finding effective solutions for a particular environment. In all cases, individuals must overcome their tendency to evaluate their own benefits and costs more intensely than the total benefits and costs for a group. Collective-choice rules affect who is involved in deciding about future rules and how preferences will be aggregated. Thus, these rules affect the breadth of interests represented and involved in making institutional changes, and they affect decisions about which policy instruments are adopted.[21] (…)

The lessons from local and regional CPRs are encouraging, yet humanity now faces new challenges to establish global institutions to manage biodiversity, climate change, and other ecosystem services.[22] (…) In the end, building from the lessons of past successes will require forms of communication, information, and trust that are broad and deep beyond precedent, but not beyond possibility. Protecting institutional diversity related to how diverse peoples cope with CPRs may be as important for our long-run survival as the protection of biological diversity. There is much to learn from successful efforts as well as from failures.

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Massimo: Because when I work in a capitalist enterprise, I may get a wage in exchange for my labor power, but in the moment of production I do not participate in any monetary transactions. If I need a tool, I ask you to pass me one. If I need an information, I do not have to pay a copyright. In the factory – that we are using here as a metaphor for the place of capitalist production – we may produce commodities, but not by means of commodities, since goods have stopped to be commodities in the very moment they became inputs in the production process. I refer here to the classical Marxian distinction between labor power and labor. In the factory, labor power is sold as a commodity, and after the production process, products are sold. In the very moment of production, however, it is only labor that counts, and labor as a social process is a form of commoning. Of course this happens within particular social relations of exploitation, so maybe we should not use the same word, commoning, to not confuse it with the commoning made by people "taking things into their own hands". So, we perhaps should call it distorted commoning, where the measure of distortion is directly proportional to the degree of the subordination of commoning to social measures coming from outside the commoning, the one given by management, by the requirement of the market, etc. In spite of its distortions, I think, it is important to consider what goes on inside the factory also as a form of commoning. This is an important distinction that refers to the question of how capital uses the commons. I am making this point because the key issue is really not only how we conceive of commoning within the spheres of commons, but how we reclaim the commons of our production that are distorted through the imposition of capital's measure of things.

This capitalist measure of things is also imposed across places of commoning. The market is a system that articulates social production at a tremendous scale, and we have to find ways to replace this mode of articulation. Today, most of what is produced in the common – whether in a distorted capitalist commons or alternative commons – has to be turned into money so that commoners can access other resources. This implies that commons can be pit against one another in processes of market competition. Thus we might state as a guiding principle that whatever is produced in the common must stay in the common in order to expand, empower and sustain the commons independently from capitalist circuits.

Stavros: This topic of the non-commodified space within the capitalist production is linked to the idea of the immaterial labor, theorized, among others, by Negri and Hardt. Although I am not very much convinced

by the whole theory of the empire and the multitude, the idea that within the capitalist system the conditions of labor tend to produce commons, even though capitalism, as a system acts against commons and for enclosures, is very attractive to me. Negri and Hardt argue that with the emergence of immaterial labor – which is based on communicating and exchanging knowledge, not on commodified assets in the general sense, but rather on a practice of sharing – we have a strange new situation: The change in the capitalist production from material to immaterial labor provides the opportunity to think about commons that are produced in the system but can be extracted and potentially turned against the system. We can take the notion of immaterial labor as an example of a possible future beyond capitalism, where the condition of labor produces opportunities of understanding what it means to work in common but also to produce commons.

Of course there are always attempts to control and enclose this sharing of knowledge, for example by the enclosure acts attempting to control the internet, this huge machine of sharing knowledge and information. I do not want to overly praise the internet, but this spread of information to a certain degree always contains the seed of a different commoning against capitalism. There is always both, the enclosures, but also the opening of new possibilities of resistance. This idea is closely connected to those in the anti-capitalist movement who claim that there is always the possibility of finding within the system the very means through which you can challenge it. Resistance is not about an absolute externality or the utopia of a good society. It is about becoming aware of opportunities occurring within the capitalist system and trying to turn them against it.

Massimo: We must, however, also make the point that seizing the internal opportunities that capitalism creates can also become the object of cooptation. Take as an example the capitalist use of the commons in relation to seasonal workers. Here commons can be used to undermine wages or, depending on the specific circumstances, they can also constitute the basis for stronger resistance and greater working class power. The first case could be seen, for example, in South African enclaves during the Apartheid regime, where lower level of wages could be paid because seasonal workers were returning to their homes and part of the reproduction was done within these enclaves, outside the circuits of capital. The second case is when migrant seasonal workers could sustain a strike precisely because their livelihoods is not completely dependent on the wage due to their access to common resources, which happened, for example, in Northern Italy a few decades ago. Thus, the relation between capitalism and the commons is always a question of power relations in a specific historic context.

The role and reactions of the state

How would you evaluate the importance of the commons today? Would you say that the current financial and economic crisis and the concomitant delegitimation of the neoliberal model brought forward, at least to a certain extent, the discussion and practice of the commons? And what are the respective reactions of the authorities and of capitalism?

Massimo: In every moment of crisis we see an emergence of commons to address questions of livelihood in one way or the other: In the crisis in the 1980s, in Britain there was the emergence of squatting, alternative markets, or so called Local Exchange Trading Systems, things that also came up in the crisis in Argentina in 2001.

Regarding the form in which capitalism reacts and reproduces itself in relation to the emergence of commoning, three main processes can be observed: First, the criminalization of alternatives in every process of enclosure, both historically and today. Second, a temptation of the subjects fragmented by the market to return to the market. And third, a specific mode of governance that ensures the subordination of individuals, groups and their values, needs and aspirations under the market process.

But then, how can we relate the commons and commoning to state power? Are the commons a means to overcome or fight the state or do you think they need the state to guarantee a societal structure? Would, at least in theory, the state finally be dissolved through commoning, being made useless it would thus disappear? Stavros, could you elaborate on this?

Stavros: Sometimes we tend to ignore the fact that what happens in the struggle for commons is always related to specific situations in specific states, with their respective antagonisms. One always has to put oneself in relation to other groups in the society. And of course social antagonisms take many forms including those produced by or channeled through different social institutions. The state is not simply an engine that is out there and regulates various aspects of production or various aspects of the distribution of power. The state, I believe, is part of every social relation. It is

not only a regulating mechanism but it also produces a structure of institutions that mold social life. To be able to resist these dominant forms of social life we have to eventually struggle against these forces which make the state a very dominant reality in our societies.

In today's world, we often interpret the process of globalization as the withering away of states, so that states are no longer important. But actually the state is the guarantor of the necessary conditions for the reproduction of the system. It is a guarantor of violence, for example, which is not a small thing. Violence, not only co-optation, is a very important means of reproducing capitalism, because by no means do we live in societies of once and for all legitimated capitalist values. Instead, these values must be continuously imposed, often by force. The state is also a guarantor of property and land rights, which are no small things either, because property rights establish forms of control on various aspects of our life. Claims of property rights concern specific places that belong to certain people or establishments, which might also be international corporations. The state, therefore, is not beyond globalization; it is in fact the most specific arrangement of powers against which we can struggle.

Building a network of resistance

Stavros: I am thus very suspicious or reserved about the idea that we can build our own small enclaves of otherness, our small liberated strongholds that could protect us from the power of the state. I don't mean that it is not important to build communities of resistance, but rather than framing them as isolated enclaves we should attempt to see them as a potential network of resistance representing only a part of the struggle. If you tend to believe that a single community with its commons and its enclosed parameter could be a stronghold of liberated otherness, then you are bound to be defeated. You cannot avoid the destruction that comes from the power of the state and its mechanisms. Therefore we need to produce collaborations between different communities as well as to understand ourselves not only as belonging to just one of these communities. We should rather understand ourselves as members of different communities in the process of emerging.

But how can it be organized? What could this finally look like?

Stavros: The short answer is a federation of communities. The long answer is that it has to do with the conditions of the struggle. I think that we are not for the replacement of the capitalist state by another kind of state. We come from long traditions, both communist and anarchist, of striving for the destruction of the state. I think we should find ways in today's struggles to reduce the presence of the state, to oblige the state to withdraw, to force the state to be less violent in its responses. To seek liberation from the jurisdiction of the state in all its forms, that are connected with economical, political and social powers. But for sure the state will be there until something – not simply a collection of struggles, but something of a qualitatively different form – will happen that produces a new social situation. Until then we cannot ignore the existence of the state because it is always forming its reactions in terms of what we choose to do.

Ongoing negotiations: the Navarinou Park in Exarcheia, Athens

Massimo: Yes, I agree that is crucial. The state is present in all these different processes, but it is also true that we have to find ways to disarticulate these powers. One example is the occupied park in Exarcheia, a parking lot that was turned into a park through an ongoing process of commoning. The presence of the state is very obvious, just 50 meters around the corner there is an entire bus full of riot police and a series of guards. One of the problems in relation to the park is the way in which the actions of the police could be legitimized by making use of complaints about the park by its neighbors. And there are of course reasons to complain. Some of the park's organizers told me that apparently every night some youth hang out there, drinking and trashing the place, making noise and so on. The organizers approached them, asking them not to do that. And they replied: "Oh, are you the police?" They were also invited to participate in the assembly during the week, but they showed no interest. According to some people I have interviewed, they were showing an individualistic attitude, one which we have internalized by living in this capitalist society; the idea that this is my space where I can do whatever I want – without, if you like, a process of commoning that would engage with all the issues of the community. But you have to somehow deal with this problem, you cannot simply exclude those youngsters, not only as a matter of principle, but it also would be completely deleterious to do so. If you just exclude them from the park you have failed to make the park an inclusive space. If you do not exclude them and they continue with their practices, it would further alienate the local community and provide an opening for the police and legitimization of their actions. So in a situation like this you can

❻ **Massimo De Angelis on:**

Post-Operaismo, today's Class Composition and a Non-Messianic Notion of the Multitude

"Thoughts on Workerism after Mario Tronti's talk", Blog Entry of December 11th, 2006, online: www.commoner.org.uk/blog/?p=100

It has been suggested to me (…) that what distinguishes what we may call, broadly speaking, autonomist Marxism with other Marxist approaches is the argument that the "working class" is the agent of transformation that pushes capital on the defence and forces its "economic" development rather then, on the contrary, being capital that "overdetermines" the rest by means of its agency. This suggestion furthermore is accompanied by the claim that this view is false, since capital has "more power". In my view, the insight of 1960s Operaismo with respect to working class agency were not falsified in light of 1980s capital's agency, they were simply temporally bounded. Class struggles, in a process-like manner, have at least two broad actors, not one, and their tragic-comic struggles develop through highs and lows for both sides, "scoring points" for both sides. The process of this historical development of struggle, this very *process* of "point scoring" for one or the other, is the stuff of capitalist development. The problem is that acknowledging this does not give us any hint of how to go beyond capital and the very specific form of struggle shaping its development.

And I think it is at this point that it is important to underline that what distinguishes "autonomist Marxism" in its *operaiste* roots to other forms of Marxism, is a specific theoretical attitude, one that takes the processes that traditionally we understand as "political" and "economic", as one. (…) [It has been suggested] that the key problematic for Operaismo in the 1960s was posed by the question: "How to unite thinking and political practice within a class composition"? The class composition that they referred to then was of course the mass worker of the assembly line, those who not only did not love their work, but who hated it. Those whose political subjectivity the operaisti understood in terms of "refusal of work". What the operaisti then forgot to understand as part of the class composition was how mass workers were articulated to reproduction loops, the unwaged work of women reproducing stressed out and drained labour power, the political subjectivity of the women movement that were just about to explode in kitchens, streets and popular assemblies that contributed to bring the Fordist *mode of reproduction* into crisis. In other words, they failed to understand how even then, in the mids of the 1960s, the "working class" was a plural and hierarchically divided social subject, a correction made later by a string of feminist writers. (…)

But the question remains: how to bring together thinking and political practices with the questions it generate within a particular class composition, the class composition(s) of *our* times?

It goes without saying that the methodological framework stated above – as any other – does not guarantee "correct" answers, or indeed does not necessarily generate useful questions. The research program of what is called Post-Operaismo for example, is very much within the general theoretical and methodological framework described above ("uniting theory and practice within a particular class composition"), but I have serious reservations with respect to its way to frame and address the problems at stake in today's world, since I do not agree with its way to understand today's class composition.

The notion of the multitude (a la Hardt and Negri), is certainly a way to pose the problematic of class composition today. But this "whole of singularities" – as the notion of multitude is often referred to – is understood as "whole" by means of a specific social subject – immaterial labour – whose labour activities and forms of social cooperation are regarded as going beyond capital's measure. In other words, in Post-Operaismo there is a messianic element that defines today's class composition, one that sees the commons constituted by social cooperation of a plurality of subjects as given by the form of social cooperation of immaterial labourers. This is messianic immanence (or messianic "tendency", if you believe this immaterial labour is a tendency waiting to actualise itself). The consequent political strategy is not based on the problematisation of how to constitute commons beyond capital and vis-à-vis its strategies to impose its measures of human activities and consequent reproduction of division along the wage hierarchy (since in this approach these commons are already *given* by the forms of social cooperation of immaterial labour). Instead the political question becomes how to seize the "administrative nexus" tying immaterial labour to capital, how to cut the umbilical cord keeping immaterial labour tied to a parasitic capital and releasing its full potentials.

The most relevant critique of this approach is twofold: First, more specifically, the fact that immaterial labour is not beyond capital's measure, that capital continuously strategises ways to subjugate creativity, affects and intelligence to its measure, and that struggles over measure therefore are existing today on the realm of immaterial labour as they were – in different forms – on the assembly line of Fordism. Second, more broadly, that capital has always relied on some forms of articulation and interrelation between "high" and "low" points of development, between extraction of absolute and relative surplus value, between "enclosures", primitive accumulation and "accumulation" proper. It goes without saying that today it relies on new forms of these articulations.

But of course there is a rational kernel in the notion of multitude. When we take the notion of multitude and get rid of its messianic element that sees the common crossing the whole of singularities as given by a given quality of labour *qua* immaterial labour – what is left is a big puzzle. What is left is a heterogeneous proletariat divided in a wage(unwaged) planetary hierarchy for which free and enriching commons largely (although not uniquely) remain a project, something to be constituted and weaved together, rather than a given. Getting rid of the messianic element means to recognise that the common weaving across this multitude of subjects is the struggle against the subjection to a mode of measuring of their life activities (whether material or immaterial) that pit one livelihoods against the other at different levels of the wage hierarchy. And when this is recognised, the problematic of our commons, rather than the commons of capital, is an open political problematic.

Two observations must be made at this point:
In the first place, as I have argued before, this non-

messianic presence of the multitude is something that has always existed in the history of the capitalist mode of production. We simply were not equipped to recognise it. The "equipment" emerged with the waves of struggles – from women to black movements, from gays and lesbians to peasants of the global south, from slum squatters to students – in the 1960s and 1970s that made it impossible for any serious observer of and participant in our world to avoid coming to terms with diversity and plurality, and its dignity and autonomy. From these struggles also emerged the recognition that the classic texts of Marxism were missing something out which was fundamental, such as the invisible work of reproduction. Second, this non-messianic notion of multitude, as mentioned, opens up problems, rather than solving them. If the revolutionary subject is composite, diverse and structured within a wage hierarchy (meaning, the relation with one another are some type of power relations), and the processes that recreate this structuration are processes of competition against one another through which we reproduce livelihoods, if, in other words, what reproduces hierarchy is the *capitalist mode of commoning* (producing in common) how do we go beyond it? Certainly not by assuming we are already beyond it, or that the tendency is going beyond it! The only way it seems to me is by the production of *other* social processes, of *other modes of commoning*.

The movements that in the last two decades have increasingly posed the problematic of commoning (…) with their emphasis on processes rather than mainly on goals, seem to me to point at the right direction, at the right problematics. Once we reject messianism, the political problematics become one with the context and the contingent. In what other modes shall we produce in commons? How does our production in commons provides us with strength and power vis-à-vis the alienating production in commons as defined by capital's measure? The immanent reply to this question coincides with a process of political recomposition, for which we cannot be external observers, but internal co-producers.

see some practical answers to those crucial questions we have discussed, there are no golden rules.

Stavros: I would interpret the situation slightly different. Those people you refer to were not saying that they have a right as individual consumers to trash the park. They were saying that the park is a place for their community, a place for alternative living or for building alternative political realms. They certainly refer to some kind of commoning, but only to a very specific community of commoners. And this is the crucial point: They did not consider the neighbors, or at least the neighbors' habitude, as part of their community. Certain people conceive of this area as a kind of liberated stronghold in which they don't have to think about those others outside. Because in the end: Who are those others outside? They are those who "go to work everyday and do not resist the system". To me, these are cases through which we are tested, through which our own ideas about what it means to share or what it means to live in public are tested. We can discuss the park as a case of an emergent alternative public space. And this public space can be constituted only when it remains contestable in terms of its use. Public spaces which do not simply impose the values of a sovereign power, are those spaces produced and inhabited through negotiating exchanges between different groups of people. As long as contesting the specific character and uses of alternative public spaces does not destroy the collective freedom to negotiate between equals, contesting should be welcome. You have to be able to produce places where different kinds of lives can coexist in terms of mutual respect. Therefore any such space cannot simply belong to a certain community that defines the rules, there has to be an ongoing open process of rulemaking.

Massimo: There are two issues here. First of all, I think this case shows that whenever we try to produce commons, what is also in need is the production of the respective community and its forms of commoning. The Navarinou Park as a new commons and the community cannot simply consist of the organizers. The organizers I have talked to act pretty much as some sort of "commons' entrepreneurs", a group of people who are trying to facilitate the meeting of different communities in the park, to promote encounters possibly leading to more sustained forms of commoning. Thus, when we are talking about emergent commons like these ones, we are talking about spaces of negotiation across diverse communities, the bottom line of what Stavros referred to as public space. Yet, we also cannot talk about the park as being a public space in the

usual sense, as a free for all space, one for which the individual does not have to take responsibility, like a park managed by the local authority.

The second point is that by the park another fundamental aspect of commoning can be exemplified – the role of reproduction. We have learned from feminists throughout the last few decades that for every visible work of production there is an invisible work of reproduction. The people who want to keep the park will have to work hard for its reproduction. This does not only mean cleaning the space continuously, but also reproducing the legitimacy to claim this space vis-à-vis the community, vis-à-vis the police and so on. Thinking about the work of reproduction actually is one of the most fundamental aspects of commoning. How will the diverse communities around this park come together to *share* the work of reproduction? That is a crucial test for any commons.

Beyond representative democracy: the collective self-government of the Zapatistas

But how can we imagine this constant process of negotiation other than on a rather small local level?

Stavros: To me this is not primarily a question of scale, it is more of a fundamental question on how to approach these issues. But if you want to talk about a larger scale initiative, I would like to refer to the Zapatista movement. For the Zapatistas, the process of negotiation takes two forms: inter-community negotiation, which involves people participating in assemblies, and negotiations with the state, which involves the election of representatives. The second form was abruptly conceded as the state has chosen to ignore any agreement reached. But the inter-community negotiation process has evolved to a truly alternative form of collective self-government. Zapatistas have established autonomous regions inside the area of the Mexican state in order to provide people with the opportunity to actually participate in self-governing those regions. To participate not simply in a kind of representative democracy but in actually getting involved themselves. Autonomous communities established a rotation system that might look pretty strange to us, with a regular change every 15 or 30 days. So, if you become some kind of local authority of a small municipality, then, just when you start to know what the problems are and how to tangle with them, you have to leave the position to another person. Is this logical? Does this system bring about results that are similar to other forms of governing, or does it simply produce chaos? The Zapatistas insist that it is more important that all the people come into these positions and get trained in a form of administration that expresses the idea of "governing by obeying to the community" (*mandar obedeciendo*). The rotation system effectively prevents any form of accumulation of individual power. This system might not be the most effective in terms of administration but it is effective in terms of building and sustaining this idea of a community of negotiation and mutual respect.

Yes, establishing rules and imposing them is more effective, but it is more important to collectively participate in the process of creating and checking the rules, if you intend to create a different society. We have to go beyond the idea of a democracy of "here is my view, there is yours – who wins?" We need to find ways of giving room to negotiate the differences. Perhaps I tend to overemphasize the means, the actual process and not the effective part of it, its results. There are of course a lot of problems in the Zapatista administration system but all these municipalities are more like instances of a new world trying to emerge and not prototypes of what should become.

We can also take as an example the Oaxaca rebellion, which worked very well. Those people have actually produced a city-commune, which to me is even more important than the glorious commune of Paris. We had a very interesting presentation by someone from Oaxaca here in Athens explaining how during those days they realized that "they could do without them" – them meaning the state, the power, the authorities. They could run the city collectively through communal means. They had schools, and they had captured the radio and TV station from the beginning on. They ran the city facing all the complexities that characterize a society. Oaxaca is a rather small city of around 600,000 inhabitants and of course it is not Paris. But we had the chance to see these kind of experiments, new forms of self-management that can produce new forms of social life – and as we know, the Oaxaca rebellion was brutally suppressed. But generally speaking, until we do not see these new forms of society emerging we don't know what they could be like. And I believe that we have to accept that!

About principles: connecting discourse to practice

Stavros, you mentioned that the administration and rotation system of the Zapatistas should not be taken as a prototype of what should come. Does this mean that you reject any kind of idea of or reflection about models for a future society?

Stavros: I think it is not a problem of a model. We

cannot say that some kind of model exists nor should we strive for it. But, yes, we need some kind of guiding principles. For me, however, it is important to emphasize that the commons cannot be treated only as an abstract idea, they are inextricably intertwined with existing power relations. The problem is, how can we develop principles through which we can judge which communities actually fight for commons? Or the other way round, can struggles for commons also be against emancipatory struggles? How do we evaluate this? I think in certain historical periods, not simply contingencies, you can have principles by which you can judge. For example, middle class neighborhoods that tend to preserve their enclave character will produce communities fighting for commons but against the idea of emancipation. Their notion of commons is based on a community of similar people, a community of exclusion and privilege.

Principles are however not only discursive gestures, they have to be seen in relation to the person or the collective subject who refers to these principles in certain discourses and actions. Therefore, reference to principles could be understood as a form of performative gesture. If I am saying that I am for or against those principles what does this mean for my practice? Principles are not only important in judging discursive contests but can also affect the way a kind of discourse is connected to practice. For example, if the prime minister of Greece says in a pre-election speech that he wants to eradicate all privileges we of course know he only means certain privileges for certain people. So, what is important is not only the stating of principles, but also the conditions under which this statement acquires its meaning. That is why I am talking about principles presuming that we belong to the same side. I am of course also assuming that we enter this discussion bearing some marks of certain struggles, otherwise it would be a merely academic discussion.

If we were left alone, what would we do?

Let's imagine that we were left alone, what would we do? Do we still need the state as an overall structure or opponent? Would we form a state ourselves, build communities based on commons or turn to egoistic ways of life? Maybe this exercise can bring us a little further…

Massimo: I dare to say that if we were left alone we may end up doing pretty much the same things as we are now: keep the race going until we re-program ourselves to sustain different types of relations. In other words, you can assume that we were left alone and still work in auto-pilot because nobody knows what else to do. There is a lot of learning that needs to be done. There are a lot of prejudices we have built by becoming – at least to a large extent – homo economicus, with our cost-benefit calculus in terms of money. There is a lot of junk that needs to be shed, other things that need to be valorized, and other still that we need to just realize.

Yet auto-pilots cannot last for ever. In order to grow, the capitalist system must enclose, but enclosures imply strategic agency from the part of capital. Lacking this because of the assumption that we were left alone, the system would come to a standstill and million of people would ask themselves: What now? How do we reproduce our livelihoods? The question that needs to be urgently problematized in our present context would come out naturally in the (pretty much absurd) proposition you are making. There is no easy answer that people could give. Among other things, it would depend a lot on power relations within existing hierarchies, because even if we were left alone people would still be divided into hierarchies of power. But one thing that is certain to me is that urban people, especially in the North, will have to begin to grow more food, reduce their pace of life, some begin to move back to the countryside, and look into each other eyes more often. This is because being left alone would imply the end of the type of interdependence that is constituted with current states' policies. What new forms of interdependence would emerge? Who knows. But the real question is: What new forms of interdependence can emerge *given the fact* that we will never be left alone?

Concerning the other part of your question, yes, we could envisage a state, but not necessarily in the tragic forms we have known. The rational kernel of the state is the realm of context setting for the daily operations of commoners. From the perspective of nested systems of commons at larger and larger scale, the state can be conceptualized as the bottom-up means through which the commoners establish, monitor and enforce their basic collective and inter-commons rules. But of course the meaning of establishing, monitoring and – especially – enforcing may well be different from what is meant today by it.

Stavros: Let's suppose that we have been left alone, which I don't think will ever be the case. But anyway. Does that mean that we are in a situation where we can simply establish our own principles, our own forms of commons, that we are in a situation where we are equal? Of course not! A good example is the case of the occupied factories

in Argentina. There, the workers were left alone in a sense, without the management, the accountants and engineers, and without professional knowledge of how to deal with various aspects of the production. They had to develop skills they did not have before. One woman, for example, said that her main problem in learning the necessary software programs to become an accountant for the occupied factory, was that she first had to learn how to read and write. So, imagine the distance that she had to bridge! And eventually, without wanting it, she became one of the newly educated workers that could lead the production and develop strategies for the factory. Although she would not impose them on the others, who continued to work in the assembly line and did not develop skills in the way she did, she became a kind of privileged person. Thus, no matter how egalitarian the assembly was, you finally develop the same problems you had before. You have a separation of people, which is a result of material circumstances. Therefore, you have to develop the means to fight this situation. In addition to producing the commons, you have to give the power to the people to have their own share in the production process of these commons – not only in terms of the economic circumstances but in terms of the socialization of knowledge, too. You have to ensure that everybody is able to speak and think, to become informed and to participate. All of these problems have erupted in an occupied factory in Argentina, not in a future society.

Anthropological research has proved that there have been and still exist societies of commoning and sharing and that these societies – whether they were food gatherers or hunters – do not only conceive of property in terms of community owned goods, but that they have also developed a specific form of eliminating the accumulation of power. They have actively produced forms of regulating power relations through which they prevent someone from becoming a leader. They had to acknowledge the fact that people do not possess equal strength or abilities, and at the same time they had to develop the very means by which they would collectively prevent those differences from becoming separating barriers between people, barriers that would eventually create asymmetries of power. Here you see the idea of commons not only as a question of property relations but also as a question of power distribution.

So, coming back to your question, when we were left alone we have to deal with the fact that we are not equal in every aspect. In order to establish this equality, we have to make gestures – not only rules – but gestures which are not based on a sum zero calculus. Sometimes somebody must offer more, not because anyone obliges him or her but because he or she chooses to do so. For example, I respect that you cannot speak like me, therefore I step back and I ask you to speak in this big assembly. I do this knowing that I possess this kind of privileged ability to talk because of my training or talents. This is not exactly a common, this is where the common ends and the gift begins – to share you have to be able to make gifts. To develop a society of equality does not mean leveling but sustaining the ability for everybody to participate in a community, and that is not something that happens without effort. Equality is a process not a state. Some may have to "yield" in order to allow others – those more severely underprivileged – to be able to express their own needs and dreams.

Massimo: I think that the gift and the commons may not be two modalities outside one another. Gift may be a property of the commons, especially if we regard these not as fixed entities but as processes of commoning. Defining the what, how and who of the commons also may include acts of gifts and generosity. In turn, these may well be given with no expectation of return. However, as we know, the gift, the act of generosity, is often part of an exchange, too, where you expect something in return.

Arenas for constituting the commons and their limitations

Massimo: The occupied factory we just talked about exemplifies an arena in which we have the opportunity to produce commons, not only through making gift gestures but also by turning the creative iteration of these gestures into new institutions. And these arenas for commoning potentially exist everywhere. Yet every arena finds itself with particular boundaries – both internal and external ones. In the case of occupied factory, the internal boundaries are given by the occupying community of workers, who have to consider their relation to the outside, the unemployed, the surrounding communities, and so on. The choices made here will also affect the type of relations to and articulation with other arenas of commoning.

Another boundary that comes up in all potential arenas of commoning, setting a limit to the endeavors of the commoners, is posited *outside* them, and is given by the pervasive character of capitalist measure and values. For example, the decision of workers to keep the production going implies to a certain extent accepting the measuring processes given by a capitalist market which puts certain constraints on workers such as the need for staying competitive, at least to a certain extent. All of a sudden they had

to start to self-organize their own exploitation, and this is one of the major problems we face in these kind of initiatives, an issue that can only be tackled when a far higher number of commoning arenas arise and ingenuity is applied in their articulation.

But before we reach that limit posed by the outside, there is still a lot of scope for constitution, development and articulation of subjectivities within arenas of commoning. This points to the question where our own responsibility and opportunity lies. If the limit posed from the outside on an arena of commoning is the "no" that capital posits to the commons "yes", to what extent can our constituent movement be a positive force that says "no" to capital's "no"?

But then, when will a qualitative difference in society be achieved to be able to resist those mechanism of criminalization, temptation and governance Massimo spoke about before? What would happen if half of the factories were self-governed?

Stavros: I don't know when a qualitative difference will be achieved. 50% is a very wild guess! Obviously that would make a great difference. But I think a very small percentage makes a difference as well. Not in terms of producing enclaves of otherness surrounded by a capitalist market, but as cases of collective experimentation through which you can also convince people that another world is possible. And those people in the Argentinean factories have actually managed to produce such kind of experiments, not because they have ideologically agreed on the form of society they fight for, but because they were authentically producing their own forms of everyday resistance, out of the need to protect their jobs after a major crisis. Many times they had to rediscover the ground on which to build their collectively sustained autonomy. The power of this experiment, however, lies on its possibility to spread – if it keeps on enclosing itself in the well defined perimeter of an "alternative enclave", it is bound to fail.

I believe that if we see and experience such experiments, we can still hope for another world and have glimpses of this world today. It is important to test fragments of this future in our struggles, which is also part of how to judge them – and I think these collective experiences are quite different from the alternative movements of the 1970s. Do we still strive for developing different life environments that can be described as our own Christianias? To me, the difference lies in the porosity, in the fact that the areas of experiment spill over into society. If they are only imagined as liberated strongholds they are bound to lose. Again, there is something similar we could learn from the Zapatista movement that attempted to create a kind of hybrid society in the sense that it is both pre-industrial and post-industrial, both pre-capitalist and post-capitalist at the same time. To me, this, if you want, unclear situation, which of course is only unclear due to our frozen and limited perception of society, is very important.

Athens' December uprising

How would you describe Athens' uprising in December 2008 in this relation? At least in Germany much focus was put on the outbreak of violence. What do you think about what has happened? Did things change since then?

Stavros: One of the things that I have observed is that at first both the leftists and the anarchists didn't know what to do. They were not prepared for this kind of uprising which did not happen at the far bottom of the society. There were young kids from every type of school involved. Of course there were immigrants taking part but this was not an immigrant revolt. Of course there were many people suffering from deprivation and injustice who took part but this was not a banlieu-type uprising either. This was a peculiar, somehow unprecedented, kind of uprising. No center, just a collective networking without a specific point from which activities radiated. Ideas simply crisscrossed all over Greece and you had initiatives you couldn't imagine a few months ago, a lot of activities with no name or with improvised collective signatures. For example, in Syros, an island with a long tradition of working class struggles, the local pupils surrounded the central police station and demanded that the police officers come outside, take off their hats and apologize for what happened. And they did it. They came out in full formation. This is something that is normally unimaginable.

This polycentric eruption of collective action, offering glimpses of a social movement, which uses means that correspond to emancipating ends, is, at least to my mind, what is new and what inspired so many people all over the world. I tend to be a bit optimistic about that. Let me not overestimate what is new, there were also some very unpleasantly familiar things happening. You could see a few "Bonapartist" groups behaving as if they were conducting the whole situation. But this was a lie, they simply believed that.

What is also important is that the spirit of collective multifarious actions did not only prevail during the December days. Following the December uprising,

❼ **Stavros Stavrides on:**

Collective Action and Urban Porosity

"The December 2008 Youth Uprising in Athens: Glimpses of a possible City of Thresholds", Paper presented at the 2009 ISA RC21 Sao Paulo Conference

The term "urban conflict" can be taken to include all those forms social antagonism takes, when the resulting struggles happen in an urban spatial context. Is the city however simply a container of these struggles or does urban spatiality actually mold social conflicts, giving them form, affecting their meaning and their relations with specific urban rights and demands? (…)

When, during an urban conflict, people collectively seek to re-appropriate public space, they are not simply using the city as it is; they are transforming it. Their actions not only search for space, they invent space. These "performed" spaces, these "practiced" spaces, as they "happen" in the process of the conflict, acquire distinctive characteristics that tend to influence the outcome and the form of the conflict. Emergent spatialities, thus, represent the ways people who participate tend to imagine spaces that will house the life they fight for. At the same time, those spatialities reflect the ways in which collective action attempts to create its own space. The spatialities of urban conflicts are thus both imagined and real. It is very important, therefore, to understand how images and representations of space, actively participate in forming the qualities of the spaces created as urban conflicts transform the city.

One of the dominant modern images of a longed for emancipated community presents it as barricaded in a liberated stronghold: A defined territorial enclave always ready to defend itself. This image, embedded in the collective imaginary of the oppressed, tends to construct a geography of emancipation in the form of a map clearly depicting free areas as defined by a recognizable perimeter. Either as islands, surrounded by a hostile sea or as continents facing other hostile continents, these areas appear as spatially circumscribed and traceable. This image was many times dominant in the history of Athens youth movements: Exarcheia was often fantasized as an alternative liberated stronghold.

Emancipation, however, is a process not an essence, if we find it crucial to differentiate it from the religious image of a happy afterlife. Emancipation is the ambiguous actuality of spatially as well as historically dispersed struggles. There may be potentially liberating practices but there can be no fixed areas of freedom.

Could we then perhaps visualize spatialities of emancipation by considering those appeals for social justice that focus on the use of space? Spatial justice, in this context, could indicate a distribution principle that tends to present space as a good to be enjoyed by all. Accessibility can become one of the most important attributes of spatial justice. Any division, separation or partitioning of space appears, thus, as obstructing this kind of justice.

True, an emphasis on spatial justice may establish the importance collective decision making has for the social as well as for the physical definition of space. This imaginary geography of emancipation, however, has to understand space as a uniform continuum to be regulated by common will rather than as an inherently discontinuous and differentiated medium that gives form to social practices. In a somewhat crude form, this imaginary could end up completely reducing space to a quantity to be equally distributed. And accessibility might end up being some kind of distributing mechanism. We can actually connect this way of understanding spatialities of emancipation with contemporary discourses on human rights or human communicability (Habermasian ideal speech situation included). More often than not, these discourses presuppose some kind of trans-historical and trans-geographical human figure. The same kind of human figure becomes the subject of spatial justice, only this time such a figure is not viewed as the inhabitant of an ideal city any more but rather as the free-moving occupant of a homogeneous space.

A different (third) kind of geographical imaginary has emerged out of a criticism for this idealized view for a just city (or a city of justice). Sometimes drawing images from contemporary city-life, this imaginary focuses on multiplicity and diversity, as well as on possible polymorphous and mutating spaces, in order to describe a spatiality of emancipation. Strong roots support this view. A critique of everyday life and everydayness, already put forward during the 60s, has provided us with a new way to deal with the social experience of space. If everyday life is not only the locus of social reproduction but also contains practices of self-differentiation or personal and collective resistance, molecular spatialities of otherness can be found scattered in the city. As de Certeau has put it, "a migrational, or metaphorical, city slips into the clear text of the planned and readable city".[1]

This image contains a view of inhabited space as a process rather than as a fixed condition. Spaces of otherness, thus, proliferate in the city due to diversifying or deviating practices. Spatialities of otherness, in such a view, are considered as inherently time-bound. Space is neither reduced to a container of otherness (idealized in utopian cities) nor to a contestable and distributable good. Space is actually conceptualized as a formative element of human social interaction. Space thus becomes expressive through use, or, rather, because use ("style of use" as de Certeau specifies) defines users. (…)

Urban conflicts and urban struggles can become focused on the protection of specific places as places that contain and represent specific situated collective identities. A working class neighborhood threatened by gentrification or an ethnic minority meeting spot threatened by racist neighbors can become stakes in an urban conflict which involves different groups of citizens and different authorities. December uprising seems to have taken one step further: reclaiming space was not connected to the preservation of established situated identities. Collective identities, as we will see, were implicitly criticized.

A contemporary liberating effort may, indeed, seek "not to emancipate an oppressed identity but [rather] to emancipate an oppressed non-identity".[2] If social reproduction is enforcing identity formation, an emancipating struggle might be better directed against those mechanisms that reduce humans to circumscribed and fixed identities. Spaces of emancipation should then differ from identity-imposing and identity-reproducing spaces. Space as identity (and identity as space) presupposes a clearly demarcated domain. Space as the locus of non-identity, as the locus of relational, multifarious and open identities, has to be, on the contrary,

loosely determined space. It is not that such spaces are or become amorphous. It is their power to compare and connect adjacent areas that makes those spaces "loose",[3] open to different determinations. (…)

Liminality, this experience of temporarily occupying an in-between territory as well as an in between non-identity, can provide us with an alternative image for a spatiality of emancipation. Creating in-between spaces might mean creating spaces of encounter between identities instead of creating spaces corresponding to specific identities. (…)

A "city of thresholds" might be the term to describe a spatial network that provides opportunities of encounter, exchange and mutual recognition.[5] Those spaces of encounter are the alternative to a culture of barriers, a culture that defines the city as an agglomeration of identifying enclaves.[4] Thresholds, by replacing check points that control access through interdictions or everyday discriminating practices, provide the ground for a possible solidarity between different people allowed to regain control over their lives.

We can therefore understand the spatiality of threshold as a possible characteristic of transformed urban space. Urban conflicts that create this kind of performed urban spaces, actually transform the city, no matter how temporary this transformation might be. Urban conflicts can, in this way, introduce to the existing city of secluded enclaves and regulated flows a new spatial quality that may threaten the imposed spatial order. This spatial quality can be conceptualized as an emergent urban porosity. (…)

A "city of thresholds" can be a city where public space functions as a network of intermediary spaces, of metropolitan thresholds, where different and interdependent collective identities can be performed in mutual awareness. Actions of civil, or should we say metropolitan, disobedience may realize temporarily those urban thresholds as places of otherness, as places of new emergent spatialities of encounter. What the December uprising has shown is, perhaps, that a collective demand for justice can create new forms of active urban justice. Is the prospect of the city of thresholds an adequate description of this potentially emancipating quest? It is really too early to know. After all, a writing on an Exarcheia wall justly says: "December was not an answer. December was a question".

References and Notes:

1 Michel de Certeau: "The Practice of Everyday Life", Minneapolis 1984, pp. 91-110

2 John Holloway: "Change the World Without Taking Power", London 2002

3 Karen Franck and Quentin Stevens (eds): "Loose Space: Possibility and Diversity in Urban Life", London 2007

4 Peter Marcuse and Ronald van Kempen (eds): "Of States and Cities. The Partitioning of Urban Space", Oxford 2002, pp. 258-280

5 Stavros Stavrides: "From the City-Screen to the City-Stage" (in Greek), Athens 2002

something qualitatively new happened in various initiatives. Take the initiative of the Navarinou Park in Exarcheia. This would not have been possible without the experience of December. Of course, several anarchist and leftist projects around Exarcheia already existed and still produce alternative culture and politics, but we never before had this kind of initiatives involving such a variety of people in so different ways. And, I think, that after December various urban movements have gained a new momentum, understanding that we don't simply demand something but that we have a right to it. Rejecting being governed and taking our lives into our own hands, no matter how ambiguous that may be, is a defining characteristic of a large array of "after December" urban movement actions.

The city of thresholds: conceptualizing the relation between space and the commons

We have discussed a large variety of different events, initiatives and projects. Can we attempt to further relate our findings to their spatial and urban impacts, maybe by more generally trying to envision a city entirely based on the commons?

Stavros: To think about a city based on commons we have to question and conceptualize the connection of space and the commons. It would be interesting to think of the production of space as an area of commons and then discuss how this production has to be differentiated from today's capitalist production of space. First of all, it is important to conceive space and the city not primarily as a quantity – which is the dominant perception – the quantified space of profit-making, where space always has a value and can easily be divided and sold. So, starting to think about space in the direction of commons means to conceptualize it rather as a form of relations than as an entity, as a condition of comparisons instead of an established arrangement of positions. We have to conceive space not as a sum of defined places, which we should control or liberate but rather as a potential network of passages linking one open place to another. Space, thus, becomes important as a constitutive dimension of social action. Space indeed *happens* as different social actions literally produce different spatial qualities. In the prospect of claiming space as a form of commons, we have to oppose the idea that each community exists as a spatially defined entity in favor of the idea of a network of communicating and negotiating social spaces that are not defined in terms of a fixed identity. Those spaces thus retain a "passage" character.

Once more, we have to reject the exclusionary gesture which understands space as belonging to

a certain community. To think of space in the form of the commons means not to focus on its quantity, but to see it as a form of social relationality providing the ground for social encounters. I tend to see this kind of experiencing with and creation of space as the prospect of the "city of thresholds" ❼. Walter Benjamin, seeking to redeem the liberating potential of the modern city, developed the idea of the threshold as a revealing spatiotemporal experience. For him, the flaneur is a connoisseur of thresholds: someone who knows how to discover the city as the locus of unexpected new comparisons and encounters. And this awareness can start to unveil the prevailing urban phantasmagoria which has reduced modernity to a misfired collective dream of a liberated future. To me, the idea of an emancipating spatiality could look like a city of thresholds. A potentially liberating city can be conceived not as an agglomerate of liberated spaces but as a network of passages, as a network of spaces belonging to nobody and everybody at the same time, which are not defined by a fixed power geometry but are open to a constant process of (re)definition.

There is a line of thinking that leads to Lefebvre and his notion of the "right to the city" as the right that includes and combines all rights. This right is not a matter of access to city spaces (although we should not underestimate specific struggles for free access to parks, etc.), it is not simply a matter of being able to have your own house and the assets that are needed to support your own life, it is something which includes all those demands but also goes beyond them by creating a higher level of the commons. For Lefebvre the right to the city is the right to create the city as a collective work of art. The city, thus, can be produced through encounters that make room for new meanings, new values, new dreams, new collective experiences. And this is indeed a way to transcend pure utility, a way to see commons beyond the utilitarian horizon.

Massimo de Angelis is Professor of Political Economy at the University of East London. His research focuses on value theory, globalization, social movements and the political reading of economic narrative. He is author, most recently, of "The Beginning of History: Value Struggles and Global Capital", 2007, and editor of the online journal "The Commoner".

Stavros Stavrides is Assistant Professor of Architecture at the National Technical University of Athens. He has published several books and articles on spatial theory, his most recent research focuses on emancipating spatial practices, characteristically developed in his essay "Heterotopias and the Experience of Porous Urban Space", 2007. He is author of "Towards the City of Thresholds", forthcoming on Professional Dreamers Publishers, Trento.

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