A commoning creative practice: tending to mutuality in spaces of engagement.

A thesis submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

Olivia Hamilton
BA hons Interior Design, RMIT University

School of Architecture and Design
College of Design and Social Context
RMIT University

February 2018
Declaration

A thesis submitted in fulfilment of the requirements of the
Degree of Doctor of Philosophy
Olivia Hamilton
BA hons. Interior Design (RMIT)
School of Architecture + Design
College of Design and Social Context
RMIT University
February 2018

I certify that except where due acknowledgement has been made, the work is that of the author alone; the work has not been submitted previously, in whole or in part, to qualify for any other academic award; the content of the project is the result of work which has been carried out since the official commencement date of the approved research program; any editorial work, paid or unpaid, carried out by a third party is acknowledged; and, ethics procedures and guidelines have been followed. I acknowledge the support I have received for my research through the provision of an Australian Government Research Training Program Scholarship.

Olivia Hamilton
Acknowledgements

Many thanks to my supervisors, Dr Pia Ednie-Brown and Dr Scott Mitchell for their support, guidance and feedback.

In addition, I would like to acknowledge and thank the following people. Christine Visneau, Dr Chris Cottrell, Dr Scott Andrew Elliott continue to be inspiring and generous collaborators and friends. I also want to thank Chris for all the conversations over the last few years, and especially for offering me a place to work before I even knew I needed it. Madeleine Griffith, Joel Sprake, Edmund Griffith, Loren Dalgarno Lockwood, Miso and Ghostpatrol, Holly McNaught, Lachlan Tetlow-Stuart, Isobel Knowles and Van Sowerwine, Emma van Leest, Hannah Bertram, Cameron Bishop and Simon Reis, Catherine Welshman, Eric Cooper, James Lenick, Josh Matthews, Grant Cornett and Steven Visneau were all were involved in various ways in the projects undertaken in this research and I would like to thank all of them for their effort, time and generosity. I am grateful to my copy editor Haydie Gooder, for her professional services, and also for her encouragement and friendship. My colleagues from Interior Design at RMIT University Melbourne have been unfailingly supportive: Dr Suzie Attiwill, Dr Roger Kemp, Dr Anthony Fryatt, Phoebe Whitman, Phip Murray, Dr Leah Heiss, Andrew Miller, Dr Caroline Vains Dr James Carey and finally Dr Trish Pringle who has mentored and encouraged me since my honors. I would like to thank my father Gavan Griffith, and my siblings, Madeleine, Cressida and Ned, as well as my neighbours and friends who have cared for us all and been there for me when ever I needed help. Most of all I want to thank my partner, John Armstrong who is unflagging in his support and encouragement.

I dedicate this study to my mother Vanessa Griffith, who loved sharing her life, and to John and my children Estela, Rafael and Gabriel, and my stepchildren Jordan, Jed and Josie.
Abstract

This practice-led research began with initiating collaborative projects within commercial space that aimed to evade simply contributing to commoditised experiences and instead proposes new spatial, social and creative relations for those involved. Through a series of diverse projects, the research evolved into an exploration of how the practice of commoning can inform creative, spatial design projects, and vice versa, with an emphasis therein on what I call 'creative mutuality'.

There is an ostensible disparity across the creative works that formed the vehicles for this research – magazine publishing, durational and participatory projects, several installations, teaching, interior design practice and an internet-based documentation system. Across this disparity, almost all the projects involved working with others and unfolded over time in physical and virtual commercial spaces. As such, the research largely concerns creative practices that are collaborative, spatial and durational. Each project is understood as a 'movement', through which creative practice and commoning come into varied correspondence. Within these movements, methodological questions concerning capture and documentation, emergent processes, open systems and a recurrence of technical and structural loops could be explored. These questions of method were investigated across such different modalities and levels of emphasis that it was only through gradual accretion that the collectivising characteristics and their affinity with contemporary notions of commoning became evident.

Commoning describes the relational process of maintaining or reproducing a shared life. It occurs in many modalities and contexts but the aim, in terms of individual and collective benefit, is the emergence of a profound sense of connectedness and meaning. This research explores ways of working interstitially across commoning and creative practice. It proposes that creative collaborative practices can bring new perspectives and capacities to commoning through being innately innovative and trans-disciplinary. In return, commoning can provide guides for creative practice through explicitly seeking, recognising and valuing experiences of mutuality. Mutuality is understood here as a generalised but profound sense of caring, and being cared for, by the social and spatial surrounds you are part of and contribute to. Creative mutuality, then, is mutuality specific to a creative project, where shared acts of creation becomes a focus through which mutuality flows. Creative mutuality develops when the project becomes the conductor of currents of mutuality that sustain further creative engagement and a deep sense of care for the work and others involved in the project.

Mutuality is an elusive phenomenon of socio-political significance. It functions as a transformative agent of change within the dispositions of individuals towards each other and their surrounds, and can offer both commoning and creative practice distance from neoliberal concerns and values. This research proposes that collaborative or participatory creative projects seeking to find such a distance can be assisted through commoning processes that help cultivate creative mutuality, thereby evading problems associated with transactional or exploitative relational systems.

The value proposition offered here is that attention to creative mutuality in the context of creative projects may offer a way to more widely counteract those kinds of systems. This research contributes to how creative practices can be developed and guided by commoning, and how, in turn, creative practice can be conducive to a proliferation of commoning. Ultimately, this PhD offers a framework for future collaborative creative practices and an approach to design teaching, through tending to commoning processes that develop mutuality, thereby engendering and prioritising relations and environments of inclusivity, care, emergence and exchange.
INTRODUCTION
0.0 INTRODUCTION
0.1 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORKS AND COMMUNITIES OF PRACTICE
0.2 STRUCTURE
0.3 PROCESSES

CHAPTER 1
1.0 COMMONS
1.1 COMMONING PROCESSES
1.2 ENCLOSURE
1.3 COMMONING IN CREATIVE PRACTICE
1.4 CREATING CREATIVE COMMUNITY
1.5 COMMONING AND PARTICIPATORY PRACTICE

CHAPTER 2
STORY 1
2.0 INADVERTENT PROSPECTORS
2.1 DREAMING DEVICES

CHAPTER 3
STORY 2
3.0 INTRODUCTION TO PROJECT: SMALL
3.1 STRUCTURING CONNECTIONS
3.2 BUILDING EQUITABLE COLLABORATION
3.3 FORMING COMMUNITIES AROUND A CREATIVE PROJECT
3.4 FREE WORK
3.5 ADJUSTING TO ATTENUATING RESOURCES

CHAPTER 4
STORY 3
4.0 INTRODUCTION TO PROJECT: CONSUMED
4.1 MAKING SPACE
4.2 PRODUCERS
4.3 INDIVIDUAL CREATIVE DEVELOPMENT WITHIN COLLECTIVES
4.4 DOCUMENTING
STORY 4
4.5 SUCCESS/FAIL, EVALUATING AND EVALUING
4.6 DURATION AND TEMPORAL DEPTH

CHAPTER 5
STORY 5
5.0 MUTUALITY
5.1 CREATIVE MUTURITY
CHAPTER 6
STORY 6
6.0 INTRODUCTION TO PROJECT: PICTURE YOURSELF
6.1 OCCUPYING THE EXISTING
6.2 COMMONING AND SYSTEMS
6.3 LOCATING LOOPS

CHAPTER 7
STORY 7
7.0 INTRODUCTION TO PROJECT: AFTERIMAGE
7.1 QUESTIONS OF AUDIENCE
7.2 INHABITABLE DIAGRAMS

CHAPTER 8
STORY 8
8.0 INTRODUCTION TO PROJECTS: BUILDING MOVEMENTS AND COLLECTIVE COMMONS
8.1 BUREAUCRACY
8.2 MAKING USE OF MISUNDERSTANDINGS, MISCOMMUNICATIONS AND MISTAKES
8.3 ETHICS OF OWNERSHIP IN COLLABORATIVE PROJECTS
8.4 MAKING IN THE MINOR

CHAPTER 9
STORY 9
9.0 DREAM HOUSE
9.1 HOUSING FUTURES

CHAPTER 10
STORY 10
10.0 COMMONING PEDAGOGY
10.3 FUTURE MOVEMENTS

CONCLUSION
11.0 HOW THIS RESEARCH AREA WAS ADDRESSED.
11.1 CONTRIBUTIONS OF THE THESIS
11.1.1 Method for approaching commoning in collaborative and spatial creative practice
11.1.2 Relationship between commoning and creative practice
11.3.1 A sense of creative mutuality a guiding principle
11.2 POSSIBILITIES FOR FUTURE WORK
0.0 INTRODUCTION

This research is concerned with articulating the value of commoning and participatory spatial design practices coming together. In simple terms commoning can be understood as the processes that appear when people care for or manage a shared resource, but it also applies to the relational processes that occur when people maintain a shared interest or project. Commoning entails locating self-interest within wider interests that privileges the well-being and ecology of the community, and identifies the care-taking characteristics within the individuals that maintain projects, work or spaces in common.¹ In the current social, ecological climate, commoning activists assert that it is essential these values become central to all human practices and politics.² Commoning and creative participatory practice already share many characteristics and areas of interests, although this is not yet very widely acknowledged. Creative work formed by a disposition and orientation towards commoning brings both creative work and commoning into closer correspondence, seeking between the two, new qualities, values and principles that can creatively reconstitute ways of being in the world. Testing commoning in various creative disciplines and situations finds commoning as a mutable approach able to inform and affect processes in diverse situations. Understandings of how commoning and creative practice can come together accumulate through this research, informing ways of working and linking experience in one part of life with those in another. This research proposes how the ethical values of commoning together with spatial design practice can underpin a broader mode of living, becoming and engaging: shaping not just a project or a practice, but all aspects of life.

My interest in the spaces and social relations that encourage new ways of living and working within collectives began when I left home at seventeen. I arrived in Paris without a plan or much money and was fortunate to be offered food and board in a bookshop in exchange for a few hours of work each day.³ Here I met and lived with people from all over the world. After seven months I left the shop and started hitch-hiking, frequently staying in the squats and communes that were the homes of some of the people who gave us rides. Early the next year I moved to America, first into a shared house in Portland, Oregon and then drove across the country and ended up in New York. I lived for the next seven years in various types of homes; a squat in an old tenement building in the East Village, a stripped out four-room railroad apartment, and finally in two factory buildings in Williamsburg and Bushwick, Brooklyn.

All the places I lived needed work to become habitable. I constructed interiors with new friends and roommates. We built walls and hung doors, found furniture on the street that we adapted or repaired, learning the skills and borrowing the tools, as we needed them. We formed communities as we built the spaces where we would live and make creative work. The paid jobs we worked covered our rent and materials and clothes bought by the pound from the second hand shop. Almost everything else we needed was traded, made, shared or exchanged. Building the interiors in these spaces, and the work we made within them, created both loose and tight knit communities formed through the activities, collaborations and cohabitations. Our lives, work, and creative practices merged in vast, rough, multipurpose spaces; in the warehouse shells and abandoned piers and sheds along the waterfront. Working and living in this way both reflected and constructed the social bonds and the spaces we occupied. The merging of life and art reflected the inhabitants’ political and social dispositions, which were allowed to expand further by opportunities afforded by the open and flexible spatial conditions.

³ Shakespeare and Company, 37 Rue de la Bûcherie, Paris, France. January to July 1991. The owner of the shop, George Whitman, had his motto painted above the door; ‘be kind to strangers lest they be angels in disguise.’

Fig 0.1 A typical streetscape in Williamsburg 1992. Image credit: John Lenick
The period between the mid eighties to the mid nineties fell between the collapse of the Cold War, the ascendancy of neoliberalism, the imminent wide scale adoption of the internet and the arrival of social media and global connectivity. It was a time when alignments between creativity, technology, social relations and economies were in flux. The creative communities that coalesced in Brooklyn were not particularly cohesive, nor were they unique, but the particular period meant buildings that provided both space and low rents, qualities conducive for the production of creative works, could still be easily found within major European and American cities. In Brooklyn, without the institutional or financial support of the established art world in Manhattan, it was necessary to collaborate and find alternate ways for producing life and work in these spaces.

The projects that make up this research are varied in their approach and emphasis, but collectively look for ways to encourage collaborative practice to become cumulative and connective, to incorporate processes of commoning that provide the ethical values and a conceptual framework for positively making creative work ‘in common’. I realise now I have tried to recreate for myself and make available in various ways to others, in new spaces and places the sense of creative agency and community that occurred through the combination of social, spatial and cultural conditions in that period in New York. This has been a slippery activity to work with or describe, as it is not a discipline or a process, but rather an interest in engendering emergent and evolving creative interrelations between spaces and people over time.
From the beginning this research has been interested in how creative practice could evade the more conforming aspects of neoliberal capitalism. An almost unconscious desire compelled me to find ways of structuring collaborative creative works, or developing certain socio-spatial conditions, to initiate changed relations with existing power systems for those that worked with, or encountered, the projects. Initially this was approached through making or instigating social and creative systems that allowed the project’s participants to question the extent of, and their relationship to, commoditisation. Eventually it became clearer that this line of questioning was not the central focus of my work, but side effect of a larger concern. The projects I was making all had within them, at differing levels, the experiences from living and working with others in my past. Those experiences were continuing to influence both what I was interested in making and my approaches towards working creatively with others. This realisation has forged a belief that even a fleeting encounter with creative commoning can potentially take seed, as it did for me, manifesting in not-yet-known but potentially transformative future activities of others.

Commoning is able to change the physical systems and shapes of the world, but also the disposition of those engaged. Commoning becomes who you are, your subjective self formed in relation to other. It is not separable from identity or activities. Looking back over a practice that sometimes seems to be made up of unrelated work and experiences, I became aware of a constancy in the values that motivated the work and that continues to inform all aspects of my life. Harney and Moten describe this position as already ‘being in something,’ where a ‘call and response’ occur simultaneously rather than as an ontological enactment or sequence. This realisation was a key moment in the research. As I began to understand how commoning principles already underpinned everything I had done to this point, I began to recognise that commoning could also be a framework for moving forward.

4 Stefano Harney and Fred Moten, The Undercommons: Fugitive Planning and Black Study (Wivenhoe, New York: Minor Compositions, 2013), 13.
0.1 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORKS AND COMMUNITIES OF PRACTICE

Since the term commoning was introduced in 2008 it has rapidly expanded to encompass many varied modalities and systems. Commoning provides an alternative to the state and market systems that are pushing social and environmental systems to the point of total collapse. It supplants the ideals of financial individualism and external management and instead regenerates connections between people and also with the environments they inhabit. Embedded in the social and spatial relations of commoning are new economies that are not based on assigning or extracting value based on price. This is a paradigm shift that cultivates within the individuals involved, a sense of agency in a world and meaningful inner subjective experience that is not tied to values conferred by consumerism.

Over the last decade environmentalists, economists, designers, anthropologists, geographers, sociologists, urban planners, historians, technology developers, legal theoreticians, activists, to list just a few, have gravitated towards commoning, all finding within it uses and ideas specific to their discipline. However, any specialist enquiries into commoning are usually of much wider interest across many other fields and contexts. A commoning community constructs its own internal mesh of relations, but is also outward looking and open to new ideas.

The various collaborative art practices, social theorists and the more explicit examples of commoning discussed here, make for a very disparate field of practice. A continual effort to locate my practice within a larger conceptual field led me to varied practices and theoreticians over the course of this research. The larger framework developed through a process of gleaning; finding and storing ideas that resonated with me, despite not yet being able to demonstrate how they might fit together at a future date. It was not until after the projects in this research were completed that it became clear they could all be related to processes of ‘commoning’. Collecting disparate work together is important to many commoning activists. The aim is to make stronger connections across existing loose networks or projects, both to strengthen them and to make the commoning processes more evident to broader society. The concept of commoning itself has had the effect of bringing theorists and practitioners working across many disciplines into concert over commoning as a shared interest and activity.

The diversity of the theorists and practitioners informing this research is necessary for three reasons. Firstly, the projects I made and discuss take very different forms and therefore are informed by a similarly broad variety of practices. Secondly, the concept of commoning, although not new in practice, has only recently been defined and new practices and theoretical understandings are in a process of aligning with and exploring what commoning can mean to them. This has meant that the discourse around commoning has rapidly expanded as new ways of working with these ideas and processes emerge. Thirdly, the diversity reflects my own idiosyncratic research practice where ‘images that produce thoughts’ are gathered and revisited. The research embraces emergent and contingent approaches and the project work did not proceed in a logical narrative sequence. It has often been challenging to navigate or even describe the work in the context of research, as the processes have only become coherent contemporaneously through occasional and startling insight. By looping back through the work, new understandings appear that can then move the work and the ideas forward. Over time, and with a growing awareness of commoning, the disparate elements have begun to form an interconnected field, producing a stronger and expanded image of how the processes of commoning can work within, and in correspondence with, creative practices.

The works, literature and theory in this section have been selected for their usefulness in producing an understanding of commoning relative to my creative work. Consequently, my own cultural bias is evident in both the geographical locations and the practices, which are largely from the western world, often from Australia and America. My practice is in creative fields, and is consequently primarily oriented by others that make collaborative work in the public and commercial sphere. My approach has been particularly informed by SenseLab, who operate out of (and within) an institution, and Clare Doherty’s public work through Situations. Both these practices develop in tandem their creative and theoretical work, which have in turn connected my
own work and ideas to wider theoretical fields. De Certeau’s conception of tactical inhabitation of the existing conditions was an early, important influence on my thinking and creative practice, and has remained intrinsic in relation to my conception of commoning as tactical.

Several key theorists and activists are central to the contemporary concept of commoning. The work of the historian Peter Linebaugh, and the theorist and activist David Bollier, are frequently referred to, as one situates commoning in a historical context and the other agitates for how it could shape and inform the future. David Harvey, Stavros Stavrides and Massimo de Angelis, critique from different perspectives the existing urban conditions and propose how commoning can contribute to new formations of the city. Pascal Gielen examines the bi-directional effects of creative practice and urban space and the development of sustainable creative practices within a ‘common city’. Lawrence Lessig and others have entered into commoning from a legal perspective. Their interest is in how existing and new laws protect or enclose commons, new technologies and the internet and the subsequent effects of copyright and has lead to the formation of the creative commons and supported peer-to-peer file sharing and other systems that protect, embody and engage commoning principles.

Connections across separate areas of interest and disciplines are forged as activists, theorists and practices find frequencies within other work that resonates with ideas emerging in their own and seek definition, visibility and new opportunities for commoning. The broad group of practitioners, theorists and activists, across both commoning and creative practice, who have influenced and informed the research are listed below. However, the final two sections in this list – modes of thought/conceptual schema and participatory creative practice – are where I would most clearly identify my ‘community of practice’ and the arena to which the research aims to make a contribution.

### Commoning theorists/activists:
- David Bollier: commoning, activism, patterns
- Pascal Gielen: commons, urban space, creative practice
- J.K. Gibson Graham: alternative economies
- Peter Linebaugh: commoning history, urbanisation
- Lawrence Lessig: internet, copyright, privacy, law
- Maria Mies, Elinor Ostrom: global commons
- Moten and Harney: Undercommons
- Uncertain Commons: commoning as revolution

### Urban theorists/tactics of urban occupation:
- Michel de Certeau: tactical inhabitation
- David Harvey: spatial justice, rights to space
- Nikos Papastergiadis: ‘parafunctional’ spaces, openness
- Stavros Stavrides: commons, urban space
- Sharon Zukin, Jane Jacobs (etc.): gentrification

### Modes of thought/conceptual schema:
- Jane Bennett: loops
- Michael Hardt: affective labour
- Simon O’Sullivan: the minor
- Tim Ingold: learning, the minor
- Jacques Rancière: participation

### Creative practice approaches:
- Clare Doherty and Situations: public art, participation, duration
- Claire Bishop: participation, events
- Raumlabor, Theaster Gates: urban, co-occupation, access, gentrification, spatial justice
- Jane Rendell: temporality in creative practice, writing
- SenseLab: open/emergent systems in creative practice, documentation
These various theoretical and creative practitioners produce an interconnected way of understanding this practice-based study within both the fields of participatory art and commoning. The research has been concerned with finding or making platforms for a bi-directional engagement between commoning and the processes of creative participatory practice. This is seen as working in a trans-disciplinary way that allows unknown experiences and methods of practicing to emerge from combinative influences.

The other interest is finding how the processes of commoning can situate and guide creative participatory or collaborative practices within the existing economic and socio-political systems. This proposes that alignment between commoning and creative practice can contribute to an increase in the likelihood of the emergence and recognition of mutuality in creative activity and participation. The experience of mutuality has become important as a way of motivating creation, gathering community and seeking an ethical approach to shared participative or collaborative production. The transformational characteristics of mutuality shift the participant’s subjective relationship with the social and spatial conditions they inhabit, potentially forming a sustained orientation towards the values and principles of commoning in creative practice.

Fig 0.7 Broken piers under the Williamsburg bridge 1992. Image credit: Hank Linhart.

0.2 STRUCTURE

The projects that form the basis of this research appear chronologically with each chapter focusing on a particular project. This structure reflects the unfolding and accumulative understanding of commoning that evolved through doing the work. Over the course of making the work and then by undertaking this writing, the ideas and the discussion take several lines of enquiry that slowly aggregate and eventually begin to connect. Most chapters begin with a short narrative story; a subjective and personal perspective of the experience or a related event as understood at the time. The chapters are conceived as ‘movements’ through a series of ideas and projects, referring to how each project maintains a degree of independence but comes together over time through the recurrence of commoning. Three chapters (two, five and nine) are made up of two sections that draw out a pivotal idea at key moments in the research. The other chapters (three, four, six, seven and eight) focus on a particular project. Each of these begins with a description of the work, followed by a discussion that extracts key aspects and experience from each project, contributing overall to an emerging and expanded understanding of a commoning creative practice. This part of the discussion involves forays into other people’s practices and theories in order to articulate and situate what was discovered through doing my own projects.
The structure of the chapters and also the overall thesis is reflective of an unfolding and emergent approach to both making and writing. Incidentally emergent approaches are also often characteristics of commoning processes, and it is likely that an existing, albeit unnamed, disposition toward commoning unknowingly influenced this attitude within my work from the outset. The projects accumulatively reveal how processes of commoning can be instrumental in the formation of creative work across different modalities, and collectively demonstrate how commoning can inform other diverse or varied creative practices. In this way, the writing charts how the project work constructs a wider comprehension of commoning in creative practice. The projects are the means for interpreting, and also integrating, varied aspects of life into a more cohesive whole.

Chapter one builds an argument as to why and how the commons are still of relevance to current perspectives, technologies and social practices. It starts with a brief overview of events and attitudes that lead to the wide scale enclosures and marginalisation of commons, and the recent emergence of the term 'commoning'. The timing of the appearance of the concept of commoning is concurrent with growing signs that the systems that have come to dominate society are on the verge of collapse. Failing economies, ecological disasters and rampant social inequality mean it is becoming ethically more difficult to continue with our current consumer based lifestyle. Despite this reality, the privatisation and enclosure of shared spaces and resources, and the growth of consumerism continues to become more and more pervasive. People often first become interested in processes of commoning in response to a sense of social alienation that can be the result of consumerist culture. Often an initial experiences with commoning leads to exposure to a plurality of collectives, entities and practices that seek change through the production of alternative ways of being, producing further engagement with commoning. The extent of the current proliferation and interest in commoning activities proposes that lived experiences of commoning are actually transformative on a structural and also a psychological level, leading to real change for both individuals and communities.

From this background, a community of creative practices are identified that extend commoning into creative participatory works in various ways. These are multi-disciplinary practices that share philosophical and practical interests in processes associated with commoning. Identifying how commoning appears, both explicitly and implicitly within practices, it becomes clear that commoning is transversal, carrying across situations, modalities and disciplines.
In Chapter two the discussion moves to a personal perspective of rapid gentrification in Brooklyn, America. This period is the foundation for this research and is framed as a movement of commoning through urban occupation. The chapter describes the transformation of non-residential spaces into homes to live and to work, and then the subsequent rapid gentrification of that same area as a case study for how the emergence of creative acts of commoning in the wider urban environment is frequently followed by apparently inevitable enclosure for commercial gain. Nikos Papastergiadis’ proposition of parafunctional space within urban space is an important concept for drawing together spatial relations, social praxis and processes of commoning, and explaining how accesses to these kinds of spaces affords the production of new social and creative communities. The discussion in this chapter speculates how processes of creative commoning that support alternative social systems could interrupt existing procedures that result in the displacement and homogenisation of communities.

Chapter three charts the production of an online magazine of independent children’s design as a movement of commoning through publishing and online interrelations. I collaboratively edited and produced *Small* for more than five years starting before but continuing after I commenced this Ph.D. Over its life the magazine required various processes to initiate, tend to and further, the production of work in common. These processes included; forming and sustaining communities around a common project, developing alternative models and values for operating within commercial environments, and finding how to make equitable relations. Working directly with a partner and also with wider groups who all had various and fluctuating levels of commitment, meant different forms of collaboration and participation were initiated, managed and maintained in the production of the creative work. Processes of commoning facilitated these activities, but were identified in retrospect rather than as a conscious driving force behind the project.

Commoning processes became a more conscious interest in the practice through a public and collaborative installation project, titled *Consumed*, discussed in Chapter four. *Consumed* was situated in a shop in a small commercial strip and functions to describe a movement of commoning through participatory creative practice. Through *Consumed* systems that had been almost organic in the online publishing project (*Small*) were identified and translated into a creative project within a physical space, with a finite time frame and specific documentation mechanisms. *Consumed* foregrounded the importance of seeing the spatial, the social, and the temporal as interrelated— and the consequent ways those interrelations affected commoning and creative work. After this project was completed, I came across Claire Doherty’s project *One Day Sculpture* that had similar structural and philosophical correlations to *Consumed*. Doherty’s project helped position my own work more specifically in relation to a wider field of public, participatory and collaborative works. The comparison with this work, and to a lesser degree several others, proposed how alternative exchange models, such as gift economies or collaborative consumption can shift the dynamic between ‘consumer’ and ‘producer’ in the creation and encounter of creative work.

At this point the framework of commoning became significant as a way to structure shared projects while avoiding automatically utilising the more usual dynamics that drive collaboration or participatory practice. Commoning provided a new way of thinking about working together as it described a process that recognises that those involved in ‘making work in common’ are also producing a set of values and practices for forming and managing those relationships. An ongoing concern with how duration and documentation has been colonised by commodification came to the forefront in this project. Approaches to duration and documentation continued to develop in relation to an expanding understanding of commoning with creative practice.

Chapter five seeks to understand commoning processes in relation to the production of mutuality and creative projects. As mutuality emerges between people, over time and in space, the kind of commitment and transformative change that sustains creative collaborations and also activities of commoning cannot be produced by coercing people into operating together. An experience of mutuality can be transformative, in that the combined feeling of being cared for and of caring leads to persistent desire to reproduce that condition. Mutuality is already recognised as a central component of functional and sustained commoning activities. The
The distinction between mutuality and creative mutuality is subtle. Mutuality is a more generalised, but still a profound sense of caring, and being cared for by the social and spatial surrounds one is part of and contributes to. What I term ‘creative mutuality’ is specifically focused on shared creative project work through which currents of mutuality flow. Creative practice can more directly develop the conditions that are conducive to the production of creative mutuality across broader communities by centralising the shared acts of creation as a nexus of production of mutuality. This experience is a proliferating agent for future collaborative creative projects that seek to produce similar experiences. Creative mutuality works from the inside out- developing the creative work in ways that are not able to be predicted or planned. Individuals, both known and unknown to the initiators of the project are engaged and continue to orbit the creative work, while the work is sustained and continues to develop through their interest.

Chapter six describes a project, Picture Yourself, that was undertaken soon after Consumed, and in many ways was shaped by perceived shortfalls in the previous project. Picture Yourself had the effect of bringing the ethics of collaborations within creative work to the forefront. In addition, this project took place within a large shopping mall and so was a movement of commoning within highly commercial space. This location tested what kind of social and creative interrelations could occur in extremely controlled and commoditised environments. The field between creativity, participation and commodification has become increasingly blurred, even in the few years since the work was undertaken. This chapter describes specific instances of the two merging in order to discuss how practitioners can navigate their own boundaries between creative participatory practice and commodification. Commoning is recognised as contributing to an ethical approach able to navigate a course through often indistinguishable territories, a central concern of this practice.

Technological and conceptual loops are identified as a common element across all the projects in Chapter six. In the earlier works the loops were intuitive and often unrecognised, but the persistence with which they recurred in the projects signalled greater significance. The insistent loops emerged as a pattern and more central within this practice through Picture Yourself. Jane Bennett’s articulation of cyclical loops as transformative helped develop a conceptual understanding of the loop that is not necessarily repetitive.10 In relation to a broader conception of commoning, Bollier describes how patterns are a ‘performative creation of meanings that generates values in a community.’11 Eventually this enquiry produced an understanding that the loops within the work are both connective and emergent. The loops located in the different projects were instrumental in the overall practice, bringing processes of folding back through existing ideas and materials, yet also twisting and arriving somewhere new going forward. Picture Yourself was a constructed as a loop that incorporated the viewer as both the producer and the perceiver of the work, able to change, and be changed, by what they saw. Recognising this loop made evident larger loops within the practice including how the lived experience of creative mutuality induced by commoning processes folds back on the participant, transforming their outlook and producing a tendency towards commoning in their future activity.

...
Identifying that the recurring structure of loops were performatively creating meaning, lead to finding other recurring elements that functioned as conceptual lenses for the work. Along with the more easily apparent interests in commoning, mutuality and utilising looping structures, a practice of operating in ‘the minor’ is also significant. The concept of ‘the minor’ became useful as it contained the values inherent to both collaborative creative practice and commoning, without being necessarily a collective activity. This begins to show how commoning can guide even non-collaborative projects that are operating in a wider, social field. Simon O’Sullivan’s explanation how ‘minor’ takes an alternate political position that is resistant without being overtly oppositional to commoditised art practices, and is extended to commoning art practices. Associating the concept of the minor in the project work identified a politicised framework without requiring an overtly political or activist approach. Articulating how the collaborative projects in my practice correlated with O’Sullivan’s conception of the minor clarified how a collaborative creative practice can be both minor and figure in cultural production. Further exploration into the minor by Erin Manning and Tim Ingold, made alignments with a wider community of collaborative and emergent practices, and lent support to the sometimes fragile, often intuitive and emergent processes of this research.

Chapter seven describes AfterImage, the only project that is not collaborative or public. This project was a movement of commoning through experientially manifest conceptual space. AfterImage strengthened the conception of loops as trajectories that interconnect in various ways in conceptual, technological and physical space. The project and discussion proposes a way to think through the previous works through constructing an inhabitable diagram. The diagram functions as an explanatory and exploratory reflective tool for visualising and forming social, spatial and creative interrelations. This approach enables a perceptible shift between subjective experience and objective view, making explicit the ability for each to become proliferating agents that contribute to making new work. By producing an inhabitable diagram that functions to analogously describe the experience of creative commoning, it became possible to gain a perspective on previous works and also speculate on future manifestations. This tactic draws on an existing ‘designerly’ tendency to visualise elements as spatially arranged, and uses the technique for a critical exploration of the relations between seemingly disparate elements that might otherwise remain disconnected.

The eighth chapter focuses on two intertwined projects, Building Movements and Collective Commons. Combined, these projects form a movement of commoning through teaching within an academic and institutional space. Building Movements was a complex series of collaboratively designed spatial installations produced within an institutional context; the Design Hub at the Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology. Collective Commons was a documentation system that was produced alongside the four Building Movements installations. These projects operated in a regulated institutional context that ostensibly encouraged creative innovation. The process of doing the work made apparent the invisible restrictions and controls implemented by excessive but largely concealed bureaucracy. This project also produced further reflection on the various ways problems arise in emergent and collaborative works. Miscommunication and mistakes can appear to signify failures, but a wider reflection on the results of failure over time, resulted in deeper understanding of the capacity of failure to open up new possibilities and to become through this an opening of opportunity rather than a closing down of possibility.

Together Building Movements and Collective Commons manifested many of the emergent characteristics of the earlier works and more explicitly developed how processes of commoning and creative mutuality can form and inform collaborations. Specifically, the projects extended how commoning processes can tend the conditions for creative mutuality to appear. An aspiration for creative mutuality is both a desire and a guiding principle for collaborative creative works. As both Building Movements and Collective Commons were teaching projects, as well as a collaborative research work, the processes of commoning and working together on creative work in relation to my teaching practice proposed applications for pedagogy that were to become more significant in the future when I began a full time academic position.
Chapter nine is a movement of commoning through the reconfiguration of domestic spaces for cohabitation. This project resonates with the initial experiences in New York of constructing and making interior spaces within existing buildings to facilitate new ways of living and working. Both the domestic reconfiguration and the occupation of old commercial buildings occurred in highly commoditised real estate markets which traditionally force out more marginalised inhabitants and ways of life. A familiarity with unconventional and alternative living conditions perhaps rendered it easier to imagine new domestic and spatial arrangements without being limited by an overly pragmatic approach or conventional solutions. Flexible living spaces that are parafunctional in their ability to be many things at once and over time provide many more various forms of inhabitation, ultimately encouraging a broader capacity for living together.

Chapter ten begins to cast into the near future, seeking ways that commoning processes, creative practice, research and pedagogy can come together through design studio teaching. This exploration marks a move through several loops, the most extensive connecting back to a quality that was originally attractive about commoning; how it is able to connect experiences, outlooks and values in distinct parts of life together. A pedagogical approach is proposed through the concept of ‘commoning commoning’ where the subject and the processes are the same thing, allowing for more subtle or oblique instruction that leaves plenty of space for the student to make their own relations and processes with the material. This chapter positions the design studio as a parafunctional space, able to facilitate new dreams of the future, and also seeks how design teaching can be integrated with the values and conditions that encourage creative mutuality.

Chapter eleven concludes the thesis, drawing together the theoretical threads across these projects and proposing directions for further work. This thesis demonstrates how the emergent characteristics of commoning can develop through diverse creative works, and by forming connections across disparate practices, traversing fields and disciplines to produce new spaces of engagement. An accord between commoning and creative collaborations expands the emerging paradigm of commoning and orients the ethical and social concerns of this creative practice within prevailing economic conditions. The research proposes how commoning entwined with creative practice can lead toward a sense of creative mutuality. Mutuality engenders and prioritises inclusivity, care and dynamic processes of exchange, as well as the means for negotiating increasingly complex ethics.
0.3 PROCESSES

This research was conducted through practice-led methods. In the School of Architecture and Design at RMIT where my research is located, this would usually mean that the examination would involve a dissertation, an exhibit and a one-hour presentation. However, the more I wrote, the clearer it became that producing an exhibition as either a culmination of this research or as a review of the projects did not seem a useful way to present the value of the research. The short duration of the exhibition and the conventions of the presentation would have meant it would be impossible to produce the kind of emergent, durational and connective relations that are central to the interest of this work. It felt worth putting more time into a longer dissertation rather than the potentially limited value of the exhibition. The extended dissertation format gave me more space to expand on other aspects that felt important such as how this research can inform a pedagogical approach and include personal narratives that are pivotal in identifying and illuminating the praxis of commoning.

The position I have taken with this writing resonates with Jane Rendell’s interest in interdisciplinary work and her ideas of how critical writing can function as a mode of spatial practice. Rendell is concerned that existing research methods can enforce an external logic on the process that can end up marginalising more exploratory, fragile and untested forms of knowledge. As this research has unfolded through emergent and minor processes, there were many points where the work was only able to feel for a way forward, drawing on instinct and other ‘academically weak’ tactics to find ways to continue, Rendell’s perspective supported and renewed a commitment to my approaches to working and research. Her view is that interdisciplinary practices can contribute to expanding research methods, as by their nature those practices question the usual ways of operating, encouraged considering this work (as a trans-disciplinary practice, and a thesis that was researched through creative project work) as contributing to new research methods.

For Rendell, the current economic environment means that it is necessary to propose new methodologies for both spatial practice and critical writing in order to avoid it being sublimated by existing economic and power relations. She argues that seeking new ways of performing and creating interdisciplinary research ‘allows for the emergence of marginal and often complex forms of research that are at once questioning of dominant ideologies and economic systems and capable of proposing alternatives’ In her own writing practice Rendell explores inter-subjectivity and interdisciplinary processes through a method she calls ‘site writing’, where she prioritises the site of engagement and juxtaposes various critical theorists with her own voice and using her ‘own life as subject matter for theoretical reflection’. Her approach resonates with how this work has emerged from navigating the inter-relation of life with creative work. Rendell sees ‘writing is a form of designing’ which is both intersubjective and interdisciplinary. Her views accept a more tangled reality as a starting point and position the theoretical aspects of research as necessarily creative. Rendell’s perspective is liberating as it allows for an understanding of how the research, creative work and a lived life are in continuous and mobile concert with each other. In this case it was looping through research, creative work and life that eventually revealed the undercurrent of commoning within all three, a quality that might have been overlooked in any single area by itself.

The writing demonstrates how links were established between this creative practice and commoning over time and through a series of ‘movements’ that encouraged various realisations. This way of working, the ideas and work it explores, as well as commoning itself, are all emergent processes. Key concerns and interests led me across varied roles and activities, revealing an existing disposition towards commoning in creative practice and as creative practice. The developing understanding that occurred through this process has led to what is understood here as ‘creative mutuality’ within creative practice emerging as a significant connection between commoning and creative practice. This research seeks to encourage wider engagement in the production of mutually beneficial interrelations of commoning and creative practice, potentially producing change at various levels through a creative and social praxis.

14 Ibid, 119.
15 Tim Ingold describes the usefulness of ‘weak approaches’ in education as a way of valuing ‘relational achievement’ rather than ‘forgone conclusions’. This is explained in more detail in Tim Ingold, Anthropology and/as Education, (England and New York: Routledge, 2017).
CHAPTER ONE

1.0 COMMONS

The long history of commons is evident in remnants our lives and our language, but has been largely alienated from our everyday experience. Recently there has been a growing undercurrent of interest in re-establishing many aspects of common life. Over the last decade it has become undeniable that capitalist and neoliberal systems are fatally corrupted, making it vital to seek and to create alternatives. Varied disciplines interested in the commons are developing credible propositions for how the values and processes found within historical and contemporary commons could fundamentally reorganise our contemporary lives. An historical understanding of commons; what engenders and sustain them, the threats to them and the value of them, inform how commons thinking and activities can contribute viable alternatives for our society.

The increased visibility of commons are due to a number of social, political and technological changes that have allowed for new forms of commons to emerge, as well as growing interest and scholarship that is beginning to correct a pervasive view that commons are longer viable or substantially in existence. The ethical arguments and social motivation for the identification, maintenance and development of all kinds of commons have been re-energised by the extent and pressures of globalised commodification, growing inequality and erosion of social capital.

Commons can be broadly described as shared social, cultural, virtual or physical resource maintained or produced through a social system of stewardship. Commons have always existed in most cultures but the forms they took were diverse and situated within their own cultural norms and so were usually largely undefined and not necessarily grouped under the term. The term ‘common’ is most frequently associated with the historical system of land access in pre- and early capitalist England, and more recently to describe file sharing networks. Commons are now recognised as referring to both resources and practices across a vast range of modalities. Our understanding of commons resonates with the vestiges of a commons based society that is still evident and experienced in our friendships and family structures. In the western world a shared life is now often only experienced within family relationships as it is one of the only remaining places where the unit is a totality, managed and maintained through behaviours articulated through care. Commons might also be experienced or understood through other more ephemeral shared resources such as language, knowledge, culture and traditions. Cultural and intellectual material is also gathered together by ‘open access knowledge’ commons or peer-to-peer sharing platforms. Technology has also created ways for people remote from each other, to collect together through shared interests or beliefs.

The ways by which commons emerge or are maintained become the customs of that community. Traditionally this was the basis for developing an individual and communal sense of identity and of security, both elements central to forming significant social and spatial attachments, or a ‘non-commodified means of fulfilling people’s needs.’ Even as capitalism shifts what constitutes ‘needs’ further and further into the realm of consumerism, participating or belonging to commons still offers the individual a means to integrate various aspects of life, promote social equality and tend to themselves and others situated within the context of a wider society and environment. The ability of commons to provide a deeper, intersubjective understanding of the world and the conditions we live within, underpins how, despite concerted and sustained efforts to erode them, commons systems have persisted over time.

The combination of elements that contribute to commons and the variety of locations and modalities that they exist in, point to the inherent complexity in defining them. De Angelis explains how no aspect of the common is singular or fixed but instead the entirety is produced through conceptualising three aspects at once; a shared resource, the individuals that have chosen to enter into communal stewardship and the social practices that maintain both the
resource and the relations. Those involved in commons share a commitment to negotiating difference and articulating a way of living in the world that can recognise in the present an aspiration for a shared future. Ultimately the social practices of the individuals who produce and constitute the commons are the means through which the commons is reproduced. This social praxis has become a key identifying feature of the contemporary commons and has recently become known as ‘commoning’.9

1.1 PROCESSES OF COMMONING

The last thirty years have been characterised by massive changes in the ways we operate and relate due to new technologies and political, economical and social structures. Society has become both connected and fragmented in ways that have never existed before. Financial, political, and ecological crises, and resulting mass immigrations, all surge past international borders, crashing global markets, breaching seawalls and crossing continents. The internet, social media and world travel all continually mediate our understanding of identity, temporality and community on multitudinous intangible and more obvious levels. In the face of these changes, the developing paradigm of commoning proposes ways the world and its constituents may be shaped as other to the neoliberal or commoditised forms offered by the existing fields of power.

The transition from commons to commoning represents a major conceptual shift as the idea of commoning opens up ways to think of commons as producing an activity and subjectivity, rather than being a separate entity in a location or a set of coordinates. Peter Linebaugh introduced the term ‘commoning’10 in 2008 to describe the social praxis, or the activity and processes that occur when collectively maintaining, producing or managing a common pool resource.11 Linebaugh explains that commoning is “…conducted through labour with other resources”12 meaning it does not make a division between labour and shared resources. By introducing the concept of commoning, or more accurately, naming and so therefore rendering it visible, he expanded the conceptual space where alternatives to the existing systems can be located and tested.13

Although the term commoning is relatively new, the activity is one that it is easily understood. Commoning resonates with a more fundamental part of ourselves that acknowledges we are formed by our relationships, and that these relationships co-produce the physical, social and cultural environments that we live in.14 Through commoning, the framework of mutually involved relations is extended back into the public sphere, contesting the dominance of commerce in maintaining and shaping public space and relations. The aspiration of commoning
is to offer a widely inclusive and accessible means for constructing alternative, meaningful and interconnected social and creative relations. As in the microcosm of families, there are many ways that these relations can break down or be co-opted by unsympathetic forces. Commoning resists this through an attitude of negotiation that seeks to navigate complex dynamics and conditions and contribute, rather than extract value, from shared experience. Once these characteristics are internalised they produce within the individual an enduring and resilient commitment towards commoning across varied modalities, which is able to challenge the politics of exclusion with inclusion and replace a preference for extraction and accumulation with values of reciprocity and negotiation. The specific commoning activity may dissipate, but the values and disposition will continue and cause new irruptions in other interstices.

Commoning produces knowledge through collectively negotiating the social and relational meaning of that which is produced or created. In mutable and distracted global interrelations, both producing commons and the core values of commoning are an affective experience. David Bollier explains this is because ‘commons are not things, resources or goods; they are the organic fabric of social structures and processes.’ As a result commoning is deeply affective, in that its relational and collective activities ‘shape both their subjects and their means; commoning practices literally produce what is to be named, valued, used and symbolised as common.’ The affectivity of commoning makes clear how new commons can continue to exist or to be formed despite increasing efforts to enclose existing commons, without subscribing to the growth or scarcity dichotomy of capitalism. Commoning continues to attract new adherents even as mainstream approaches to managing those relations, but all share underlying values that are not organised around profit. Thompson describes ‘through commoning, commoners gain a sense that they are the protagonists in their own lives.’ For David Harvey navigating the mutable interrelations of commonings is ‘an unstable and malleable social relation between a particular self-defined social group, and those aspects of actually existing or yet-to-be-created social and/or physical environment deemed crucial to its life and livelihood.’

Stavros Stavrides summarises commoning practices as encouraging creative encounters and negotiations through which forms of sharing are organised and common life takes shape. He goes on to say ‘commoning practices, thus, do not simply produce or distribute goods but essentially create new forms of social life, forms of life-in-common.’ The capacity to produce new relations is at the core of why commoning is attractive and affective – the social and spatial agency of commoning contrasts with the prescribed activities and occupations and increasingly precarious social, environmental and economic conditions inflicted by neoliberal planning.

Various forms of commoning develop with different relations to the market and their own approaches to managing those relations, but all share underlying values that are not organised around profit. Thompson describes how this is an essential characteristic of commoning as it always ‘entails supplanting the market paradigm, based on maximising self interest and assigning value based on price, with a paradigm that maximises communal well-being.’ This makes commoning fundamentally confounding to existing bureaucratic or capitalist frameworks, and incidentally not easily deployed as a social solution by those in power. Commoning is described by theorists and activists such as David Bollier and Stavros Stavrides, as both idiosyncratic and broadly accessible, a versatile and compelling contrast to the existing systems. The living processes of commoning acknowledge complexity and difficulty, but propose within the already existing present, in multiple and varied ways, alternatives to the social, environmental and economic futures that are conditioned by neoliberal policies. Ruivenkamp and Hilton describe commoning in general as ‘a quest for independence from the ordering temporality of capital(ism).’ In valorising many other ways of being, commoning strives not to be utopian but to present a more hopeful, but also practicable, alternative to the predominant version of reality. This view is convincing because, as Stavrides explains, ‘commoning practices shape both their subjects and their means; commoning practices literally produce what is to be named, valued, used and symbolised as common.’ Commoning has the capacity to develop a subjective and objective approach for creating social relations that lend themselves to the production of new collective forms of living and working creatively.
Over the last decade there has been a shift from primarily conceiving commons as a shared territory or resource to the social practices through which a commons re-produces. This is a significant development in the history of commons, igniting new territories of interest and also effectively countering the view, discussed further in Section 1.2, that commons are antiquated and dysfunctional. The identification and development of the concept of commoning produces new correlations and applications for participatory, public, process driven creative practice. This research is interested in finding ways that the social praxis and values of commoning can contribute to systems of creative practice. The incorporation of commoning and creative practice develops values that can propose new imaginings and possibilities for a mutually engaged social and creative life.

1.2 ENCLOSURE

Capitalism has consistently profited from the commons through instituting policies of enclosure. These policies have normalised privatisation and a preference for the free-market to organise society. Enclosure takes resources that belong to everyone and privatises and commoditises them for individual market gain. As the values of the market are so different to those of the commons, it has been necessary for the market to subjugate the commons not only for direct gain but also to shift the populations views into a territory that can accept the increasingly short term and destructive activities that support market growth. This trajectory is seen all over the world, and in all kinds of commons from traditional land based commons to virtual communities. A strong disposition towards commoning is needed to maintain any particular commons but is also more broadly necessary to stave off enclosure across commons in general, and to continue to support, directly or indirectly, the development of new commons and forms of commoning. Practices of commoning are always countering enclosure, and for this reason are able to contribute knowledge to creative practice that is trying to fend off similar threats.

Enclosure is facilitated by the existing dominant world view. The autonomous self-regulating market that has increasingly shaped the structures and spaces of western society has conditioned the mainstream to be unable to recognise or understand commons. It also relegates the kind of social order that any commons produces as both irrelevant and archaic. Framing commons as naive, outdated or utopian means they can be disregarded, seen as unable to substantially exist or function alongside the social and financial structures of contemporary life. This view contributes to commons being more widely conceived as a romantic notion peripheral to current systems. Despite the continuing re-emergence of commons this perception continues to prevail. The relatively low profile of commons within existing power and legal systems supports strategies of enclosure and loss of any specific commons is largely unacknowledged and minimised, appearing relatively low profile of commons within existing power and legal systems supports strategies of enclosure and loss of any specific commons is largely unacknowledged and minimised, appearing simply to be an isolated occurrence and unrelated to larger problems.

The fate of commons in western Europe illustrates the ability of the market to enforce dispossession from the commons and replace it with an abidance to neoliberal forms of dispossession. The Magna Carta, for example, was the basis for the United States Declaration for Independence. Enclosure takes resources that belong to everyone and privatises and commoditises them for individual market gain. As the values of the market are so different to those of the commons, it has been necessary for the market to subjugate the commons not only for direct gain but also to shift the populations views into a territory that can accept the increasingly short term and destructive activities that support market growth. This trajectory is seen all over the world, and in all kinds of commons from traditional land based commons to virtual communities. A strong disposition towards commoning is needed to maintain any particular commons but is also more broadly necessary to stave off enclosure across commons in general, and to continue to support, directly or indirectly, the development of new commons and forms of commoning. Practices of commoning are always countering enclosure, and for this reason are able to contribute knowledge to creative practice that is trying to fend off similar threats.

Enclosure is facilitated by the existing dominant world view. The autonomous self-regulating market that has increasingly shaped the structures and spaces of western society has conditioned the mainstream to be unable to recognise or understand commons. It also relegates the kind of social order that any commons produces as both irrelevant and archaic. Framing commons as naive, outdated or utopian means they can be disregarded, seen as unable to substantially exist or function alongside the social and financial structures of contemporary life. This view contributes to commons being more widely conceived as a romantic notion peripheral to current systems. Despite the continuing re-emergence of commons this perception continues to prevail. The relatively low profile of commons within existing power and legal systems supports strategies of enclosure and loss of any specific commons is largely unacknowledged and minimised, appearing simply to be an isolated occurrence and unrelated to larger problems.

The fate of commons in western Europe illustrates the ability of the market to enforce dispossession from the commons and replace it with an abidance to neoliberal forms of dispossession. The Magna Carta, for example, was the basis for the United States Declaration for Independence. Enclosure is facilitated by the existing dominant world view. The autonomous self-regulating market that has increasingly shaped the structures and spaces of western society has conditioned the mainstream to be unable to recognise or understand commons. It also relegates the kind of social order that any commons produces as both irrelevant and archaic. Framing commons as naive, outdated or utopian means they can be disregarded, seen as unable to substantially exist or function alongside the social and financial structures of contemporary life. This view contributes to commons being more widely conceived as a romantic notion peripheral to current systems. Despite the continuing re-emergence of commons this perception continues to prevail. The relatively low profile of commons within existing power and legal systems supports strategies of enclosure and loss of any specific commons is largely unacknowledged and minimised, appearing simply to be an isolated occurrence and unrelated to larger problems.

The fate of commons in western Europe illustrates the ability of the market to enforce dispossession from the commons and replace it with an abidance to neoliberal forms of dispossession. The Magna Carta, for example, was the basis for the United States Declaration for Independence. Enclosure is facilitated by the existing dominant world view. The autonomous self-regulating market that has increasingly shaped the structures and spaces of western society has conditioned the mainstream to be unable to recognise or understand commons. It also relegates the kind of social order that any commons produces as both irrelevant and archaic. Framing commons as naive, outdated or utopian means they can be disregarded, seen as unable to substantially exist or function alongside the social and financial structures of contemporary life. This view contributes to commons being more widely conceived as a romantic notion peripheral to current systems. Despite the continuing re-emergence of commons this perception continues to prevail. The relatively low profile of commons within existing power and legal systems supports strategies of enclosure and loss of any specific commons is largely unacknowledged and minimised, appearing simply to be an isolated occurrence and unrelated to larger problems.

The fate of commons in western Europe illustrates the ability of the market to enforce dispossession from the commons and replace it with an abidance to neoliberal forms of dispossession. The Magna Carta, for example, was the basis for the United States Declaration for Independence. Enclosure is facilitated by the existing dominant world view. The autonomous self-regulating market that has increasingly shaped the structures and spaces of western society has conditioned the mainstream to be unable to recognise or understand commons. It also relegates the kind of social order that any commons produces as both irrelevant and archaic. Framing commons as naive, outdated or utopian means they can be disregarded, seen as unable to substantially exist or function alongside the social and financial structures of contemporary life. This view contributes to commons being more widely conceived as a romantic notion peripheral to current systems. Despite the continuing re-emergence of commons this perception continues to prevail. The relatively low profile of commons within existing power and legal systems supports strategies of enclosure and loss of any specific commons is largely unacknowledged and minimised, appearing simply to be an isolated occurrence and unrelated to larger problems.

The fate of commons in western Europe illustrates the ability of the market to enforce dispossession from the commons and replace it with an abidance to neoliberal forms of dispossession. The Magna Carta, for example, was the basis for the United States Declaration for Independence. Enclosure is facilitated by the existing dominant world view. The autonomous self-regulating market that has increasingly shaped the structures and spaces of western society has conditioned the mainstream to be unable to recognise or understand commons. It also relegates the kind of social order that any commons produces as both irrelevant and archaic. Framing commons as naive, outdated or utopian means they can be disregarded, seen as unable to substantially exist or function alongside the social and financial structures of contemporary life. This view contributes to commons being more widely conceived as a romantic notion peripheral to current systems. Despite the continuing re-emergence of commons this perception continues to prevail. The relatively low profile of commons within existing power and legal systems supports strategies of enclosure and loss of any specific commons is largely unacknowledged and minimised, appearing simply to be an isolated occurrence and unrelated to larger problems.
As industrialisation started to take effect and populations expanded, land became more valuable and there was also financial incentive to suppress subsistence activities. In the 1700s England passed laws enabling enclosure of common lands, ostensibly in the name of increasing productivity. The enforcement of these laws was ensured through financial rewards for those in control of the processes. This strategy was supported by recognition that enclosing commons makes resources that were previously freely available, less accessible, alienating people from methods of subsisting and producing perceived or actual scarcity that can then be capitalised on. The effects of the enclosures and the accompanying restructuring of public and work space by industrialisation rippled through society, shifting social and political relations, changing conceptions of leisure, and prescribing value to the production of capital. The authors of Reclaiming the Commons describe in vivid detail the extent that enclosure dismantles existing ways of life through ‘processes of expropriation, exclusion, denial and dispossession’ that disconnects people from a sense of shared survival. Commons are always spiritually and emotionally significant to those who tend to them and inhabit them. When enclosure occurs, it does not just fence off what was once shared, it intrinsically changes the composition of that space through disrupting the social and temporal relations that run through it.

In addition to social and spatial dispossession, enclosure perpetuates capitalism, as through expropriation it produces new labour forces and also a consequent reliance on capitalism. Capitalism positions producers and consumers; work and leisure, in symbiotic but oppositional roles. The decline of traditional commons and the emergence of industrialisation in England also had the effect of designating separate areas and times for work and leisure. Partitioning life in this way was normalised by the values of industrial production that enforced the social and moral value of hard work and punctual time management. The separation of work and leisure also results in capital that needs to be spent when not at work. Over time, the practice of acquiring goods with capital introduced the concept that a sense of self could be developed independently through the accumulation of commodities. Culturally this continues to have dramatic effect on perceptions of an individual’s worth.

The seminal modern argument for enclosing commons was outlined by Garret Hardin in his text, “The Tragedy of the Commons” written in 1968. Hardin described ‘the tragedy’ of a shared resource that is destroyed for all through ineffective management and exploitation by an individual. He argued that commons were always under-utilised and ultimately ruined by poor governance and subsequent environmental destruction, a position that has been taken as the modern moral and economic justification for the market appropriating commons all over the world. His text is still frequently cited to support enclosure and regulation, giving credence to the view that bureaucratic management of common land is the most equitable and fair way to control of the processes. This strategy was supported by recognition that enclosing commons makes resources that were previously freely available, less accessible, alienating people from methods of subsisting and producing perceived or actual scarcity that can then be capitalised on. The effects of the enclosures and the accompanying restructuring of public and work space by industrialisation rippled through society, shifting social and political relations, changing conceptions of leisure, and prescribing value to the production of capital. The authors of Reclaiming the Commons describe in vivid detail the extent that enclosure dismantles existing ways of life through ‘processes of expropriation, exclusion, denial and dispossession’ that disconnects people from a sense of shared survival. Commons are always spiritually and emotionally significant to those who tend to them and inhabit them. When enclosure occurs, it does not just fence off what was once shared, it intrinsically changes the composition of that space through disrupting the social and temporal relations that run through it.

The seminal modern argument for enclosing commons was outlined by Garret Hardin in his text, “The Tragedy of the Commons” written in 1968. Hardin described ‘the tragedy’ of a shared resource that is destroyed for all through ineffective management and exploitation by an individual. He argued that commons were always under-utilised and ultimately ruined by poor governance and subsequent environmental destruction, a position that has been taken as the modern moral and economic justification for the market appropriating commons all over the world. His text is still frequently cited to support enclosure and regulation, giving credence to the view that bureaucratic management of common land is the most equitable and fair way to control of the processes. This strategy was supported by recognition that enclosing commons makes resources that were previously freely available, less accessible, alienating people from methods of subsisting and producing perceived or actual scarcity that can then be capitalised on. The effects of the enclosures and the accompanying restructuring of public and work space by industrialisation rippled through society, shifting social and political relations, changing conceptions of leisure, and prescribing value to the production of capital. The authors of Reclaiming the Commons describe in vivid detail the extent that enclosure dismantles existing ways of life through ‘processes of expropriation, exclusion, denial and dispossession’ that disconnects people from a sense of shared survival. Commons are always spiritually and emotionally significant to those who tend to them and inhabit them. When enclosure occurs, it does not just fence off what was once shared, it intrinsically changes the composition of that space through disrupting the social and temporal relations that run through it.

The seminal modern argument for enclosing commons was outlined by Garret Hardin in his text, “The Tragedy of the Commons” written in 1968. Hardin described ‘the tragedy’ of a shared resource that is destroyed for all through ineffective management and exploitation by an individual. He argued that commons were always under-utilised and ultimately ruined by poor governance and subsequent environmental destruction, a position that has been taken as the modern moral and economic justification for the market appropriating commons all over the world. His text is still frequently cited to support enclosure and regulation, giving credence to the view that bureaucratic management of common land is the most equitable and fair way to control of the processes. This strategy was supported by recognition that enclosing commons makes resources that were previously freely available, less accessible, alienating people from methods of subsisting and producing perceived or actual scarcity that can then be capitalised on. The effects of the enclosures and the accompanying restructuring of public and work space by industrialisation rippled through society, shifting social and political relations, changing conceptions of leisure, and prescribing value to the production of capital. The authors of Reclaiming the Commons describe in vivid detail the extent that enclosure dismantles existing ways of life through ‘processes of expropriation, exclusion, denial and dispossession’ that disconnects people from a sense of shared survival. Commons are always spiritually and emotionally significant to those who tend to them and inhabit them. When enclosure occurs, it does not just fence off what was once shared, it intrinsically changes the composition of that space through disrupting the social and temporal relations that run through it.

Hardin's views on the necessity of enclosure were widely adopted despite glaring faults in his logic that have been extensively addressed by supporters of commons. A particular fault with Hardin’s analysis is the problem he describes does not scale up to being a universal issue. Bollier notes that Hardin’s example of the exploited commons did not actually describe the usual form of commons as there was no shared authority over its management, and the argument simply articulated a framework that could be employed to support existing neoliberal goals. Maria Mies and Veronica Bennholdt-Thomsen research and work with subsistence workers, particularly women who are maintaining and working commons in the southern hemisphere, remain incredulous at the extent to which Hardin’s logic has framed and structured the debate around commons in the western world. Mies and Bennholdt-Thomsen vehemently reject his views and point out that the customary interpretation of Hardin’s position enables and justifies patriarchal, neoliberal ideologies of globalisation and privatisation through deeming the social
and economic aspects of commons as inconsequential. They declare the urgency of supporting all forms of contemporary commons because ‘although capitalism is able to enclose, colonise and exploit material and non-material commons’ it is not able to create them. Despite the persistent refutation of Hardin’s argument, the precept it supports has been widely accepted as common sense, even by people unfamiliar with the debate. The internalised cultural message is that the broader public is not able to self-regulate or manage their own amenities. The economy is framed as the only acceptable and able mechanism for managing resources, enabling even wider colonisation of previously shared resources by neoliberal systems.

As the market restlessly seeks new areas to commodify, commons are again attracting commercial interest as potential new sources of revenue or capital. De Angelis identifies how neoliberal politics are attempting to circumvent an impasse in their own policies by incorporating commons and commoning as the ‘basis for new capitalist growth’ through ideas such as ‘sustainable development’. These propositions are often actually unsustainable as the market finds it impossible to conceive of motivations other than making a profit, or to imagine a culture that is not driven by greed and conflict, whereas commoning explicitly questions this limited view of human motivation. The fundamental principle of commons; open access, is an anathema to capitalism. Instead, a capitalist perspective views spaces as transferable and commons as replaceable. Within this logic everything is un-moored from meaning and tethered only to market value. Social activity is conceived as replicable and relocatable, not unique and specific to its socio-spatial relations. The market occasionally it obfuscates its position by mimicking or replacing the characteristics or customs developed in common in a community, giving the impression that it can maintain the same cultures after displacement or expropriation and efficiently replace the function of commoners or commoning in sustaining a particular community. Regardless, the forms of community and creative activity the capitalist systems promote, only temporarily obscure the loss of a deeper connections. Market-leading forms of social engagement can ultimately always be transferred or transacted, and so cannot value or produce the subtler and intangible characteristics that meld people to the places they occupy and in relation to each other.

The global financial crisis of 2008 exposed the extent of the incongruities between the ideals of peace and prosperity promised by the free-market, and the reality of endemic inequality and global environmental destruction. As the rupture in neoliberal narrative passed the point of inflection these contradictions became increasingly difficult to ignore. On this backdrop Elinor Ostrom won a Nobel prize for economics in 2009 for her lifelong work on commons and the management of shared resources. The subsequent publicity of her research has undermined continued endorsement of Hardin’s assertions, and demonstrated that commons are a convincing, and already existing, alternative to the dominant organising paradigm of the market.

With globalisation, many more cultural and natural commons have become accessible to the market. Despite the recent expansion of commoning across more diverse domains and activities, the dominance of neoliberal narratives mean the concept is continually threatened by fragmentation that renders it invisible or unreocgnised. This is enforced by the perceived dynamic of commoning always being in direct opposition to capitalism. In Silent Theft, David Bollier makes it clear that despite being committed to commoning, he does not support eliminating the market. Instead he prefers developing a more optimal balance between commoning and the financial systems. The attitude that a more moderate form of capitalism could exist alongside commons was once more widely in evidence. Building societies and financial cooperatives started in the nineteenth century as institutions that supported a social program within the existing economic systems, for example securing housing for its members. Over time these types of institutions were invariably privatised or converted to profit. The progression is usually
explained by referencing the tragedy of the commons, making their demise appear inevitable. Existing enterprises and markets are less interested in sustaining a balance with commoning and instead preserve a myopic view when it comes to maintaining their own growth.53

The more moderate balance of interests that Bollier champions are, despite some exceptions, often crippled or cannibalised by capitalist growth intent on transforming everything into financial commodities. As commodification has become a pervasive condition across many areas of life it produces a widely accepted framework of values, normalising financial growth and consumerism as a natural progression, and the only marker of development, for all societies and cultures. Naturally not all forms of enclosure are detrimental, as the formation of any community, collective or user group, involves some definition of a boundary. However, these boundaries are different from the kind of enclosure that supports neoliberal agendas that prioritise the isolated right of the individuals, and separate people from a sense of stewardship towards the spaces and society they inhabit.

Capitalist hegemony is countered as commoning processes invent their own mesh of connections across varied disciplines and modalities through shared interests and values. By incorporating an agenda of making connections, the activity of commoning turns traditional conceptions of commons as a separate and bounded community, outward towards being a much broader discourse. Counteracting the self referential logic of capitalism requires a conscious construction of other perspectives. Bollier reminds us that talking about our ‘common wealth’ demonstrates what we share and negates the market driven message that we 'have little in common and can accomplish little when we work together.'54 Various groups for alternate economies; such as the Social or Solidarity Economy,55 or the Community Economy,56 that use transversal approaches to redefine the economy in terms of complex social relationships across communities and sectors, explicitly include connectivity as part of their agenda. By evidencing a mesh of diverse and varied activities that share key attributes and values in common, new alignments and connections across commoning systems are strengthened and elaborated.

As creative practice drifts into a more pervasive and subtle inter-relationship with processes of commodification it becomes more difficult to make distinctions between the two areas. Even creative practice consciously engaged with social and spatial processes are frequently employed as tools or instruments to encourage displacement through gentrification and other forms of enclosure. For creative practices the conversations around commodification are often reduced to a binary between politicised forms of resistance or acceptance of a perceived futility in resisting neoliberal capitalism. Resistance to the wholesale commodification of culture appears irrelevant or useless, abetting attitudes of acceptance or acquiescence.

Despite creative practices being massively entwined with, and conflicted by the market, they are still uniquely positioned to intervene in the general and wholesale adoption of market values. The commons and commoning present a way to refute the normative logic of the market and replace it with an alternative. Reclaiming or inventing new commons is inherently innovative and adaptive; attitudes easily adopted by creative practitioners. By utilising the central tenets of the commons as a blueprint or guide, creative practitioners can develop their capacity to incorporate the values and processes of commoning into their own projects. When creative practice begins to draw in commoning across both conceptual and structural modalities, it extends the existing reach of commoning and explains how multiple shifts in action, attitude and values, even minor ones, can accumulate across various disciplines to propose a more inclusive and sustainable vision of the future.
1.3 COMMONING IN CREATIVE PRACTICE

A disposition for commoning propels the individual into a variety of commons or commoning relations. The development of a disposition produces and sustains a continued orientation towards commoning, instead of it being merely a temporary engagement, entertainment or event. The existence of a disposition that continues to seek and sustain commoning experiences indicates how commoning can permanently orient the creative practitioner and underpin their broader values across their life and work. The contemporary view of commons and acts of commoning, does not centralise humans or perpetuate the view that commons exist in support of us, rather recognises that we exist in an intermesh of life within a world that is common. Such a vast perspective can have the effect of neutralising the feeling that commoning can affect positive change. The projects undertaken by me and also those by others that are discussed in this research demonstrate the existing diversity of commoning within creative practice, and indicate the potential for commoning values to further inform manifold creative practices and contexts.

Commoning occurs across many disciplines, each bringing to it perspectives, experiences and capabilities that overall expand the reach commoning. Ash Amin and Philip Howell argue that commoning needs to be understood as ‘much an art as it is an act, unleashing a host of campaigns in its name and under its banner and relishing the contagion of collaborative work in shared space, but it is a practice of imagination too, allowing many vocabularies of being in common to proliferate.’57 Taking this view means creative practice can contribute to composing a common world from the perspective of, and in the realm of, creative practice. The specific qualities creative practice brings to commoning are different to that of anthropology, geography, economics, urban planning, agriculture or any of the areas with a more established interest in commoning. It can make stronger the ‘practice of imagination’ in commoning processes. The innate practice of sharing inherent in any commoning, ensures that the various and particular ways commoning is utilised by any one, will move from into broader interrelations and dialogues with others.

Creative practice; made and experienced through combinations of the body, the hand, the mind and with others, provides a more manageable scale and immediate entry to commoning for those making, or those experiencing the work. Creative practice interested in the relational and emergent qualities of commoning can begin from this point to valorise more complex and extensive relations with which we support and maintain our specific forms of life. Creative practice becomes one with creative commoning when people make work together, and through doing this develop, or find systems of working with shared ethical values, transparency and consensus in order to reach decisions. Increasingly contemporary practices concerned with social and public space and emergent forms of working can be identified as commoning (although they may not necessarily make this connection themselves). Commoning is often the means or motivation for practices that divert institutional power and money to create new nexus for cultural production. The creative fields where commoning occur are conceptually diverse and geographically scattered. These characteristics make it a mutable activity, made even more so by the hybridised activities, and because they are always in the process of being collectively invented.

The trajectory to commoning in creative practice could be traced many ways and the path described in this research is not meant to be comprehensive or authoritative. It appeared in relation to the project work and delineates the ideas and practices that were significant for aggregating a particular understanding in relation to broader creative collaborative work and the key ideas of commoning. It also serves to depict how various practices separated in time and space and by discipline, can be usefully constellated to bring, in this case, commoning into interrelation with creative practice.

In this research, understanding how commoning and creative practice can be brought into correspondence starts with Michel de Certeau. De Certeau describes in *The Practice of Everyday Life*, individual and social practices of ‘subverting from within’ the dominant system to function differently to expected procedure.58 The people he observed are not defined by themselves as a commoning, but collectively they expose an ongoing activity that could be described as a form
of commoning. He recognised in the adaptive and unfixed activities, individuals creatively re-ordering their spatial and social relations within the established power structures. De Certeau observed that they operated within the urban environment without producing a formalised movement, political act or organised counter-cultures. As deviations from planned occupations, they were usually spontaneous and short term, making them less likely to be easily assimilated into the formal schema of an overarching narrative. The people de Certeau identified were not passive consumers, as the public was widely generalised as at the time, but instead ‘users’ who were reclaiming their autonomy within existing structures.

De Certeau defined ‘place’ as situated and delineated, belonging to the strategist, and ‘space’ as available for new unplanned use, occupied by the tactician. De Certeau’s protagonist ‘makes something’ of the systems they are forced to occupy but also have ‘no place to indicate what they do with these systems’ and so can not produce something in ‘common’. De Certeau is contradictory here as he claims the individuals are functioning in isolation but his examples of ‘making do’ are inherently social and would not be invisible to others occupied similarly. In de Certeau’s account, the tactician was hidden in the system, while the power structures were defined by their visibility and ability to give shape and order to the world. From a dominant vantage the tactics are rendered invisible, as counter capitalist activities often are, however, for those attuned to this way of operating the recognition of similar practices by others forms common bonds, articulated or not. The theorist, Pascal Geilen, notes that tactical inhabitation means ‘the common is time and time again newly constituted in the interruption.’ These tactical modes of occupation are commoning the urban environment through the persistent and various modes of interrupting the dominant frameworks.

Since the publication of *The Practice of Everyday Life*, the urban conditions are changed in ways that have both strengthened the apparatus of the strategists and also the resolve of the tactician. Capitalist systems are increasingly adept at identifying new fuel for their own growth. Creative activities occurring in the margins are excavated by ‘the culture industry, repackaging real innovation as a fashion statement.’ As the tactical inhabitant innovates new dodges in response to assimilation, these modes of evasion are absorbed by the prevailing conditions of capitalism. A hacker demonstrating a weakness in a program leads to stronger barriers; individual style is appropriated for fast fashion; homemade footage becomes free viral content supporting subliminal advertising or ‘click bait’; previously unwanted buildings inhabited by artists are transformed into expensive condos. The avaricious colonisation of all forms of social and creative cultures by commerce activates the tactician, but also reduces the time and space available for them to locate, explore or develop, other potentials.

---


60 Felix Stadler, “Open Cultures and the Nature of Networks,” *The Note Book* project (Novi Sad, Serbia and Montenegro Sarajevo, Bosnia and Herzegovina: Futura publikacije and Sarajevo Center for Contemporary Art (SCCA), 2005).

61 This idea is discussed further in the Chapter two where Nikos Papstergedis’ notion of parafunctional spaces within the urban environment functioning as ‘dreaming devices.’ This means they are spaces that are ‘open to variable uses and provide the space and time for alternate ways of living and working to emerge.

---

**Fig 1.2 Preparations for The Fly Trap, Williamsburg 1991. Image credit: Pegi Vail.**
The complex conditions that support creativity, and the concurrent controlling or enclosure of that same activity, are encapsulated in the ambition of some cities to capture creativity as their cultural identity.\(^62\) Governments have recognised the social and financial benefits of ‘creative cities’ as outlined and envisaged Richard Florida.\(^63\) and develop strategies to transform the city by programming an alliances between creativity and capital.\(^64\) Geilen believes creative cities are repressive, as they entice creative people to become ‘entrepreneurs’ and limit their occupation to a fixed place within a well thought out and socially cohesive urban environment.\(^65\) Vrasti and Dayal concur with this view, explaining that in the production of Florida’s creative cities “what gets produced, traded and speculated on is more than just real estate, the physical infrastructure of the city; it is urbanity itself, the common sociality specific to the city.”\(^66\)

However, with awareness of the forces that coerce creative occupants into becoming complicit in the transformation of available ‘space’, to a programmable and commodified ‘place’ can be redirected. Claire Doherty citing Joshua Decter, describes ‘public space as a “ready-made domain”: over-regulated, patrolled, increasingly securitised and surveyed, a placeholder for the eventual arrival or appearance of what might be described as “public art.”’\(^67\) Doherty is keenly aware that as a producer of projects in public spaces that her work exists in tension with developers and planners. She attempts to explicitly deflect the forces that prefer to ‘make places’ through how the work and processes are designed. Often she will suggest, and then develop a project quite different to that envisioned by the council or planning body she is employed by,\(^68\) endeavouring through various tactics to educate and then expand their vision towards more open forms of art in public space.

Commoning within creative practices is as varied as commoning in the wider world but can be loosely identified through the existence of co-production and co-management. Commoning interconnects people with each other and the environments they operate in. It is a dialogical and relational process, meaning that within the individual the processes of commoning are both flexible and innovative. It becomes a deeply personal orientation that shapes a general approach to life. Beyond inter-personal and societal relations, commoning has implications for how we conceive and care for the spaces and terrains that support the processes of life. When commoning develops in conjunction with creative practice that operates within an urban context, an extended sense of care to the participants, community and to the wider environment over an extended duration is all implicated in any creative act.

In creative practice, systems of commoning can manifest in several different modes. The first is when commoning is the means by which the work is made; that is a collective co-produces the work. In the second mode the work is co-produced through participation with the audience. Both these models operate within existing financial and clerical terrains, seeking ways to deflect surplus into supporting spaces for commons and associated un-commercialised activities; itself an ancillary activity of commoning. Creative practice involved in commoning frequently moves from one mode to the other.

AS220 in Providence, Rhode Island is an example of how both these modes can be present and driving different parts of the project. AS220 was instigated by commoning and is how it continues to develop and be maintained.\(^69\) Initiated in 1992 by a small group, their manifesto derided the institutional and commercial control in the art world. They leveraged a meagre amount of capital and, with community support, purchased run-down buildings that have continued to provide low rent housing and studios for artists, and un-juried and uncensored spaces to work and exhibit or perform. A local Australian and contemporary example is the collective who operate and maintain Testing Grounds\(^70\) (fig 1.4) and Site Works,\(^71\) both sites for experimental art projects and community use in Melbourne. The collective who are behind the sites,\(^72\) convinced local councils to hand over their existing maintenance and security budget for the site and allow them to use the funds to repurpose the space in support of experimental and public arts. Within these kinds of common creative spaces, support, space and infrastructure is given for the testing and exploration of otherwise financially unviable activities. People are attracted to the activities and the spaces form new communities. The proximity and shared resources precedes activities of commoning centred on the maintenance and protection of the space and the social relations.
Coming in contact with large scale collective creative events in New York, revealed how art could entangle outcomes and processes and also produce a differentiated but communal experience. *Cats Head* and *Fly Trap* (fig 1.3) were just two of the creative collectives making performance and art events around Williamsburg in the early 90’s. Their one night events were run by a fluctuating core group of around ten people, cohered through trust, hard work and shared values, which included making all decisions by consensus and without concern for profit. The group produced events in Williamsburg in Brooklyn in the early 1990s in order to provide alternative venues and experiences to what they saw as available in the ‘commodified art scene’. At the *Fly Trap* event in an empty South Williamsburg factory in the summer of 1991, over 200 people performed or made participatory works for and with the audience throughout the night. Melanie Hahn, a producer and choreographer, commented that space was organised cooperatively by the performers and artists, and that this process often resulted in unplanned collaborations. As people interacted with the works, producing performances of their own, it was impossible to discern the audience from the artists or from the original producers.

Involvement in transforming public space into common space is a proliferating activity. The affective change within those involved continues to fuel new, and yet un-thought of, irritations of commoning. Uncertain Commons are an anonymous and amorphous collective operating subversively from within various institutions, locating the physical or psychological interruptions to existing conditions that create time and space for other potentials to emerge. Uncertain Commons remain anonymous to elude assimilation and to demonstrate an ideological rejection of privatisation and ownership. They prioritise their autonomy, mobility and differentiation as an evasive tactic. In their manifesto Speculate This!, advocate for creative activity to continue to invert the pattern of co-option by reclaiming, even if just temporarily, territories claimed by commercial forces. Uncertain Commons extend this into a call for future making through commoning proposing ‘affirmative speculation that senses potentiality lives it, virtually and creatively materialises worlds yet to come’. In this way the creative work of commoning is agitating for alternate futures through a lived experience or inhabited demonstration of alternative modes of occupying the world and forming relations.

---


74 Anna Hurwitz cited in Hahn, “The Cat’s Head,” 156.

75 Hahn, “The Cat’s Head,” 158.

76 Noam Chomsky commented that the most exciting aspect of the Occupy movement was its ability to construct links across various irritations of commoning around the world. See Noam Chomsky: “What Next for Occupy?” except from Noam Chomsky, *Occupy* (U.K. Penguin, 2012).


78 Ibid., 74.
1.4 CREATING CREATIVE COMMUNITY

Within creative practice the term ‘community’ is always complicated, but in relation to commons it is a group of people, or a set of ‘commoners’, who choose to enter into processes of management of shared interests together. Stavrides expands on this definition, explaining that it is not enough to simply develop a community with shared similarities but rather to find ways or propose how commons can negotiate difference. Rather than being reduced to a struggle that only succeed or fails in overthrowing the existing forms of control this attitude describes how ‘commons could be a way to not only understand what is at stake but to provide a way to get there’.79 As a model it foregrounds process as a way of understanding, and also producing or reproducing what is important to the practice. For creative practice this approach indicates how it can resist instrumentalisation. By aligning with, and using values of commoning, creative work can begin to ‘push the otherwise inconceivable, by lending the possible expression.’80 Concurrently, the relational qualities that occur through processes of commoning can be stitched into the structure of creative practice informing the values and orientation of the practice, and producing the spatial and social conditions for making work together.

Over the course of the research my developing understanding of my own intuitive tendency towards commoning, meant I became interested in variable modes for intentionally creating ‘in common’. These interests are reflected by the Spaces of Commoning group, involving artists, architects, designers and others who spent two years working together on commoning in various ways. They see practice and research that explores creative commoning as necessary in order to ‘rethink and undo the methodological premises of Western sciences, arts, and architecture, and to raise unsettling questions on research ethos, accountability, and the entanglement of power and knowledge.’81 In this research the common activity was usually a creative project that in part responded to attenuating or contested environments it was situated within. This was to test the specificity of those circumstances but also as an attempt to develop ways to operate from within commoditised systems. From this premise a practice of creative work and pedagogy has emerged that is enmeshed with, and guided by, processes of commoning.

The ‘research creation’ group, SenseLab,82 demonstrate another way that existing conditions can be occupied for purposes other than those designated by the controlling powers. Founded originally by Erin Manning, SenseLab has developed in close accord with the influence of her partner Brian Massumi. Operating out of Concordia University, SenseLab is concerned with resisting what they perceive as neoliberal pressures of the economy within institutions and instead seeks more experimental productions for knowledge. They network international and cross-disciplinary practitioners and academics to work together at a nexus of philosophy, art and activism, catalysing new forms of knowledge and creativity. Their website describes a large and evolving group with prolific activities and interests, but explains that ‘participants are held together by affinity’ and the projects are collectively ‘self organising’.83 This does not mean they free-fall, but instead are composed by the conscious activities and interventions of all involved.

Holding projects and people together and being conscious of the state of others requires care. Changing the conception of care-taking to a distributed activity moves it from being either someone’s sole responsibility, or belonging to no one. Care-taking has historically made up a significant part of women’s unpaid and paid labour but the character of care-taking has dramatically changed as it has ceased to be distributed across the community and instead seen as the responsibility of the individual. Feminist sociologists and economists have noted that many aspects of care work, often those constituting commoning or commons work as they are directly involved in producing or maintaining life, became invisible as wage labour and capital became the predominant signifiers of value.84 The relegation of care-taking work as value-less (in market terms) correlated with an increased perception that commons, similarly concerned with care-taking and outside of capitalist systems, had negligible value and needed to be enclosed and then transitioned into consistent productivity for the market. By disrupting fabrics of shared and distributed care, people are isolated and more easily alienated from each other. Brian Massumi and Erin Manning identify the role of care within their processes as not a personal quality or

79 An Architektur, “On the Commons.”
80 Geilen, “Performing The Common City” 278.
81 http://spacesofcommoning.net/
82 http://senselab.ca/wp2/
83 http://senselab.ca/wp2/about/
84 For example, Mies, Maria, and Veronika Bennholdt-Thomsen, The Subsistence Perspective: Beyond the Globalized Economy, translated by Patrick Camiller, Maria Mies, and Gerd Weih (London: Zed Books, 1999); Gibson-Graham, The End of Capitalism (As We Knew It).
a private subjective state but rather ‘a collective practice of care: an enactive, technique-based concern on the part of each group for the process of another group and for the overall process in which all the groups were implicated’. This notion of care is articulated by Jen Archer-Martin who is interested in drawing out how the Maori conception of interconnectedness can contribute to an expanded understanding and respect for care-taking in design practice and teaching.

My encounters with commoning situations were initiated by becoming involved with an existing but mutable community of people both at an immediate domestic scale and within a larger demographic. This creates an entangled sense of being, situated simultaneously in the spaces, the attitudes, the activities and the social conditions. When commoning appears in these enmeshed social and physical environments it resonates in all aspects of identity, inducing a changed outlook in the individuals. David Bollier explains how ‘through the processes and experience of commoning, some very different forms of knowing arise or are preserved. They slowly take root and eventually change our pattern of thinking and our frame of reference.’ The different form of knowing that Bollier refers to is represented within me as an understanding of the potential of collaborative projects for generating and exploring alternate value systems. The changed way of thinking strengthened a pre-existing disposition and meant that the creative and collaborative work I make with others is explicitly situated and connected to a wider community of commoning activities, contributing to and developing the extents of commoning.

1.5 COMMONING AND PARTICIPATORY PRACTICE

Participation exists only through engagement. An interest in engagement through participation resonates with the intangible yet meaningful contacts and experience that occur in commoning. An interest in the characteristics, effects and implications of participation emerged as a distinct art genre in the 60s and 70s developing on ideas established by the Dadaists and the Situationists. Claire Bishop describes how participatory practice emerged as an art form when creative practitioners rejected the commodified white box environment of traditional galleries in preference for public situations where the producer and the viewer co-produce the creative work through their interaction. Over the subsequent decades participatory practice has become widely accepted as an art form.

A broad acceptance of what was once a challenging and political art form is, in part, because of the adoption by commercial enterprises of similar methods for ensuring engagement with their goods and services. Neither participatory practice nor commoning are separated from the interests of existing financial power structures. In cities around the world, participatory creative practice is now easily deployed by strategists as another tool for mediating urban and cultural production, and also our experience of it. Government planning, cultural tourism, gentrification processes are frequently fused with forms of creative practice because they recognise that creative and vibrant communities are useful for furthering their economies.

Commerce is attracted to forms of participatory practice that reflect or produce the values it already understands; creating cultural or social capital that can be translated into financial returns. A more tactical approach likely to be used by a commoning practice, might align itself with the structure in which it operates but ultimately use it to a different end. This can be confusing as at times either approach, tactical or strategic, will be largely indistinguishable from the other. Participatory practice has a discordant ability to be able to align convincingly, and be useful to, oppositional ideologies, merging as easily with the experience economy as with a commoning perspective.

Claire Bishop is particularly vocal in her criticism of participatory practices overlapping with the experience economy, seeing it as a ‘marketing strategy that seeks to replace goods and services with scripted and staged personal experiences’. The experience economy is adept at utilising participatory practice to support of the directives of commodification. Geilen comments how this results in creative practice being implicated in the production of ‘touristic experience with tour operators disguised as artists’.

85 Lohmann and Hildyard, ‘Energy, Work and Finance.’ The 2014 Corner House report is a fascinating account of the historical and contemporary interrelations between finance, energy and commons. The authors discuss how commons can not be conceived as only oppositional to finance but instead as a modern, multiple, internally diverse presence in its own right. The authors point out that many commons come to owe their form to their role supporting or defending profit against activities and point to Building Mutual Societies are one example.
87 Te Ao Māori – interconnected social and environmental mutuality. In a major departure from western law New Zealand has conferred personhood on the Whanganui River. The Te Awa Tapu Act – it recognises the indigenous conception that people are indivisible from the river; it is not just a resource: http://www.legislation.govt.nz/bill/2016/0129/latest/DLM6830851.html#sec-110 (Paper presented at RMIT Design Hub, May 11, 2017).
88 Bollier and Helfrich, ‘Patterns of Commoning’ 121.
90 Joseph B. Pine and James H. Gilmore, The Experience Economy. Updated ed. Boston, Mass.: Harvard Business Review Press, 2011. In 1998 the business theorists, Pine and Gilmore, populated the influential idea that that profits and brands could be made more valuable by providing customers with meaningful experiences. The concept already underpinned tourism and hospitality which usually only sell an experience, but further spread to other disciplines such as urban planning and architecture. The experience economy, which supplanted the service economy, has since been largely superseded by co-production and consumers’ discussed in Section 3.4.
91 Lohmann and Hildyard, ‘Energy, Work and Finance.’ The 2014 Corner House report is a fascinating account of the historical and contemporary interrelations between finance, energy and commons. The authors discuss how commons can not be conceived as only oppositional to finance but instead as a modern, multiple, internally diverse presence in its own right. The authors point out that many commons come to owe their form to their role supporting or defending profit against activities and point to Building Mutual Societies are one example.
By moving out of the gallery into the social or spatial public sphere, participatory practice intersects with broader social and urban experiences. Any type of participation in culture within the public sphere has multiple abilities; it can be entertaining, manifest an event experience in urban space, collectivise or create a community, or develop and sustain cultural identities. Over the same decades that participatory practice appeared as a new form of creative practice, urban planning, real estate development processes and cultural marketing began to co-opt public experience for commercial purposes. The underlying purposes are increasingly complex and multi-layered, making differentiating the forms of participation and the motives more difficult to discern. The term ‘participatory practice’ is conceptually and materially undefined, and also encapsulates various distinct approaches. Its defining feature is that it requires the participation of the audience, however the audiences’ relation to the work, to each other or to the producer can vary vastly resulting in very different experiences. Even an ethical agenda does not necessarily manifest an comparative experience for those involved. As seen with community art that is reliant on funding and often utilised as a relatively cheap fix for social issues by governments, and identifying the underlying ethics simply clarifies whether the work is deployed on behalf of another agent.94

Nicolas Bourriaud coined the term ‘relational aesthetics’, in his text with the same name, to describe practices and artists who alter socio-spatial conditions and interested in making explicit the collective nature of social experience.95 Bourriaud proposed that the value of practices working ‘relationally,’ was the intersubjectivity that occurs when the viewer is permitted to enter into a dialogue with the producer rather than encounter art in a private and individual manner. For Bishop, Bourriaud privileges physical interaction over aesthetic merit and or conceptual engagement. Bishop derides Bourriaud’s apposition of literal activation of an audience with political emancipation, noting that the open-ended-ness proffered by these practices often correlates more closely with the scripted experiences promoted by the experience economy.96 For Bishop, the difference between a de-authored approach that is values collective creativity and an authored tradition (the form that Bourriaud is more interested in) that attempts to provoke participants, is that one is ‘disruptive and interventionist, the other constructive and ameliorative.97 It is her belief that the relevance and importance of participatory practice is not simple social engagement but lies in the potential for it to ‘invite us all to appropriate the works for ourselves and make use of these in ways that their authors might never have dreamed as possible.’ Although Bishop is not referring to commoning, this observation delineates where commoning intercepts with participatory practice.

Bishop describes three main agendas that motivate either form of participatory practice; the first is a desire to empower or activate the subject, the second is concerned with developing a more democratic understanding of authorship and collaboration and the third approach is concerned with alienation produced by capitalism. All three of the agendas that Bishop lists are also central concerns of commoning, making an immediate and obvious alignment between participatory practice and creative commoning. As these agendas can exist in practice that have become embedded in the experience economy, the existence of these three concerns in a project are not enough for participatory practice to be one of creative commoning. Bishop observes that the three agendas appear differently in practices that actively engaged the viewer in works of art to those who employ social forms of everyday life to underline the ‘collective dimension of social experience.’98 It would follow that they must appear differently again within participatory practice concerned with commoning.

The way commoning participatory practices might intentionally differentiate themselves from the experience economy is addressed by Paul O’Neill and Clare Doherty in “Locating the Producers”. The participatory practices they include in their review are defined by their attempts to locate potential elements in a project that could contribute to commodification, and then intentionally incorporate tactics to manage this. They identity duration as central in overcoming patronising tendencies of employing participatory social practice as a tool of social engineering.
For them, duration has the capacity to affirm Grant Kester’s promotion of ‘dialogical art’ as a model where ‘conversation becomes an integral part of the work itself’. O’Neill and Doherty do not explicitly mention the paradigm of commoning but they describe how creative and participatory practices can be aware of commoditising undertows, and instead elect to be attendant to what they would see as an attitude of commoning. Their approach contributes to the production of affirmative urbanisation processes rather than a consistently commercialised urban experience.

Usually when the economy deploys creative participation, the activity of artists is transformed into that of entrepreneurs. The method of introducing temporary creative urban interventions are now frequently used as a precursor to commercial development, to create future customers, condition communities for commercial intents or to support the planning tenets for a ‘creative city’. For the urban planner, the tenets of participatory practice are an expedient and economical mode for introducing creative activity into the public environment. Art events and biennales, keen to attract new audiences and improve the metrics of attendance and engagement, have incorporated participatory practice as a way of creating measurable interest and activity. The ‘Melbourne Now’ exhibition was a comprehensive overview of artists practising in Melbourne in 2013 and reflected Melbourne’s growing desire to be seen as a creative city. The exhibition included a large proportion of interactive works that fulfilled the event’s mission to ‘promote engagement with contemporary art in new and dynamic ways’. Melbourne Now featured a flashing dance floor ‘that appropriated the current makeup palettes of Yves Saint Laurent’ and a room lined with Velcro that thrown balls would fix to, among other entertaining works. For Claire Bishop, this kind of participation is problematic as the mere involvement of the audience through participation is not necessarily enough to produce a durable or formative, affective experience that would separate it from the experience economy. In her view this is where the distinction between work that scripts interaction, and the ability of interrelation to develop ‘co-producer’ becomes immaterial. As ‘co-production’ has also become scripted, openness is displaced with an experiential ‘mono-functionalism’. The distinction between participatory practice that is in service of the economy, and that which is driven by other agendas, becomes unclear and rendered irrelevant, meaning participatory practice is more easily utilised for commodification.

Using participatory art or public engagement as a commodified experience has become even more explicit with the emergence of ventures focused entirely on how engagement or participation can consolidate a commoditised framework. ‘The Museum of Ice Cream’ does this by blurring marketing, retail, museum and advertising in ways that remove the idea of a ‘museum’ to being completely in service of commerce. In many ways it is appears, and also functions, no differently from scores of other participatory installations, however in this project the intentions are much more explicit and made without irony or comment.

The museum is an intensely aesthetic environment of immersive ice cream themed installation art-works. The founder and creative director Maryellis Bunn, explains that her museum provides for contemporary interests in ways that are not addressed or recognised by traditional museums. Visitors book online a forty-five minute tour that comes with a guide and free ice-cream provided by sponsors. Most importantly, photographs and ‘selfies’ are encouraged and catered for, becoming the central component of the entire concept. Each room provides

---

For more information on the ‘Melbourne Now’ exhibition, one can visit the website: [https://www.ngv.vic.gov.au/melbournenow/](https://www.ngv.vic.gov.au/melbournenow/)

In other news, the ‘Museum of Ice Cream’ is located at [museumoficecream.com](https://museumoficecream.com), where one can book an appointment to visit.

---

Fig 1.5 Screenshot of a Museum of Icecream image search December 2017.
an imminently ‘instagrammable’ environment replete with crowd management by the guide, cute accessories and flattering lighting. The subsequent proliferation of images on the internet further advertise the concept, attracting more visitors largely seeking to re-enact the same scenes and have the exact same experience. Her approach has garnered lucrative sponsorship deals, free promotion from celebrities and influencers, consistently sold out runs in major cities across America and further opportunities for expansion.

Even in environments that are not so explicitly commodified as the ‘Museum of Ice Cream,’ participatory artworks can easily eliminate any distinction, or even discussion, of the underlying reasons for their existence and instead, become primarily an entertaining event. Grouping the work into a single discipline ‘participatory practice’ flattens the ethical differences. If all the forms of participatory work are seen as essentially the same, they can more easily be co-opted in general, and important distinctions in their ideas are sublimated by the most forceful denominator. Australian based academics and researchers; Danny Butt, Scott McQuire, and Nikos Papastergiadis, describe how easily public participation can be co-opted to produce ‘a collection of individual users working consensually and rationally toward goals that mirror the core values of neoliberalism – innovation, competitive enhancement, financial autonomy – rather than re-imagining the form of social and political life through the elaboration of multiple singularities.’110 When the evaluation of varied forms of participation is reduced to measuring an ability to engage and entertain the largest amount of people, other forms of participation are pushed out of play.

Rather than expanding knowledge and experience of varied ways of participating the production of life, participatory projects are used distract participants from questioning the system they are engaged in. Participating in creating our shared lives is an essential freedom. When all participatory works are seen as similar variants of the same ideology they are easily dismissed. By ceding an area that could otherwise continue to expand through new and open forms of participation, to be shaped and controlled only by capitalism, certain unknowns are cauterised. It is necessary to not only continue to make our culture through our participation, but to choose to participate across all realms of life in making the culture we want, not just accept the one we are served.

An historical understanding of the commons explicates where the concept of commoning has emerged and where the potential threat and values of commoning lies. This is relevant to anyone interested in commons or commoning, but has specific use for creative participatory practice. Participatory creative practice shares many social and spatial interests with commoning and so offers opportunities to bring both into resonance. Participatory practice can find in commoning the values and political orientation with which to navigate a highly commodified terrain and also its existing capacity to be instrumentalised by neoliberalism. The next chapter further explores how participating in creative practice and commoning, together can influence and inform how spatial and social life is produced.

---

A movement of commoning inside the creeping trajectory of urban gentrification through creative communities in warehouses in Brooklyn.

CHAPTER TWO

2.0 INADVERTENT PROSPECTORS

**Story 1:** I kept my foot on the clutch and we coasted down the long hill to Las Vegas, the old Volvo expiring in a final cloud of steam and smoke. We slept in the car for a week, wandering aimlessly through the sparkling, crashing casinos and the desolation of the Greyhound bus terminal, formulating ways to get out of there. Finally, we heard that friends were driving to New York and could pick us up. A man with sad eyes at the bus terminal offered us fifty dollars for the car, the check bouncing after we left town. We travelled across the rest of the country on the floor in the back of a windowless van, a strip of unchanging sky visible over the dashboard. I was planning to go back to Europe once I reached the East coast, but on first sight of Manhattan spangled against the night I resolved to stay. I was 19, and it was the summer of 1992.

The people I lived among and with in northern Brooklyn exposed territories in the late 1980s and early 1990s that had previously been ignored or undervalued by the real estate and commercial market. The initial low budget and anti-materialist attitudes that attracted the people that I knew to the area quite predictably, in retrospect, fuelled rapid commercial development. We were complicit in forming and commodifying the area in a way that did not necessarily benefit the communities that were there before or the more recent one that we had developed. By not accepting or acknowledging our role as inadvertent developers there was no ability to affect how the development unfolded. In the last few decades, the gentrification patterns have become so formulaic that commercial enterprises have identified how creative communities, or even just the by-products of creative communities,¹ can usefully and expediently pioneer for future development. Pascal Gielen points out that neoliberal forces essentially coerce creative practitioners into becoming creative entrepreneurs in order to thrive in the 'creative repressive'² cities of this century. In the nineties northern Brooklyn transformed at first slowly, then, supported by the requisite changes to planning, very rapidly, displacing the older communities and the creatives dependent on the low rents and large spaces of the empty industrial buildings.

¹ For example, developers may precede their development by staging interesting cultural events or installing a pop-up café or market to temporarily create a sense of dynamic community.

² Pascal Gielen, “Performing the Common City: On the Crossroads of Art, Politics and Public Life,” in Interrupting the City: Artistic Constitutions of the Public Sphere, ed. Sander Bax, Pascal Gielen, Bram Ieven (Amsterdam: Valiz Antennae, 2015), 286.
The existing communities in that part of Brooklyn had been relatively stable for decades, held together by robust and diverse cultural identities within neighbourhoods formed around generational occupancy, similar income levels and cultural and religious affiliations. The original, ethnically organised communities coexisted with the first wave of creatives that moved in. The artists largely occupied previously abandoned buildings and so were not competing for the traditional housing stock and were also supporting existing businesses. This period of co-existence, or even mutual benefit, is now usually much shorter as the machinations of gentrification have become more rapid. The sociologists who wrote the recent book *Gentrifier* acknowledge they are inhabitants of gentrifying areas, and so are themselves seeking ways to navigate the ethical and social topology. They propose a more balanced transformation could be executed if the new incoming community integrated and united with the original community earlier in the process to demand equitable housing that then maintains the social diversity and equality. However early intervention in this process is unlikely to occur by displacing the generations that act as local historians to neighbourhoods, the gentrifier only see themselves in an increasingly solipsistic enclave. Peter Moskowitz, speaking of Brooklyn in this case, says this means the gentrifier concludes then that the place they have moved to is a reflection of natural processes not ‘the consequence of a powerful and violent systems’ that they are implicit in continuing. The newer arrivals are then only activated to protest displacement when their own housing situation or perception of cultural quality and experience is threatened.

The ultimate social displacement and polarisation that occurs in this cycle of gentrification is characteristic of the repressive characteristics when long term planning policy such as Richard Florida’s model of the ‘creative city’ is interpreted by local governments with a focus on the economic rewards. Grant Kester describes the growing links between public art and speculative real estate development, where the provision of public art was traded for the right to develop or privatise public space, or used to ensure their development with a competitive edge. Instead of art functioning politically to provide a critical vantage on the mechanisms of the market and state, it serves enhance their objectives. The city is essentially decoupled from the existing usage and activities of the occupants to become an aesthetic work in itself, with both the public and creative practice deployed in the creation and formation of a vision developed for the people, not by the people. The work is carried out through the activity of the new creative entrepreneurs and emblematised by artwork that functions as monumental logos for the new creative city. Creative practice deployed in this way is meant to work to ‘acclimate the working class to the forms of subjectivity demanded by capital, but not question the demands themselves.’ The more contested or destructive activities of speculative development are smoothed over and disguised.

With gentrification, processes that could result in better amenities and services within complex, diverse communities are instead organised by economic ideologies predicated on expediting financial profits. Stavros Stavrides explains that gentrification is ‘explicitly connected to displacement acts directed against all those who are stigmatised for their misery or their ‘unruly’ behaviours and especially against those who inhabit areas that may become “developed” in the interest of real estate investors.’ Once displacement has begun, it gathers momentum, and those heralding the impending gentrification are also eventually displaced. David Harvey argues that the processes ‘the people who create an interesting and stimulating everyday neighbourhood life are displaced by real-estate entrepreneurs and upper-class consumers, is the true urban tragedy of the commons for our times.’ Despite this view Harvey optimistically proposes that all acts of enclosure open disclosure elsewhere through the intrinsically agile, persistent and generative characteristics of commoning.

Creative practice has a complicated relationship with gentrification as it is often the forerunner for its impending arrival and so is implicated, fairly or not, in this process. However, it retains a capacity to interrupt the process by using creativity to imagine and foster new futures. Raumlab is a Berlin based collective who work at the intersection of art, architecture, design and urban planning, intervening in the urban fabric to produce or instigate new ways of occupying space. Sometimes they do this on the level of abstract urban planning but at other times they inhabit difficult or abandoned spaces and initiate opportunities for inhabitants to understand how they can produce and sustain their public space.  

---

[4] Ibid., 78.
Raumlabor’s ongoing involvement with the abandoned airfield, Templehofer Feld demonstrates their commitment to supporting the public in maintaining ongoing access to what has become commercially valuable space. A tactic employed by Raumlabor is to develop and offer ‘testing situations’ that can provide the public with vantages from where they can come up with their own views. At Templehofer Feld the group installed a massive scaffolding next to open space that served as a multipurpose venue for the development of content ‘by demanding a use and completion’ from the neighbouring communities. Through inclusive and open interventions, combined with similarly open and inclusive processes and functions for use, they are able to co-develop with the users’ long-term ideas for the inhabitation of public and urban spaces. The public is equipped to identify and resist commercial development that will alienate the community from each other and the spaces they need to sustain them.

More often the processes of gentrification are not engaged with by those it will effect until it is too late. As the real estate values in Brooklyn increased exponentially, the old industrial buildings that are so conducive for co-operative making and living became harder to find and to keep. After years of building, rewiring, insulating, painting and replacing broken windows, all the more marginal artists renting in the area were evicted and forced to move on. Some, like those who lived near our building in the old Tung Fa Noodle factory, formed collectives and went on rent strikes to fight their evictions. Their creative energies were redirected for years into an ultimately futile battle with landlords and against planning. The trajectory of gentrification and displacement is so widely accepted it appears inevitable and unstoppable. Artists are often implicated as gentrifiers without any differentiation between those that are marginalised and displaced, and those that are able to respond to the capitalist imperative to transform into creative entrepreneurs. The incoming residents and developers were not attracted to the existing Italian, Hasidic, Polish and Hispanic communities but to the aura that had formed around the creative community. Peter Moskowitz notes this process ‘involves the transmogrification of normal neighbourhood life into a story that can be sold.’ In the process of improving amenities, providing services and implementing all the other commercial attractions to bring in more people to that part of the community, the very qualities that were initially appealing, were smothered or rendered unrecognisable.

During the gentrification of Williamsburg and Greenpoint in northern Brooklyn, the sense of risk that supported openness and creative possibilities, attracted the kind of speculative development that gambles on converting risk into profit. The growing investments produced an increasingly secure real estate market, meaning the spatial and social risk that enabled alternative occupations evaporated. The area grew more stable as new residential and commercial developments opened up. New businesses and rising rents resulted in displacement, severing many of the threads that had connected the earlier inhabitants to each other and the neighbourhood. Gentrification that builds off creative work results in exclusion and social displacement along economic lines, creative or not.

Fig 2.2 Waterfront in Williamsburg 1992. Image credit John Lenick.

13 http://agile-city.com/community-project/tempelhof-park-berlin/

14 http://raumlabor.net/junipark/


16 Many artists are marginal gentrifiers, meaning they are participants in the initial stages of gentrification but are likely to be pushed out and displaced by the process. Sharon Zukin, The Cultures of Cities (Cambridge, MA: Blackwell, 1995).

17 Moskowitz, How to Kill a City, 180.
Chapter 2

In the same way places become popular with tourists as their ability to ensure safety and a predicted experience becomes more secure, the appeal of the northern part of Brooklyn grew once it ceased to be seen as unattractive or dangerous, and instead was known to offer security and entertainment. By marketing destinations for tourists the destination is ultimately transformed to suit the tourist gaze. Complex and multiplicity is replaced by a more singular and digestible ‘brand’. In Williamsburg, Brooklyn, the brand appeared and was crafted by the new arrivals to mirror themselves. These arrivals were in the dual roles of being the tourist, (coming for the experience), and the producer (creating the experience). That fusion creates a sense of ‘authenticity’ as there is no ‘behind the scenes’ which can destroy the illusion. The ‘brand’ of the creative and social scene continued to be formed and developed by participation in that same creative and social scene, which in turn attracted further participation. The integration of branding and social experience to attract and condition future consumers has since further exploded, as social media now supports the dissemination of this merge in subtle and much more pervasive ways.

In 1995 the building we lived in, an iron fronted three-story warehouse near the foot of the Williamsburg Bridge, suffered a mysterious fire on the empty ground floor. It was immediately declared uninhabitable and boarded up. Shortly after it was demolished and replaced with tightly packed apartments. After the fire, I moved with five or six members of various New York hard-core bands further out along the train line to another factory in Bushwick. We had found a vast and open interior on the top floor of a factory and painted it with dreams of a new collective performance and art community with an event space and stage. We signed a ten year lease as insurance against the frequent evictions we had all experienced when development had taken off in our previous neighbourhood, however, despite this being the second time I had settled in an abandoned industrial building in a neglected area, I still did not believe that grim and desolate Bushwick would be similarly transformed. The man at the corner store passed cigarettes under a scratched bulletproof screen and sex workers met clients in their cars below our windows. Coming home late, we would call ahead for our roommates to meet us at the train station, the walk alone felt dangerous and very dark. I did not realise that I was still an inadvertent prospector, locating new areas for future economic development, continually subject to market forces I did not acknowledge, understand or even recognise.

The other floors of the building were still operating as factories, often running their machines through the night. The building shuddered and creaked and machine oil seeped out of the timber floors when the sun warmed it. When winter came I insulated and plastered my room, gluing CD cases over the holes in the wire mesh glass to keep out the wind. We soaked the oil out of the floor with sand, and I painted bright patterned rugs over the worst stains, but the cavernous space remained dark around the edges, discarded building materials and stored belongings lumped in the shadows. At times a sense of community would begin to emerge, but apathy, discord and the erratic presence of most of the inhabitants, meant it quickly dissipated. The dream for the lives and the space remained disconnected from the physical and material processes of making and working together. The lack of mutual commitment was replaced by individual focus on the returns that could come with completion; long term housing security or financial revenue, without much effort towards sustaining or growing the sustainable relations. I began to think about leaving, and so the incentive to create a home and to construct the shared vision began to be replaced by other dreams. Although we had all the constituents for a common; the space, the collective of people and various motivations, it was apparent that these elements did not guarantee the emergence of the consuming and affective experience of commoning. This observation would return to me years later when I began this research and started to search for the ways to sustain work in common. A common work or project can be implemented, but the ongoing processes of commoning requires more than just a social group, a space and a function. The other necessary but intangible qualities that connect people on a deep level to their lives, each other and the places they occupy, cannot be staged or forced, however there are ways they can be both encouraged and tended to.
2.1 DREAMING DEVICES

The spaces we occupied in Brooklyn provided an experience of combined spatial and social qualities that were brought to life or invented by the activities of tending to them. This occurred through commoning and because of the qualities afforded by the spaces. The buildings we occupied were ‘parafunctional spaces’; spaces that had lost their original purpose and because they were no longer producing capital, they had temporarily slipped from market view. In that state spaces become ‘not yet defined’ and so open to appropriation by use. The occupation of parafunctional spaces makes ‘zones in which creative, informal and unintended uses overtake the officially designated functions’. Nikos Papastergiadis refers specifically to abandoned industrial areas and warehouse spaces, however he is clear that ‘parafunctional’ is also a verb. It describes the space, but is also the activities and relations unfolding as the space is re-utilised as a ‘starting point to other kinds of thinking’. Parafunctional space is formed by activity that exists in time, it is always relative to the activities that produce it. With a loss of those activities the spatial characteristics are transformed into real estate or property with measurable dimensions, visible features that translate into a market value.

In the urban landscape parafunctional spaces are created and maintained by re-use. The forms of use are frequently implemented through processes of commoning. The re-use of these spaces causes hybridised forms of occupation to develop, but can also draw attention to their usefulness as property. Common space and parafunctional space both sit outside the economic system and manifest forms of life with less distinct programs, or ones not programmed by commercial concerns. Papastergiadis observes that these ‘are useful places, not just because they are convenient and cheap, but because their wrongness is a prompt, a spur, a starting point to other kinds of thinking’. To value these activities means the recognising that the spaces that support them have a value that cannot be measured in economic terms.

Papastergiadis mentions that ‘parafunctional spaces’ can function as ‘dreaming devices’ in his book *Spatial Aesthetics, Art, Place, and the Everyday*. The term ‘dreaming device’ is used only once when he explains how occupants of the parafunctional spaces ‘brought with them tools and instruments— not just technical implements, but dreaming devices’. A device or an implement with a particular purpose, is associated with the lexicon of industrialisation. A more open application of the term opens up the idea of seeing qualities also as implements in purposeful production. The device provides the necessary support for commoning and creative practices, and the dreaming that this produces expands existing conceptions for inhabiting social and creative spaces. Parafunctional interiors that are inhabited as living and working spaces become dreaming devices through manifesting material and programmatic differences that make possible new forms of life. This occurs because the spaces have qualities and allow for configurations that break normal patterns of use that set distinct programs for inhabitants. As well as new imaginings, the dream-like qualities also manifest in other ways; through the imperceptible merging of one activity into another and the startling juxtapositions that make the inhabitant see things anew.

Fig 2.3 The raised sleeping space was reclaimed from the end of the wide corridor in order to enlarge the 23 square meter space that was my home when I first moved into the Smith Building on South 8th St.
This type of dreaming can only unfurl slowly, requiring time for the inventions of unfamiliar patterns and ways of beings to coalesce into new forms of life over time. Making explicit how commoning can conjoin with creative, alternate modes of occupying the city, empowers those modes with the means to resist repression or exploitation by capitalism, particularly in relation to current gentrification processes. When ‘parafunctional’ spaces are foreclosed before the diverse approaches can aggregate into viable alternatives, the creative energy of the marginalised artists that might propose something other than creative entrepreneurship, are ultimately usurped or dissipated. Spaces for un-prescribed activities are integral to both commoning and developing emergent creative work. Papastergiadis believes the openness of a city directly correlates with the kinds of occupation and life that can flourish within it. Openness can be found in the abandoned and empty parts of the city that are left behind in economic development, empty warehouses, factories and abandoned lots, ignored once they cease to produce capital.

Parafunctional spaces enact new relations in contrast to constrained spaces that must support existing societal and spatial boundaries. Parafunctional space is simultaneously activated and changed by what occurs within them. The various parts of life are not delineated in the same way within parafunctional spaces, an experience also intrinsic to commoning. Emergent and unknown processes counter and confound capitalist systems that, despite a veneer of flexibility, ultimately can only serve a designated function. Gielen believes that it is hybridised activity that is ‘artistic and ecological and economic and political and social’ that will be the basis for creative commoning. That activity also results in a conception of the world around us as interrelated, not made up of distinct areas, roles or demographics.

How creative practice can contribute to more integrated processes of being in the world, and have a voice along with environmental, social, economic and political movements that are already involved in doing this, can be developed through incorporating commoning in creative practice. A correspondence between commoning and creative practice develop new platforms of relations, which enable the production of alternate modes for existing in the urban environment. The amalgamation of specific spatial conditions and social practices or relations is also intrinsic to ‘parafunctional’ inhabitations. The relations between creative practice with both parafunctionality and commoning is significant as together they all aggregate various ways of hybridising space and creative practice while seeking to maintain autonomy from the market. Recognising the social conditions and spatial conditions as entwined demonstrates why the subsidiary activity of these spaces is their ability to function as dreaming devices. The dreams are the result of the spatial and social prompts Papastergiadis mentions as able to spur other kinds of thinking. The idea that spaces develop within the occupant the capacity to ‘dream’ up alternatives to what is usually presented, is a powerful tool for producing new conceptions for the future.

These spaces demonstrate a contemporary and urban version of the responsive interrelation between space, social processes, creative practice and commoning and how, for commoning to emerge, all the components need to be in existence and able to combine and exert their influence. Commoning does not recognise a disjuncture between space and social relations, seeing each as contributing to the other and intertwined with each other. The way they are interrelated are specific to the conditions and are both subtle and complex, meaning the value of creative occupation, the necessity of parafunctional spaces and the existence of commoning can easily not be identified or protected, even by those embedded in it, until displacement is already underway. David Bollier describes how commoning ‘cultivates new cultural spaces and nourishes inner, subjective experiences that have far more to do with the human condition and social change than the manipulative branding and disempowering spectacles of market culture’.

However, the tight focus that capitalists maintain on achieving their predetermined goals, and ability to deploy branding and spectacle, puts capitalism at a strategic advantage in terms of claiming space and identity within culture.

Capitalist and neoliberal processes that seek to enclose or instrumentalise commons by enclosure have become so voracious and rampant that commoning is not just a productive activity for making the social spatial conditions; to continue to reproduce it must also be a form of resistance. The international movement ‘Occupy’ came to attention in 2011 with their occupation of Wall

---

26 This proposition is developed further in Chapter five in the discussion on mutuality.

27 Papastergiadis, Spatial Aesthetics 81.

Street in New York protesting the corrupt values and practices of financial institutions. The protests by these groups as well as other forms of protest, and some creative practices that take art into the public sphere, provide a visible challenge to neoliberal urban and spatial controls. These kind of challenges should not be understood as limited to public space, but also encourage us to question how all space has an ability to affect the structures of our lives. For example, current domestic conventions that separate zones of activity, and partition communities into family units, are also indirectly questioned by the commoning attitudes that instigate movements such as Occupy who make a point through taking over privatised public spaces for other uses. For creative practitioners living and working in warehouses and industrial spaces, the spaces they inhabit do not resemble or function like standard domestic housing and consequently support and innovate different ways of living. Interior and domestic space are less visible, and so challenges to established modes of occupation are not so widely acknowledged, or seen as inherently political despite presenting other than normative ways of living. The political emerges to desegregate various parts of life, such as; work from leisure, perceptions of male or female domains or roles, or family from community, for both the individual and across larger groups.

The capacity of spaces to determine activity and effect the forms of life that occupy it, is felt, consciously or not, by any occupant of a city. When open spaces are privatised the kind of activity that is acceptable within them becomes prescribed. Mark Pimlott explains how public interiors are usually 'representing the interests of the ruling class and inculcating the public with its ideological principles.' David Harvey also describes the effect of neoliberal urban policies on global urban centres and consequently how the design and organisation of spaces enforce and support the tenets of capitalism. For Harvey, the 'kind of city we want cannot be divorced from the question of what kind of people we want to be, what kinds of social relations we seek, what relations to nature we cherish, what style of life we desire, what aesthetic values we hold.' In Harvey’s view the political and social action of commoning is the key to re-establishing openness in city that allows for new forms of life to emerge.

Mono-functionalism supports the appearance (as well as actual) social control as appropriate behaviours are afforded and enforced by the environment. Resistance to prescribed activity takes many forms, not always visible protests, but the various controls are expert at repression, making it difficult to identify the methods or extents of these activities and how they sustain over time. The extent of mono-functionalism in urban spatial design is disguised, or confused, by technology which blurs the boundaries of community, home, work and leisure. Work and leisure can be undertaken remotely at any time and community becomes virtual and dispersed. However, on closer examination, the boundaries that are blurred are ones that primarily further the reach of the economy. The liquidity of the commercial space and consumerist behaviours disguise the fixed commercial drivers. For example, the ability to work from home does not translate to the kind of parafunctional occupation that Papastergiadis is interested in, even though it may be construed as similar.

Fig 2.4. Interior of the second, larger space (95 square meters) I rented for $50 a week in the Smith Building.
Parafunctional is both a noun and verb; referring to spatial qualities and also the activities and relations unfolding as the space is re-utilised as a starting point to other kinds of thinking. The insecurity around ongoing access to the spaces that both activities utilise, can be countered by collectively developing new kinds of foundations that provide relative constancy and can continue to be built on. Pascal Gielen proposes that a sense of stability can be achieved by prioritising the collective and the social, meaning creative commoning can continue to re-emerge even when the specific spatial conditions are lost. When the emphasis is on the social relations, despite losses of specific spatial locations to neoliberal policy, capitalist development or urban privatisation, the shared and social activity is able to continue as parafunctional in that it maintains the conditions for new possibilities.

Commoning as a social practice within the built environment contributes to undermining capitalism’s established ability to transform parafunctional inhabitation into economic developments. The American artist Theaster Gates does this though a confrontational and direct approach that renegotiates relations between gentrification and development, commoning and commodification. Gates is an independent artist who exhibits and sells in commercial galleries, but then uses the existing commoditised art system to divert capital into supporting other forms of creative activity that include collective and commoning processes. Cultural capital from his social practice or commoning work consequently increases his artistic status and the value of his commoditised works, which means more surplus flows back into his social practice, which he sees as his primary concern.

Gates argues that artists wanting to make change need to ‘forget wall murals and learn to “sculpt” with money and power.’ He acknowledges the effects of his profile and practice in the neighbourhoods in which he operates as potentially destructive if they signal to real estate markets that there is immanent cultural and social change. This means that he must also confront how his projects impact on the marginalised neighbourhoods he works within to avoid arriving back through a strange loop in exploiting the increased values his cultural activity generates, albeit in real estate instead of art markets. Gates directly grapples with the ethical and practical impact of any gentrifying effects in the communities he works in as it is important to him that his practice aligns with the tenets of commoning rather than verging into commodification. The building works create multifunctional spaces for the use of the community; an archive, performance space, gallery, community centre, library, café, workshop. By building with the people who live in the immediate area, the community has agency in how the development supports and expands existing life. These spaces are parafunctional and perform as dreaming devices for their community, creating a sustainable and embedded means for an existing culture to grow and thrive.

For others, the endlessly expansive space of the internet with its low cost of use and the absence of barriers to entry, presents another way to sustain dynamic and emergent communities of social creativity in the physical and economic spaces of the city. However, social negotiation is very different online as the communities are constructed through members accessing the group in their own time and space as ‘networked individuals.’ Nick Wilson believes creativity needs be reclaimed as a transversal social phenomenon and notes that interacting exclusively through the internet, even in open-source peer production systems, privileges expertise rather than emergent processes. It is limiting to suppose the internet by itself can replace the physical spaces that support creative activity and communities. Wilson argues that social creative practice ‘calls us to rethink the relationship between creativity and the economy through re-focusing attention on the collective and relational nature of creative practice.’ Although the internet supports varied forms of social creativity, the value and reasons for embodied forms of social creativity cannot fully migrated to virtual and distributed frameworks of the internet, it is still necessary to maintain or produce open and accessible physical spaces that are not ordered by the market.
Taking a less permanent but still not completely ephemeral approach, Raumlabor (referred to in the last section) made a mobile inflated space housed in the back of a standard van that could be quickly assembled anywhere to produce a space that held up to eighty people. 'Space Buster' (fig 2.5) was funded by the Storefront for Art and Architecture in New York and travelled around the United States in late 2017, holding various events and interacting with architectural, urban and social space as it made new space for temporary and collective uses. Raumlabor propose through their practice that the experience of space can create new ways of being and relating. The group explains on their website that 'Spacebuster became a device for rediscovering and re-appropriating the city, and experiencing it in collectively.' There are dream like qualities to the space and the materials, the milky semi-translucent surface is described as 'allowing the inhabitants to see the city in sharper detail than they had ever seen it before.' Raumlabor avoids simply providing an entertaining pop-up event in a creative economy through careful programming. In each location they work closely with community groups and non profit organisations already embedded in the community they are visiting to design or produce experiences that facilitate engagement specific to the social and spatial conditions of that neighbourhood. This aspect of their work is overlooked by the reporting which more usually focuses on the attractive and striking imagery the inflatable produces. The photogenic qualities of the design are a tactic that attracts the funding which they can then use to their advantage fulfilling other agendas. Spacebuster suggests how parafunctional spatial experience can be created and deployed. It is lighter and more mobile than the abandoned factory spaces, but spatial and tangible in a way the internet is not, able to physically transform spatial and social conditions into a device of dreaming.

Wider culture and governance undervalues the dreaming afforded by parafunctional space, and has no notion of what is cauterised by lost access to those spaces and ways of being. The feminist economic writers J.K. Gibson-Graham believe our ability to imagine alternatives has been limited by capitalism and only "by cultivating subjects and revealing spaces of difference can we start to enact economic alternatives." This echoes Edward Soja's call that it 'becomes more urgent than ever to keep our critical geographical imagination creatively open to redefinition and expansion in new directions: and to resist any attempt to narrow or confine its scope.' David Harvey concurs 'creativity around the common has to be held open for all, and the attempts to enclose on this creativity have to be warded off.' Understanding how commoning produces, creates and maintains 'dreaming devices' within the existing urban fabric, demonstrates its capacity to break up the homogeneity of existing economic and socio-spatial structures. This attribute is explored in the next chapter through the discussion on a collaborative and durational project that attempted to provide glimpses of transformative activity.
A movement of commoning through early on-line magazines and commerce as an editor/curator/producer of Small Magazine.

CHAPTER THREE

Story 2: I flew from New York to Texas to visit my friend Christine. Between us we had five children under four years old. I was living in New York and the winters felt longer now I was inside with small children and a baby. In Dallas we hired a van and piled in the children. Driving out of the sprawl, the countryside stretched dry and flat, looking more like Australia than I was expecting. Christine and her husband Steven had rented us a cottage at what had once been a holiday resort but now seemed mostly abandoned, a relic of simple holidays from earlier decades. Ivy grew over the cabins and rusted trucks dozed on the edges of the fields. We were making the fifth issue of our magazine and it was the first time we were in the same place while making it. Our own children were the models and Steven, who was just starting his photography career, took the pictures. The children barely noticed they were participating as the photo shoot took place over three days and we found the moments we wanted to capture as they played. On the third evening my daughter could not sleep in the hot night and got up and joined us where we were sitting outside. She sat on the swing under the sulphuric street light, the clothes she was wearing almost indiscernible in the darkness. Steven reached for his camera and caught the moment.

Fig 3.1 Small Issue five. Somewhere not here Image credit: Steven Visneau.
3.0 INTRODUCTION TO PROJECT: SMALL

The community Christine and I had been part of in Williamsburg was already dissipating by the time we separately left Brooklyn around 2003. The large spaces and cheap rent that had provided us with creative and financial freedom were no longer available. Around the same time the social proximity that had been necessary for the culture and community that we had experienced became less crucial as the internet increasingly became part of everyday life. The endless space and free access to the internet was providing new ways people could create, connect and form communities from a distance. Although, like most people I knew, I did not even get an email account until 1997, I had first heard about the internet visiting a friend in Boston in 1993. He and his friends from MIT enthused how this new invisible network would connect everyone and everything together, changing the way we thought about distance, communication, business and art. For him and his friends, the internet was an open space of opportunity, still largely uncreated. The description drifting into speculative and imagined territories like medieval maps depicting both treasures and sea monsters. My friends were excited by the creative possibilities, and also the potential to create a fortune, pre-emptively identifying the defining characteristics of the internet. Christine and I found that ways of making and sustaining relations learnt in the shared physical and parafunctional spaces we had occupied in Brooklyn, could be reconstituted in virtual space. The internet seemed like a para-space in itself, a terrain that was around us but still unknown, largely un-colonised and open to being dreamed into new forms.

In 2007 and I had just moved back to New York from Boston and Christine was now in Dallas. We each had a very young child and a baby so our days were filled with their care, but we were both missing a particular kind of creative energy and mental preoccupation that she and I had shared when working on projects together in the past. Christine’s husband travelled quite often, and like me, she was spending a lot of time in her house alone. Finding herself in a new city, pregnant and without any networks to continue her freelance work, she had started buying vintage fabrics from estate sales, making them into children’s clothes and selling them online. When my children fell asleep in the stroller I was unable to get them inside and up the stairs to our apartment without waking them, so as I pushed them around the streets I would talk to Christine on the phone. The northern winter daylight faded by four and in the evening when my children were in bed, I searched the internet, looking up people and projects that Christine had mentioned during the day. I noticed how the internet collected together geographically and socially disparate individuals into new creative forces and how these groups and activities were forming new markets. By the mid-2000s, the emergence of online markets, particularly Etsy, allowed small businesses such as Christine’s, that would have been previously unsustainable due to isolation or lack of financial resources, to market themselves globally.

One day as we were talking about these things, we had the idea to start an online magazine of independent design for children. The idea germinated from discussions about Christine’s experience trying to secure publicity for her own small, independent business along with our shared surprise at the amount of short term, disposable and ultimately useless items commonly purchased for babies in America. The expensive advertising structures of the existing print magazines excluded smaller businesses, keeping them from challenging the larger players financially or ethically. At that time, magazines were not yet under the creative or financial pressure from alternative media that they are now and so were still able to control and arbitrate what material reached the public. We determined that our magazine would try to encourage a different kind of consumerism around children’s design, and also support creative people through commissioning new work. It also seemed a way to start an ongoing project we could work creatively on together. Neither of us had any experience with graphic design, web design, publishing or producing, nor did we have networks or contacts that could guide us, so we guessed at and tested approaches until we agreed it suited us both.

1 https://www.etsy.com

2 Some examples that were common and seemed particularly ridiculous to us were the rubber seats to hold an infant vertical who can’t yet sit, educational plastic toys that clip on to strollers and obscure the view of the trees and clouds, and baby monitors for two bedroom apartments.
We elected to design the website to have the more obvious aspects of a traditional magazine; a cover, and then a contents page, followed by interior pages that could be turned, rather than the more common scrolling format of a blog or website. This visually differentiated us from the existing websites or blogs and kept the appearance and structure of print magazine. We co-opted what already existed to support a slightly different mission and used the familiar print structure to transpose an authority that we didn’t possess ourselves to the virtual medium. The commercially familiar framework attracted existing commercial magazine readers whose consumer views and spending habits could be then shifted towards supporting more environmental and ethical practices, makers and suppliers. On a personal level, Small gave us a way to ameliorate the isolation and loss of creative networks that we had both experienced when we moved to new cities with our young children.

Stavros Stavrides describes how the tactician operates by finding places they can ‘insinuate’ themselves into the dominant rhythms, not simply destroying or suspending them, but taking advantage of the opportunities created by them. These spaces are more easily recognised when they are anchored in the tangible urban landscape, but we were finding that they also existed in other more immaterial environs. Stavrides believes that a person operating tactically is able to read and recognise dominant systems, so therefore is also able to recognise the spaces that are left open by the dominant systems as new areas available for temporary occupation. The same ability that locates parafunctional space (Section 2.2) that can be occupied as a dreaming device, can also remake and reform other areas into spaces for dreaming.

3.1 STRUCTURING CONNECTIONS

At first we created the entire magazine content by ourselves in our own homes. We would each design and produce a photo shoot, and then Steven Visneau⁴ or Grant Cornett⁵ (respectively Christine’s husband and our mutual friend) who were both trying to build portfolios and become professional photographers, would take the photographs. Christine and I planned the other stories, interviews and pages together and then I would lay them out and she would organise and upload them. Our visual approach was honed through critiquing, selecting, eliminating and refining the work until we were both satisfied. After the second issue came out and the format was established, we were contacted by people interested in contributing to future issues. We also found the magazine was being shared and distributed by other sites, something we had not anticipated. The first two issues functioned to attract readers and as a prototype for future contributors. Steven and Grant remained central to the magazine and contributed photographic work to each of the twenty issues, working either with one of us or external stylists. The four of us formed the central core of the collaboration, secure in our commitment but also challenged to extend our creative work in each issue.

---

⁴http://www.stevenvisneauphotography.com
⁵http://grantcornett.com/
The magazine as a platform continues to be expanded on even now, through the 'experimentation with the magazines formal, conceptual and social possibilities as a distribution form that might circumvent mainstream institutions and audiences and foster artist communities and counter publics.' Small came out quarterly and shared some structural similarities to print magazine, but also diverged in many ways. Hyperlinks were included throughout so the reader could immediately click from the image or advertisement to the makers’ website, folio or online shop. The magazine website also became an archive for all the past issues, so work from repeat contributors was linked to their work in previous issues, creating a folio of their work within the magazine. By following hyperlinks, the reader could form alternate trajectories through the magazine and the archive, directly connecting the current pages with past work and other locations on the internet.

The magazine followed a general layout that was repeated each issue. This is a common format in magazines as both a rhythm and readership is developed through expected and repeating elements. Many of the techniques we used in the magazine are now so prevalent that they seem obvious, but at the time we began Small we could not find any other online magazines of independent design for children, so there were no templates. There were a few existing online magazines on other topics but they mostly collected together reviews or information about existing technology, projects or events. A few print magazines would duplicate aspects of their published material online but did not incorporate the technology of the internet, like hyperlinks or searchable tags, into the design. There were many blogs and sites that collected together visual and graphic material from across the web, but these all curated existing work rather than commissioning new work to produce a cohesive and designed publication released at specific intervals.

As this was the first time we had tried to work together over the internet and also the first time either of us had produced a magazine, we had to constantly adjust the way we worked as our skills advanced, and our understandings of the possibilities changed the parameters of the project. Co-designing and co-managing the whole project meant we could be flexible and were able to try new things at short notice. We wanted the majority of the stories in the magazine, including the graphically designed pages, to resemble individual art works, rather than using a formatted template (fig 3.3 and 3.4). For example, all the regular sections were constructed as elaborate collages, forming disparate elements into cohesive images. Each issue would include editorials, reviews or relatively long interviews with creative practitioners. We would also include work that was not usually seen in a magazine, for example embedding music play lists and commissioning a short fiction film in the place of a still photo shoot (fig 3.10 and 3.11). Overall the design approaches meant the magazine had an idiosyncratic quality that was not easily replicable.

---


*7* http://www.smallmagazine.net/

*8* The website that we had built for Small is so technically outdated that it has lost some of its functionality and the last three issues have recently been lost. The internet, although able to archive most things, has difficulty archiving itself.


*10* Examples of these are Net diver, Form Fifty Five, and Design is Kinky that all established in 2005.
3.2 BUILDING EQUITABLE COLLABORATION

The collaborative partnership between Christine and myself was built on our shared history of periods living in the same house, having mutual friends and working together. The years of sharing an apartment had produced a familial closeness reflected in a collaborative approach and shaped our communications even when it was largely over email. In his examination of how collaborative circles originate, Michael Farrell describes how ‘pairs’ can produce what he terms as ‘instrumental openness’. He elaborates that a secure relationship provides a level of trust, which enables a pair to generate solutions that neither would conceive alone. Trust in the other person in the relationship means that nascent ideas can be shared. The dual ability for both to play the part of creator and critic means each collaborator has an audience on whom ideas can be tested, ideas which can then through feedback, become more established.

A successful collaborative group reflect the commoning characteristics of a family group, with occupants motivated by a sense of commitment and mutuality. Having this kind of relationship meant that continually calibrating against each other was instinctual for Christine and I, but in this case was also demanded by the structure of the project and the platform. We found we could work together and distribute the work instinctively and the relative level of input did not need to be monitored for an immediate sense of equivalency. By balancing non-synchronous equity in our relations the contribution levels were able to modulate and shift over time, alleviating potential points of stress as we could accommodate each other’s fluctuating external commitments.

After the first issue we began to be contacted by people we had never met or even talked to. This meant the models we had for collaborating had to expand beyond what worked in our close circle. Without the interpersonal commitment and mutuality built over time in family-like relationships, equitable transactions had to be actively negotiated between the parties. A temporary relationship that forms because of a mutual project has quite different qualities to existing relationships that result in mutual projects. This is partly because a sense of a mutual commitment within an extended duration is not usually available in temporary collaboration. The dominating framework of capitalism determines that retribution for work is structured by an extreme market orientation that commodifies all resources to enable their appropriation, and a parallel de-humanization of people valued only as consumers or labour inputs. It is hard to think outside of the existing frameworks that naturalise that way of operating, however, in this project it was necessary as our priority was to foster different kinds of relationships and creative opportunities that did not rank and calculate value and input in that way.

3.3 FORMING COMMUNITIES AROUND A CREATIVE PROJECT

Whenever we worked with others we looked for ways that the proposal could sustain our work in common, but also other ways we could contribute to the development and extension of our collaborators’ relationships and work practices. The photographers, illustrators and artists were invited or commissioned to make work for the magazine based on their existing work and practice. We did not direct what they should do for the magazine. This afforded them an opportunity to extend their own practice and test or try something they were interested in with the support of the magazine. For early career photographers and stylists this was an opportunity to broaden their own work experience and folio. As we had an extensive network at this stage, we could bring people together who lived remotely from us but near each other, extending their creative connections and also enabling more ambitious work.
Chapter 3

These relationships were carefully considered as, along with finding people with complimentary skill sets, we would look for how they could contribute to projects and each others’ practices in less obvious ways, including supplementing or expanding the other person’s level of experience, area of practice, technical knowledge or creative outcomes. This approach was largely successful as through these new working relationships, the practices of many of the contributors developed in a way that specifically opened up professional and creative opportunities. Additionally the contributor retained the rights to their work and once the magazine was published they were free to sell the work. They often found new customers or markets through the magazine readership who could visit their online shop through the embedded links. We would continue to promote people we worked with, supporting their future projects through publicising them in either the magazine or the associated blog, as well as re-linking to their work in earlier issues.

By forming supportive relationships with other bloggers and online sites with slightly different reader demographics, we found we could cross-promote the magazine and all our contributors to new audiences as in turn the bloggers received exposure to our audience. These bi-directional relationships formed through mutual interests and affinities, rather than from a calculated basis, and often began through conversational email contact or from suggestions of people we might be interested in including. This cross-promotional system is common practice now that successful bloggers are very aware of the commercial value of their readership statistics. They are identified by social media companies as ‘influencers’ and are paid to mention products. However, when we first started, analytic technology was not widely used or well understood. We knew we had a lot of readers and began tracking the numbers from 2008 but only used the information to reassure ourselves that small companies would benefit from any advertising.

Christine and I were both keen to find new ways to incorporate more illustrators, as we noticed they had largely been replaced by photographers in print magazines and knew that many illustrators were finding it hard to publish their work. To help address this we made the first section of every issue an illustrated fashion story. The illustrators we commissioned were not commercial fashion illustrators or experienced in magazine work. We structured the project by selecting clothes and designers that we believed resonated with the illustrators existing drawing style and subjects, and then sent them images. The illustrator would then incorporate the images of the items we had selected in a new six to ten-page story with a theme, similar to how a photographer and stylist conceive and produce a fashion story. Again, they retained the rights to the drawings and could publish them and sell them wherever they wanted once the magazine was published. This was a successful model for both the illustrator and for the magazine, as it gave the illustrator broad exposure and the opportunity to use the same work more than once, and was relatively easy for us to produce as it only required contact with one person compared to the more complex requirements of remotely organising a fully staffed fashion shoot. This system also meant that we could include clothes from small or obscure designers located all over the world, who were not able financially or geographically to send clothing to America for a photographic shoot.

Another approach was to feature an image of work by an artist or photographer we liked and then later, after they were familiarised with the magazine, we would contact them to discuss commissioning new work. Our project with photographer Pamela Klaffke15 was one of the more interesting examples of how this approach unfolded. Klaffke embraces unexpected results in her photographs by using damaged or out of date film in analogue cameras. We loved her processes and aesthetic and wanted her to make a fashion story for the magazine. Klaffke was very resistant to making any kind of commercial work and initially turned us down. After considering her practice in relation to our interests we came back to her with another proposal. We suggested instead of giving her clothes to photograph by existing designers, we would make a series of outfits for children repurposed from second hand adult clothes purchased at a thrift shop. This proposition was interesting to Klaffke and the magazine for different, but overlapping, reasons. It is also the kind of proposal that a commercial magazine would not waste page space on, as it is not selling products and does not bring in more advertisers and potentially may even alienate them.

15http://pamelaklaffke.com/
A point of resistance with being involved in a commercial publication for Klaffke was her wariness of any external editing to her work. Part of her agreement to work with the magazine was the stipulation that her images were not to be cropped or altered, and that she would lay out her own pages and add the text. A commercial magazine would not necessarily concede this kind of control, but as we believed the creative relationship was based on a commitment to the person/artist and their creative growth rather than a specific outcome, it was natural for us to leave the control with her. Our interest in finding new systems for collaboration and using a commercial medium to propose alternative consumption, was fused with Klaffke’s positive response to using second re-purposed adult clothes which resonated with her slightly dark, ambiguous imagery. In the end this project exemplified how diverse interests and approaches could be balanced through prioritising mutuality in a creative project.

3.4 FREE WORK

An argument frequently used to deride the validity of commoning is that if it has any relation to the market it must be undermined by a conflict of interest, consequently negating commoning’s ability to be alternative to capitalism. However, commoning activity is not always in polarity to the market. Larry Lohmann and Nicholas Hildyard point out in their report that ‘many commons come to owe their form to their role supporting or defending profit-centred activities.’ Similarly, J.K Gibson-Graham determinedly visualise complex economic landscapes that incorporate contradiction and undermine the accepted hegemony of capitalist culture, to provide a way forward from the negation: ‘We have assiduously espoused the alternative view that co-option does not automatically happen in the vicinity of power; that one resists co-option not by distancing oneself from power, but through the vigilant practice of not being co-opted – in other words, self-consciously and diligently maintaining the integrity of a project.’ Hildyard and Lohmann, express antipathy towards a contemporary notion of commons as being an ‘invitation to twee sentiment rather than a modern, multiple, internally diverse presence in its own right’ and go on ‘if the concept of commons partakes of reaction and co-option, it can also constitute an affirmation, rallying point, and promise of liberation.’ The territories are contested and contain contradictions, but commoning is able to avoid being neutralised by the logic of a more dominant conception of capitalism, and navigate through an internal compass that seeks to resist co-option.

The meaning of ‘free’ has, like sharing, become distanced from its original definition and in even co-opted in some cases. Within the magazine we noticed how things that were free, or done for free, had various obligations that maintained the system. Stephen Vøyce cautions that systems of dispersing work without money changing hands can appear to align with a more ‘utopian gift economy’, but there are always beneficiaries of the social capital that is transferred. Vøyce is referring specifically to open source peer networks but his observation resonates with all creative collaborations. Christine and I were aware that as the magazine editors we were receiving

---

Chapter 3

Cultural capital from work contributed by others. To mitigate this, we would try to operate from a perspective of mutuality and return as much as possible to the relationships. Small made enough money each issue through advertising to cover all the costs of running it, producing the commissioned work as well as funding occasional working visits between New York and Dallas. We also focused on reducing costs. Most significant was the decision to only publishing online and so avoid expensive printing. It was important to us that the magazine was available for free as it ensured a much wider readership, meaning that the work we featured was distributed to many more people and countries than any of the contributors could have individually reached. We would provide as much support for the contributors as possible so that their work for the project was limited to design and production; the most satisfying and personally rewarding parts of creative process, and did not include administration, postage, scheduling or any other peripheral works or costs.

Christine and I, like the other contributors, gave our time for free because of the rewards associated with being involved in the project. One of the readers, professional marketer on maternity leave, explained to us a less evident potential outcome from working in this way. She had contacted us offering to help manoeuvre what we were doing into a more financially successful model and although we were not sure that it was something we wanted to do, we were interested to hear her ideas. She explained that what we were doing was classified in business language as a ‘loss leader,’ where engaging in work for little or no pay elevates your profile in ways that might lead to future opportunities. I could see how this made sense from a business perspective, but for me, the importance of the project was as part of my immediate life and I had little conception of how, or if, this value could be transferred into the future. I was still home with three children under four years of age. Through my participation in the magazine I received social connections, a platform for creative activity, a community of interesting people and an answer to the ‘what do you do?’ question.

The human contact and creative stimulation from the magazine alleviated my creative and social isolation, and routine of spending all day with three young children and being home every evening. For many of our contributors and readers having children had been an unexpectedly seismic change in the structure of their lives and perception of themselves. I was fortunate to be able to spend five years looking after my children full time, but was aware that in America this is a choice frequently decided by calculating the cost of day care and deducting it from a parent’s potential salary. Without family nearby to help (essentially a free labour force that offsets the demands of capitalism) the cost of care, was prohibitive.

The infrastructures that provided support, shared responsibility and social contact when at home with children have, in many communities, already been dismantled long ago, replaced for many by work and its consuming web of relationships, obligations, goals and hierarchies. The devaluation of caring activities is historically bound up with how much of the care-taking work was done by women. It is also not a coincidence that a communities commoning characteristics which frequently supported the care-taking work, were also devalued. Along with the ancillary
social and community relations produced through the spaces and activities of care-taking, care-related occupations have been widely and systematically denigrated by globalised and neoliberal capitalism. This is evident through how in many capitalist countries there is little or no social or financial support to those caring for children. State funded child care, if it exists, is justified in economic terms as it means carers are able to continue their participation in wage labour. Those providing the care are still often precarious and employed and financially marginalised. Maria Mies presents a complex and feminist perspective that addresses the issue of care-taking more broadly. She argues that by re-investing commons, and re-framing the economy relative to commons, society will become able to value care-taking; for children, the environment and each other.22 Reinstating the value of care-taking in all relationships underpins the emergence of commoning and of commons.

Recognising the value of caretaking in all aspects of life is also undermined by new forms of commercial activity that blurs the distinctions between work done for free through care and commitment and paid work. To do this the market absorbs models of care and reconstitutes them for financial gain. For example, innovative co-production methods such as peer-to-peer are re-packaged as ‘prosumers’; individuals identified as co-creators of what they consume. There may be value to be had for both the company and the consumer involved in this relationship but it does not fundamentally alter the exchanges of, what Marx termed, the ‘use value’ or ‘exchange value’.23 If the ‘prosumer’ or the ‘co-creator’ is simply involved at different points in the supply chain, finally to be re-appointed as the end as ‘consumer’ there is no meaningful shift in roles, just a sleight of hand that ultimately still encourages consumerism. Ashlee Humphries and Kent Grayson point out that: ‘to the extent that the ‘prosumer’ or ‘co-production’ revolution is merely just a sleight of hand that ultimately still encourages consumerism.

This conflation has continued as corporations and start-ups engage the sharing economy as a model, proposing that they are liberating people (and their time) from rigid employment structures. Invariably the possibly genuine interest in social change and other values are usually discarded at some point in favour of higher stock prices that reflect the kind of growth that is imperative to capitalist success.25 Increasingly, companies such as Uber and Airbnb that initially appeared to be expanding on a sharing economy are ultimately extracting value without reinvesting in the human cooperation.26 When the responsibility for the worker is transferred away from the employer the consequence is a rapidly growing precarious and insecure labour force. An ancillary effect is that it commoditises services previously done for free, making social relationships transactional and promoting an individualistic ethos.28 Lawrence Lessig describes these as ‘thin’ sharing economies where the motivations of those involved are ‘me regarding’.29 Rather than contributing to positive change in the relations between producers and consumers, the companies effectively demonstrate the sophistication and adaptability of corporate and capitalist frameworks to incorporate and sublimate alternatives to capitalism, ultimately expanding their own territories.30

In contrast, Gibson-Graham draw attention to the already existing diverse economic practices that fall outside of the mainstream conception of economics which privileges wage labour and capitalist business. They propose that by recognising that the economy is already multi-layered we can understand the economy relative to community, integrating them both to sustain more equitable worlds. They describe this as a ‘community economy’ which is an ‘ongoing process of negotiating our interdependence. It is the explicit, democratic co-creation of the diverse ways in which we collectively make our livings, receive our livings from others, and provide for others in turn.’31 Importantly, Gibson-Graham propose how existing capitalist conditions can be negotiated without falling into conflating all market activity with the economy, consequently setting up an intransient binary between the market and ways of operating that do not subscribe to capitalist values such as commoning.
The contemporary capitalist economy enforces the perception that it is both logical and natural though manipulating and mediating political, social and linguistic structures. Raj Patel points out that we are suffering from a misplaced faith that profit-driven markets can ‘point to true value’. He observes that the future will be shaped by our will to imagine a different kind of world that is not shaped by the free market.32 The ‘Uncertain Commons,’ (see Section 1.3) an anonymous multi-disciplinary collective, similarly try to address the cardinal position of capitalism by rejecting the financial terminology and frameworks that support that conviction. They instead aim to ‘playfully inhabit forms, vocabularies, and media ecologies of public discourse’ to invert the power dynamic.33 By doing this they attempt expose the bias in language that strengthens the perception of the logic of capitalism.

The necessity of shifting existing frameworks in order to introduce new conceptualisations is picked up by many collectives and indicates other shared characteristic across diverse groups. Community Economies Collective and the Solidarity Economy34 both explicitly address this in each of their mission statements. The Community Economy derides ‘capital-centricism’, meaning the perception of capitalism as universally coherent, and language that continues to corroborate this view. Kevin Jackson is interested in an economy of mutuality35 and refutes the argument that businesses should exist to maximise profit and instead believes they ‘must reflect on how they contribute to (or take away from) the common good of the society in which it is engaged.’36 He argues that all enterprises must have social values, rather than relegating that obligation to be carried by not for profit business. By being guided by internally developed values enterprises will ultimately find a personal understanding of success that with current metrics they are not able to register. The Solidarity Economy is committed to supporting economies that are animated by mutuality and reciprocity. They believe that by making coalitions of the diverse participants the separate activities are strengthened, contributing to increased vitality, visibility and viability over the whole.

These groups, and others, introduce alternatives to economic market value and instead begin to construct a more nuanced way of thinking about relative inputs and outputs within complex systems of relation. Anne Ryan observes that although ‘only a certain group of people may benefit from a particular commons, commons regimes can learn from each other and add their experience to the overall commons movement.’37 When new frameworks for thinking about value are rendered visible, it contributes to dismantling the pervasive political, social and linguistic structures that enforce the assumed ontological superiority of the current dominant financial system and values.

3.5 ADJUSTING TO ATTENUATING RESOURCES

Attenuating resources drive capitalists to uncover new areas from which value can be extracted. Commons are attractive for this reason as they can deliver both resources and populations to extract value from. Capitalism perpetuates the widely accepted (although incorrect) view that humans are only motivated by self-interest. From this perspective the market appears the most rational way to service and organise self-interested parties. Any dissolution of a commons activity in the face of attenuation because of capitalist pressure, appears to represent a general failure in commonging as a system. This idea of progress is both created by, and supports Hardin’s theory of the tragedy of commons (as discussed in Chapter one). Commonging is required to institute permanent and global change in order to be viewed as successful, as the individual examples any individual examples of functioning or sustained commonging are minimised as exceptions. The paradox is that any individual capitalist enterprise can fail without seeming to afflict the conception, or acceptance, of capitalism as a whole. The global financial crisis of 2008 demonstrated massive flaws in market logic and revealed the precariousness of even the largest capitalist institutions. Even in the face of that failure, the market and its regulators maintained a willful blindness and forceful commitment to their ideologies, ensuring through bailouts and new regulations, the continuity and entrenchment of the same systems. Despite accumulating disasters, both economic and environmental, growth remains the main value and measure of success for business and politics.
Producing the magazine, distributing it at no cost and working remotely, were all only possible because of the internet, but also because the look, structure and use of the internet that we recognise today was still under development. Inside the culture of macro economics, users create and invent their own economic tactics. De Certeau describes these as ‘transgressions in a profit economy’ where diversions from the profit economy forge networks that require reciprocity. Small and many of the producers it supported were operating in this way. It was a period when there was a growing interest in handmade and small-scale art, craft and design. Etsy, the online market place for handmade products and supplies, started in 2005 and expanded rapidly and there was a hopeful sense that maybe the infrastructure the internet might be able to radically change the existing retail systems. Affordable software, websites and platforms like Etsy, offered people the ability to run small and independent business, have flexible hours, ethical manufacturing and personal satisfaction from dispersed geographical locations. Initially when Etsy was founded it was differentiated from the values of the existing market and proposed a viable alternative.

In their first few years Etsy seeded their website with makers through forming relationships with people who were running online craft forums, and also sponsoring craft fairs across America. We also adopted a similar mix of online and real world connections to develop Small and the community involved with it. By 2007 Etsy had started a blog that showcased the successful sellers and marketing tips. As regular guest editors we were able to promote the magazine and the designers we worked with, while Etsy could demonstrate to their client’s new media that could support and grow their businesses. From here we branched out into other mutually supportive relationships. We partnered with Renegade Craft Fair in Brooklyn, along with Etsy, in 2007, and were involved in many events with local retailers and gallery spaces over the next few years. We co-hosted or sponsored other venues, establishments and outlets that aligned with our values and supported the same community. At all these events we were able to make connections with wider audiences, potential contributors and supporters.

By 2011 there was a sense that the ideology behind the entity was changing. Rob Kalin, one of the founders of Etsy, was pushed out when he insisted on remaining committed to the original ethos behind the company. By 2013, crafters were told they were allowed to use manufacturers as long as their goods ‘were handmade in spirit’ which has resulted in large scale manufacturers violating the terms of the site and alienation of the sites original community. A wider transition towards emphasising marketing rather than making began to emerge. At the Parallels symposium at the National Gallery of Victoria in Melbourne, 2015, the American key note speaker, Wava Carpenter, suggested to the Australian audience of makers and designers that crafting their own story was as essential as the actual craft work. In her view, the work was subsidiary to the ability...
to market it. In illustration she presented two popular and easily ingested narratives that she believed would sell goods: the image of a happily crafting couple in an attractive studio with a dog or baby playing under the work table, or the symbiotic union of a design savvy westerner with some joyful indigenous people, encouraging them to use their traditional techniques to make universally saleable design objects. The original ethos of authenticity, craft skills, sustainability and potential freedom from corporate structures is subsumed as marketing merges craft with design and wraps them both in aspirational narratives. In 2015 Etsy was listed on the public market, observing quietly that they knew they would need to work hard to protect their market from predatory practice as the ‘authenticity’ they still retained was essential for their continued existence, and incidentally, also for their stock value.43 As the embodied sense of being situated within a community and activity, recedes, it is increasingly just an appearance of authenticity that remains.

Despite the trajectory from an idealistic to the free market for Etsy and many other companies that try to negotiate a new way of operating, this does not indicate that non capitalist values are always doomed. Commoning is made up of many interconnected and variable models and the eclipse of one does not indicate a terminal problem across all of them. The opposite may be more true. When a business fails it often leaves in its wake destitution, bankruptcy, shame and emotional damage. With commoning, a collective may terminate or the individuals move on, without a feeling of failure or a sense of scarcity. From a capitalists’ vantage of success, this is difficult to conceive and again demonstrates that the normative models of capitalism do not always provide a useful measure.

One reason that commoning can sustain such a different outlook is that people oriented towards commoning are usually participating in many modes of commons. It is impossible for any one form to meet all needs and usually the activities ‘nest together in different ways’.42 Before the participants become literate in commoning, these various experiences are not necessarily concatenated for either the individuals involved, or for external observers. Without the signifiers of success that capitalism recognises such as wealth, the many modes of commoning that accumulate over a lifetime, or over a community, may not register in broader society. The resources, energies and relations that had supported Small were not stable or perpetual, but as a project made through processes of commoning, Small did not need to continue forever in order to be of value. As Clare Doherty acknowledges, there are enduring legacies produced through temporary relationships enacted by creative projects.43 The underlying approaches and values that maintained the magazine, which I now understand to be processes of commoning, were durable and have been sustained.

Sometimes resisting co-option means acknowledging that the territory has shifted and the original proposal or activity is no longer able to maintain resistance. Around the 15th issue of Small, Christine and I noticed that the composition of the fluid community that coalesced around the magazine, both supporting it and producing it, had started to change. As we became aware of this, we had to consider if we had also been repositioned by the shifting market, and now rather than supporting alternative practices to become self sufficient, we were instead staking out a new territory and the methods for future exploitation. When we began the magazine there was no similar type of publication, but over the next few years many more started up.44 Some of these new publications were creative, ethical and well organised and they are mostly still operating, albeit in a more commercial incarnation; others, many of which have since closed, employed the same unscrupulous practices of the print magazine that had incensed us into starting Small. We were told that the new online publications often damaged or did not return stock they borrowed, and requested more items than they needed or could feature from companies that could not afford to lose inventory. They would not refund postage, expected free gifts, and undermined their credibility by offering paid ‘advertorials’ and product placement. These attitudes caused independent designers and artists to again become wary of involvement, as they had been with print magazines when we first began.


42 Ryan, "The Transformative Capacity of the Commons and Commoning.


Although the reputation of Small meant our existing collaborations were stable, we noticed that the trust necessary for us to establish new relationships and continue to practice in the way we had initiated was already eroded in new contacts. Agents, writers and bloggers had begun to come up with ways to track their readership and monetise their influence, meaning relationships were now quantified and re-framed as transactions. Makers felt increasingly exploited, and the readers, always sensitive to inauthentic editing, ‘advertorials’ and product placement, had become more cynical. The systems of exchange that had previously seemed ‘thick’ and able to sustain complex dynamics, had thinned out and moved towards market-regulated exchanges.

Similar to the processes of urban gentrification that I had experienced in Brooklyn (discussed in Chapter 2), the structures of the internet at that time was increasingly being organised and shaped by capitalising entrepreneurs, big media, infrastructure and copyright law. Felix Stadler calls for open systems and free access, arguing the repressive controls of cultural production and elimination of risk, destroys future innovation because ‘we need … time and freedom to experiment much more’. This plea echoed resistance to foreclosure on artist occupied ‘dreaming devices’ and the ancillary social and creative innovation occurring in the face of gentrification in Brooklyn and other urban spaces.

Small was always a tremendous amount of work. When we began in 2006, operating in a new medium required an inventiveness that was engaging for both of us. In the first few years of production we were working it out as we went along which caused unknown and unforeseen results and relationships. Sometimes these were problematic but more often they were stimulating as the magazine functioned as a platform for testing new ideas rather than rolling out a planned and repeating format. As our skills and networks grew, slowly the outcomes became conceptually and aesthetically more predictable and over time the way we were working and the community stopped feeling dynamic and open. I had become aware that there is crossover between growing skills and knowledge and the innovative creativity that seeks to fill the gaps, resulting in high levels of engagement. As either the skill level or creative responses plateau, the level of engagement declines. In 2013 we had been working on the magazine for more than five years, I was back in Australia and had started teaching and researching and Christine was in Dallas working a new job full-time. We decided together that the 20th issue would conclude the publication.

As a project, Small had expanded the physical space that we were each living in, carving out a new terrain we could occupy and shape as we chose. Our surrounds and schedule were constrained by the requirements of caring for small children, where the joy and love in that work is tangled with the mundane routines and often isolated labour of undistributed care-taking. The dream resulted in processes that located and constructed the mental space for shared creative work in our separate lives, that we could then maintain between us. The project enabled us to transition into another space that took any shape we dreamed up. The systems by which diverse creative works that formed the magazine were initiated and produced, did not vanish when the magazine ended, but became the foundation for the project, Consumed, discussed in the next chapter.

45Lessig, Remix: Making Art and Commerce.

46 This trajectory has culminated with a repeal of the Net Neutrality Laws in the United States in 2017 that had ensured equal speed and access of all web content. Recently the rapid expansion of blockchain technology, which passes information via distributed networks, is beginning to propose how existing hierarchies might be destabilised. Blockchain technology (which is currently more well known underlying Bitcoin, Ethereum and other crypto-currencies) is a network of distributed trust. They are a flattened hierarchy and cannot be privatised. This is such a fundamentally different system to what exists (in capitalist systems more generally as well as in the internet) that it may soon present a credible challenge to the growing hegemony of tech monopolies, consequently changing the structure of the internet. See Steven Johnson “Beyond the Bitcoin Bubble” The New York Times Jan 16 2018 also ABC Radio Australia “Nightlife: The Bitcoin Bubble” with Philip Clark and Sarah McDonald.

47 Felix Stadler, “Open Cultures and the Nature of Networks,” The Note Book Project (Sad, Serbia and Montenegro Sarajevo, Bosnia and Herzegovina: Futura publikacije and Sarajevo Center for Contemporary Art, 2005), 28.
Fig 3.12. Twenty back issues of Small 2007-2011.
A movement of commoning through participatory creative practice as a creative producer of Consumed.

CHAPTER FOUR

Story 3: An hour before sunset there was already a long line outside the door. I left the crowd waiting on the pavement and went home to get our children dinner and into their beds. Miso and Ghostpatrol told me later that they had envisioned the night as an intimate event, a test run for a future larger project. They had imagined a few of their friends would come and spend time together. As Ghostpatrol would draw them a picture and then in the black cardboard hut, the patterned perforations glowing like a lantern, they could have the image tattooed on their skin. When I returned later that evening the small room was warm and crowded, music played and people talked as they waited. Ghostpatrol sat on a stool drawing, drawings swaying on a string spanning the room, people pushing up close to him alert to losing their turn. Once they had their image, they would enter the paper lantern, crouching on the ground holding out a pale forearm as Miso jabbed ink into their skin with a needle taped to a pen. All night people kept turning up, crowding into the small room waiting for their turn. The audience chatted, drank beer they brought with them and listened to music as the ambience shivered between anticipation and impatience.

4.0 INTRODUCTION TO PROJECT: CONSUMED

When I began my PhD in 2009 I imagined academic research to be an introduction to a community sharing their interests and practices. I had just moved back to Australia from America and was once again looking for people and a place I felt connected to. The university offered me a place to work on campus, inexplicably with a small research group all working at the juncture of architecture and computer coding. As I sat in front of my computer next to a terrifying and territorial Masters student, and surrounded by silent men involved in parametric modelling, I thought back to the kinds of social and spatial relations in my past that had invigorated me. I wanted to find if I could reproduce the experiences I had enjoyed in the past; living and making work in the loft spaces in Williamsburg and working with Christine to produce the magazine Small.

In the lofts, the interrelations between work and life had emerged from specific temporal, social and creative conditions (see Chapter two), and with Small, we had found systems that initiated and supported the production of diverse work from a variety of artists within a framework (see Chapter three). For the first time these two very different experiences seemed to reveal some shared propensities. I began work on a project titled Consumed which facilitated nine artists, five working alone and four in pairs, to produce and display new work made in a temporary studio and exhibition space over a 24-hour period. The project had several interrelated aims, the main two being; making visible the processes that make creative work, and providing a framework that encouraged generative approaches and also collectivised individuals, including myself.
I approached artists that I perceived had an existing interest in working outside of a gallery context and, to varying levels, a focus on the interrelation between audience and maker. The artists who agreed to participate were asked to simply turn up at the site for their 24-hour period with any materials or tools they thought might be useful, and see what unfolded over the day. The work from the previous day would possibly still be in situ, in which case they could dismantle it, or continue working on, around, or with what was already there.

Although I was used to approaching people to produce work for the magazine, I was still startled that all of the artists I approached were interested in this project as I was aware the unfamiliar structure and emphasis on process were potentially alienating. The form of Consumed offered a similar framework to the magazine; a promoted and public space where risk and experimentation were encouraged and supported and each component or contributor was part of a larger whole. However, compared to the aesthetic and curatorial control exerted in Small, there was no requirement for proposals and no lag between production and display for editing in Consumed, meaning that the overall project resulted in much more diverse approaches and works.

The project was located in an existing commercial space, this time a shop front, on a main street. Shop windows have similar purpose to magazine covers. Both curate and display the contents in a way that will attract the attention of potential audiences. In this shop space, the glass was divided in half by a vertical metal bar and, to me, the central division of the window resembled a magazine laying open face down with the spine cracked open in the middle. If the window is like a cover, an exterior facing representation of what can be found on the interior, then the interior space of the shop could be imagined as replicating the content of the magazine. Compared to print magazines the online characteristics of Small meant the pages functioned more as 'spaces' of interaction; evident in the networked hyperlinks that connected disparate elements within, and beyond, the magazine, but also the distributed social and creative connections that were behind the production of the work. The correlations I drew were useful as they helped me structure Consumed both spatially and socially.

I decided to work with the separation of space that was indicated by the metal bar which bisected the window. I constructed a temporary wall to divide the interior, designating one side the production area and the other side for the display of the work. This located creativity on one side and display on the other, or in economical terms made a division between production and consumption. The production half of the space was clearly visible through the glass during the day and also illuminated at night, while the view into the consumption side was obscured by semi-opaque film I had applied to the window. The translucent film meant the display space was obscured during the day with only vague shapes visible through the frosted glass. At night, when the work would have been underway for twelve or so hours, the display space changed through back-lighting to become more apparent and emphatic from the street. Although still more muted than the view onto the production side, the shadows of the objects and people moving in the display area were projected onto the window. This arrangement deliberately inverted the importance of the final work and modes of display, in favour of visually prioritising the processes of making.
From my previous work with Small, I was familiar with trying to find a balance between allowing for openness and freedom as well as being aware of the responsibilities of working with other people. With Consumed these considerations were more pronounced by the process of applying for ethics approval. The ethics applications process was difficult to align with as it framed the audience as 'subjects', and the project as resulting in 'data collection.' The design of the project made it impossible to predict the potential effects for everyone involved and still privilege un-prescribed outcomes. I did not want to ask the artist to pre-design their work and instead hoped, as I described above, that they would respond to the site, the conditions and the time frame. The location, at a tram terminus, meant that the audience would be largely circumstantial and not expectant. Several of the artists were interested in shifting the relationship between art and audience by working directly with the audience to produce projects that unfolded or appeared through their engagement. The agency of both the producer and the viewers was integral to generating this kind of exchange and the emergent aspects of this way of working would become circumscribed and undone by predicting what could occur in the future encounter. Ultimately, to negotiate a balance between the open and participatory design of the project and the official university ethics restrictions relating to public involvement, the artists signed releases acknowledging they understood the framework and documentation methods, and agreeing to avoid any filming of the public.1 This was reiterated by a plain language statement displayed on the shop window.

The artists I invited to be involved in Consumed demonstrated in various ways an interest with participatory work and displacing the boundaries between maker and audience. Although their work was all very different, there were common threads that connected them at a less obvious level. I found the artists online using search words relating to my theoretical interest, and then contacted them by email. Hannah Bertram2 (installation artist), Isobel Knowles and Van Souwerine3 (collaborative animators), Emma van Leest4 (paper cut out artist), Miso5 - the working name of Stanislava Pinchuk, and Ghostpatrol6 - the working name of David Booth (at the time mostly focussed on street art), Lachlan Stuart-Tetlow7 (digital installation), Holly McNaught8 (performative installations), and Madeleine Griffith9 (model maker and illustrator) all responded and were interested in being involved.

Although I was used to approaching people to produce work for the magazine, I was still startled that all of the artists I asked were interested in this project as I knew the unfamiliar structure and emphasis on process were potentially alienating. However, Consumed was able to attract contributors for the same reasons the magazine was able to. Both had similar frameworks; they promoted and public space where risk and experimentation were encouraged and supported and each component or contributor was part of a larger whole. Despite the structural similarity, intentionally not requiring proposals or outcomes as well as the near simultaneous process of production and display, meant that the overall project resulted in much more diverse approaches and works compared to the results when aesthetic and curatorial control are exerted as they were in Small.

---

1 Ethics approval for this obtained on the 17 September 2010 (CHEAN A.2000579-07/10). The ethics approval process for this project has been written about in more detail by Pia Ednie-Brown ‘Supervising Emergence: Adapting Ethics Approval Frameworks Toward Research by Creative Project,’ in Supervising Practices for Postgraduate Research in Art, Architecture and Design. Educational Futures (Rethinking Theory and Practice), vol 57, ed. Brent Allpress, Robyn Barnacle, Lesley Duxbury, and Elizabeth M. Grierson (Rotterdam: SensePublishers, 2012).

2 Hannah Bertram: http://www.hannahbertram.com/

3 Isobel Knowles and Van Souwerine http://www.isobelandvan.com/

4 Emma van Leest http://www.emmavanleest.com/home/

5 Miso also known as Stanislava Pinchuk http://m-i-s-o.com/

6 Ghostpatrol also known as David Booth http://davidbooth.com/

7 Lachlan Tetlow-Stuart http://lachlantetlowstuart.com/

8 http://tlsc.co/cv-3

9 http://www.madeleinegriffith.com/
The particular qualities of the site produced certain constraints that functioned as catalytic agents within Consumed. Erin Manning and Brian Massumi of SenseLab describe how ‘enabling constraints’ are ‘positive in their dynamic effect though it may be limiting in its form/force narrowly considered.’ The enabling constraints in the Consumed scenario were instituted by both the site and the duration; the 24-hour period with the associated changes of light and audience as well as the sense of finiteness of one full day. The limited time and lack of access prior to the event meant that process could not be excluded from the approach. The specific spatial conditions of the store front as well as its location on a busy intersection also contributed constraints.

Fig 4.6 Hannah Bertram drawing on the glass at 11pm.

Fig 4.7 Madeleine Griffith working on the production side of Consumed at 11am as my son plays in the foreground.

Hannah Bertram (fig.4.7) set out to use the full 24-hours drawing on the glass, letting the work unfold through the process of making, while Emma Van Leest (fig.4.10 and 4.11) wanted to test a specific idea and so only worked during the day and into the early evening until she felt satisfied with her exploration into animation through projection. Van Souwerwine and Isobel Knowles collected images from the public by encouraging them to press their faces onto the glass. The images they gathered of the audience were reconfigured into an interactive animation which responded to the new audience later that evening. Miso and Ghostpatrol presented an event that ran from sunset to sunrise (fig 4.1 and 4.2). The audience arrived early, forming an unintended and temporary community as they waited, first for access to the event and then for their turn to participate. The vacillating attitudes and emotions were often palpable as the group dynamic shifted throughout the night; the ambience often quite different to what the artists had planned, and quite different to video documentation they independently produced of the night.

Lachlan Tetlow Stuart did not overtly invite the audience to participate but instead utilised the existing behaviours of people (fig.4.8 and 4.9). He elected to operate at night when darkness and quietness emphasised the disruption he made by amplifying the traffic lights and accompanying beeping sounds. When the pedestrian pushed the button at any of the four cross walks they became both performer and audience as they unknowingly initiated an amplification of the existing beeps, causing the sound to ricochet around the intersection, moving in and out of syncopation. Intentional participation was invited by encouraging the pedestrian to press the button again, as it additional presses added to the pattern of sound surrounding them. The changing lights also triggered green ‘go’ and red ‘stop’ lights to flash in the store front, identifying the source of the irruption of noise.

One Day Sculpture\textsuperscript{13} organised by Claire Doherty and David Cross took place in New Zealand, the year before Consumed, running from August 2008 to September 2009.\textsuperscript{14} Cross and Doherty commissioned 20 artists to each make a work that lasted only 24-hours, presented separately over a 12-month period in the city of Wellington. One Day Sculpture was on a larger scale, utilised many different sites and ran over a longer time frame, but the shared structural and creative similarities to Consumed were significant. This demonstrated to me that this way of working had validity and also connected my work to a wider community of practices with similar interests and values. Both projects asked the artists to produce new work within the twenty-four hour time frame as a ‘means to navigate and activate the public sphere.’\textsuperscript{15} Doherty notes ‘the cumulative and collaborative curatorial structure might allow for commonalities and connections to emerge between the works in the series, with each work occurring autonomously on its own day and on its own terms.’\textsuperscript{16} In this way separate works occurring at different times could become cumulative and interconnected through the implementation of a framework. Locating Cross and Doherty’s project also helped me see how my own work was cumulative and interconnected, a developing practice made up of many projects and approaches, rather than necessarily usefully evaluated as single events.

\textsuperscript{11} This side effect is evident in many participatory projects and discussed extensively in David Cross and Claire Doherty, eds. One Day Sculpture (Bielefeld, Germany: Kerber Verlag, 2009), 11.

\textsuperscript{12} Sunset to Sunrise with Ghostpatrol and Miso, directed by Louis Mitchell (Melbourne: mp4, 2010).

\textsuperscript{13} http://www.situations.org.uk/projects/one-day-sculpture/

\textsuperscript{14} Consumed ran in May 2010.

\textsuperscript{15} http://www.onedaysculpture.org.nz/ODS\_about\_ODS.html From the about page on the website.

\textsuperscript{16} Cross and Doherty, One Day Sculpture, 8.
4.1 MAKING SPACE

Commoning is a practice of building different ways of being in the world which unfold and emerge in what ever spaces are available. The concept of space in time becomes important for understanding how commons can continue to exist, and how new commons can continue to emerge in contemporary society. Commoning is a spatial practice, evidenced in the etymological and ontological connection to natural commons historically a shared physical location or resource (see Chapter one). Communities and practices that occurred on natural commons were supported and formed by the specific characteristics of the space. When these spaces were appropriated for private property, the loss resulted in the reconstitution of not just the landscape but also the peoples who previously had access.

In our contemporary society, most space that is not privately owned is state owned. This eliminates common space; the third category of space which is neither private nor public. Lieven de Cauter writes that we have become unfamiliar with occupying spaces that is neither private nor public as the remnants of common space are scarce. Thus the concept of commoning creates a way of understanding the importance of the spatial situated-ness without necessarily drawing the conclusion that without being tethered to a specific location the commoning activity vanishes. De Cauter explains that the universal commons are available for use but not appropriation, whereas the sharing practices of a society or network are appropriated and transformed through use. He calls for ‘acts of commoning, of re-appropriation of the commons’ where practices of use produce spatial commons and ‘common places.’ The spaces that are made into commons by everyday people are both created and maintained by use, as they themselves are also created and maintained by their practices (as described in Chapter one).

Conflict occurs once pressure is applied to a shared space that has been occupied in parafunctional ways to conform to the rules of property. De Cauter points out that a paradox of commoning is that it is immediately threatened as soon as attention is focused on it. Once it becomes re-conceptualised as potential property that must be either protected or profited from, immediately the debate begins to shapes the form it will take. For this reason, de Cauter believes that there should be no political controls in commons. For commons to exist they need to be ‘defended against economisation but also politicisation.’ He proposes that by conceiving of commons as space in time, they are able to continue to emerge in various ways particular to their temporal social and spatial conditions. Commons now manifest as moments in time, often temporary and fleeting but not always. They are made by a multitude of activities that can no longer just be identified as a social structure and culture specific to a territory.

Conflict occurs once pressure is applied to a shared space that has been occupied in parafunctional ways to conform to the rules of property. De Cauter points out that a paradox of commoning is that it is immediately threatened as soon as attention is focused on it. Once it becomes re-conceptualised as potential property that must be either protected or profited from, immediately the debate begins to shapes the form it will take. For this reason, de Cauter believes that there should be no political controls in commons. For commons to exist they need to be ‘defended against economisation but also politicisation.’ He proposes that by conceiving of commons as space in time, they are able to continue to emerge in various ways particular to their temporal social and spatial conditions. Commons now manifest as moments in time, often temporary and fleeting but not always. They are made by a multitude of activities that can no longer just be identified as a social structure and culture specific to a territory.

Social and public creative works cannot exist independently from their context because, as Papastergiadis observes ‘what works in one setting will literally not work automatically in another setting.’ He points out that negotiating the spaces in which art is experienced, is a key component of the work. The space is not neutral backdrop but instead is in dynamic relation with the work. As both the space and the creative activity condition one another, the relations between the space and the activity are co-produced and cannot be separated out from each other. The spatial co-production is furthered by the involvement of the audience. For Papastergiadis the confluence of creative work, participants and space makes ‘a malleable stage upon which the work is not only presented, but also within which it is completed.’

Spatial creative practices already shape into public and private space when it makes incursions into spaces reserved for alternate purposes. Over the last few decades, art practices have increasingly moved out of museums to work with atmospheres, relations, and concepts instead of material objects. This migration from museums to urban and social spaces has been motivated for some creative practices by attitudes that can be understood as commoning; resisting commodification, encouraging social relations, and developing through shared activities. Different practices (some examples that are discussed throughout this research are the projects supported by Situation, the work of Bianca Hester, SenseLab and Raumlabor) can model specific techniques for furthering commoning in the existing urban fabric even when they do not necessarily see themselves as engaged in commoning.
As discussed in the introduction to this Chapter, the site where projects occur, and/or the spatial characteristics of the environment it is within, all provide particular constraints that can be construed as enabling. Considering the qualities of site and space as enabling for creative work is a model that can be extended to practices of commoning within public spaces. Rather than feeling dis-empowered by a lack of suitable spaces for an activity, the view can be inverted and spaces already firmly occupied by capitalism can be reconceived as providing constraints that instigate or enable a response. This view is supported by David Harvey who asserts the necessity of actively remaking the city. He proposes that commoning in the urban environment should be ‘progressive forces of cultural production and transformation that can seek to appropriate and undermine the forces of capital, rather than the other way round. When this is applied to creative practice it re-orientates the outlook of both creative practice towards conceiving constraints as enabling, and the excess of commodified spaces producing abundance and opportunity rather than spatial scarcity, ultimately empowering activities of occupation and appropriation.

The spatial arrangements of shops afford a standing invitation to enter, enacting a transformation on the person entering from passer-by to consumer. The shopfront location extended on my interest in reusing commercial space – an interest that began with inhabiting and exhibiting in industrial spaces, and then publishing in an area claimed by commercial magazines (as described in Chapters one and two. The use of commercial space for creative practice is discussed further in the subsequent Chapter.) Reusing an unoccupied shop front for Consumed was an enquiry into spatial variations that could produce other transformations: a passer-by into an audience, the audience into a producer, the individual into a collective. For a passer-by, the storefront window is a casually encountered space of display, designed to capture attention, and offers an invitation for acquisition. Sylvia Lavin notes that Keisler’s description of the ‘plane of negotiation’ inherent in storefronts is:

analogous to how weather fronts are understood today as the plane of negotiation between different atmospheric densities and principle cause of meteorological phenomena. This presents an opportunity to produce new kinds of urban happenings that might begin or be catalysed by the plane itself but that have their consequence elsewhere, out there.

This process is not aiming for civic transformation by activating abandoned commercial spaces. Raumlabor develop social and spatial projects (such as Spacebuster discussed in Section 2.1) that negotiate how to activate spaces or communities without triggering displacement through gentrification. They focus on instigating an inclusive and imbricating process of being within an existing urban environment and simultaneously co-producing alternate ones; a form of spatial dreaming that seems at once convincing and entirely illogical.
4.2 PRODUCERS

Understanding the roles of producer and consumer was a dilemma that came into focus through Consumed in ways that were not necessarily clear at the time. Later, through a better understanding of how commong values mutual management and production, it became more evident that the concern about these roles in creative work was indicative of the existing (but not yet acknowledged) affiliation with the precepts of commoning. The design of the space underlined this enquiry by making two distinct areas, one for production and one for display or consumption. Designing and organising the event meant the job description appeared to be that of a ‘producer’. When the audience participated in making the work, intentionally or not, they also became producers. The inverse of producing, ‘consuming’ was also not easily defined. The project title, Consumed, alluded to both the consuming nature of intense involvement in a creative process and commercial acquisitiveness.

As creative practice has become more place and time based, the role of the curator has also changed. Claire Doherty observes that this shift fully appeared around 2005 when ‘the curator emerged as the linchpin in negotiations between artist and space’ and was actively involved in the production of the work. Doherty takes this role herself but is also trying to propose a broader understanding of the methodological processes of contemporary curatorial practices that are both context specific and concerned with duration. She sees herself as aligned with other ‘place making’ curators whose curatorial approach develops new understandings of place in time. Since One Day Sculpture Doherty has made more explicit her role as a cultural producer of public works that encourage the experimental arts and the formation of communities and new ways of interacting with the world. She believes that being a cultural producer is a form of curation that speaks to the processes of ‘selecting, shaping and managing an idea’. The similarities in our approaches and interests, particularly finding similarities in our existing preferences. They see this as essential to the development of the work, but they note that there are often multiple charismatic agents within any project. That observation identified the root of my unease in claiming to be the producer of an event. However, O’Neill and Doherty have a slightly different view as the scale of the works they undertake means that political support is necessary and they believe this is more easily gathered if it is focussed through a specific ‘curator or producer.’ To satisfy the various stipulations required by external involvement and backing, the creative structures must necessarily be tighter and so also more predictable. Doherty continues to balance this while still privileging open and unscripted works but making the projects palatable to political support means they inevitably are structured on some level to result in ‘deliverables’, even if these are intangible.

O’Neill and Doherty identify how charismatic agency is significant to commissioning work in that it can gather and focus funding and opportunity. They see this as essential to the development of the work, but they note that there are often multiple charismatic agents within any project. That observation identified the root of my unease in claiming to be the producer of an event. However, O’Neill and Doherty have a slightly different view as the scale of the works they undertake means that political support is necessary and they believe this is more easily gathered if it is focussed through a specific ‘curator or producer.’ To satisfy the various stipulations required by external involvement and backing, the creative structures must necessarily be tighter and so also more predictable. Doherty continues to balance this while still privileging open and unscripted works but making the projects palatable to political support means they inevitably are structured on some level to result in ‘deliverables’, even if these are intangible.

The systems that I instigated in Consumed so frequently moved into realms I did not anticipate, and became something other than what I had designed for, that it felt disingenuous to claim I was ‘producing,’ when in reality it was more analogous with the subjective and reactive processes of ‘gonzo journalism’. This indicates a slippage, or openness to being within the project, influenced by the subjective experiences. The effect of this is that, both intentionally and accidentally, I shift from being the ‘producer’, to becoming a participant, to making work myself. This is an intersubjective and imbricated occupation, more aligned with de Certeau’s tactician whom he describes as involved in ‘way of thinking invested in a way of acting, an art of combination which cannot be dissociated from an art of using’. It is through the slippage between roles that I find myself within the event, involved alongside others, in ways that are various and emergent.
The assumptions that I entered the project *Consumed* with, particularly around the roles of producer and consumer entailed and how they could be redressed, became tangled and difficult to decipher during the project. Over the extended time frame of this research, continued attempts to uncover the underlying concerns I have with these roles eventually resolved. Modern society has effectively separated many aspects of life that were once naturally more integrated; family from community, labour from leisure, consumption from production, leading to increased disjunctions and a more fractured sense of self. A core characteristic of commoning is a rejection of these kinds of strict demarcations. The intermingled and entangled characteristics of the projects overall, reflect my larger issue with contemporary acceptance of the segregation of life.

4.3 INDIVIDUAL CREATIVE DEVELOPMENT WITHIN COLLECTIVES.

*Small* magazine used a framework that supported creative self-actualisation and collectivised creative work or new collaborations of people. We simply accepted proposals as they were submitted, or alternatively approached people whose existing work we were interested in, offering them full creative control over the work they contributed. This creative freedom, combined with the support and framework to make new, often experimental works, meant the system afforded an alternate value exchange to monetary transactions.

I used a similar system in *Consumed* by offering the artists high degree of creative freedom over the 24-hours they occupied the site. They were not required to submit a proposal, or even arrive with an idea. If they thought they might need or want materials or technology or any other practical help, I would attempt to make it available, along with a stipend for meals. The cultural capital that I accumulated from having the artists participate and contribute to the project and my research was exchanged for support, space and opportunity to expand aspects of their own practice. This approach meant we were all tending to the development and sustainability of the other’s future practice.

*Consumed* provided a framework that encouraged emergent and open processes and the agency of the artist involved. Theorist Grant Kester explains that collaborative work that replicates to a public a predesigned vision or idea from the artist ‘forecloses the possibility that creative insight might be generated through less proprietary forms of compositional agency.’ He proposes that instead of agency being attributed to individuals, it is seen as ‘fluid and transpositional over the course of a given creative action.’ The structure of *Consumed* meant that, as an entirety, the event would never be able to dispense predesigned interaction or scripted participation, even when occasionally those operating within in it sought to deliver that kind of experience. Kester describes the potential of collaboration in creative work as a more dialogical form of encounter through reciprocal and relational negotiations of difference occurring through the work. Facilitating dialogical collaborations resonated with my ambition for this project, and also with my broader ideological orientation.

---


35 Possibly Miso and Ghostpatrol’s event was conceived in a fairly scripted way, however ultimately it did not really unfold like that and, as it constellated with the collective, it is not really possible to look at it separately without considering the other works.

36 Kester, *The One and Many*, 221-22
Using an open curatorial approach meant the overall project had to be able to support artists working with processes and emergence as well as those who chose to use a more scripted approach. At the time, and for some time afterwards, as my own processes and way of working were also emerging, the kind of inconsistencies or conflicts within the work, and the greater research, were often very confusing as apparent connections were constantly interrupted or undermined by the appearance of oppositional ideas.

The seeming inconsistencies in my theoretical thinking and practice eventually began to be networked into a more complex understanding of emergent and collaborative work through processes of analogous thinking. When researching commercial spaces and shopfronts, I came across Tyrus Miller’s observation of how Walter Benjamin, in his walks through the commercial districts of cities, would seek ‘to discover critical “constellations”, immanent but hidden in the material, thus disclosing unapparent connections between seemingly unconnected entities or phenomena.’ This comment resonated with me, reminding me of Jane Bennett’s description of Paraclesus who practiced a discipline of perception where ‘he could see how one thing mirrored another and could experience the repetition as itself wondrous.’ Barbara Maria Stafford describes analogous thinking as an ability to ‘weave discordant particulars in to partial concordance.’ Finding an acceptance of analogous thinking enabled more transpositional thinking and an ability to locate commonalities across previously incongruous entities. With this shift, useful correspondences appeared across the disparate elements of Consumed and with the wider research. The analogies made visible correlations in the past to the present, and opened up future thinking and working as part of an evolving whole.

### 4.4 DOCUMENTING

Documentation constructs the notion of an ‘original’, seeking to fix it in time and space. The intention behind how it is fixed can shape inadvertently or intentionally, to perform in future in certain ways. Creative projects are most usually documented through photography or film. Photographic documentation has supported the move away from art as an ‘object’ to more temporal, ephemeral, social or performative works. The documentation enables temporal participatory event works to continue to be encountered beyond their limited existence in an actual time and space. How this documentation is construed and disseminated is the means by which cultural capital is both produced and designated. Daniel Palmer notes that temporal events ‘are more generally “consumed” as still photographic images – whose ability to record, spread and multiply across the globe, not to mention endure for posterity, makes them the primary mode by which all those audiences who do not have the privilege of “being there” become “informed.”’ The compositional and framing decisions by the photographer involved are not neutral but actually constructs how that work will be remembered and also represented in the future.

The effect of documentation on the future conception of the work is particularly evident with temporary projects and events. Claire Bishop identifies how contemporary participatory art ‘is dependent on first hand experience and preferably over a long duration’ but is also aware that it occurs for a double audience; those in attendance and those who will encounter it in the future. For her, this ‘means dominant narratives around participatory art lie in the hands of those curators responsible for each project and who are often the only ones to witness its full unfolding – at times present even more so than the artist.’ Bishop extrapolates on this arguing that evaluating this kind of work should occur through examining the meaning of what is produced by the work, the politics of spectatorship, not the processes by which it is made.
Event based work is often effectively assimilated into the commoditised art system as digital photography, which along with social media transmits the cultural capital. The documentation of events that occur in a particular time and space often reproduces the aspirations of the work. The presented image is construed as the ‘real’ experience, available eternally to the imagination and internalised by the viewer as factual rather than a fabrication. The form that the documentation takes and the way it is distributed, as the only remaining evidence of the work, influences the allocation of the cultural capital. The person (or people) making, commissioning, editing and disseminating the images is deploying the work to function in a new way. As previously discussed, the interpretation of work by any viewer reconstitutes the work, however the producer of the images is explicitly able to contribute to how the work will be interpreted by others. As Papastergiadis points out, the camera is ‘implicated in the reconstruction of our value system.’ The decisions made as to how the documentation is created, mean the initial values of temporal, transitory, collective works are either included and emphasised, or detached and minimised by the visual evidence that is available to future viewers.

It is difficult to conceive of a method able to document social interrelations, atmospheres and subjective experiences and transmit these in a way that can be interpreted by future viewers, as well as clearly emphasise that the ‘true value’ is being present to experience the work. Usually photographs and video are selected to make the document. These technologies construct for the viewers a perception of the value of the original event, producing the cultural capital of ‘being there’ as unique, rather than replicable and endlessly encountered through the documentation. However, this strategy means, as Papastergiedis notes, that documentation takes over as ‘the valued evidence of art’. He goes on: ‘in this peculiar transposition of value from the completed object to the preliminary or resultant traces of experience, there is a way in which the museum reclaims its original function and also neutralises the radical attempt of the artist to convert it into a production house for significant experiences. For him the camera does not merely ‘distort or repress ideas or existing values ... but is involved in the process of constituting their precise form.’

In Consumed the various artists made their own decisions without discussion with me as to how, or if, they would further promote their individual project. Miso and Ghostpatrol’s did some limited advertising of their event, Sunset to Sunrise, which was picked up by various popular websites. This had the effect of attracting a much larger audience than they intended. Later they released a film of the event that they had independently commissioned. It lasts about three minutes and depicts groups of young people in golden light, smiling and enjoying the social and creative ambience to the sounds of a dreamy soundtrack. ‘Damn, so pissed I missed this’ appeared in the comments below the film when it was up on Vimeo.46 Sunrise to Sunset with Miso and Ghostpatrol publicised and documented only the predicted and aspirational aspects of the project, not the unexpected experiences. Miso reported that she had continued working, despite being tired and overwhelmed, because of the pressure from the audience who had waited and now felt entitled to receive their free tattoo. This experience negatively coloured her memory of the whole project but is not rendered through the film they had made, or any other documentation of their event (fig 4.15).

---

45 Some artists, notably Tino Seghal, resist documenting their work, however this has in itself become incorporated into the marketing through its unusualness. Marina Abramovic argues that documentation of work by other performance artists can be used as a score or template from which she, or anyone, can restage their work. This points to questions around documentation, the nature of originality and copyright. However, the net effect of this has approach has been the accumulation of cultural capital to her own practice, not any noticeable shift in the existing systems.

46 Papastergiadi, Spatial Aesthetics. 45.

47 Ibid. 44-50.

48 Louis Mitchell ‘Sunset to Sunrise with Ghostpatrol and Miso’ filmed in October 2010, mp42.24 (authors collection). See Figure 4.X for still images from the film.
With event-based work such as Consumed, the composition, editing and selection processes that contribute to the construction of the future perception of the work are more hidden than they were in Small magazine. When editing for the magazine, the contributors clearly acknowledged that they were involved in the production of a document, and that their work would be later designed and edited into a cohesive format. Everyone involved understood the magazine form is composite, not a neutral document of a more authentic version residing elsewhere and in another time. The magazine thus becomes a more transparent, and consequently honest, model of similar practice that occurs in the cataloguing of art where the relations between the art and its document and the commercial intent are much less overt.

The documentation proposition for Consumed attempted to make pellucid the processes of selection and editing in the composition of the document of the event. These interests were evidenced in three ways. The first was through the form that the ‘archive’ of the event took – how it distributed cultural capital and the extent it foreclosed or opened the potential for future work. The second focused on duration, specifically how extending the temporal dimensions of an event could democratise access and allow for emergent futuring activities. The third aspect was at that stage just a nascent hunch, but was concerned with how documentation processes offer a way of rendering explicit what Jacques Rancière describes as ‘an emancipated community’, which “is in fact a community of storytellers and translators.” These are spectators who are not coerced into physically participating but are recognised as active interpreters able to appropriate the story for themselves, and ultimately make their own story from their encounters.

These three interests motivated the design of the documenting processes in Consumed, which were two filmic systems that together built up multiple perspectives. The first system was four closed-circuit cameras that ran continuously inside and out of the shop and was set up by me. These cameras were initiated at the beginning of the week and ran without interruption. The footage was displayed on a split screen monitor in the corner of the working space so the artist and audience could see what was being recorded at all times. (fig 4.17 and 4.18) As two of the cameras were outside on the street and two were inside the space, the split screen gathered together both the perspective of the audience outside and the artists inside, showing each what the other was seeing. The second system of documentation was produced by each artist, concurrently with their project, by taking still images or video on a provided SLR camera. They could focus the lens on what was important or interesting to them and intermittently make images over their twenty-four-hour period.

The plan for the documentation in this project was to more clearly delineate the connections between the various artists and their approaches. This connection was not necessarily evident to the occasional viewer who may only see an individual occupying the space and producing work separately. It also contributed to the work collectively becoming an open collaboration system where the ‘participants are working to create one or more shared artefacts, usually with the knowledge that the product will be consumed by some future unknown audience.’ Danny Butt observes ‘works of art escape their constraints – whether set by curators, dealers, historians or, most critically, the artist themselves – in a future encounter with an audience’ despite efforts to contain how this will occur. I envisaged the overarching documentation system and the alternative, individual documentation as ‘by-products’ of the processes, time frames and site, not subject to containment, but continuously available for re-use and reinterpretation.

---

When the raw footage was edited and reformatted it was to become a stop animation, available for viewing online. The visualisation of how this would function involved the documentation system and the alternative, individual documentation running continuously in two different directions. Where these loops intersected, the viewer would be able to change the flow of the footage and follow an alternate view of the work. The design conceived the documentation as coming from the system, not images of the system. Instead of constructing or designing the documentation as fixed for future viewing, the work must be actively constituted by any future viewer, making explicit all viewers ability to actively interpret information. Umberto Eco describes in his influential essay, ‘The Poetics of the Open Work, 1962’, that all works are ‘effectively open to a virtually unlimited range of possible readings, each of which causes the work to acquire new vitality in terms of one particular taste, or perspective, or personal performance.’ Although this is true it does not mean that it is not forgotten in the seductiveness of the multi-media, and now social media, that endeavours to control the narrative and crop out dissenting, complex or intersubjective experience. The design of this document was an attempt to create and articulate a continued openness that makes the ‘virtually unlimited range of possible readings’ evident to all, not just self evident to the individual.

The project incorporated multiple perspectives into the documentation process from the outset. Instead of crafting or superimposing a narrative, the maker or audience were able to interrupt or interact with what they saw being documented on one hand and were also continually reminded of what they could not change, and that there were other people’s points of view were always involved. Having this embedded within the project, means that the artist’s own views, and creative activity that is intimately familiar, is suddenly ‘made strange’ by an unfamiliar perspective or awareness.

As digital technology for documentation has become ubiquitous and networked over the last ten years, increasingly subtle layers of legibility are incorporated or understood in documentation images. Our ability to make images and also to understand how images become branded (referring to how a consumable becomes surrounded by an aura of intangible meaning that is not necessarily relevant to the measurable value or usefulness of the item) has increased exponentially, particularly through social media platforms. Large companies have realised that a perception of authenticity sells more products and authenticity can be easily acquired through using real people not paid actors. This has lead to the emergence of ‘influencers’ who through Instagram or other social media platforms, trade on their social cache to directly market what they are selling. This visibly occurs on a global scale employing high profile users, but also between high school students, young entrepreneurs, who make an online profile and sell their own clothes to their peers through Instagram and other platforms. This establishes a strange loop where teenagers are not just trying to emulate the popular kids, they can literally wear their clothes. Even very young users of Instagram are aware that when filters, editing and selection of images, previously skills that only belonged to professionals, can build a larger picture over time, essentially developing themselves as a brand.


When our ability to produce media and ‘content’ is growing it does not necessarily reflect a commensurate awareness of the artifice in these practices. The uniformity and sleekness of modern social platforms, web design where most of these images are distributed, produces a self-absorbed enclave, enforcing the normativity of the perceived reality. The quantity of the images available, and the algorithms that present them to us, expose us to even more similar images, furthering the impression of homogeneity and the cycles of solipsism. An ability to produce

Fig 4.16 TV showing footage during Sunset to Sunrise

Four closed circuit cameras filmed continually in the space, the footage shown in real time on a split screen TV. As digital technology for documentation has become ubiquitous and networked over the last ten years, increasingly subtle layers of legibility are incorporated or understood in documentation images. Our ability to make images and also to understand how images become branded (referring to how a consumable becomes surrounded by an aura of intangible meaning that is not necessarily relevant to the measurable value or usefulness of the item) has increased exponentially, particularly through social media platforms.

Fig 4.17 during Lachlan Teetlow-Stuart

This has also expanded how ‘branding’ practices are now applied to everything from products and individuals, up to whole cities. Social media platforms like Instagram have become causative in the design and production of all kinds of consumable items and activities. Exhibitions are increasingly envisioned in terms of being photogenic and overtly or covertly encourage social media documentation. Museums, institutions and more ephemeral events in the ‘creative city’ plead with visitors to post and share, adding the suggested hash tags to ensure the metrics, and the optics, around visitor engagement continues to climb.

Although our ability to produce media and ‘content’ is growing it does not necessarily reflect a commensurate awareness of the artifice in these practices. The uniformity and sleekness of modern social platforms, web design where most of these images are distributed, produces a self-absorbed enclave, enforcing the normativity of the perceived reality. The quantity of the images available, and the algorithms that present them to us, expose us to even more similar images, furthering the impression of homogeneity and the cycles of solipsism. An ability to produce


53 The closed circuit footage meant there were four perspectives within the artist’s view at all times. Two of the four cameras were fixed and the other two could be positioned by the maker or the audience.

54 The sense of familiar relations suddenly made strange, refers to Brechtian alienation theory where theatre is made unfamiliar and allows for new perceptions by distancing the audience from manipulation through identification or narrative techniques. Walter Benjamin Understanding Brecht, London: Verso, 1983

55 Instagram is used to develop brands in both obvious and subtle ways. Large companies have realised that a perception of authenticity sells more products and authenticity can be easily acquired through using real people not paid actors. This has lead to the emergence of ‘influencers’ who through Instagram or other social media platforms, trade on their social cache to directly market what they are selling. This visibly occurs on a global scale employing high profile users, but also between high school students, young entrepreneurs, who make an online profile and sell their own clothes to their peers through Instagram and other platforms. This establishes a strange loop where teenagers are not just trying to emulate the popular kids, they can literally wear their clothes. Even very young users of Instagram are aware that when filters, editing and selection of images, previously skills that only belonged to professionals, can build a larger picture over time, essentially developing themselves as a brand.

56 The New York Times frequently writes about how restaurants are producing dishes that are very attractive but not enjoyable as their emphasis is on being visually appealing and photographic. https://www.nytimes.com/2014/07/09/dining/dishes-worth-of-instagram-but-not-your-appetite.html

57 Incidentally this process is analogous to the effects of gentrification in displacing diversity and difference with a reinforcing reality that reflects the inhabitants. See Peter Moskowski, How to Kill a City: Gentrification, Inequality and the Fight for the Neighbourhood (New York: Nation Books, 2017).
an interpretation or to connect to more complex subtexts does not necessarily have the time or space to develop. Claire Bishop’s assertions that participation is implicit in any encounter with art is true resonates with Eco’s observations, but given the volume of encounters, combined with the growing ability of the mediation to manipulate even the production of ‘internal relations’, the extent that this experience becomes meaningful to the viewer is often limited. My concern with documenting was starting to reveal a sustained ideological preference for establishing how creative work could continue over extended time periods, and to make clear that the form of the document was influenced by, as well as influencing, the viewer.

The design of the documentation system in *Consumed* attempted to make visible how creative works remain open to interpretation. Through the documentation the viewer could become more consciously aware of the connections between their personal internalisation (meaning to acquire an understanding through a combination of memory and experience, that becomes part of you) of an event, and their own responses within Eco’s ‘virtually unlimited range of possible readings’. The unfixed quality I was trying to incorporate in the documentation reflected the qualities of internalisation; also combinative and durational and relative to the individual. In this project the documentation tried to make clear that the work continues to shift, both in itself and its effect beyond the actual event. The looping quality in experience also became increasingly significant. The loop runs through the shared creative experience making a personal view that shapes later understandings and responses to other shared experience. The loop in this project was the creative construction of a view particular to the individual even in a shared experience that produces within them a specific response in the ‘unlimited range’. That process has effect now, and in the future, through filtering and shaping how later experiences are internalised.

Attempting to construct this sequence for others, and also have it remain open and available over time, reflects the structure of the experience that had initially shaped my view: the transformative change incurred through the lived experience of the creative community in New York that produced a continued orientation toward similar experiences. It was at this stage that I understood that structures able to create a meaningful experience and produce some kind of transformative change in the participant as the significant aspect. I had not yet fully understood that I was also interested in the specifics of the transformative experience (what I later understood as commoning of creative practice) that occurred within the structure. This realisation only began to emerge over time and through returning again and again to new understandings of previous experiences, as they continued to be filtered and shaped by my current practice.

### 4.5 SUCCESS/FAIL, EVALUATING AND VALUING

As a project, *Consumed* both succeeded and failed, sometimes even at the same time, during the week that it ran. It has since continued to both succeed and fail. This has always been concerning to me, as the project was difficult to execute and intrinsic to my initial research proposition. I felt for it to be valuable to my research it needed to be successful according to metrics that were acknowledged by others. Emma van Leest, Lachlan Tetlow Stuart, Hannah Bertram, and Van Sowerwine and Isobel Knowles had largely positive experiences, reporting that the constraints and site had either produced a new perspective on their current work or opened up a new trajectory for future work. For example, Van Leest became interested in animating her previously static cut-outs and Bertram deepened her understanding what endurance brought to her drawing process. However, I knew that for other participants the structure and time frame had not been enabling and instead had only constrained them. The experience of managing the crowds and the pressure had been close to overwhelming for Miso and Ghostpatrol, discouraging them from a larger scale project in a similar vein. Holly McNaught struggled to find motivation to work for more than a couple of hours and Madeleine Griffith found her audience interrupted her making it hard for her to produce work she was satisfied with in the time frame.
I also failed in what I set out to do in the project. The documentation system was designed but never produced, as the amount of the footage from six cameras filming for seven days, four of them continuously, was difficult to manage. At this stage in my research the document project was discarded as I was not convinced that spending more time on it was necessary or helpful. However, without the final film, the project also failed to generate new work that would connect with future audiences and continue the agendas of the project as an open system. As the documentation material I had collected only evidenced the participants making their own work, it was difficult for me to describe to others how the project was also my own work and relevant to my research. I had intended to also be a participant in one of the 24-hour slots, but other claims to my time meant I had used that extra day to set up the technology and install the interior elements for the other participants. In presentations of my research I would try to emphasise the value in the aspects that had ‘worked,’ but I felt like I was fabricating a version of the events, no different from the heavily scripted or curated documents that the project had been critiquing.

My perception that the work had been a failure deepened over time with this project. At times I was unsure of my processes, easily unbalanced by questions or criticism that would then affect my resolve and ability to persevere. At a dead end I eventually pivoted towards new work. Failure can generate new growth if there is a process of staying alert to new propositions that emerge in the work, meaning that from failures unforeseen potentialities erupt. Claire Bishop refers to Breton’s research which suggests ‘that work perceived by its makers to be an experimental failure in its own time may nevertheless have resonance in the future, under new conditions.’ This indicates that extended duration can have a role in re-conceptualising the worth of any work. Understanding the value of work in this research has been an emergent and contingent process. Over time it became clearer that the value of the projects is situated in how they eventually collectivise through constituting a ‘constellation’ of varied work. This perspective enabled projects that had been set-aside as failures, to be folded back into wider research, directly contributing to a new conceptual understanding or a future trajectory.

Working from failure and acknowledging its effect on my research felt like a risky process. Wider cultural aversion to creative risk is exemplified by a clear preference from commoditised systems for works, exhibition or events that, if not blockbusters or ‘sure-fire hits,’ are at least predictable. Risk is often described, and so also understood, using market terms of investment to evaluate the returns and potential loss. Business management systems were introduced to evaluate cultural practices in the 1980s as corporatisation increased and as creative practice was bureaucratised. The language of risk control, market evaluation and commodification lead to acceptance of accepted and recognised values in order to allow the space for new values to appear.

The language of risk control, market evaluation and commodification lead to acceptance of valuing original work by its measurable ability to be a practical tool for some other purpose. Predictable and measurable value has an effect on two aspects of creative productivity; the first is a requirement that creative workers predetermine how their project will function as a tool, and the second, the need to be able to communicate, quantify and measure its effectiveness as a tool. Danny Butt comments that ‘the increasing tendency of governments to pre-specify the characteristics of good evaluation by providing guidelines and standards stems from an understandable desire for greater predictability and control over the content and process of evaluation.’ The concerted efforts to naturalise market terminology and evaluations as the framework for creative work and processes, combined with the existing ineptitude to imagine a world that is not formed by capitalist values, has the effect of continuously undermining and eroding non capitalist-centric values and activities while at the same time enforcing the measures of the market as normative.

Institutions also prefer coherent outcomes and clear narratives, as they are both useful for making more of the same and incrementally shortening a sense of mastery. The artist Thomas Hirschhorn describes the perceptual shifts that frame how he sees success and failure within his projects, explaining how external measures by institutions and the market can distract him from seeing what has real value in his work. He criticises work that is documented or made interactive...

---

56 Carol Dewick’s research indicates that the text we responded to today is either fixed or on growth. Carol S. Dewick, Mindset: The New Psychology of Success. New York: Ballantine Books, 2016.

57 Bishop, Artificial Hells, 7.

58 As mentioned in Chapter 0 and Section 4.5, the analogy of constellations as developed by Jane Rendell has been an important organising analogy throughout this research.

59 Felix Stalder describes how mainstream creative culture, constrained by the imperatives of the market to be profitable, must look to marginal creative culture for innovation, maintaining a lacunary position as gatekeeper between the new innovations and the mass market. Felix Stalder, ‘Open Cultures and the Nature of Networks’. The Next System Project (Novi Sad, Serbia and Montenegro Sarajevo; Bosnia and Herzegovina: Futura publicacije and Sarajevo Center for Contemporary Art, 2005): 24.

60 As mentioned in Chapter 0 and Section 4.5, the analogy of constellations as developed by Jane Rendell has been an important organising analogy throughout this research.

in ways that hide what really occurs. “What I’m criticising is the idea that failure isn’t accepted, that it’s hidden. I wanted to stop hiding failure, stop hiding the fact that I might be wrong.”

This observation resonated as for me, identifying perceived failures within projects was often illuminating and a motivating force throughout my creative research. The problems within one work are addressed directly or indirectly by the subsequent work. Lisa Le Fuevre affirms failure in processes in the introduction to *Failure* as important describing how ‘without the doubt that failure invites, any situation becomes closed and in danger of becoming dogmatic.’

By recognising the failures, the work does not incrementally build on what appears to have succeeded, but rather emerges from the hidden and submerged aspects that failed.

Working from failure produced a confusing topography of work across my practice. The practice appeared to be made of unconnected outcrops responding to entirely different environments, materials and forces. A narrative of success appears to proceed incrementally, providing a visible and cogent trajectory. With emergent and contingent approaches, the work does not follow a logical sequence but instead forms separated islands of work. These works bloom in response to seismic shifts that produce apparently random and unconnected irruptions, impossible to concatenate in any meaningful way. It is a difficult terrain to navigate or describe, a turbulent environment made mobile by distant impacts and immediate contacts. At a submerged level hidden reefs evolve over time, forming connections between each island. The narrative in this way of working does not foreshadow the future, but instead makes sense contemporaneously through startling insight. This process is exemplified by how several years later the intention for the documentation re-emerged in a more realised form. *Collective Commons*, discussed in Chapter eight, was a different but similarly open, emergent and accumulative form of documentation.

The confusing realisation that the work is failing to appear or to contribute appropriately to a predetermined structure, but somehow is simultaneously still valuable in unexplainable ways, is produced when failures are actually generative. Each work I made produced in me a desire to approach similar questions in a new way, often leading to the development of the next work. In this way generative failure is not a setback, but rather becomes a tool for imminent imaginings. The dialectic of failure or success imposed by market logic is transformed into a more complex mesh of relational values.

**Story 4:** It was Hannah’s birthday but she told me she was happy to spend it drawing, her husband and daughter would come by at midnight with a cake. She planned to take the full twenty-four hours covering both sides of the window in white pen work, working all night until at dawn she would erase it. She brought in black and white photos of graffiti tags she had collected in Melbourne and New York to reconstitute as interwoven ‘lace work’ through drawing. As the day passed, her drawing blossomed on the glass, doubling as it grew over the interior and exterior of the pane. People stopped to look, their reflections layered with the intricate lines. The light faded and the drawing glowed, backlit by the room, the artist and the ladder silhouetted against the image. Later still, the last tram pulled past and the pub on the intersection closed, leaving the street almost silent. As the sun rose, Hannah finished covering the last corner of the glass with white curlicues. She stretched in the cold blue light and climbed the ladder with a cloth. Quickly she wiped the intricate lines off both sides of the pane. It smeared and then vanished. Nothing remained.

### 4.6 Duration and Temporal Depth

The importance of time as a material of social creative processes became evident through *Consumed*. The fixed period provided an enabling constraint that activated the processes. The rhythm of the week as whole, and the seven days within, were the organising principle with associated changes in the light and conditions as the hours passed. The attempt to produce durational documentation in this project was an extension of consistent underlying values of process, social and cohesion and creative emergence, all requiring time.
Temporal experience, like shared public space, has changed radically since industrialisation. With the enclosure of the commons, a move away from subsistence and the production of surplus capital that needed to be spent, the way that people spent time, and the time they devoted to doing what the market deems productive, underwent a radical change. Employment within factories and mechanised production methods meant that precise and uniform clock time became the prevailing measure of time, leading to a 'market-oriented valuation of time has steadily replaced non-market-oriented temporal values.' Corporatised emphasis on speed and efficiency produces a uniform conception of time an predictable temporal characteristics sustain the tenets of capitalism and neoliberalism. They are forces that prefer time to be perceived as scarce and most usefully spent producing or consuming.

New temporalities appear when people move beyond transactional measurements, and instead conceive relations in terms of abundance. When this outlook occurs within a collective or a group it forms temporal commons. Creative practice has increasingly engaged with time; a necessary component of a larger shift over the last few decades towards participatory or process based work. Miwon Kwon critiques how this shift has encouraged a superficial engagement with site specificity and duration and subsequent attempts to resolve the problem through reinventing these practices as 'nomadic.' Without any real connection to a site over time, the exhibition just creates a much wider stage for cultural production that is ultimately supporting de-localised consumerist experience. Responding to this observation, Doherty identifies a consideration of duration and the temporal effect of the work 'as corrective to the itinerant model' and countering de-contextualisation.

When creative work commits to considering the effect of the intervention as time unfolds it counters the instrumentalising of creative practice by the globalised approach to creative urban event planning (also discussed Chapter one). By engaging with this idea, those involved acknowledges there are effects, both positive and negative, during and beyond direct engagement. In "Locating the Producers: Durational Approaches to Public Art", Paul O'Neill and Claire Doherty observe 'creative work must be conceived as part of a cumulative process' not as a singular entity or event. For them, inter-subjectivity has to move beyond an explicative relationship between art and participation as largely metaphoric co-production, and instead they consider duration as intrinsic to a practice concerned with social engagement. Observing that more subtle impacts on wider communities were only evident over time, led O'Neill and Doherty to note 'the durational can contribute to new forms of public space by allowing certain differences to develop in dialogue with others.' They propose that participation should not be focused on the 'relation or a social encounter with artistic production, but as a socialised process necessary for arts production in which negotiations with people and places are durationally specific, yet intentionally resistant to any prescribed outcomes.' The authors use a series of case studies to explore this idea, and to propose that cumulative process in creative practice can become a form of civic practice. In their view when the work is 'on-going, experienced individually, sometimes discordantly, which is enacted by us as citizens' it moves participatory art away from being event based, an approach already well utilised by the experience economy, to a form that is always becoming. For them, the relationship of duration to the activity provides a way to resist subscribing to the festival or biennale mentality that is often the fall back position for creative public experiences.
Working to the rhythm of the day and the week in Consumed did structurally connect the distinct approaches of each of the artists, despite the individual artists not really forming connections. These observations are echoed by David Cross and Clare Doherty in their reflections on One Day Sculpture. They note that the 24-hour period functioned to conceptually and geographically associate disparate works, and also gave the artists a ‘frame within which to work, and to kick against.’ The constricted time for each project resulted in unintended effects on the audiences as ‘temporary communities were “enforced or created” just trying to view the work.’76 The temporary nature of each work, situated over an extended period of a full year meant the entire series was only ever experienced partially, denying the ‘experience of a totalising view or single touristic visit.’77 This effect was stronger in One Day Sculpture as those projects were also distributed geographically, however, the 24-hour cycle of Consumed also meant that there was no way for anyone to experience the entire work. Duration of the event, rather than in relation to the personal experience or stamina of the individual, changes the conception of the audience being central to viewing of a work or event.

When writing for the One Day Sculpture catalogue, Jane Rendell extends on Edward Soja’s argument that space needs to be considered in the production of social relations. She proposes that his ‘reassertion of space into social theory includes a “reassertion of time into critical spatial practice.”’78 This is important to her because ‘to practise is a verb, verbs are words of action – that his “reassertion of space into social theory includes a “reassertion of time into critical spatial practice.”’79

Temporal commons are enclosed when time is privatised by the market valued only for its transaction potential. The emphasis on speed and efficiency is pressurising and the severity of the effects of corporatised time has encouraging a resistance to assumptions of how time should be used. Over the last few decades, many groups have formed trying to protect or explore slower processes. The Slow Food Manifesto was published in 1989 and inspired all kinds of slow practices across many fields revolting at the hectic pace of life. The Slow Research Lab is one such group that are committed to a ‘different velocity of engagement, but also to evoke a quality of being, characterised by critical thinking, deep spaces of reflection, and the unique forms of creative expression that are born of them.’80 Academics Maggie Berg and Barbara K. Seeber come to the conclusion that speed has negatively affected collegiality, communication and collaboration in universities and undermined innovative research.81 Collectives that promote slowness and the benefits of extended time are interested in producing deep satisfaction and new forms of creativity and knowledge through sustained, slow-paced engagement. Often these movements do not make an explicit association with commoning, but the qualities they seek through adjusting their relations with time, as well as their efforts to produce new temporal cultures, are essentially the care-taking approach of commoning.

The Occupy movement engages more explicitly with commoning to challenge the widespread acceptance of how spaces and resources are currently allocated. The movement entered the international spotlight through its occupation of Wall street in 2011. While the flimsy tents and the temporary communities clearly contrast with the defined, solidified financial spaces and entities that surround them, the people in those public spaces also defied corporatised time. The duration of the project was conceived as extending though the documentation for as long as there was interest from future audiences or interactions.

87 Cross and Doherty, One Day Sculpture, 11.
88 Ibid.
89 Cross and Doherty, One Day Sculpture, 11.
90 Jane Rendell, “Constellations (Or the Reinsertion of Time into Critical Spatial Practice),” in One Day Sculpture, eds. David Cross and Claire Doherty (Bielefeld, Germany: Kerber Verlag, 2009), 20.
91 Rendell, “Constellations.”
92 Ibid., 88. This observation resonates with Lindau’s reasons for introducing the verb ‘commoning’ in order to articulate the social and temporal processes inherent in the actions of tending to the spaces.
93 Slow Research Lab, http://slowlab.net/
94 Maggie Berg and Barbara K. Seeber, The Slow Professor: Challenging the Culture of Speed in the Academy (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2016).
96 Pascal Gielen, Performing the Common City: On Crossroads Art, Politics and Public Life. In Interrupting the City: Artistic Constitutions of the Public Sphere, eds. Sandor Bax, Pascal Gielen, and Bram Leven, (Amsterdam: Valiz Antennae, 2015), 278.
97 The Uncertain Commons collective, who also demonstrate and perform this themselves, as well as many others such as the Emissary group (formed after the New Zealand Occupy Movement to support commoning as an organisational method) who were inspired by the collective experience of the New Zealand Occupy to set up digital and physical structures that continue the tenets of commoning into current and future activities.
The new temporal commons produced by the Occupy movement demonstrates how our current temporal experience can be questioned and also reconfigured. Allen Bluedorn explains that temporal commons are a ‘shared conceptualisation of time and the set of resultant values, beliefs, and behaviours regarding time.’ The ability to conceive and maintain both social and temporal commons are both continually endangered because, as Bluedorn points out, ‘economics in general tends to devalue the non-quantifiable aspects of any commons, including the temporal commons.’ Time is so uniformly managed and the conception of how time should be used and valued so pervasive that demonstrates even more clearly than spatial commons do, the difficulty of conceiving something other than what already exists. The need to maintain alternatives is increasingly necessary as Julian Brigstocke the traditional concerns around the effect of enclosures of common space on the future is being replaced by concerns about foreclosures on the future, where the dominant capital regimes don’t just deliver devalued futures but ensure destroyed futures. Brigstocke believes that resistance is imperative, requiring not just the invention of new temporal commons, but the awareness and maintenance of future potentials.

When an individual artist makes a durational work, the audience registers the physical and mental difficulty of committing to repetitive, accumulative process. Contemporary Australian artists James Carey and Hannah Bertram both explore how endurance drawing can change relationships to site. Carey is informed by the effects of time in the site and often responds to this by working within the site and responding to its material and atmospheric qualities to produce a work over many days or weeks. Carey speaks of his painstaking interventions in sites as developing ‘an immersion in time in flow.’ Hannah Bertram, a participant in Consumed, is most well known for her installations works made by meticulously arranging or stencilling dust into elaborate patterns directly into a site. The dust drawings take an enormous amount of time to produce and are dismantled with one push of the broom. I was prompted to invite her participate in Consumed as her pre-existing interest in ephemerality, duration and documentation resonated with the time based structures I had planned for the project. Since 2005 Bertram has been involved in several twenty-four hour drawing projects, often working in alongside others in public space. Drawing on the windows for her entire allotted time in Consumed contributed to her personal investigation into how continuously drawing changes her perception of time and of process.

There is a broad spectrum of durational approaches evident in all time based creative practice. Carey and Bertram both work with duration and endurance and the material remnants of time passed and time spent. Their approach is very different to the temporal qualities evident in the work that Situations commissions, and also different from the temporal interests that appeared through undertaking Consumed. If time in public work is correlated with endurance,
the effect of the time spent is focussed with an individual artists and only shared cognitively by the audience. A commoning conception of time has a different emphasis as the temporal experience and effect is shared and co-produced. The public work that Doherty has gone on to produce with Situations always addresses temporality and the qualities that time imparts, without necessarily equating temporality to endurance. The work she undertakes makes it clear that temporal depth can be considered and attended to regardless if the work is long term or fleeting. Temporal depth perceives activities occurring in a collective continuum, encouraging care-taking and an attitude of reciprocity and hospitality.

Descriptions or discussions of time-based creative practice reflect the colonisation of time by unquestioningly restricting time to measurements such as length and associated qualities of endurance or commitment. In commoning, temporality is qualitative and communal, not equalised or differentiated only through measuring the length. A conception of temporal depth plays out across various social, spatial and temporal fields and is specific to each work. The social, creative relations I was interested in require a sense of connection between people over time. Duration, space and community might be the raw ingredients of a commoning, but for it to become a transformative requires other intangible qualities to emerge. It is temporal depth, the awareness of shared time extending into both the past and the future, that commoning values and contributes to. Work undertaken in common that also takes temporal depth into consideration, become an open ended and discursive process of engagement. This framework renders the practice less vulnerable to being inadvertently instrumentalised by a ‘creative city’ mentality that seeks to deploy artists and creative practices as part of strategic marketing.89

Along with reconstituting temporal commons, other ways of temporally organising society that have been marginalised by the hegemony of capital transactions are being reinstated by creative practice. Erin Manning and Brian Massumi incorporate Marcel Mauss’ conception of the gift economy, meaning the transference of cultural capital produces a social system.90 Mary Douglas says in the introduction to The Gift that Mauss noticed ‘the mechanism by which individual interests combine to make a social system, without engaging in market exchange ... Like the market it supplies each individual with personal incentives for collaborating in the pattern of exchanges.’90 Manning and Massumi refer frequently to the ‘potlatch’ system that Mauss describes in his text. They propose that by focusing on ‘the event of giving’ rather than the transference of value exchange, ‘generosity as ritual technique occurs in a field of relation that cannot be reduced to the giver as individual, or the object as gift, or even the punctual connection between the two in a particular act of giving.’92 (This is discussed in more detail in Chapter five where the distinction between reciprocity and mutuality is drawn out.)
A gift is always embedded in hospitality through making your space, food or home available without expectation of immediate reward. The requirement to reciprocate is implicit not immediate as it in financial transactions. The other party requires time to return the favour, the hospitality or the gift, meaning that in the period between there is an indebtedness, offset by the intention to reciprocate. It is the reciprocity of the structure that invokes temporal depth in the relationship. Although the next Chapter proposes that mutuality is preferable to reciprocity, reciprocity is in many ways easier to conjure up and initiate which is useful for establishing bidirectional and durational communication. Mutuality and reciprocity, require an understanding between people that their relations will not be abruptly cauterised, sidelined or leveraged, but can continue to evolve over time in open, discursive and accumulative processes.

When trying to connect the temporally, spatially and artistically diverse works of One Day Sculpture, in writing commissioned for the catalogue, Jane Rendell proposes that the individual projects could be conceived as a constellation in which each star occupies a discrete position in relation to the others, but also has a different time or life span. For Rendell, the analogy means works can be brought in concert with other work across temporal and spatial dimensions to produce new forms of relational understanding. Her method of using an analogy to construct not only an image but a way of operatively thinking about the arrangement of diverse work over time (as well as the specific use of ‘constellation’ as the analogy), became a way to constructively incorporate inconsistencies that I had previously felt problematised the formation of a coherent proposition.

I had set out to produce this work assuming that my earlier positive creative experiences of living in the community in New York and working with Christine on Small had appeared because of the extended duration they occurred in. I was realising that what I had thought of as duration was actually a shared sense of temporal depth; a shared past and idea for a future that we were mutually committed to maintaining and producing. Although the various temporalities that underpinned the structure of Consumed contributed to the project through forming enabling constraints and a connecting framework, they did not result in temporal depth across the participants (although there was some evidence of it within the specific engagements). It became clear that the underlying reason I did not push past the obstacles and make the film, was that when I conceived of the film it was based in the realisation that duration was important, but I had not yet understood that that simply incorporating more time would not resolve the issue. The specific temporal qualities of the design did not establish more complex, sustained and interconnected network of relations over time but did demonstrate that it is temporal depth combined with a sense of mutuality that creates that experience. The following Chapter describes how an understanding of mutuality lead to a concept of creative mutuality in project work; bringing commoning and creative practice into closer correspondence and emerging as an increasingly central aspect of this practice and research.

---

93 Although this research ultimately is more interested in mutuality (discussed in Chapter five), the significant overlaps between generalised reciprocity and mutuality mean that even other forms of reciprocity founded in the expectations of returns is still a gateway to understanding how creative and social relations are fostered and grow over time.

94 The more accurate term is asterism however perceiving images in the arrangement of stars is more commonly referred to as constellations.

95 Jane Rendell, “Constellations,” 19.
CHAPTER FIVE

Story 4: Loren and I had met many years before around Canberra at concerts and friends’ houses. He was tall and very thin, with wild hair and loose, hand dyed clothing. We all looked a bit like that but he stood out, probably because he was known from starting a commune in the country when he was fifteen and then heading up a squat in the abandoned barracks. I would see him or hear of him sometimes when I came back from America; I knew he went to art school to study wood work, bought the vintage bicycle collection from the Canberra museum, moved to Indonesia after the tsunami to help to rebuild, came back and became a furniture maker. Now, years later in a different city, we both had children and houses not far from each other. I thought of him because I was looking for someone to teach a studio with about alternative housing models. It was a subject I was interested in as I was worried I was going to be forced to sell my own home and I wanted to find if there were still other ways to live that opened up rather than closed down possibility. I was anxious that year and working on a project with someone who had known me so long and saw me as capable, soothed and supported me. Preparing the course encouraged Loren to get back in touch with people he used to work with, renewing the interests in rebuilding and working with communities. When we finished teaching, he and his family moved to Tibet to help in the aftermath of the earthquakes. Through talking and teaching together, moments in my past had resonated with what I was doing now, excavating a forgotten way of working and being that I loved and could continue with.

5.0 MUTUALITY

Consumed originally set out to create the conditions for emergent creative work and develop social and creative connections across and through a project, but it was becoming clear I was actually seeking to induce something more intangible. I had felt this quality strongly when working with Christine on Small and had been missing it in my creative life since then. The focus on duration and subsequent understanding of temporal depth, as well as an awareness that processes of commoning were both significant, however it was clear that either alone did not create the transformational experience that had motivated me to make the work. That experience remained elusive. The quality I was actually seeking was a sense of mutuality.

Mutuality and reciprocity are often used interchangeably however there is a subtle difference that becomes relevant for a nuanced understanding of relationality within commoning and also commoning’s potential in collaborative or participatory creative practice. The Oxford Dictionary defines ‘reciprocity’ as exchanging things for mutual benefit, and mutuality as the sharing of a feeling, relationship or action between two or more parties.1 Some confusion occurs because the definition of ‘generalised reciprocity’ overlaps with mutuality, as it means ‘one may also give without the intent of receiving directly’2 however this is still different from direct reciprocal relations which is how it is usually understood.

Lewis Aron describes an important difference between the two terms in the introduction to his book The Meeting of Minds: Mutuality in Psychoanalysis. Aron differentiates these as:

The distinctive idea of mutuality is that the parties unite by interchange in the same act; as a mutual covenant. The distinctive idea of reciprocity is that one party acts by way of return and response to something previously done by the other party; as a reciprocal kindness [...] The essence of the word mutuality seems to be sharing in common, or sharing between people. Mutuality implies reciprocation, community and unity through interchange. Lack of mutuality by contrast connotes difference and separateness, a lack of sharing.3

The emphasis in mutuality is on the investment of time, effort, care, attention, an act of inclusion rather than exchange.4 Reciprocity resonates more closely with a gift economy, where a bond is formed through a social debt. This debt is the temporary production of inequality between two parties, an inequality that requires a response intruder to stabilise or invert the power dynamic. Although this is mutual activity and may over time, and through ongoing contact, produce from the bonds a feeling of community or commitment, the underlying motivations of reciprocity when differentiated from mutuality, spring from feelings of indebtedness; a focus on repayment and sense of obligation.
Comming and mutuality are oppositional to the dominant view of capitalism that people are primarily self-interested. The rejection of the normative and accepted framework produces a 'dislocation' which opens up space for the consideration of alternatives to what have previously been accepted. In the introduction to the new edition of Gibson-Graham's influential book The End of Capitalism (as we knew it), they note that the ability to consider alternatives to existing structures occurs when 'something outside the given configuration of being offers itself as an element or ingredient for a new political project of configuring.' Mutualy when it occurs in comming or in creative practice makes this configuring possible as it develops new and sustaining frameworks of value that are not based on transactions or debt, but instead are formed by a our perception of our self in a state of becoming through negotiation and interrelation with others.

In comming it is a mutuality that transforms labour into something that is more profound. This is because comming is 'affective labour'; work that produces a shift or response that occurs equally in the body and mind of those involved, and creates transformations across individuals and communities. The affectivity of the labour allows for the formation of a sense of self that is integrated within wider system of relations extending from the past into the future. The individual and the group develop in relation to each other, with a shared dispositions toward mutual care-taking and negotiation.

The term 'affective labour' was developed from autonomist feminist roots by Michael Hardt and his frequent collaborator, Tony Negri. Hardt describes affective labour as 'working directly on the affects; it produces subjectivity, it produces society, it produces life.' He explains that affective labour is 'somatic, but the affects it produces are nonetheless immaterial. What affective labour produces are social networks, forms of community, bio power.' Hardt is primarily interested in how modern capitalism has incorporated affective labour, but proposes that it has a 'potential for subversion and autonomous constitution' that is even greater from being so central to modern capitalism. Affective labour is necessary for the production of life, not least in the current economy because unpaid for care-taking and life producing work is the invisible part of the system that sustains and enables capital accumulation. Hardt makes a distinction between 'affective necessary labour' and the potential of 'necessary affective labour.' He sees 'the production of affects, subjectivities and forms of life' as having 'enormous potential for autonomous circuits of valorisation and perhaps for liberation.' In these ways affective labour is the formation of new inter-subjectivities that support the activities of comming.

As the processes for production of life changed initially through industrialisation, and now by the modern economy, the labour required for many of those processes has also migrated. Tim Jensen points out that we are becoming programmed to more easily recognise and engage with affective labour that supports capitalism in the same way that neoliberalism 'entrains us to experience certain emotions over other ones.' Jensen's position is that, similarly to how the our natural environment is exploited and extracted, 'our collective emotional and affective environment is being shaped - violently, systematically - to serve the interests of capital.' Affective labour was originally rooted in the direct maintenance and production of life within a landscape and a community. Jensen makes the argument that despite capitalism's efforts to sever them, our emotional terrain and our environments are still intertwined. Consequently the second cannot be addressed without first finding ways of 'seeing, sensing and thinking strategically towards creative, effective acts of resistance.' By realising that affective labour is multi-directional, that it has an affect on the individual, their disposition and the societal and spatial environments they inhabit, the individual can more consciously select what affective labour he engages with, choosing or seeking 'necessary affective' forms of labour that can produce resistance.
David Bollier understands that the processes of affective labour are for the individual an ‘unfolding experience of turning out towards others, producing a sense of self that emerges through doing.”¹⁵ He believes that new ways of sensing and seeing will appear though the forms of affective labour that he sees as the ‘life-blood’ of commoning.¹⁶ Mutuality also occurs in correlations with nonhumans and environments. The mutual relationship between people can be an offshoot of occupying and caring for the same terrain. Affective labour in commoning is caused by simultaneous care; an interchange centred on a shared project or interest, the social relations that tend to it and the spaces and temporal qualities that sustain it. The affective qualities of the labour ‘changes how we perceive ourselves, our relationship to others and our connection to the environment,’ seventeen re-constituting the collective emotional terrain.

Both commoning processes and mutuality are inter-subjective, which in relation to models of the mind describes the view that the self is constructed through an ‘ongoing involvement with a matrix of other relations.’¹⁸ Commoning understands the individual as relational and formed in conjunction with their spatial and social interactions. Heather Menzies describes how commoning is ‘a habitat of interrelationships; mutual obligation and mutual self interest, and hopefully affinity.’¹⁹ The relational and contingent quality emerges through a ‘dynamic process of joint exchange and a feeling of intimacy, connection, understanding of another’ twenty between people sharing a common interests or purpose. This description bears similarities to commoning, indicating deep correlations between commoning and mutuality.

An understanding that we exist in an interrelated and intersubjective habitat is not as alienated within some cultures, although frequently has been marginalised by the broader culture more occupied with maintaining market systems. Aboriginal, Torres Strait, and Māori cultures hold mutuality and interconnectedness as central in their conception of environment and community. These ways of being propose how an integrated perception of self within an environment and community that can inform every aspect of life. Bruce Pascoe, points out ‘one of the most fundamental differences between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people is the understanding of the relationship between people and land.’twenty-one He describes how Aboriginals held land in common, seeing themselves as joint and temporal custodians and how before colonisation ‘the system in operation could be considered a jigsawed mutualism’. He writes that ‘people had rights and responsibilities for particular pieces of the jigsaw but they were constrained to operate that piece so that it added to rather than detracted from the pieces of their neighbours and the epic integrity of the land.’twenty-two In Australia there is a pervasive and continuing failure to properly acknowledge Aboriginal community and land care approaches. However, growing recognition of the failures of existing systems to protect the shared resources that are essential for life are leading to more awareness of the validity and knowledge in Aboriginal traditions and values. Increasing heed is being paid to their practices as it becomes clear that colonisation legitimised not just the appropriation of land, but also divested the country of established, evolved and sustainable concepts of care.

In New Zealand, Māori conceptualisations of inter-connectedness are more widely accepted than the indigenous perspectives in Australia. In 2012 the Whanganui Iwi (tribe) in the North Island won the right for the third largest river in New Zealand, the Whanganui River to be granted personhood, ensuring there is no legal differentiation between inflicting harm on the tribe or to inflicting harm to the river.²¹ Traditional Māori culture sees all living things as interdependent, meaning the systems that support life need to be cared for as a totality, not as parts. Māori remain sceptical of the care-taking capacity of economic models where value is calculated in dollar amounts. Their perspective and advocating is encouraging respect for holistic values in decision making, and introducing processes to encourage this across broader governmental frameworks.
Outside of cultures that still have at their base a profound and interconnected sense of care for others and the land they occupy, a direct understanding of self forming in relation to others and mutuality is most frequently experienced in the family unit; the strongest remnant of commons based society in western culture. Love is an intrinsic to motivating an attitude of care within this context. Hardt and Negri explain how love can be extended to become political in the production of commons. Although love enables us to escape individualism and solitude into a life shared with others, for Hardt and Negri this capacity is severely limited in contemporary culture which usually quarantines love within the family unit. When love is extended beyond a narrow interpretation of only applying to those most proximate or most similar to you, then it becomes ‘political’ and able to produce a socialised life in common. Hardt and Negri point out that because love is not passive, but productive, creative and always forming, it is able to compose ‘new assemblages and constitute new forms of the common.’

Hardt and Negri do not propose love as a sentimental or idealised solution. They are clear that once we ‘identify love with the production of the common, we need to recognise that, just like the common itself, love is deeply ambivalent and susceptible to corruption.’ They illustrate this view by explaining that nationalistic, exclusionary or prejudiced groups are not formed by hatred, but by massively corrupted love. In their view corrupted love results in the opposite of commons. For them, the power of love lies in its potential to embrace distance and difference, remaining open and able to compose a common of multiplicities. This form of power resembles the power of mutuality.

Although affective labour is also useful to the policies of neoliberalism, once it is differentiated by the addition of mutuality, the affective labour of commongning cannot be colonised or reshaped by the more powerful market. A sense of mutuality in commongning appears over time through the ‘affective labour’ of commongning. Mutuality involves a more connected self that emerges from relationships and relatedness, and it is this experience that is at the core of any transformative effect. Experience of the affective labour of commongning processes develop our capacity to counter normative neoliberal and capitalist systems and construct other ways of valuing each other. Mutuality is a transformative agent as it changes the dispositions of individuals towards each other and their surrounds, thus effecting further change.

5.1 CREATIVE MUTUALITY

Mutuality and creative mutuality share many qualities; it is largely the application that is specific. Mutuality is a more generalised but still profound feeling of caring, and being cared for, within the society and spaces you inhabit and contribute to. Creative mutuality develops when the project becomes the conductor of currents that sustain further creative engagement and a deep sense of care for the work and others involved in the project. Creative mutuality is more specific to a creative work or project by which shared acts of creation become a focus through which mutuality can flow.

Most activities undertaken to produce life are creative to some degree. In this research I am specifically concerned with participatory or collaborative practices and projects, and the design, construction and experience of spaces, and how all these forms of creation then interrelate with wider social and spatial relations. This does not negate the kind of creativity that is found in playing with children, tending to a garden or preparing meals, however the scope and scale of the works I have focussed on, and also their intention and duration, differentiate them somewhat from the creativity that entertains and occupies us during the production of life. A shared life that includes play, food preparation and tending to land are all defining activities of a commons.
However, rather than building from these fundamental creative activities, this research takes a different vantage. It seeks to understand how the significant, enduring and sustaining aspects of those activities in life can resonate within a design and creative practice, and how, in turn, the projects and practices interested in care and connection can be folded back in to the forms of creativity that we already share in common.

Creative mutuality occurs in my project work in two forms. There are people in my life I have share mutuality with (some mentioned in this writing) and then there is a more generalised attitude which informs how I approach new situations and collaborators. My sense of mutuality has been expanded in most cases however has sometimes contracted, through the processes of making creative work with others. Specific collaborative relations have been able to take my initial orientation and develop them further. Mutuality that settles into a relationship lies in the knowledge we will be able to work in that way again. It connects our past and future, producing temporal depth (Section 4.6) within our relationship. We now have between us now a capacity that is sometimes latent, sometimes active, to manifest creative mutuality through a project. When creative mutuality appears it a current that runs through the work, keeping the work developing through holding the parties in its orbit. The work and the relations are sustained despite movement through points of perigee and periapsis relative to availability or commitments. During Small when Christine had other work obligations, when I had a new baby, when either of us were ill or tired or uninspired, the other person would, without discussion or division, carry the labour of the project. We were supporting each other but also sustaining the project; there was no need to differentiate what was motivating us; it was the project, of each of us individually, and both of us together, indistinguishable as parts, as it was all intertwined. Developing the kind of mutuality that supports creative work, that then in turn also furthers the sense of creative mutuality, can be approached from polar directions. Existing mutual relations can be called into creative work, or through creative work mutuality can be born.

Within all these ideas is a recognition that there are mutable and immeasurable qualities that surge through us, encouraging care and investment in what we share. Mutuality is an elusive quality but has socio-political significance. The ephemeral and intermixed qualities cannot easily be translated into market values, and so have been systemically set aside or devalued. Bollier points out we are so steeped in ‘market culture, we sometimes have trouble understanding that a system based on non-economic forces can be powerful in its own right.’ For creative participatory practice that has become mired in the experience economy, this shift opens, rather than fixes its position. When creative practice adopts an attitude of commoning it begins to construct more direct and authentic access to affect and mutuality. The process of shifting from one mind set to another in any discipline is more easily internalised when it is explicated through a lived experience. Creative collaborative practices can, if they desire, then extricate themselves from being embedded in the experience economy and instead contribute to constructing their own frame works of value.

The affective characteristics found in mutuality make creative collaborations generated through mutuality very different from other forms or work. It allows for more complex and non-measurable components to enter the equation when forming relations or working with others. Aron explains, ‘mutuality refers to commonality and sharing that may be quite different in form, quantity or degree for each party.’ Mutuality cannot be imposed or implemented, meaning it is impossible to insert into a training manual or the experience economy. An outlook of mutuality does not calculate or incur a debt for what is owed, but focuses on what can be shared. Collaborations that incorporate or are based on structures of capitalist exchange, prioritise symmetry and equality, and ideally manage the relationship as a trade balanced across various modalities between all those involved. As symmetrical exchanges are the basis of any commercial market, collaborations can be easily developed, maintained and organised using the capitalist transaction exchanges as a model. Sharing with capitalism the same transactional basis and framework makes collaborations much more easy to co-opt (as discussed in Section 3.4) in order to extract capital or other kinds of value. Cultivating a sensitivity for multi-directional influence means mutuality can occur even when there is an asymmetry in power.
Collaborations often reflect the same values as commercial exchanges as it is difficult to invent new systems that don’t reproduce the structures of those that already surround us. Asymmetrical arrangements between people are often framed negatively, easily dismissed as either paternalistic or exploitive. Mutuality in commoning differs from existing systems of exchange that are more usual in collaborations, in that mutuality is specifically able to sustain dispersed, asynchronous or asymmetrical input. Collaborations can certainly develop mutuality but as it is not central to the tenets of collaborating it is not tended to, or sought, with the same intention and care a practice with commoning processes. Collaborative or participatory creative projects that are seeking to find distance from the conforming or instrumentalising characteristics of commodifying systems and transactions can be guided by commoning processes and potentially find creative mutuality emerging from, and making, the work.

An experience of mutuality rarely describes the entirety of a project or interrelationship. What is important is that when those involved have an aspiration for mutuality within all their interactions, and the projects are explicitly striving for mutuality and are able to recognise, nurture and value its emergence, there is a likelihood of it occurring. Like infants engaged in forging their world through intimate interactions, the emergent understandings expand with experience and over time. By recognising the validity of sensorium that are marginalised by market rationalism, and then seeking experiences such as commoning that allow these to grow, it is possible to develop a consistency within the ways we relate to others and to the spaces we inhabit, both directly and more universally, that privilege mutuality rather than self interest. Creative mutuality is often elusive and fleeting, but by seeking it and being guided towards it, creative mutuality is still able to shape and influence the relations within and around the work.

---

31 Kieffer, Mutuality, Recognition, and the Self, 23.
A movement of commoning through highly commercial space as both a creative producer and a participatory creative practitioner with Picture Yourself.

CHAPTER SIX

Story 5: I stood in front of the photo-booth at the top of the escalators in the mall and waited for someone to walk past. As I waited, I realised I was hoping that no one would come by, taking any excuse to avoid making eye contact. It was excruciating approaching strangers and asking them to contribute to my project. I had imagined the project would continue over the entire three weeks, but I was now beginning to realise that it was going to be difficult to get the minimum photos I needed. This was partly because of a lack of interest from the intended audience, but exacerbated by my reluctance to approach anyone. People I spoke to stared uncomprehendingly at me as I described my project intentions and I could not tell if it was me or the audience that was making this so hard. At the end of the day I packed up and went home, wishing I could abandon the entire project. I had committed to filling the exhibition space, it was too late to do anything else and I couldn’t think of a way to get out of it.

6.0 INTRODUCTION TO PROJECT: PICTURE YOURSELF

The intention for Picture Yourself developed from a perceived failure in the previous work, Consumed, to shift creative activity away from the domain of the individual artist. Picture Yourself sought to expand on the level of connection, and also participation, with the audience evident in Consumed. When the audience was engaged in Consumed it was usually through receiving something specific delivered by the project; becoming an animation by Sowerwine and Knowles, receiving a tattoo from Miso or a drawing from Ghostpatrol, being surprised by Tetlow-Stuart’s intervention – they did not necessarily become involved in the creative processes. Picture Yourself took as its starting point that experiences of social creativity can produce an inclusive and social experience and also a transition from being the consumer to being the producer. This kind of creativity attempts to initiate a more social and accessible experience that may proliferate further creativity in potentially unexpected areas and individuals. Picture Yourself relocated the central creative activity away from individual artists to the audience who would produce material for the future exhibition, functioning to broaden more common and individualistic conceptions of who is creative.

Picture Yourself was located within a shopping mall, Melbourne Central, in the main business area of Melbourne city. The directors of the mall were interested in embedding creative activity as a way of differentiating themselves from other malls through evidencing cultural and community engagement. They formed a partnership with a not-for-profit gallery, West Space, who managed and created the program. The proposals were to specifically engage with the commercial spaces and activity. I was interested in working in the extreme commercialised interior of a mall to further explore how creative participatory practice could inhabit existing commercial space and experience. Within the mall I identified an oddly programmed area between the escalators leading from the street entrance to the restaurants on the second floor. The corridor was empty except by, taking any excuse to avoid making eye contact. It was excruciating approaching strangers and asking them to contribute to my project. I had committed to filling the exhibition space, it was too late to do anything else and I couldn’t think of a way to get out of it.

The proposition invited mall occupants to record aural ‘portraits’ and take photographic self-portraits in the booth and then cumulatively fill the exhibition space, slowly filling up with images and sound until it formed a crowd, constructing a community of sorts, made up of many individuals describing and picturing themselves. Collecting the images was more difficult than expected as people were reluctant to contribute. Depending on the age of the participants, the outdated technology of the photo booth was either completely unfamiliar or nostalgic and either response could affect their level of interest. The inhabitants of the mall were there for a

---

1. These booths used to be all over Melbourne, usually outside train stations but also in arcades and foyers. They provided the public the opportunity to self-document an excursion or a friendship in a period when photography was more expensive and required time and also carrying special equipment in order to take, process and develop the film. The owner of the booth allowed me to buy use of the booth for half the usual price of the photos. He told me he expected he would be forced to close his business soon and commented that in general his business was declining and materials and parts were becoming hard to come by.

different purpose; socialising, eating, shopping or entertainment, and were not psychologically primed for alternate experiences to these. Many were too indifferent or too busy to listen to the proposal and I had not taken into account how my natural reluctance to interrupt people or draw attention to myself, and my work, would inhibit the initial encounter.

The first day I was in the mall I realised that I needed to lower the barrier to participation. I struggled to get anyone to engage and the process and explanation was too complicated and alienated people. The act of taking self-portraits in public is now a common occurrence, but at that time the iPhone 4, with the front facing camera that popularised selfies, had only just come out, and ‘selfies’ were not yet ubiquitous. I saw the camera booth as offering the chance to self-reflect through the activity of making a self-portrait, privately in a public space. Given the current prevalence of the practice now it is interesting how difficult it was in 2010 to find people who wanted to make a photo of themselves. Now with the proliferation of public media platforms, a self-portrait is less commonly about self reflection and instead is usually focused on a form of self-projection.

The second day I forced myself to imbue my explanation with confidence, I bought a clipboard, a prop of authority that seemed to help people hear me. I improved at evaluating the various people passing by and only approached the drifters, an inadvertent self-selecting audience identifying themselves through their slower steps and wandering gaze. Initially I had planned to ask the participants to record the audio self-portraits as they waited for the photo strip to come out by the photo booth. As I continued to approach people, I redesigned the parameters of the project in my head, eliminating the aural portrait as it became clear it was too much to ask or explain, and most people were not comfortable or willing to do this. Eventually the exhibition took the form of larger than life portraits and an independent audio component. The portraits were reformatted from the photo strips. Instead of selecting a single image form the strip, the four images on the strips were overlaid, as their movement over the series seemed to capture more of their individuality. However, without the fuller dimensionality that the self-recorded audio would have contributed to the portrait, the self-portraits felt emblematic of the level of involvement and sense of difference, but still a community.

Cameron Bishop and Simon Reis,⁴ planned to inhabit a second space located behind the area where the work I was developing was to be shown. They would construct a two-third scale replica of the first space, and the Picture Yourself exhibition within it, but add mechanisms and a diorama that would spatially transform the space. At random intervals some of the walls and a column were engineered to shake, and the lights would flash on and off. After a minute or so the room would go dark and a small room concealed behind a two-way mirror was illuminated, exposing a kind of hideout with various abandoned or broken commercial objects. Their proposal related to their specific conceptual concerns on the subjective nature of experience and affect of consumerist structures. These concerns had overlaps with my own theoretical interests and I thought the two projects might work together, each expanding the territory of the other.

I post engineered the sound component in my exhibition through making general recordings within the mall. The sound recording was mixed onto several channels and eventually presented through small speakers that were distributed around the room below the portraits. This arrangement meant that the different layers of voices would become indistinct or clearer with proximity, similar to the aural experience of walking through a crowd. The end effect of the anonymous voices and the layered portraits was a more general portrait of the occupants in the mall than I had originally imagined. I realised the design of the project had not balanced the level of anonymity with the amount of time available and the engagement from the participant. With this project the participants were being asked to crossover form being anonymous to exposing quite personal aspects of themselves. This is a transition that only occurs over time and cannot be compressed into the kind of brief encounters orchestrated by this project.
In March 2011, a few months after this project finished, an artist known only as JR collected the million dollar TED prize\(^5\) to develop the *Inside Out Project*,\(^6\) an ongoing and global portrait capture system using large format photo-booths. The project was conceived as a 'global platform for people to share their untold stories and transform messages of personal identity into works of public art.' The images were captured and produced in mobile photo-booths and then the large format images were exhibited in an effort to engender social awareness and change. This system shares some similarities with the design of *Picture Yourself*, albeit on a much larger scale. In the *Inside Out Project* the images record and celebrate an already existing community, and in the process strengthens their existing connections and identity. In this more ‘known’ scenario, the barriers for engagement are low as there is a pre-existing identification of a group as a shared community.

Despite my interest and in open systems, it became clear over time that this project had an unintended effect of flattening the system into a series of steps, rather than a more complex inter-connected web of relations. Because all the participants contributed in a largely prescriptive way, over a short time period, I found it was not possible to develop a variable balance of inputs for the individual contributions or support individual creative processes as I had been able to do in *Small* (Section 3.2). Instead of being open, the project was formed through a modular and incremental structure that could not develop or support manifold inputs. Despite a similar system the existing community in the *Inside Out Project* was able to circumvent the problem.

The values of commoning open up possibilities for how creative practice can operate within commercial space. Bollier believes this is because ‘commoning cultivates new cultural spaces but also because it supports ‘inner, subjective experiences that have far more to do with the human condition and social change than the manipulative branding and dis-empowering spectacles of market culture.’ Processes of commoning can compete with hegemony of consumer culture because it develops other forms of agency through blending multiple forms of experience. These processes are simultaneously involved in production, organisation, a social culture, and personal interests.

*Picture Yourself* was reliant on the fleeting participation of self-selecting individuals whose only commonality was their passing presence in the mall. Forte and Lampe describe how ‘creating a shared artefact requires collaboration not just around the creation of the artefact but also around its administration and curation.’\(^8\) In an effort to create a creative community in an unorthodox environment I had over simplified the interaction with the participants. The necessity of this was exacerbated at the start of the project when it became clear that too much complexity in what were only passing relationships, simply alienated people and made the barrier to entering too high. The result of the original design and the modifications produced a very similar experience for each person involved without enough time or motivation for it to become a meaningful encounter.
The interrelated social and creative relations I was envisioning could not be drawn into existence within that environment. In Consumed the artist participants were initiated into the system and invested in being involved and had considered how their involvement could produce something meaningful for them and to others. In Picture Yourself the audience who produced the work were only involved in contributing the material and, as I managed all the administration and curation, the social connections were severed. Any emergent future potentials were largely cauterised by the time the work was assembled in the exhibition. This realisation made clear that in future work it was necessary to consider how the contributions could become vital throughout the system, rather than just requiring brief individual engagement and subsequent disengagement.

6.1 OCCUPYING THE EXISTING

Picture Yourself was part of a program organised by the mall management to bring the arts into their environment. This can be looked at from two vantages; as an admirable and open-minded support of art practices, or as aligning with model's of a creative city (discussed in more detail in Chapter one) where art appears to be supporting creative culture but is really in the service of developing the commercial identity of the mall.9

The director of West Space, Philippa Murray, saw the relationship with the mall as primarily an opportunity for artists, as their current gallery space and exhibition program was over subscribed. In her view the sponsorship of space from the mall was not so much a considered policy but rather agitated for and maintained by an individual within the mall management who had an interest in the arts and saw an opportunity in the empty retail spaces. Despite this more personal connection, West Space understood it was a transactional relationship and supplied management with marketing information and their membership metrics to balance the sponsorship in the form of rent-free space. The program also attracted interest from other agencies; Creative Victoria10 chose Melbourne Central to launch that year’s annual Arts Funding, and the Victorian Government Arts minister at the time, Peter Bachelor, was involved. Murray reported there was a general sense that the idea of sponsorship through space was of interest to the art world, and also noted a curiosity about the ways an independent arts company could be involved in the commercial entity. Even though the partnership was framed as a transaction between entities, but was actually largely reliant on a direct relationship with individual within management body, and the idea was never fully understood or assimilated by the rest of the management. When the individual moved on and the personal relationship was removed, the partnership dissolved. Without that support the relationship became only a transaction and the gallery could not demonstrate the kind of obvious or measurable returns that renting the space to a commercial business would provide.

The projects I had created up to this point, had all occupied different kinds of commercial space: Small operated in virtual commercial space; Consumed was staged within a shop front on a commercial street, and now Picture Yourself occurred inside a mall. Small magazine had the appearance of commercial enterprise and occupied a similar space to other commercial publications.11 In all of these examples existing infrastructure was re-used to frame new propositions, in a sense the existing conditions become an armature to support an alternate use. Alternate uses of commercial frameworks function as a ‘Troyan horse’ allowing the work to quietly enter new territories disguised as something else. In all of these territories artful navigation is required to avoid becoming either early prospectors for future development or the result of marketing strategies that seek to replace goods and services with scripted and staged personal experiences.12 The risk is, as Claire Bishop observes, in ‘context, project-based works-in-progress and artists-in-residence begin to dovetail with an “experience economy” (introduced in Section 1.2). To avoid inadvertently feeding dominant commercial power systems the practitioner has to have the tools to navigate the major systems without being overpowered by it.13

8 Richard Florida, “Cities and the Creative Class,” City and Community 2, no 1 (2003). http://creativeclass.com/rfcgdb/articles/4%20Cities%20and%20the%20Creative%20Class.pdf (accessed May 23, 2017). Florida notes that the prevalence of bohemian culture or the ‘bohemian index’ supports the view that places that provide a broad creative environment are the ones that flourish in the ‘Creative Age’. Steven Malanga counters this supposition and argues that creativity did not actually result in more financially successful cities in any of the indicators. Steven Malanga, “The Curse of the Creative Class,” City Journal (Winter, 2004).

10 Creative Victoria is a government body that seeks to foster collaboration, cross-promotion and economic growth in the creative industries and in the broader community.

11 Small magazine appeared to be a commercial venture (and occupied a similar space to existing commercial publications), but was not motivated by commerce.

12 Claire Bishop, ‘Antagonism Relational Aesthetics,’ October no. 110 (2004): 5

13 The idea of implements in this research developed through dreaming devices in Chapter two, and becomes over this research a set of approaches (outlined in the conclusion of this writing) that when used in communiting creative work, encourage a capacity to maintain alertness to co-option and bring about propitious conditions for creative mutuality.
For Lefebvre, the expanding dominance of modern urbanisation meant the city was conceived of as a place of capitalist production but also held potential for transgression and alternative social projects. In 1968 he wrote that the ‘right to the city’ went beyond housing and demanded that the population was entitled to be collectively involved in the creation of urban spaces that satisfied the needs and desires of the inhabitants. This contention pushes against the totality of commercialisation that seeks to limit the occupational models and systems to those that further commodify activity. Urbanisation has continued to increase in scale and dominance since Lefebvre’s time of writing. David Harvey picks up Lefebvre’s call that the ‘revolution in our time to incorporate the financial systems that commoditise the spaces we inhabit. The urgency of his statement is born from Harvey’s belief that the form the city takes cannot be separated from the forms our society and relationships take. By ceding control of our urban spaces to ‘the political and economical elite’ who have the power to shape the city to best suit their needs and priorities, we are also ceding the power to shape our own lives.

In the context of the urban environment, capitalism’s enclosure of shared resources limits the potential of future creative activity to that which serves the market. Throughout Rebel Cities, Harvey makes the point that the urban inhabitant must be alert to less obvious forms of enclosure, as the concept of the commons can be appropriated by political power in the same way that actual land-based commons can be taken over by real estate interests. Resistance to this, in his view is crucial, as the ‘freedom to make and remake our cities and ourselves is...one of the most precious yet most neglected of our human rights.’ Harvey sees commoning as a mutable activity and with conscious attention it is possible to find ‘creative ways to use the powers of collective labour for the common good, and to keep the value produced under the control of the labourers who produced it.’

Nikos Papastergiadis does not believe a creative city can be enforced on its public, but argues it is formed by the inhabitants who are more equipped to embrace unpredictability and potentiality. He explains that the city’s creative potential can be defined by the dynamic between the defined and not-yet-defined aspects of the city. The non-defined aspects of a city ‘retains the potential for new and unpredictable alignments and forms of cultural production whose proper name is yet to emerge.’ The authors of Space, Power and the Commons, take a slightly different position, proposing ‘now that the whole city is a potential site of economic production, the spaces for resistance and for inventing alternatives to the existing order have multiplied.’ This sounds like a plausible view, the increase in one results in the increase of the other, but if dominance and power are increased by expansion it seems that the forces with which they can suppress resistance would also increase.

The kind of parafunctional spaces that Papastergiadis describes, and that I inhabited in New York in the 90s, do not seem to be as available, or perhaps are no longer overlooked. Up to the end of the century or a bit longer in some places, those types of spaces allowed for the invention of the alternative forms of inhabitation over relatively long durations. This meant that social and creative cycles could be explored and followed. Now these activities and spaces are very quickly assimilated or transformed into commodified places by globalised and hyper-aware creative-entrepreneurs. Parafunctional spaces where ‘alternatives can be invented’ may possibly still be located by mobile and adaptable occupants, but it is less apparent if the accompanying dimension of parafunctional ‘time’ is still available.

However, through commoning the perception of deprivation and scarcity can be inverted to become one of plenitude. Leo Hwang points out that when utilising a standard definition of economy to define success, the solutions to problems emerge in a standardised capitalism-centric export-base epistemology driven by a needs-based approach. The apparent solution to identified needs is to fortify capitalism in order to address absences. The framework of capitalism is so self-referential that it can be difficult, or even impossible, to conceive of solutions that exist within alternative paradigms. This is observation is supported by Maria Mies, who notices through
her subsistence research how globally all types of commoning activities (often performed by women), have been marginalised by an understanding of ‘economy’ that only recognises a very small proportion of the actual economy. Mies equates subsistence production with ‘life production,’ and proposes our view of the economy be re-oriented by the production of life, not the production of commodities.

The devaluation of subsistence activities has had the ancillary effect of also devaluing the activities frequently associated with maintaining and caring for community in common. Activities that are life producing are directly related to the satisfaction of human needs. By privileging monetised labour, people become alienated from affirming everyday experiences of mutual assistance, reciprocity and community service.24 Mies reminds her readers that the economic system is ‘not the outcome of some immutable natural law, but that it was constructed by men some centuries ago and can be changed. It is not without alternative…’25 Commoning is ‘not an alternative economy but an alternative to the economy’ and has emerged as dynamic relational processes and values, rather than situated as always relative to specific and shared resources.26 The ideological expansion of commoning over the last decade, has developed models for how creative collaborative practice can perform a practical and philosophical transition to systems that maintain openness and support the processes that make up current and yet to be formed, experiences and environments. Mutuality (discussed in Chapter five) remains a key concept for further developing these processes and for finding relational qualities that create dynamic exchange beyond reciprocity.

Nick Wilson identifies the broad features by that make up social creativity as ‘divergent thinking, trans-disciplinarity, co-ownership, heterogeneous knowledge production, boundary-spanning, technology-brokering, collaboration, dialogue and reflexivity.’27 I recognised all these features in my own work, at various levels. Space, social relations, time and creative practice are seen as a synesthesiastic merging of various components into an integrated but multipartite whole. A shift in any one of the elements implicates all the others, meaning that creative work is always forming in multi-directional relationships with spatial, temporal and social processes. It is for this reason that David Harvey insists the urban conditions shape the people we are, our relations and activities.28 Although Harvey takes a geographer’s perspective, the same call is relevant to creative practitioners who share and respond to transversal relationships.

To ‘practice’ in this way requires staying alert to all of these areas; the spatial, temporal, social and creative, being encroached or colonised for other purposes. Maintaining alertness to co-option means occupying the existing systems and territories in ways other to those advised, as the current dominant systems prefer that all areas of life be made accessible for commercial occupation. These theoretical understandings, activities and practices of others, contribute to developing my own processes and projects of commoning.
6.2 COMMONING AND SYSTEMS

Harvest by Jim Crace\textsuperscript{29} is a fictional account of pastoral England during the violent displacement that emerged due to the Enclosure acts.\textsuperscript{30} The commoners in his story shelter an abiding suspicion of strangers and fatal aversion to change. Crace evokes a historical commons and commoners as foreign to contemporary society, an antiquated and curious relic of past systems. The novel charts the fate of commoners as they are rapidly disenfranchised from their land and community when their wheat fields and woodlands are enclosed and converted into sheep meadows. The widespread enclosure of shared spaces and general acceptance of Hardin’s logic described in Chapter one, that ‘humanity inevitably exploits resources that are not assigned clear property rights, including the commons’\textsuperscript{31} have reinforced in the western world a nearly universal acceptance of the perception of commons as outdated and irrelevant.

Capitalism is singularly persuasive at deploying powerful and effective systems of reproducing itself. The argument that the labour economy automatically frees people from the weary drudge of survival is a simplistic perspective, echoing problems with Hardin’s views on commoning, by eliminating the complex social systems and affective characteristics of living of other more integrated ‘life-producing’ systems.\textsuperscript{32} Mies and Bennholdt-Thomsen believe that the capital accumulation is able to grow out of life, however life is never able to grow out of capital. For them, life producing activities such as care-taking and commoning should be centralised with economic activity more secondary and peripheral. Mies and Bennholdt-Thomsen aim to remove the stigma and negative connotations of subsistence and instead underscore its association ‘with attitudes of independence’\textsuperscript{33} and new social perspectives. They note that until the Second World War most people were still involved in some form of subsistence activity supported by mutual aid and question how ‘the most lifeless thing of them all, money, is seen as the source of life’\textsuperscript{34} in such a short period. Manifold social and life producing systems have been replaced with a model that is ordered by wage labour and capital accumulation.

Accumulation leads to ownership which has become the major determinate of how power is arranged, enforcing the systems that best support their own supremacy.\textsuperscript{35} As the capital benefits of ownership became more apparent, enclosure of shared and commons space accelerated. This has meant that our everyday experience of truly shared public space is now very limited. In Rebel Cities, David Harvey describes how modern cities have increasingly ‘become cities of fortified fragments, of gated communities and privatised public spaces kept under constant surveillance’.\textsuperscript{36} Nearly all land property, particularly in the city, is now either private or public, meaning it is either owned by the state or a person and therefore subject to their controls.

The dearth of natural or land commons contrast with the surfeit and diversity of other forms of modern commons. Online knowledge commons, open source peer production, file sharing, creative commons, certain art practices, protest movements occupying public space and other examples are all around us. Hardt and Negri observe that the “blinders of today’s dominant ideologies”\textsuperscript{37} make these non-geographical commons difficult to understand in the same terms. This is partly because as capitalism has reached the limits of material production it has increasingly begun commoditising ‘affects, spectacle, information, images, experiential moments.’\textsuperscript{38} The immaterial productions of capitalism make all kinds of immaterial commons that have so far evaded capture, targets for future enclosure. Philosopher and art historian Lieven de Cauter makes clear that the only way to defend any commons is ‘by the proliferation of certain acts of commoning’.\textsuperscript{39} Creative collaborative practice, already familiar with emergent and non-bureaucratic systems, is uniquely positioned to contribute to this.

\textsuperscript{29}Jim Crace, Harvest (London: Picador, 2013).
\textsuperscript{30}Between 1750 to 1850 approximately 4000 enclosure acts were passed in Britain and vast areas of land were enclosed and made available to private ownership and industrialised farming. Ellen Rosenman, “On Enclosure Acts and the Commons,” BRANCH: Britain, Representation and Nineteenth-Century History, ed. Dino Franco Felluga, Extension of Romanticism and Victorianism on the Net.
\textsuperscript{32}Ibid, 21.
\textsuperscript{33}Ibid.
\textsuperscript{34}Mies and Bennholdt-Thomsen, The Subsistence Perspective, 17.

\textsuperscript{36}Harvey Rebel Cities, 15.

\textsuperscript{38}David Harvey, Michael Hardt, and Antonio Negri, 'Commonwealth: An Exchange', Afromerum 48, no. 3 (Nov 2009): 210 221.
\textsuperscript{39}Lieven de Cauter, “Commonplaces on the (Spatial) Commons,” in Interrupting the City: Artistic Constitutions of the Public Sphere, eds. Sander Bax, Pascal Gilden, and Bram Leven, (Amsterdam: Vala Antonac, 2015).
Open and emergent systems both characterised and created the internet as a ‘knowledge commons.’ Openness was crucial to the development of the internet. This was because, as Lawrence Lessig, a founder of American non-profit organisation Creative Commons describe how in the early days of the internet the people working on it noticed that the networks they were creating were often used in very different ways to their expectations. The early developers concluded it was important not to presume they could predict the future use of the internet and it was important to allow the knowledge to be invented through use. Open systems disable central control so that innovators can decide how it is used without seeking permission from a central authority. This ideological orientation of the early developers resonates with the defining feature of commons; ineluctably open. The inverse of openness is that it also enables enclosure. With no barriers to entry, open systems can be infiltrated and diverted from their original intentions for use. Lessig outlines how increasingly the network, and the philosophy behind it, ‘has been re-architected for control.’ Desire to control the internet and to maintain existing capitalist structures, has lead to a profusion of punitive and aggressive copyright and patent laws, designed to maintain the current veneration of private property and transaction systems.

The current system of ownership and private property, essential for maintaining capitalism, is supported by increasingly fortified and extensive copyright laws Copyright laws were first instituted in Europe and America in the late 17th century primarily to break up printing monopolies. The laws were mostly concerned with publishing, and protected ownership for between ten years or the lifetime of the author. The early laws privatised some material, however the vast majority of creative work was still available for all kinds of free use. Since then, the type of information that is subject to copyright has grown exponentially, meaning the material and tools with which to develop future ideas are locked up for increasingly long periods. Contemporary copyright laws build on earlier versions that were initially developed for older technologies, applications and distribution methods in a time when the internet was inconceivable. The physics of real objects are very different to those in virtual space, however the laws attempt to categorise them as essentially the same, which suggests it is all private property that can be stolen. This is a fabricated logic as information and files on the internet are endlessly available, meaning use does not necessarily translate into scarcity as it can in the physical world. As scarcity, perceived or actual, drives up price in market systems, a lack of scarcity or abundance creates a difficult conundrum for capitalism. In order to remain relevant and consequently retain power, the problem has to be resolved by manufacturing a perception of scarcity. In relation to the endless provisions that virtual delivery enables, capitalism is required to do more than manufacture scarcity to retain control. The system responds to the changed physics of contemporary virtual life by expanding the domains and durations of copyright. This approach determinedly ignores the historical precedent of collective innovation through the internet.

The laws that enclose freedoms such as file sharing, collaborations, re-use, interpretation and creative hacking in the internet also corresponds with the thinking that encloses other shared resources, or the universal commons, such as patenting genes, plants and seeds. Movements like ‘copyleft’ and Creative Commons are philosophically against copyright, believing ‘universal access to research and education and full participation in culture’ is necessary for innovation and our future. The platforms they have developed offer authors choices as to how their material is disseminated. The widely adopted counter argument that supports enclosing freedoms on the internet, despite these freedoms having lead to demonstrable innovation, is often presented as binary between theft and compensation; ensuring that artists, writers and the producers of creative content, software or code being paid their due or else being exploited by the consuming public. Lessig agrees that creators should be compensated but argues it doesn’t follow that the systems we have used leading up to the invention of the internet should be the ones we continue to use.
Conceiving alternatives, rather than enforcing existing parameters despite changed conditions, requires an imaginative leap. As discussed in Chapter one, ongoing failure to do this can contribute to a widespread acceptance that our current reality must reflect the inherent logic and supremacy of the structures that support it. A statement exemplified in the application of old copy right laws to new conditions, demonstrating how our current realities are created by our belief in the structures that uphold them. J.K. Gibson-Graham argue that the strength and supremacy of capitalism is not because it is actually a homogeneous and totallising force, but because we have accepted a ‘capitalocentric’ view which means other systems are seen as relative to capitalism. Capitalocentric thinking maintains and continues its own supremacy in ordering reality by designating alternatives as fictional or fantastical. Fredric Jameson takes this further saying that for many of us ‘it is easier to imagine the end of the world than to imagine the end of capitalism.’ Other conceptions for how the world may be produced or created, have become relegated to imaginary or fantasy, not rooted in the logic of the real world. By depicting imagination as ‘not of this world,’ any imaginative conceptions of how the world could be organised other to how it is, can be efficiently disposed of through maligning or devaluing them as irrational.

Imaginative processes in commoning cannot be so easily repressed as they continue to explore beyond the existing frameworks, to expose hidden, marginalised, or simply other formations and conceptions of the world. Doing this it opens up abilities to envision the end of the world than to imagine the end of capitalism. Other conceptions for how the world may be produced or created, have become relegated to imaginary or fantasy, not rooted in the logic of the real world. By depicting imagination as ‘not of this world,’ any imaginative conceptions of how the world could be organised other to how it is, can be efficiently disposed of through maligning or devaluing them as irrational.

Relative to the perceived homogeneity of capitalism, the many modalities and applications of commoning occurring in many different disciplines can camouflage the unifying characteristics that might make it more defined. Emergent systems allow for ‘dynamic processes of interaction within constituent elements’ and privilege processes over outcomes or products. In a recent conversation Sean Dockray and Danny Butt both state an ideological preference for creative systems that resist the production of proprietary right, describing several creative projects that developed as systems as examples of this. These projects were all initiated by an individual or group, who essentially function as the catalyst, enacting something that continues to develop in ways they would not have conceived and may not stay involved with. Dockray and Butt point out that when work is part of a continually emergent relational system it remains available to re-adaption and re-use for future works and future thinking, rather than fixed in a time and place or ‘owned’ by any individual.

The adoption of systems to proliferate commercial concerns into new areas has been supported by the systems and algorithms that now structure the internet. The editors of the book Platforms and Public Participation, Butt, McQuire and Papastergiadis argue that successful evasion lies in the formation of platforms that construct new connections. These theorists suggest that,

public sphere discourses of inclusion and participation no longer hold an unambiguous liberatory potential when applied to commercial platforms. In fact, participation in networked publics is now so routinely co-opted for commercial ends that any alternative agendas must utilise the evident power of platforms to autonomously generate new forms of relation, and open a space for non-commercial ends before effective collective power can be exerted in the networked sphere. When work is conceived as occurring in a system that is part of a continual process, patterns emerge over time and can occur through even the most negligible or forgotten parts of projects. This means ‘the process helps elicit insights that we already know.”

87 Ibid. 6.
89 Ibid.
90 As mentioned earlier, J.K Gibson-Graham vehemently reject this conception of capitalism and argue it is made up of many varied forms. This argument breaks up the monolithic view of capitalism, requiring a total revolution in order to instigate change, and instead allows for it to be confronted in various ways particular to its specific form.
93 For example, the LA branch of The Public School, a geographically distributed and online platform for the self organisation of learning, that Dockray helped initiate in 2007.
94 Danny Butt, Scott McQuire and Nikos Papastergiadis, Platforms and Public Participation, Continuum 30, no. 6 (2016), 2.
Rancière criticises the supposition that an audience becomes collective or communitarian through being brought together.\(^{58}\) In his view this is because whether encountering art or simply walking down the street, every person is continually in the process of interpreting their surrounds. It can be argued that the relations between consumer and consumerism mimic the processes of Rancière’s emancipated spectator. The spectator becomes emancipated through actively finding ways to ‘translate in their own way through the forest of words, acts, and things that stand in front of them or around them’\(^{59}\) that collectivises them. People within a mall are continually involved in a personal process of interpreting their surroundings and making associations and disassociations. The viewer becomes an ‘emancipated spectator’\(^{60}\) through the ‘unpredictable and irreducible play of associations and dissociations.’\(^{61}\)

Negotiating the stimulating environment of the shopping mall requires the same production of internal meaning through translating experience. The inhabitants in the shopping mall were already collectivised, to an extent, by a much more powerful and more convincing agent than a minor creative interruption. Picture Yourself made clear to me how effectively commercial space can produce conforming behaviour. I had assumed that with the invitation from management to make creative work within the mall that permission would equate with occupying the space in other ways, however the spatial cues are so dominant that the behaviours of the visitors are still regulated by the environment, or their intentions for being in that environment was of primary importance. For either reason, it was more difficult to interrupt visually, socially and creatively, than I expected. The dominance of the commercial environment produced such an imbalance, the project was usurped by the commercial characteristics. Ultimately it felt like it was contributing to the overall consumerist spectacle, a supporting side-show. This observation felt like an end point to this line of speculation into commercial occupation as I could not see how to form an interruption that was not almost immediately mediated or subdued by the environment.

It is the affective qualities of commoning that are transfiguring. Stavrides describes how commoning can be transformative as the activity alters both the spaces and relations. He explains ‘worlds of commoning are not simply worlds of shared beliefs and habits but are strongly connected to ways of sharing that open the circle of belonging and develop forms of active participation in the shaping of the rules that sustain them.’\(^{62}\) The shaping is bidirectional as the transformative characteristics are also a property of the activity. Transformational abilities can be seen as a form of camouflage but also a necessary quality and proliferating agent of the activity of commoning. The camouflage that commoning takes, means it is frequently overlooked, but means it can manoeuvre in subtle ways that ensure its longevity. Commoning is mutable, necessarily so in order evade the conforming pressure of neoliberal systems. This manifests in various ways, through re-purposing commercial terrains or tactically inhabiting existing conditions as Picture Yourself; Consumed and Small did, reforming spaces (Section 2.1) or adjusting to attenuating circumstances (Section 3.1). An embodied commoning approach means the attitude evades enclosure and responds to external pressures in ways that allow it to continue to exist.

Commoning was difficult to identify in these projects partly because of its mutable nature. As patterns became more familiar in my own work over time, I gained insight into the ‘things I knew’ on an intuitive level but that had not yet been ‘made visible’ or become explicit. The extended duration of the research allowed looping patterns to emerge, and these patterns helped developed the knowledge that lies latent in any processes. The process of making the work and then multiple works over time, continual re-encounters with previous thinking encourages a deeper understanding. Silke Helfrich explains how this process occurs and develops in commoning: ‘The patterns shed light on the conceptual foundation of commoning and give them a clear formulation that makes it more comprehensible to outsiders and thus more easily replicated.’\(^{63}\) The recurrence of the loops become patterns that permit people to orient themselves in complex and dynamic systems and recognise and network previously unnoticed commonalities. This is what Helfrich describes this as the ‘performative creation of meanings.’\(^{64}\) With this observation, the focus shifted from the outcomes of the projects to the properties that were occurring within them. Through intersubjective production and experience, shared patterns emerge and form new connections.
As I write this, I am listening to William Basinski’s ‘The Disintegration Loop,’ a video and music piece I came across researching loops. When I looked up Basinski, his face was familiar – it was ‘Billy’, famous in Williamsburg in the early 90s for his Bacchanalian cabaret events, performance parties and concert series that he staged in the vast and vaulted loft where he lived. The loft was named ‘Arcadia,’ after the idyllic vision, and was an unexpected and wondrous interior in that desolate district. The roof garden was watered by a small stream and a fountain, cool and lush after the treeless gritty streets. Strands of fairy lights strung a crossed the view of the broken footings and old piers, black against the Manhattan skyline. Arcadia was a ‘dreaming device’ (see Section 2.1) briefly and incongruously wrought from a filthy, garbage strewn factory and then lost ten years later to the rising rents.

‘The Disintegration Loop’ came about in 2001 when Basinski set out to archive the music he had made in the studio at Arcadia and found that the reel-to-reel tapes he had used were falling apart as he played them back. By looping a short section of his decaying compositions, the failing technology transformed the sounds and arrangements into a melancholic and beautiful ‘re-compositions,’ simultaneously new, and redolent of a time and place that is lost. In his work the loops don’t repeat perfectly, but incorporate some degree of change, a development of difference within repetition, that moves them forward. In other words, the processes that the loops go through both repeat and are generative.

Jane Bennett describes emergent loops as cyclical, spiral repetitions that are transformative as ‘each iteration occurs in an absolutely unique context, each turn of the spiral enters into a new and distinctive assemblage.’ Identifying structural or experiential loops that pass by and twist references Deleuze’s writing on repetition as isochronic rotations. Bennett explains ‘in this spiral repetition things repeat but with a twist. And this twist – or to use Lucretian terms, swerve – makes possible new formations. … From the twists and swerves of spiral repetitions are born…new images, new identities and new social movements.’ Her description resonates with observations of unexpected interconnections occurring across spatial and temporal planes, as well the emergent swerve through which each project in this research generated from previous events. Over time the recurrence of loops develop a view of the projects as interrelated and also emergent.

The loops become a way to develop new work, built out of past experience, but also to make sense of new ideas by pushing them back through more deeply understood or lived concepts. The loops in my work were never intentional but their persistent reappearance indicated that there was something driving the pattern. The loops in each project and across the body of work emerge in many modalities; technical, spatial, temporal, social and mental, and these modalities are not necessarily separable or distinct from each other. The projects are conceived as different ways to manifest physical and durational open structures that, through varied levels of interpenetration, encourage the creative production of personal meaning within a social field.
Picture Yourself and Consumed both contained some form of a loops in the technology. In Consumed, as the work was made it was recorded by four cameras and displayed on closed circuit TV. Picture Yourself was on a tighter loop and instead of recording the process, what was recorded became the work. The arrangement of the two spaces, Picture Yourself, and the second space made by Bishop and Reis that reconstituted the organisation and material of the first space, had a doubling effect as they operated individually and in a discordant resonance with each other. Passing through the first room into the two-thirds scale of the second room was a spatially curious experience, making visible a literal loop where one work was informing the next, a duplication with difference. Reflecting on the oddness of the visual and experiential replication, as well as the confusing and slightly stilted social interactions with Bishop and Reis during the production of their work that was referencing my installation, I became aware that structural and technical loops were consistently appearing in my own work.

Loops were also apparent in the overall structure of the practice as past observations and experiences were continually and explicitly folded back through current works, reappearing as unexpected similarities in future works. In particular, the response to failure discussed in Chapter four meant that elements from one work would manifest in a transformed state within the next. Other more technical loops repeat throughout the works. Picture Yourself and Consumed both folded back collected material into the actual event and onto the documentation as their underlying structure. Picture Yourself reconstituted images collected in one part of a project into future work. This method was a response or a development on the documentation methods used in Consumed. Incorporating closed circuit cameras and the plan for the documentation in Consumed also forms loops of material and technology. While this footage wasn’t incorporated into a final work, as it was too unwieldy to be managed (Section 3.2), the fact it was a part of my project’s vision indicated my interest in loops and re-imagining was always present.

Processes of creation are in conflict with a very different concept of culture that fixes on ownership, discreet objects or the individual. Felix Stalder points out that to continue to innovate, systems of exchange are needed that recognise ‘existing works have to be integrated into new ones and new ones have to be made accessible to the scientific public.’72 He elaborates that ‘intellectual production is considered a cooperative (there is exchange between authors) and transformational (new is created from existing) process.’73 In the same way that open and generative systems are necessary for intellectual and creative development, they are also necessary in the production of commoning, and collaborative processual creative activity that counters the values of commoditised art markets or ‘creative cities.’ This is an attitude and activity of use and re-use, that recognises and values dialogical exchange as intrinsic in the collective formation of open and participatory culture. These kind of creative activities are described by the artist and theorist Stephen Jones as ‘rhizomatic, proliferating in the world as sequentially coupled interactions having impacts in various ways, on themselves and on each other as the systems in process with other surrounding systems.’ Jones comments that these systems make an ‘interlooping collection of relations.’74 Bourriaud affirms his view of creative remixing in his text Post Production, pointing out that re-using material forms a ‘narrative that extends and reinterprets preceding narratives.’75

72 Felix Stalder, “Open Cultures and the Nature of Networks,” The Note Book Project. (Novi Sad, Serbia and Montenegro Sarajevo, Bosnia and Herzegovina: Futura publikacije and Sarajevo Center for Contemporary Art), 30.
The correlation between the loops of creative practice and the commoning became clearer over time. Inter-looping relations in collaborations are a system made up of interaction and feedback forming emergent processes. In *Patterns of Commoning*, Bollier and Helfrich explain how networks that develop through the interrelation of subjective and intersubjective experience, are ‘connecting us with the deeper circuits of living systems and with other commoners.’ They believe these connections ‘have their own inexorable power, especially when those circuits begin to interconnect and expand.’ Over time these become patterns, which for Helfrich is important as ‘a platform that enables us to take the first steps in adapting specific patterns to our own particular circumstances.’ A pattern language is necessarily incomplete knowledge, but still it represents the best knowledge that we have available and can be further developed jointly as needed. Helfrich makes the sentient observation ‘a patterns approach permits people to orient themselves to complex and dynamic systems’ across various scales.’ Helfrich’s observations on loops in commoning when extended to this practice were useful for revealing how creative practice and commoning could develop in relation to each other and the shared commonalities already existing between them.

As patterns emerge across the wider activities they form recognition in difference. This leads to various and disparate modalities finding or coming into correspondence. In this research, a passage an aspect of a project would form into the loop through a moment of familiarity that triggers a sense of resonance. This is a re-cognisance; the flash of recognition made from points connecting across time and space, which brings two disparate elements into correspondence. The loop connects the past into the future, by lurching towards something that was not expected. A comprehension of loops, an ability to attend to them and look out for them eventually forms overall patterns that develop new opportunities without reverting to a closed or predictable system for outcomes.

I continually revisit the periods and processes that instructed me in the past in terms of how participative and inventive co-creation can occur, seeking ways I can take these aspects forward into future works. The spatial and social opportunities available to me in the abandoned commercial space when I first arrived in New York in 1991 have disappeared for everyone, but the practice of occupying commercial spaces has remained with me. A ‘Trojan Horse’ of sorts, *Picture Yourself* entered a temple to commercial activity and attempted to open space for new forms of social and creative interrelations to occur. Although I found the processes more difficult than I expected, and also the results more limited than I had hoped, the project still contributed to clarifying the underlying values and patterns that were beginning to emerge through my research. The accumulation of the loops revealed by this project demonstrated how processual systems can construct patterns of connection between creative work, ideas and communities.

---

76 Silke Helfrich, ‘How Can We Bring about a Language of Commoning,’ 87.
78 Helfrich, ‘How Can We Bring about a Language of Commoning,’ 88.
A movement of commoning through experientially manifest conceptual space, a diagramming of the workings of the ‘dreaming device’ as a spatial explorer/reflective thinker with AfterImage.

CHAPTER SEVEN

Story 6: I was given some time in an empty floor in an old three-story warehouse in the industrial boarder of North Melbourne. My brother had made an office in the front room, however as the store area behind was mostly empty and he said I could use it for a while. It reminded me of the warehouse I had left in New York, the steel pillars and dark corners, piles of boxes and stored belongings in the shadows of the cavernous interior space. These floors were also scarred and marked by the machines that had once commanded the space and the smell of old oil and dust was the same. The district the building was in still crashed with movement during the day, but sank into deep silence as the sun set. After my children went to sleep at night I would test out the project ideas in the dark. This was the most time I had by myself for many years; the quietness, the darkness, the long hours, felt like a gift to unwrap. I was thinking about collectives, crowds, communities but felt joyful that I was working alone.

7.0 INTRODUCTION TO PROJECT: AFTERIMAGE

Creative practice interested in promoting an equality between the producer and the audience aims to avoid taking an opposing position to the audience, or establishing a relationship analogous to ‘prosumers’, (where the audience/consumer makes the work for free then buys it). Instead, by looking for ways that creative work can begin to produce individuals who can appropriate the story for themselves it encourages what Jacques Rancière describes as a ‘community of storytellers and translators’.1 The previous project, Picture Yourself, had not created a sense for the audience of being in a collective, nor had it activated the audience into critical reflection on the environments they inhabited. Picture Yourself made me look at the image of myself as a producer, a role that had long worried me (discussed in more detail in Section 4.2). It was only through becoming the audience myself and interpreting the work through my own processes of translation in AfterImage, that I had a different story I could tell.

At this point I had begun to feel disconnected from my own practice of making things with my hands, having focussed my energy for ‘making’ on platforms that facilitated the practices of others. AfterImage began as a series of experiments, testing out ideas in the dark, trying to bring something that I couldn’t envision into existence. AfterImage was a disjuncture in the sequence of the earlier projects and so consequently functions on a very different register, but through its difference provides a vantage on the work that had preceded it.

AfterImage developed from a series of experiments making automated drawings using light. I had started by making ‘photograms’, a process popularised from 1922 by Laszlo Moholy-Nagy, where objects are exposed to light to make an image on light sensitive paper. As these images materialised in the dark room chemicals, I thought about how in their abstractness they could only be understood through subjective interpretation, as a sort of gestalt image.2 The image, and also the processes that made it, seemed to stand for something other than what they were, forming connections to other practices and processes.3 As I worked I wondered if some kind of mechanised drawing apparatus could function as a diagram of this process.

---


2 Laszlo Moholy-Nagy was an early proponent of removing the artist’s physical touch by drawing with light and is credited with naming the photogram. Noam Milgrom Elcott, “Into the Dark Chamber: Avant-Garde Photograms and the Cinematic Imaginary” (PhD diss., Princeton University, 2009).

3 Recently proponents of this technique are the New Zealand duo, photographer Mark Adams and jeweller Areta Wilkinson, who use photograms to photograph and to also negotiate with Māori taronga (a term that describes something that has become a treasured item, prized possession or valued person or thing in that culture) discussed in more detail by Geoffrey Batchen, Emanations: The Art of the Cameraless Photograph (New Plymouth and Munich: Govett-Brewster Art Gallery and Del Monico Books, 2016), 46.
These were tentative, flickering thoughts, partially guiding me but also responding to what unfolded. I was working after the children went to sleep at night, initially making drawing apparatus with wire and ink, until the darkness suggested doing the same with light. I tried to capture on photosensitive paper and then on film a ‘diagram’ of the duration and engagement of working with the lights in the darkened room. As I worked I noticed bright haloes of floating white lights on the inside of my eyes, blinding me to the dark when I turned off the lights. This was an afterimage. The after image was persistent and eventually I decided to externally replicate the floating, dissipating lights that were forming internally by using filament and tiny LED bulbs. The tiny lights suspended on slim threads moved with the faintest touch, or even a breath.

Working in a vast space meant I was able to distribute the components more spatially. In the furtherest corner from the entrance I set up a glass surface supported on two trestles. The many small battery-lit LED lights that I had assembled and attached to filaments were strung up above the glass. Below the glass I positioned a movie camera pointing upwards to film the lights from below. This camera was connected to a projector that threw the image on the white wall in front of the viewer. The arrangement made a physical loop – as the viewer moved, the light sculpture moved, the recording of these movements made the projection, that was perceived by the viewer. While the projected image was of the suspended lights that the viewer could see in front of them, because they were filmed from below and through the glass, the orientation and the slight delay in the projection meant the image appeared and moved in a way that the viewer was not immediately able to connect with the physical work. The spots of lights, distorted by the filming and projecting process, would blow out and waver, appearing to float and sway. The projected image on the wall was an external description of the floating and lucent implosions on the inside of my eyelids when apprehending the original afterimage but by looking at this image a new afterimage was constructed. Through moving the LED bulbs, I made an external light drawing that simultaneously drew an internal image. The external work replicated the internal image and simultaneously the internal image was conjured by the external image.

The structure functioned to make physically apparent the loop that is formed between interactions and an art work, a loop that is closed individually by the subjective interpretation of the precipitant. Rancière’s call for ‘spectators who are active interpreters’ had long influenced the way I understood participatory engagement as an open system, able to unfold in ways not yet conceived, for the audience and also because of them. This unfolding and reverberative processes of thinking and the making together reflects Rancière’s observation that ‘artists like researchers, build the stage where the manifestation and effect of their competences become dubious as they frame the story of a new adventure in a new idiom’. AfterImage became a way of understanding the interrelation of the observer with creative work, and the formation of meaning that makes the observer a participant in the apprehension of creative work.
Fig 7.2 Diagram of the loop from movement to vision to recording to projection back to vision

Fig 7.3 Setting up the suspended lights over the glass table.

Fig 7.3 Image of the projection on the wall behind the suspended lights


7.1 QUESTIONS OF AUDIENCE

Over the entirety of this research I had become more conscious of the ability of crafted documentation to retrospectively construct an impression that essentially reformed a work into something new, often more marketable (discussed in Section 4.4 and 8.3). This awareness was probably concurrent with desktop programs and social media platforms that meant editing and filtering of photographic information was becoming more readily available. With the spread of social media and mobile photography, people have become increasingly adept at creating an 'identity that is projected outward as a narrative.' The work I had been involved in creating was capable of being interpreted or reformatted in this way however it rarely occurred to me to incorporate this form of documentation. My own disinterest in producing these kinds of versions of my work were partly ideological, but also indicated an actual inability to view the work in terms of outcome. I only saw the projects as dynamic interrelations transpiring through time, including before and after the event, so consequently it was difficult for me to reformat this understanding into a cohesive filmic or photogenic narrative.

Editing out complexity, miscommunication and other less palatable aspects of the collective experiences, alienates people from their own embodied knowledge and also forecloses on future relations and understandings that are borne out of something other than an aesthetic, idealised or predetermined views. The documentation systems I implemented throughout my projects tried to address these concerns in various ways. My driving interest was exploring the potentials of socially and creatively complex and evolving work, and the intersubjective relations that emerged from it. Making AfterImage became a process of 'documenting' all the other works I had undertaken. This did not occur literally or as a chronological narrative, but through distributed, mutable and mobile elements able to compose themselves in shifting relations to each other.

With Consumed I had begun thinking about the relationship of documentation to an ephemeral and temporary event. Documentation also seemed to provide a way to extend the duration of a project, leaving open the system for future adaptation. The documentation system conceived for Consumed was open-ended, allowing for adaptations, re-use and reinterpretation over time. In Picture Yourself I reinterpreted this system through trying to make the document of the work the same thing as the work, complicating and making the role of producer less discrete by working directly with the participants as co-producers. Collective Commons was similarly made by those participating, but additionally tried to make available opportunities for dynamic interrelations between those that were present and also for future audiences. In all of these works the documentation processes maintained a focus on the audience or participant as being dynamically involved. The work was only conceived relative to an audience. During the process of making the system I became interested in what meant to produce a temporary work in relation to documentation, what would happen if it was only accessible to anyone else through documentation and description, never as an experience.

When making creative work there is often the chance it will never be seen. With object based art the fact it physically exists makes this less significant than for performative arts that, without an audience, are only in rehearsal. Martin Patrick reminds the reader of Duchamp’s belief that the spectator makes the picture and points out ‘current, temporary, ephemeral and non-categorisable artworks ultimately gain their form and meaning via the encounter and the intersection with the viewing public.’ The emphasis is on the difference between a rehearsal and performance, process and display in art works. As any work has at least one person involved there is always an audience. Thinking about this AfterImage in terms of it being in ‘rehearsal’ meant that it could function to test ideas, similar to how a choreographer might test out movements, but without necessarily having a specific future audience in mind. In some ways working alone, being the audience and the maker myself, was a way of confronting my constant undercurrent of concern that I was still an ‘inadvertent developer,’ ostensibly altruistically encouraging public participation and engagement while siphoning off all the value and cultural capital into my own professional practice.
The emergence of participatory art since the sixties coincides with the broader dissolutions of the boundaries between public and private space. The spread of commercial activity and the commoditisation of parts of life blurs the distinctions between spheres that were previously separated. In his book *No Innocent Bystanders: Performance Art and Audience* Frazer Ward describes the emergence of public art practices as synchronous with the previously private interior and correlating sense of self, becoming part of the public sphere (public sphere incorporates qualities other than just space). Ward notes that as people became more tied up with commodities and mediation, ‘any distinction between public and private realms were necessarily eliminated, but the body was also subject to mediation, and no longer served as the ground for any “authentically” private experience.’ The increasingly seamless contiguity between public and private realms also corresponds with the fate of common space which has largely been converted to private or state owned.

In a privatised public domain, political and economic forces have the most influence on the form the city takes and the behaviours and activities of the social constituents. David Harvey demands we retain the right to remake the city as this is also the right to remake ourselves. Rancière points out the necessity of the cities inhabitants to recognise that they are involved in the political (distinguishing his position from ‘politics’ undertaken by bureaucracy and government) public sphere. Being shaped by the public realm occurs occupying it so it is not possible to opt out of these politics. Public creative activity must acknowledge its own politics in shaping the urban conditions as omnipresent political and the economical powers are actively and continually constituting and remaking the public sphere to maintain their dominance. Creative practice either interrupts or furthers the existing flows that shape space. The awareness of this requires acknowledging what Uncertain Commons (see Section 1.3) describe as ‘the recursive formula which produces, exploits, forecloses - underpins a constellation of firmative practices.’ Rather than the diametrically oppositional choice of being subsumed by the more dominant powers or being in continuous and exhausting dissension, Uncertain Commons propose that the political is internalised and becomes an orientation that steers all activities.

### 7.2 INHABITABLE DIAGRAMS

*AfterImage* struck me as a form of diagram in that it externalised a simple description of how creative work is perceived; an experience or encounter with art is re-constructed within the viewer, filtered by their unique perceptions and becomes an internal image that then can change or effect how they see the external world. The external light image on the wall was produced by physical interaction which changed the after image produced inside the eyes. Seeing the work as a diagram meant I could interpret the elements in the work as ‘forms for ideas’, rather than evaluating them by their aesthetic and artistic merits, a process I had always found desultory whenever I had attempted it.

Jean Jacques Lyotard’s exhibition, *Les Immatériaux*, held in the Pompidou Center in 1985 offered a way to position this project in the context of my research. *Les Immatériaux* was conceived on many levels, incorporating self-reflexive documentation and archiving, as well as drawing on the culture and infrastructure of the Pompidou and the technologies of that time. After several decades of obscurity, the exhibition is beginning to be returned to by theorists because it presents spatial, perceptual and visual experience as philosophy. Lyotard was grappling with the post-modern question of the relationship between humans and the immaterial forms and technologies that were appearing in that period. He approached the curation of the elements and organisation of the space as holistic and interrelated, thinking of exhibition as a ‘manifestation’ or ‘non exhibition’. The visitor attending the vast gallery space would encounter this question with all of their senses, including proprioception, as they became immersed in experiencing the very question Lyotard was proposing. The writing on this exhibition describes an accumulative and experiential way of understanding that extended beyond the parameters of the actual event.
It was not until I made *AfterImage* and stood within the loop it formed that I understood the works and ideas that had preceded it. The correlations that threaded the disparate works together had to be internalised, demonstrated through a lived experience. The sense of an embodied understanding made me realise that other lived experiences, ones I had discarded as incoherent within a research narrative (such as my early life in the lofts in New York or working on *Small*), were relevant to the larger ideas. This sensation extended beyond the physical arrangement of objects, light and projection I had constructed, and incorporated the wider context; the cavernous, slightly familiar space and the time to work alone. The vast, and quiet dimness of the warehouse, and the meditative and uninterrupted involvement in creative activity, combined and produced in me a sensation of a dreamlike resonance with another time and the parafunctional spaces I had loved in New York.

Experiences that are able to demonstrate something other than what they are, ‘weave discordant particulars into partial concordance’ through finding commonalities that connect the past to the future as part of an evolving whole. Valeria Giardino explains ‘spatial representations are at the heart of human thought, and most importantly they are used to think about non-spatial relations in the world.’ Diagrams of ideas exteriorises the mind so thoughts can be explored. The inverse applies when exterior objects can become explanatory through interpreting them diagrammatically. When gazing at the night sky, organising the abstract and chaotic luminescence as constellations connect the stars in the subjective view, flattening the temporal and spatial distances of the universe into an image that is able to orient and guide the viewer. A constellation always refers to something else, ‘regardless of whether they refer to objects and events or to concepts and objects of knowledge.’ The diagram is produced through the mental arrangement of disparate physical elements that also function as ideas.

The abstract and also analogous qualities of light make it particularly powerful as a medium with which to visualise thoughts. In her book *Art as Organism*, Charissa Terranova coins the term ‘haptic unconscious’ to describe the effect that light images (as in any form of digital or projected images) have on our consciousness. Terranova’s focus is on the relations between the percipient, light and the effects and nature of the technologies, rather than the digital or projected images) have on our consciousness. Terranova’s focus is on the relations between the percipient, light and the effects and nature of the technologies, rather than the narrative content or structures of the films. She presents a bodily and affective reading of light technology over the last two centuries, linking the haptic, light and the body, as ‘an abstraction of thought combined with the materialism of the body; the evanescent and dematerialised light image borne upon sensual mind in action.’ Her understanding of ‘haptic unconsciousness’ is developed from a synthesis of Moholy-Nagy’s individualistic approach to understanding the processes of the body when encountering art and image, and Walter Benjamin’s vision of the perceptive as a collective.

Terranova’s discussion positions ‘distributed light images’ as rooted in gestalt. Gestalt falls into systems theory, and is a dynamic system in which the whole is made up from various interrelated parts but is more than the sum of these parts. Operating within the ‘hard science’ counterpart of ‘cybernetics’, gestalt is a multi disciplinary and distributed form of knowledge and knowing. Deriving from a German term meaning structure, gestalt describes how a perceptual field does not appear to us as a collection of disjointed sensations, but possesses a particular organisation of spontaneously combined and segregated objects. Terranova introduces gestalt as ‘a means to understand perception and the form of living organisms on the micro-logical scale as well as an approach to the field of discovery on macro-logical scale.’ Her description resonates with the physical nature of *AfterImage*, one of a light image forming a dynamic system in which human proprioception is necessary to complete and to continue the loop. For Terranova, when the loop is completed by the precipitant the gestalt brings totality to the light image, integrating components that function in unique ways and on different levels in the totality of one. This means that the ‘viewer’ completes the act of perceiving a picture, and in so doing, becomes part of and creates an imagistic totality.
Terranova credits Maholy-Nagy with enabling her understanding of the enveloping capacity of light images surrounding the body to form embodied understanding. For her, light and movement make the body and the mind both felt as physically present, ‘positioned within an ecological network of relations.’26 This experience of embodied knowing leads to a sense of the haptic unconscious where ‘knowing comes from – is part of – emotional and sensual experience in the world created and mediated by art’.27 Terranova develops a concept of the haptic unconscious as extending outside of art and looping back out into the world of emergent action. The haptic is explained as affective, a means of understanding that is always rooted in the body where the output of information and the intake of information circulate in a loop, each having affect on the other. For her, haptic unconscious ‘connects it to a bigger politics of ecology, the environment and rapid and radical climate change.’28 This observation points to how this kind of knowing; a haptic, intuitive knowing of the world mediated by encounters with art, connects creative practice with the processes of commoning as always emergent and intrinsically involving care-taking.

As I stood touching the lights and looking at the projection of AfterImage set in motion by movement from my body there occurred a re-cognisance, where knowing is translated from one register to another (re-cognisance within loops are developed in more detail in Section 6.3). The submerged reefs of understanding (from Section 4.5) were suddenly became apparent. Alva Noë explains that creative work is a way of bringing the structures that organise our lives into view and performing a ‘looping back’ on the original material as it reorganises those that view it. He notes that the processes of art are an ‘attempt from within the activity to make sense of where we find ourselves.’29 In front of me I could see evidence of the effects of my actions, changing what I saw and what I understood, as simultaneously the movements of the elements functioned to reframe events in the past. Space and time felt imbricated, stretching both into the past and into the future. The philosopher Keith Lehrer believes that ‘you need a system to raise explanation to philosophy, and you need a loop to complete explanation… you need art to show you how the loop ties the subjective and the objective, the internal and external, the mind and body together in experience and to show you what the connection between them is like.’30 The presence of both conceptual and structural looping structures in the previous works was underlined by the looping structure of AfterImage. Lehrer describes how ‘the explanation is in the loop and it is the loop that is explanatory.’31 The closed circuit of the physical loop in AfterImage, interrupted through undergoing a twist in the perception and understanding of the viewer, took an even more pronounced swerve for me.

---

26 Terranova Art as Organism, 3.
27 Ibid., 12.
28 Ibid., 248.
31 Ibid., 177.
AfterImage was useful in that it generated ‘an image of thought’ for perceiving commonalities in the various documenting systems, where the document of the work is conceived as produced by involvement with making the work, in a sense reflecting the participant’s involvement back to them. This documentation filters through the maker, formed by subjective processes rather than a more external narrative. By not being designed as a linear narrative with an opening and a closing, the project can continue on beyond the time it was in operation. The open systems allow future audiences to continue to engage with the work and consequently the work continues to unfold. I was the only audience for this project interpreting the work even as I made it. Instead of converting those involved in their own processes of interpretation to my dream of a more communitarian existence, I was developing my own conception of what that could be, as Rancière describes ‘transforming through the processes of interpreting’.

The qualities of the work, but also the space and the atmosphere combined within me, linking me to what had been seen and done, thought and dreamed. The lights floating in front of me at that moment constellated the divergent ideas, bringing into existence relations across disparate points in time and space.

Fig 7.5 Hand moving the suspended lights, filmed through the glass table from below.

Rancière, “The Emancipated Spectator.”
A movement of commoning as a teacher and creative practitioner and collaborator in *Building Movement* and *Collective Commons*.

**CHAPTER EIGHT**

**Story 7:** I left my children inside and went into the backyard, pulling up weeds from between the bricks as I explained my worries about the upcoming group project to Chris. We were both doing PhD students. Our supervisor had arranged for us to do a project with another of her candidates Scott, who was coming from Finland. Neither Chris or I had met Scott and we were not sure how it would be to work together. I was torn between knowing that I should participate as it was a good opportunity to further my research, but also not wanting to let the people I was working with down when my circumstances made involvement difficult. I was worried committing to the project would be hard to balance with my family and become stressful for me, and if I was not there every day for the three weeks it was due to run, then I might not get enough out of the project for it to be useful to my research. We kept talking, the evening dimming and the pile of weeds getting higher. Chris listened to my concerns and finally suggested I change my perception and focus … instead of replicating what he and Scott were able to do, I could find another way that worked for me, and the constraints of my life. My anxiety shifted to interest.

**8.0 INTRODUCTION TO PROJECTS: BUILDING MOVEMENTS AND COLLECTIVE COMMONS**

*Building Movements* was initially proposed as a questioning of the Design Hub at RMIT University through a series of exploratory projects that would involved PhD candidates from the architecture and design school, and upper level interior design and architecture students. As a teaching project we hoped to give students a first-hand experience of the processes of researching through design and making. Working with a group students also meant we could realise much larger or more complex works in the short time frame. Pia Ednie-Brown acted as supervisor for the project and co-ordinated an exhibition alongside the installations by various other PhD candidates. The project occurred over three weeks; one week of preparation by us, then two intense weeks with the students. It culminated in an evening event that was open to the public. The students were involved all day for those two weeks, working in different groups on site and at various workshops. We supplemented the project work with presentations and conversations over meals or in the Design Hub to generate conversation and increase the students’ investment in the project.

Our mutual supervisor, Pia Ednie-Brown, brought Chris Cottrell, Scott Andrew Elliott and myself together, instigating what has become, over time, a sustained and supportive, social and creative relationship. Cottrell and I had been friends for a period and already had a sense of mutuality around our research practices, that extended quite quickly to include Elliott. He was staying at both of our houses and so our relationships were not limited to professional. Sharing living spaces and meals produced a level of proximity and familiarity that expedited the sense of mutuality between us. Enmeshing creative work with processes that usually occur with family or at home often has this effect. Berlin based artist Olafur Eliasson has a large studio consisting of about ninety people. He introduced a sit-down meal four days a week for staff, as he believes that sharing lunch disrupts the hierarchies and compartments of the office.¹ Looking back at the open loft spaces I lived in New York, and also my experiences both working with, and sharing houses with Christine, it was also apparent that a sense of mutuality developed more quickly through not separating work from shared meals and negotiating shared spaces.² This realisation was something I would return to later when planning projects for my first year students.

² It is interesting to think how privatisation of property and our increasing demands for privacy may be limiting our more casual experiences of mutuality.
Building Movements began with Cottrell and Elliott becoming more familiar with each other and the building. Cottrell and Elliot both had existing interests in the contexts and atmospheres within existing buildings and the time spent exploring made evident the common ground in their prior research. They finally selected the thresholds between the elevators and the long rooms as the locations for the installations. Cottrell and Elliot found these areas of the building had the more liminal qualities they were both interested in, which was important in order for the four installation projects to have relevance to their own research. Elliot and Cottrell proposed some initial sketchy ideas and then, with input from me and Ednie-Brown, we came up with a series of possible installations we could present to the students. The designs were further refined once the student became involved and their material investigations and existing skills and interests, eventually manifesting as four quite different propositions to be installed throughout the building.

From the start, Building Movements was intrinsically complicated as so many people were involved in the project in many different capacities. Elliott, Cottrell and I were all simultaneously functioning as researchers, as teachers and as artists/designers. The upper level architecture and design students were our collaborators but also students. There were also all the usual inhabitants of the Design Hub building – the other researchers and academic staff that needed to use the elevators every day and work in the building at the same time as we were installing the project. Other organisations had vested interests in what occurred inside the building and needed to taken into account. And finally there was the future audience for the event. All of these occupants, roles and requirements had to be balanced, and the four installations had to be completed, within the time frame and bureaucratic constraints.
The first installation resolved after extensive material experimentation as suspended strips of metallic tape that demarcated the volume of the elevator directly in front of the sliding doors. The strips would blow and shiver as the elevator doors opened and the visitor pushed through the volume, a visual and haptic rendering of the space they had just occupied. On another floor, the second installation was a large inflated space made of sealed plastic covered in circular appliqués that mimicked the scale and arrangement of the glass discs on the surface of the building. When the elevator opened as people exited it, the air in the inflatable space would escape causing the inflatable to inhale and exhale in response. A third installation confronted the visitor when the elevator doors opened with a seemingly solid wall made out of the same perforated metal as the interior of the lift. Only by pressing on a black disc marked ‘push’ did the volume roll forward, opening up just enough space for the visitor to step out of the elevator. As the actual elevator doors slid shut behind them, the visitor had to step forward and pull sideways the wall that was now blocking their way around the volume. By sliding the volume to the side they could slip past and then to exit they would push the volume back, leaving it in place, pressed against the elevator door for the next arrival. At the fourth installation the lift doors opened onto a steep flight of narrow stairs. The visitor had to exit the elevator and immediately ascend the stairs, crouch through a tight elevated corridor, then turn and descend another flight of stairs, to finally arrive in a waiting room furnished with slightly too small-scaled furniture.
The systems that had operated Small had grown into a sustained interest in the kind of frameworks that unify diverse practices and disparate interests. I had further examined how these systems might occur or be initiated for Consumed. Both required the invention of a framework that could support complex interrelations and provide different types or levels of interrelation and value for varied participants. As studio leaders, Elliot, Cottrell and I had presented the project to the students as a series of loose propositions that we hoped were open enough to motivate the students to be invested, but also structured enough to give them confidence in the teaching approach and time frame of the project. We also had to consider the stringent requirements of building managers, ethics, and required teaching outcomes. It was tempting to have the outcomes completely pre-designed, ensuring success, or at least usefulness, for our individual research trajectories, despite this approach potentially alienating, boring or exploiting the students. Seeking a balance between openness and control in the processes rather than in the outcomes, was emergent in a way that we would not have been able to predict, and meant that for the students, and for us, the experience was meaningful through their agency in the unfolding and collaborative process. For me the meaning resided in the nature of the process but the projects also fulfilled different roles and physical outcomes that were more central for others involved.
Building Movements focussed my growing interest in collaborative and emergent processes and systems that balance various levels of involvement and interest, as well as nurture the collective and social relations that are produced through working together. To better understand these interests, and to be able to share them with others in the project, I wanted to find out how the processes and experiences of working together could be evidenced. To do this I designed a documentation system that was understood as a fifth installation in the series, titled Collective Commons. It was built alongside the other four physical installations, emerging as the others did, through collaboration during the same time frame. The platform was conceived as accumulative and only able to come into existence through the multiple records and documents made or selected by the many individuals involved over the period they were making the other works. Where the other four installations in Building Movements were subject to the constraints to various organising bodies, Collective Commons evaded these through being immaterial.
The programming for Collective Commons was done by Cherie Davidson, a digital game designer who had responded to the on-line advertisement I posted seeking technical help. Together we discussed how to translate my ideas through her technical knowledge into a functioning and navigable web platform. In an email to her I explained that the platform should function as ‘an uninhabited common to be populated by the contributors.’ The title of the project, Collective Commons3 reflected that aspiration. The platform was conceived as a blank space where anyone involved or interested in the project could open a frame, or multiple frames. They could then independently upload images, text, notes, films, sound, links or sketches, described by captions and tags into their frame. Each of the participants had their own method for collecting this material; some were random, others photographed whatever was in front of them at specific intervals, documented significant instances or uploaded any material that happened to be produced in discussions, such as notes, sketches or emails. The common was designed to accrete beyond the duration of the project though continuing to expand as more contributors or more content from existing contributors was added.

The images and material within any of the frames can be flipped through forward or backward, displaying the observations from each participant non-chronologically. Visitors to the (web) site can perform a tag search and the images tagged with that word will flip to the front of each collection, as the rest of images visible on the field fade and recede visually. The tagged images are shown at full strength, demonstrating connections or links between various collaborators at through the stages of the projects. The frames that contain a particular collaborators images can not be seen individually, they are always next to at least one other frame. Each frame can be moved around in the field by the website viewer, meaning they can form deliberate or serendipitous adjacencies or collections based on their interest or point of view.

8.1 BUREAUCRACY

The site is still up and can be accessed at http://www.collectivecommons.net/
The Design Hub had opened less than a year before *Building Movements* took place, as a new multimillion-dollar facility to encourage innovative design research at RMIT. The building is monolithic, a rectilinear form caged on all sides by repeating glass discs. The interior is also patterned; circular shadows fall on the concrete floors, metal grids, perforated black circles and metal meshes clad the walls and ceiling. The building visually imprints itself on the inhabitant, the relentless optic vibrations of the surfaces seeming to be designed to produce 'apophenia'. The building maintains a rigid order through the restricted palette of regularly patterned materials and almost identical floor plan over seven floors.

While the Design Hub was promoted as enabling innovative creativity and design research but in the first year of its existence, the access, openness and experimentation required for this to occur, was very limited. *Building Movements* was initially proposed as a way of testing the authority of the Design Hub. This is an area of research observed by Danny Butt as a terrain with potential for an 'institutional critique of artistic research that makes these fields its material.' His view is that a 'generic set of operations'; property services, risk management, security, insurance and others, have produced a generalised research infrastructure across all disciplines. Butt points out that these entities have become the dominant governing structure of institutions and are largely impervious to research. He argues that the infrastructure does not ultimately support creative research but instead is beholden to external commercial partners, and other commercial concerns in general.

---

4 'Apophenia' or patternicity refers to a human tendency to see patterns as meaningful. Incidentally it is an early identifier of delusional ideation and schizophrenia. Sophie Fyfe, Claire Williams, Oliver J. Mason, and Graham J. Pickup, "Apophenia. Theory of Mind and Schizotypy: Perceiving Meaning and Intentionality in Randomness," *Cortex* 44, no. 10 (2008): 1316-1325.

As we worked, it became more and more clear the existing ‘research infrastructure’ imposed powerful and multi-directional restrictions that were not necessarily evident until they were directly confronted. As it was a brand new building, the Design Hub was still particularly subject to the external controls. Additionally, the building’s architect was still very invested in how the building appeared, regularly removing posters or other elements that he felt interfered with the design. The different management bodies in the university had overlapping areas of control, many of which converged in the Design Hub, making the bureaucracy very confusing to navigate. The project quickly became more complex than we expected, primarily as we had substantially underestimated the existing levels of infrastructure control. Although we were expecting this to some extent based on previous experiences of working in commercial spaces, comparatively those places had been relatively transparent about the balance of freedom and control for occupants. The institution revealed itself as much more conflicted, and so consequently repressed or disguised the controls.

Ostensibly the university supports creative innovation and freedom that it appears to not be able to abide on a bureaucratic level. Stavros Stavrides notes that in institutions the ‘power is first and foremost the power to decide.’ This was evident in the Design Hub where overlapping management systems reserved the power to decide almost every aspect of the project. Occupational Health and Safety were concerned about the location of the four installations in front of elevators on different floors. Although all these organisations theoretically supported the project, the conflicting and overlapping protocols and restrictions required intensive planning, negotiation and consideration in order to actually implement the works. Building Maintenance, and Occupational Health and Safety forbade any construction that caused dust in the building, meaning all drilling and sawing had to take place off-site. Additionally, we were informed that any inhabitable installations on site had follow general building code regulations, including egress from the elevators. There was to be no attachments other than tape or magnets to the interior of the building.

In public space, general rules appear to be addressed to users who have access to a specific place at specific hours of the day and under specific conditions (including discreet or straightforward surveillance). Stavros Stavrides explains how dominant institutions legitimise inequality, distinguishing between those who know and those who do not, between those who can take decisions and those who must execute them and between those who have specific rights and those who are deprived of them. Michel de Certeau and Stavrides both point out when the dominance of the systems becomes too repressive it forces those occupying the spaces to devise other ways to operate, producing new social relations which deviate from dominant models. The feedback loop between acts of control and reactive evasion of the control were evident were evident the "Building Movements" project.

At that time the Design Hub was only used by the staff, academics and graduate students who worked there. The building management and security would only agree to the building being publicly accessible for one evening as they wanted to deploy security if there were to be more than the average amount of people coming into the building. We had expected that visitors would be able to enter the building at any time, making the specifics of each installations something that would be stumbled upon. The restrictions to access meant it became more of a special ‘event’ than we had planned. The RMIT University Ethics Committee required that the audience be informed on arrival of what to expect on exiting the elevator at each installation, undoing any wonderment from encountering each installation without expectations. I had struck this same problem previously when trying to produce Consumed. Participants in both projects were understood by the Ethics Committee as passive and vulnerable subjects, rather than active participants able to interpret their environments and exercise common sense. This obstacle was managed in both projects through similarly inventive approaches that satisfied ethics and maintained the integrity of the projects. In this case, the visitors and occupants of the building were told by signs on each floor which lift to take if they wished to avoid any engagement, rather than describing what they would find if they took the alternative lifts.

As we worked, it became more and more clear the existing ‘research infrastructure’ imposed powerful and multi-directional restrictions that were not necessarily evident until they were directly confronted. As it was a brand new building, the Design Hub was still particularly subject to the external controls. Additionally, the building’s architect was still very invested in how the building appeared, regularly removing posters or other elements that he felt interfered with the design. The different management bodies in the university had overlapping areas of control, many of which converged in the Design Hub, making the bureaucracy very confusing to navigate. The project quickly became more complex than we expected, primarily as we had substantially underestimated the existing levels of infrastructure control. Although we were expecting this to some extent based on previous experiences of working in commercial spaces, comparatively those places had been relatively transparent about the balance of freedom and control for occupants. The institution revealed itself as much more conflicted, and so consequently repressed or disguised the controls.

Ostensibly the university supports creative innovation and freedom that it appears to not be able to abide on a bureaucratic level. Stavros Stavrides notes that in institutions the ‘power is first and foremost the power to decide.’ This was evident in the Design Hub where overlapping management systems reserved the power to decide almost every aspect of the project. Occupational Health and Safety were concerned about the location of the four installations in front of elevators on different floors. Although all these organisations theoretically supported the project, the conflicting and overlapping protocols and restrictions required intensive planning, negotiation and consideration in order to actually implement the works. Building Maintenance, and Occupational Health and Safety forbade any construction that caused dust in the building, meaning all drilling and sawing had to take place off-site. Additionally, we were informed that any inhabitable installations on site had follow general building code regulations, including egress from the elevators. There was to be no attachments other than tape or magnets to the interior of the building.

In public space, general rules appear to be addressed to users who have access to a specific place at specific hours of the day and under specific conditions (including discreet or straightforward surveillance). Stavros Stavrides explains how dominant institutions legitimise inequality, distinguishing between those who know and those who do not, between those who can take decisions and those who must execute them and between those who have specific rights and those who are deprived of them. Michel de Certeau and Stavrides both point out when the dominance of the systems becomes too repressive it forces those occupying the spaces to devise other ways to operate, producing new social relations which deviate from dominant models. The feedback loop between acts of control and reactive evasion of the control were evident were evident the "Building Movements" project.

At that time the Design Hub was only used by the staff, academics and graduate students who worked there. The building management and security would only agree to the building being publicly accessible for one evening as they wanted to deploy security if there were to be more than the average amount of people coming into the building. We had expected that visitors would be able to enter the building at any time, making the specifics of each installations something that would be stumbled upon. The restrictions to access meant it became more of a special ‘event’ than we had planned. The RMIT University Ethics Committee required that the audience be informed on arrival of what to expect on exiting the elevator at each installation, undoing any wonderment from encountering each installation without expectations. I had struck this same problem previously when trying to produce Consumed. Participants in both projects were understood by the Ethics Committee as passive and vulnerable subjects, rather than active participants able to interpret their environments and exercise common sense. This obstacle was managed in both projects through similarly inventive approaches that satisfied ethics and maintained the integrity of the projects. In this case, the visitors and occupants of the building were told by signs on each floor which lift to take if they wished to avoid any engagement, rather than describing what they would find if they took the alternative lifts.
The checks that the managers of the Design Hub put in place to better predict and overview the activities of the occupants, continually threatened to throttle the creative activity they were purporting to support and encourage. The desire of a controlling system to minimise risk to their property and revenue often results in limiting creativity. Stavrides describes how ‘urban enclaves’, malls, institutions and other public spaces, insist that the occupant abandons their general rights and instead conforms to ‘carefully planned system of human relations regulated by protocols of use’. He evokes de Certeau’s ‘tactician’ as able to take advantage of opportunities in time that open the fabric of control within these enclaves for inventive inhabitation. As we demanded access to the creative freedoms the building declared it offered, we uncovered escalating levels of control regulating our activity and behaviours, producing in turn various tactics of inventive resistance and evasion. The institution micro-cosmically reproduced the conflict in the methods of a creative city; where creative activity is corralled into the commercial production, the city must simultaneously repress creativity through overlays of control that enclose the openness. The hegemony of the systems in the institutional spaces has the same duelling effect with creative practices. The institution presents an aspiration to support creativity, but finds that this attitude is in direct conflict with its own overpowering compulsion to maintain control, avert risks, close openness and contain unpredictability.

The level of bureaucracy and conflicting information amounted to a substantially suppressed sense of creative freedom and the increased time spent in meetings, responding to emails and writing letters took us away from the creative work. These process became so constraining and convoluted that it was necessary to reframe the constraints as enabling. As the institution seeks to maintain familiar protocols and control it inadvertently instigates the inventive acts that operate to evade those same controls. We began planning how we could navigate the obstacles we knew of and evade the ones we speculated were about to appear. In this way we were able to come up with creative responses that both satisfied the requirements of all the restrictions while it maintained the integrity of the four installations and Collective Commons.

8.2 MAKING USE OF MISUNDERSTANDINGS, MISCOMMUNICATIONS AND MISTAKES

A desire to traverse projects and find concealed connections within bodies of work that changed or grew over extended time frames first occurred to me when I was presenting at the Practice Research Symposium. The candidates’ research interests are described in short abstracts on a poster with one image and then pinned up along the wall. The sheets did little to explain the depth and breadth of research, and could not capture the more minor interests or reveal ways that one project or practice could invisibly connect with another. A single image that encapsulates wider meaning is something we are familiar with through advertising and other media. One image is able to stand for a more complex idea as we understand the image as being associated with certain values, characteristics and attributes. A single image embedded with implied meaning is a marketing method that has been widely, and not always critically, adopted. In this case the candidates’ individual images create a larger picture of a cohesive research community that, in reality often does not provide much sense of community. This is similar to the problems that appeared in Picture Yourself where the exhibition images were also displayed in a line positioned at eye-height and were meant to construct an image of a complex community. With that project I tried to combat the sense of an image ‘standing in’ for a person by overlaying the portraits to provide four views instead of one. Even though there was a sense of their gesture, it still felt too reductive. I wondered as I looked at the wall in the Symposium if there was a way to accumulate more information and complexity through other forms of layering that could exchange a clear singular narrative for more a dialogical and connective mode of communication.
Chapter 8

The Practice Research Symposium occurs across several days, and at the time I am describing were not fully or centrally documented. With several presentations scheduled at any one time, occasional serendipitous connections between one PhD candidate’s interests and the less explicit aspects of another’s project could occur, but many of the overlapping interests were not ever identified. In the same way that Picture Yourself collated multiple images, I imagined that layering could incorporate more information than the single image and abstract without taking up more wall space. I wondered how the posters could include their previous presentations, older abstracts and panel conversations from earlier Symposiums, submerged or aborted lines of enquiry, references and other related interests. I imagined a more accumulative type of document could both track process and development for the researcher, but also construct networks of connections across various researchers beyond the more obvious categories of discipline, stream or supervisor. The interest in this was partly informed by the realisation of the loops discussed in Chapter Six, where I recognised my work was continuously folding back through itself, locating forgotten or overlooked elements that would then become essential to moving forward. The singular narrative is designed to be legible and convincing, transitioning through logical steps towards an outcome. My own processes rarely followed a clear trajectory, often looping back to discarded moments and incidental conversations in order to move forward. Building Movements presented an opportunity to work more consciously with how documentation can capture more complex and interconnected readings for both the individuals involved at the time and make them available for later re-readings of the work.

In his influential text “The Author as Producer” Walter Benjamin argues that any document of art is constructed through the historical and social relations that the recipient imposes on the work of art. The art work or the document refers to the original time but the meaning is not fixed and can only be produced through the perception of the viewer relative to how they understand the world they exist in, resulting in a change in the ‘collective apperception of reality in general.’ For Benjamin the past is not illuminating something for the future but needs to be made accessible to be experienced in the present; a non-linear and disjunctive understanding formed through ‘what has-been coming together ‘in a flash’ with the present to form a constellation.’ By incorporating multiple perspectives from the outset, rather than attempting to superimpose a narrative, means that any of the ‘authors’, not just the audience, can be confronted or surprised by an unexpected perception of work they thought they understood – suddenly ‘made strange’ by an unfamiliar presentation. This sense of strangeness appeared as the Collective Commons project developed in very different ways to how I had pre-conceptualised it, meaning what I thought I understood was made unfamiliar through the effects of other people and their processes.
The innate variety in the form and production of the work and the diverse perspectives, interests and experiences of all those involved, could have been united through just documenting the final event, which did indeed occur. While the Collective Common platform experienced some technical and function issues that caused some limitations, it did demonstrate the disjunction between the photographed event format, and the immediate complexity and unforeseen irruptions when the focus was on attempting to capture difference amongst the singularities involved. A professional photographer was hired to document the event and also the installations. These images are attractive and capture many idiosyncratic moments that occurred in and around the installations as well as their materials and forms. However, this form of image cannot capture the varied processes that went into making the installations, the often bewildering and always time consuming interactions with the bureaucracy, and the effects the constraints produced. It is unrecorded where different contributions came from, who was interested in which part and how they approached the work. The individuality of the students and their ability to be collectivised through the work exists now only as a list of credited names. Ultimately many of the commissioned documentation was added to Collective Commons which added yet another dimension, but within the context of the varied perspectives, those professional images become just another view.

Stavrides describes how commoning does not expand according to pre-existing patterns; it literally invents itself. The inherent inventiveness of commoning occurs through differences composing themselves and ‘opening new fields and new opportunities for the creation of a common world always in-the-making.’ The extent to which Collective Commons developed through misunderstandings was unexpected. In particular, one student misinterpreted the system and concluded he needed to create animated gifs in order to demonstrate change over time. This was quickly picked up by other students, and although it was not part of the original proposition, it became wide-spread and resulted in more levels of information being embedded than originally projected. It was an example of the massive disparity of perception and action that occurs across individuals and processes even within the same project. The miscommunications, misunderstandings and mistakes becoming new forms were a visible enactment of how the ‘composition takes place in the process of translation into a new language; into a language of common.”

The Building Movements project has been subsequently shaped, focused or interpreted through text and images that support the different research enquiries of those involved, however when looked at in conjunction with the Collective Commons website, the minor perspectives, connections or views that would have been lost in this reconstituting process are still available. What was initially overlooked can be navigated again, and new or forgotten connections (not necessarily evident or relevant at the time) can be unearthed. By allowing re-readings and new readings to continue to emerge the more minor variations are less likely to be overpowered by a singular narrative as both the minor and more dominant perspectives within a project can cooperatively make a work that is variable in meaning and intensity. The inclusion of the minor is a condition of mutuality, as the minor accepts differences and is open to variable readings. It does not need to impose a reading because it does not require external validation or verification. A less mutual relationship requires contracts, ethics procedures and external measures in order to protect and overall enforces the dominant narrative.

8.3 ETHICS OF OWNERSHIP

IN COLLABORATIVE PROJECTS

Building Movements has become pivotal in many of the participant’s research practices for a wide variety of reasons. Chris Cottrell, Scott Andrew Elliott, Pia Ednie-Brown and I saw the same project differently relative to our existing research practices. As described previously, the installations were developed initially through discussion between all of us based on Elliott and Cottrells’ exhaustive investigation of the building and their consequent sketch proposals for the intentions of each work. These proposals were further elaborated by students during the two-weeks of construction as the constraints and opportunities produced through varied skills and material experimentation of the students and the building’s management effected the processes.
Despite a sense of social creativity and coherence during the event and experience, the projects was many different things for the different people involved. For example, Cotterrell’s interest in air, atmospheres and temporary architecture influenced two of the projects; the inflatable space and the suspended black filaments describing the interior volume of the lift. Elliott’s practice blurs the line between installation art and architecture to provide new and curious readings of a space. His interests were more apparent in the other two installations which used similar materials to those already existing in the building, almost appearing part of the architecture. Ednie-Brown has written about the installations in Architectural Design25 in relation to pavilion architecture as a frontier for exploratory spatial experience and ‘radical pedagogies’.26

In terms of my own research, I looked for ways the documentation could contain the complexity of the disparate processes and interrelations within the four installation projects. I also felt it was important to explicitly acknowledge the skills and input and varied interests of the individual students, rather than treating the students just as a workforce. Returning to ideas that I had engaged with in Consumed and Picture Yourself, I sought ways the documentation processes could extend the duration of the project from inception, over the two weeks it was being built and the one night it was open, and on into the future. I believed this could allow for new encounters and experiences, once the temporary work was dismantled and for those who missed the single evening it was open to the public. The documentation processes in Consumed were part of the structure of the spatial system which engendered the work. The documentation made at Consumed captured what was occurring from multiple perspectives and felt back through the space at the time. The plan was to use footage as a ‘by-product’ of the event that could be transformed and re-utilised to make another work, a film with multiple narrations. With that project the documentation was made over the entire production period from multiple perspectives and with various technologies. In Picture Yourself the self-portraits, or self ‘documents’, made by the audience were the basis of the exhibition. The issues I had with documentation from working on Consumed, (discussed in Chapter four) and Picture Yourself, (discussed in Chapter six) were still preoccupying me. It was a field of concern in my own work that I kept returning to; namely how documentation could dismantle a singular, and controlling, view by proposing capture systems of relational assemblages occurring as the work unfolded, rather than retrospectively or at resolution.

The aspiration for collaborations is usually a form of equal and balanced input and reward. The documentation of collaborative projects then enforces this narrative in preference to developing how other more complex relations between collaborators can be made apparent. The documentation is often a pre-presumed add-on requiring a photographer to turn up and video or shoot the event. The prevalence of this method possibly reflects a failure of imagination, where one person’s perspective is assumed to be universal, or at least able to be representative. It is also probably influenced by the prevailing aesthetic styles that infiltrate and influence our subconsciousness. Without consciously reflecting on the documentation, the approach can inadvertently (or possibly overtly) legitimise disguised hierarchies, power dynamics or exploitation that are often latent in collaborations. Alternate documentation tactics might allow collaborators to expose and even dismantle the hidden locus of power, and instead encourage and acknowledge systems that support variable levels of usefulness, engagement and contribution from various people involved, including the audience. Thinking of documentation as primarily a representation of the outcome, strips out complexity or the multiplicity of views. When duration is included in the documentation it still often privileges an idealised narrative. (See Section 4.4 for more detail and also examples). Other emphasis in the documentation approach might begin to make the complexity inherent in these situations more familiar and open to examination, producing a more general willingness to tolerate differences to a projected ideal and to be involved in the interrelations, negotiations and social processes that occur when working together.

As approaches to documentation became more central within my work I sought out other practices that shared this concern. Most resonant is SenseLab27 who describe themselves as ‘a laboratory for thought in motion,’ and their proposition for the ‘anarchive’. The SenseLab is interested in moving attention away from both outcomes and individuals per se, and reorienting toward the unfolding ‘event’. SenseLab’s idea of the ‘anarchive’ is somewhat like Collective Commons, in that it seeks ways to document how creative work emerges during and after the project, or ‘event’.

24 In relation to pavilion architecture as a frontier for exploratory spatial experience and ‘radical pedagogies’.25


26 Although Consumed used a closed circuit TV system to film from several different perspectives, it was operating differently to surveillance as the artists could relocate or block the cameras.

27 http://senselabsca/wp2/about/
At the time of making Collective Commons, the anarchive seemed to be a vague and undeveloped proposition. It is described on the SenseLab website as ‘repertory of traces of collaborative research-creation events. The traces are not inert, but are carriers of potential. They can be reactivated, and their reactivation helps trigger a new event which continues the creative process from which they came, but in a new iteration.28 How this could physically manifest remained (necessarily) vague, although recently Erin Manning did posit that an anarchive could be made up of ‘fabulations’29 developed through conversations that blend observations and imaginative views shared by the participants after the event. In this way fact and fiction converge and new possibilities unfold through a ‘multi-logue’ forming a layered ‘future history’ of an event. In other SenseLab events they have developed additive websites that offer multiple trajectories mostly through text based reflections. These sites are often quite difficult to navigate and give the reader the sense of overhearing snippets of disembodied conversation. The structure of Collective Commons as additive and open conceptually aligns with SenseLab’s desire for creative research to be a ‘process-making engine’.30 Their interest is in working with and developing processes that are repeatedly taking effect, and able to feed forward into new iterations.

Clare Doherty and Bianca Hester are two others that include the community of voices that contribute to the event that is their work, by developing documentation strategies that evolve over the time of the event. Doherty was the producer of Sanctum32 in Bristol in 2012. The documentation formed through encouraging visitors to upload drawings, film, interviews, images and text to a website of their experience at the event. This made for a dynamic and multi-perspectival document that was reflective of the desire of the event to be a ‘platform of connectivity’.32 The existing site largely supports the narrative by Claire Doherty33 and Theaster Gates,34 that Sanctum was universally successful, communitarian and enchanting, which of course it may well have been. My experience with the beautiful film made by Louis Mitchell (Section 4.4) at Miso and Ghostpatrol’s event during Consumed lead me to wonder if Sanctum’s document was not a similar; a slightly romanticised vision that smoothed out any complexity or conflict, delivering an easily ingested version that induces wistful regret in those who missed the live event. Speaking at the Wheeler Centre in 2016, Doherty acknowledged the complexity of the event that was not evident at all in the film (which included an interview with Theaster Gates) or its documentation (the website has since been taken down, leaving only more formal reviews of the event). Doherty said that although Sanctum was ‘an extraordinary thing,’ it was not easy, commenting that there were moments of ‘extreme discord’ throughout the production process and the actual event.35 She goes on to say that these moments were actually very important in bringing about understanding of difference, but these moments and interactions are not evident in any of the official documentation they are only experienced by those that come into direct contact with those moments or were involved in the production of the project.

Hester takes a different approach. For her 2011 project A world fully accessible by no living being,36 Bianca Hester constructed a wall from cinder blocks in the public forecourt of Federation Square. The wall was solid and static but energised activities around the city and in relation to itself. A broadsheet was made available at the wall, and described events that would, or maybe just could, occur off-site, as well as some that would happen at the wall. The broadsheet continues to exist online today as a document of the work, but at the time was more like a guide book pointing to possibilities and showing interesting routes that could be taken. Although the events that did take place were photographed, there were others, where the artefact and the action both produced and also described the activity. For example each day fallen sticks were picked up around the city daily and brought back to the wall, the pile of sticks then were the documentation of the activity of collecting sticks. Hester’s daily journal on the project website37 describes the events occurring off-site and on-site mostly through images, but sometimes she includes notes of her observations, the inconsistencies and the developments as the project unfolded over the two weeks.

Hester and Doherty both capture things that occurred as the event unfolded over time in several mediums, including text. The documentation system for Sanctum was focussed on gathering views from the audience and finding ways to be available to remote audiences. Doherty explained she is always conscious of the audience that cannot attend and the documentation for Sanctum provided ample subjective and objective information for them to relate to the project. Similar to many artists that return to themes or motifs that preoccupy them, objects, documents and activities from one work, resurface in Hester’s future work, meaning her past

---

30 http://senselab.ca/wp2/immediations/anarchiving/anarchive-concise-definition/SenseLab usually refer to or creative research as research-creation.
33 Claire Doherty writing on Sanctum on the Situation blog http://www.situations.org.uk/read-claire-dohertys-essay-on-sanctum/
34 Theaster Gates discussing Sanctum, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tJBIiYLNNKY
35 Claire Doherty, ‘Art at Large.
36 http://aworldfullyaccessiblebynolivingbeing.blogspot.com.au
work is physically and materially still activating future works and processes. What is different is the way her recurring motifs – cement block walls, blue hoops, bundles of sticks – activate or regulate engagement of the new work, and also function as physical documents connecting through time; they contemporaneously reference both the past and potential future works. Spiros Panigirakis describes how in Hester’s work ‘the technology used to document the work becomes another actor amongst the staged flux of bodies, castings and construction.’ From this perspective, documents from an earlier work become actors activating future work. Hester documents what the work becomes very subjectively. Her projects encourage social engagement and her documentation reflect her interest in how the audience participates with the activating qualities of her work, and how this in turn affects the work.

Many of the existing approaches to documenting time-based work undoes the original democratic impulses that initiated the work in the first place. Instead, contemporary documentation often functions to reinstate the historical cultural, social and geographical privileges associated with art. The power that the authentic art object used to hold in traditional museology through its uniqueness and value, is shifted wholesale onto the authentic art event. As the event is fleeting, the document is all that remains. Through manipulating how the event it is documented, viewers are made keenly aware of what they have missed, enforcing the traditional value of art predicated on perceived exclusivity and inaccessibility. Despite our familiarity with the power of photography and editing, this form of documentation can still work to suspend our disbelief and maintain authority over what occurred through implying objectivity and an aesthetic, easily consumed, narrative. Future viewers largely cannot contest the language or narrative of the visual document, as it is the only accessible and legitimate evidence of the original event that remains. The document is able to be controlled, filtered and managed in a way that the subjective, chaotic and variable experience of social creative work cannot be. Documentation becomes a hidden site of a power, or of institutional control over collaborative projects that unfold over time, able to undermine, submerge or filter any conflicting views or experiences in the collective and open work. The curators can become marketers or even the unacknowledged producers of conceptually new work, if the documentation style and form, and the reasons and means of its dissemination, perform different roles from the processes that made the work or were important in the work. With documentation and editing the messy processes can be reformatted into clear outcomes, singular ownership, brand enhancement and accompanying metrics. Collective Commons was made through an emergent process that was similar to the work it was documenting, appearing in the same time frame as the installations were being made. Rather than participants seeing what one person thought had occurred, it showed them what they all thought was occurring. My interest in finding how documentation could include, rather than strip out, the social, spatial and temporal complexity of working in common, crystallised more with each project I undertook.

38 Spiros Panigirakis, ‘It’s All Wall: A Recent History of the Wall in Contemporary Art Practice,’ UN Magazine 6, no. 1 (2012).

8.5 MAKING IN THE MINOR

In his short essay “Notes Towards a Minor Art Practice,” Simon O’Sullivan extends on Deleuze and Guattari’s conception of the minor applied to literature, to a way of thinking about certain forms of creative practice. O’Sullivan points out that the three signifiers delineated by Deleuze and Guattari as the ‘minor within literature,’ can also be used to identify what a minor art practice might be. The first signifier is that a minor practice is always in a process of becoming through finding ways to be in the world that are different, but still within the existing culture. The second signifier is the minor is always collective in that it induces unfolding collaborations and communities as it ’summons its audience forth.’ The third signifier is that the minor is political, not through an oppositional critique of the dominant powers, but because of a creativity that produces ‘new lines of causality and new pathways of experimentation.’

O’Sullivan’s description of the minor applied to creative practice is constructed as an oblique view that brings the two apparently disconnected elements, minor and creative practice, together. This technique can also be used with commoning as way of seeing past the protean characteristics of commoning that distract the observer from its underlying values and forms as a practice. Both commoning and the minor can only be described contingent to the form of the system that they exist within. A minor creative practice is similar to the minor within any major discipline, it is the undercurrent that ‘can only exist with the major but is its opposite in every respect.’ In his paper O’Sullivan never refers explicitly to commoning, however when his analysis of creative practice is read from a commoning perspective it is evident there are strong correlations between the minor and commoning that open exploration of both in relation to creative practice.

The connections between commoning and the minor are drawn in relation to pedagogy by Professor Tim Ingold in his 2017 text, Anthropology and Education. Ingold describes how in contrast to the major modes of thinking which use deduction to move rationally from facts to theories or in-duction to work in reverse, from theories to facts. The minor, uses processes of ex-duction, ‘following paths of continuous variance’. The minor does not propose solutions or conclusions, but instead can ‘afford openings’. He describes this process as one of patient experimentation requiring time and openness and a willingness to follow the path to where it may lead:

> It is not so iterative and itinerant; a journey undertaken rather than a cycle of returns on a fixed point. It works more by intuition than by reason; opening from within rather than penetrating from without. It is prospective rather than retroactive improvisatory rather than prescriptive, speculative rather than confirmatory, the patience of experimentation in this sense lies in the dynamics of attention and in the endurance of waiting. We have to allow things to come into presence in their own time: they cannot be forced.

In Collective Commons the minor emerged not through an intentional or applied concept, but because that was the nature of the project; it had no hierarchy or chronological order. Every time the platform is visited, the arrangement and images are different. This means that it resists the most obvious tropes of major narratives and instead is literally created through a process of becoming, ‘generating new forms through a manipulation of those already in place.’

Deleuze and Guattari’s idea of the minor indicates a way around the increasing tendency for art to be seen ‘instrumental’. When creative practice is instrumentalised it can become a tool of colonisation for neoliberal orders. A minor practice may appear indiscernible from other practices operating outside of the art system, and consequently be vulnerable to enclosure or exploitation. The minor resists becoming instrumental in capitalism’s tendency to commoditise new forms of creative practice, as it will precisely stammer and stutter the commodity form, disassembling those already existing forms of capital, and indeed moving beyond the latter’s very logic. This aligns minor art with Deleuze and Guattari’s concept of the minor in literature as political through its ability to function within dominant structures without engaging the prevailing values.

---

42 O’Sullivan, “Notes Towards a Minor.”
44 Ibid., 41.
45 Ibid.
46 O’Sullivan, “Notes Towards a Minor.”
47 http://www.ahrc.ac.uk/documents/publication.s/cultural-value-project-final-report/p.26
48 O’Sullivan, “Notes Towards a Minor.”
Minor creative practices do not seek to dismantle the dominant infrastructure of the majority, but instead manipulate or reform existing conditions to create or expose new ways of being in the world. O'Sullivan observes that in creative practices political activity manifests as a ‘move from critique to creativity, or in fact the location of critique from within creativity’. For him, the political quality of minor creative practices is a ‘...form of cultural production from within a dominant culture; a kind of “becoming a stranger” in one’s own tongue.’\(^{49}\) O’Sullivan concurs with Hardt and Negri, that the production of new forms of modern life are continually being ‘captured’ by apparatus of control and classification.\(^{50}\) The notion of being a ‘stranger in one’s own tongue’ means a shift from a previous order and alignment with new measures, creative practices are reconfigured or re-framed to have new meaning. Through this the minor develops within the existing conditions – such as using commercial conditions as armature for alternate relations and creative activity.

O’Sullivan reminds the reader of Deleuze’s statement ‘difference between minorities and majorities isn’t their size. A minority may be bigger than a majority. What defines majority is a model you have to conform to ... A minority, on the other hand, has no model, it’s a becoming, a process’.\(^{51}\) The minor is always in a state of becoming; becoming minor by producing movement within the major, generating new forms from what is already in place. The social, urban and economic conditions that a minor creative practice inhabits are continually applying pressures to transform the minor to major, or subsume minor values by adopting them for the extension of the major’s values. This process is evident every time dominant culture repackages individuality as mass fashion, or real estate interests take over ‘parafunctional’ space. Dominant forces exert pressure on minor practices to conform to their economic value system as, until they conform, the only value of minor practice to the dominant economic structures is as an exploratory tool of assessment for potential growth within an uncharted territory. The social or creative value remains unmeasured and unvalued beyond its ability to eventually conform or be utilised by existing economic structures.

The activities of the minor are inherently political, however (similarly to commoning) the minor is a politicised activity that is not defined by dissent, but by the creative and inventive production of new affirmative subjectivities. This proposes that the minor (and by inference commoning though sharing similar processes) offers ways to interrupt by inverting the ontological order. Instead of the major enforcing the forms of life, the major is seen as following, and so terminally reactive, not fundamentally creative. O’Sullivan concludes that for minor creative practice, its future is to draw ‘forth from its audience a subjectivity still-to-come.’\(^{52}\) The ‘stuttering’ collectives – trying to invent new ways of producing life – have that in common.

O’Sullivan uses the example of feminism as minor practice in that it deterritorialises a more major and dominant language that has structured social and cultural systems. Feminism is a distributed and non-cohesive movement accreting by the actions of very varied contributors to change, from highly organised to very disorganised, personal to social. For J.K. Gibson-Graham, feminism functions as model for conceiving how transformation can occur through widely different and disparate activities. Separated movements and eruptions are eventually connected and linked ‘through processes of adaption, translation and re-interpretation.’\(^{53}\) With the minor this final step is not essential to the development, value or validity of the minor practices that precede it, but may indicate how the minor, or minor approaches could also become connected and challenge broader society.

\(^{49}\) This description resonates with J.K. Gibson Gilberts understanding of dislocations that make space for in the dominant cultural and economic systems for new approaches to emerge. This is discussed in more detail in Section 5.0 J.K. Gibson- Graham, Post Capitalist Politic (Minneapolis: First University of Minnesota Press, 2006), xxxiv.

\(^{50}\) Ibid

\(^{51}\) O’Sullivan, “Notes towards a Minor.”

\(^{52}\) Ibid

An active approach to collectivising disparate minor activities, or ‘gestures’, is agitated for by Erin Manning in ‘The Minor Gesture’. Manning consistently positions her work and practice as liminal and opening to new forms, meaning her approach resonates with the minor. Manning works within an academic institution and describes how minor creative work is difficult for institutions to incorporate as ‘new forms of knowledge require new forms of evaluation, and even more so, new ways of valuing the work we do.’ For Manning working in the minor within institutions is challenging because it is ‘difficult to value that which has little perceptible form, that which has not yet quite been invented, let alone defined.’ Manning extends Guattari and Deleuze ideas in an effort to create a ‘field of resonance’ for thinking and making work in the minor. For her, the minor is “temporary forms of life traveling across the everyday, making untimely existing political structures, activating new modes of perception, inventing languages that speak in the interstices of major tongues.” Her discussion develops how disparate minor events and activities can be constellated through locating an underlying value system and therefore become more visible and acceptable to entities such as institutions.

The minor confounds institutions through its unrecognisable forms and relations and its insistence on remaining in a process of becoming. Whereas the major seeks to shore up our understanding and points to the most solid path for moving confidently forward, the minor registers that we are on unstable ground and the path needs to be picked out of the variances opening up before us. Moten and Harney use the term ‘undercommons’ as the antithesis of understanding, a way of resisting the kind of complacency that inoculates against the unknown. Ingold elaborates on their view, explaining ‘it is in the insecurity of undercommoning, and not the security of understanding, that we truly open to one another and to the world.’ To stay with the minor the insecurity has to be coupled with a powerful instinct to keep prospecting for the path. A conflicted experience of being both lost and at home (reflecting the sense the ‘becoming a stranger in ones own tongue’ that O’Sullivan describes) was a consistent experience within this research.

Collective Commons tried to find a system for minor and dissonant narratives to remain in the documentation of the event. Collective Commons encapsulates the concept of minor in creative practice as it described a form of cultural production in opposition to the dominant forms of documentation. The platform develops through collaboration and always remaining open, meaning the entire work is still technically in a process of becoming. As a minor project it moved beyond the logic of the dominant form in ways that the physical and event installations, more major works, could not.

In this research, a minor approach was not a choice, but the result of an orientation toward approaches and interests riddled with uncertainty but combined with (a fairly unfounded but still persistent) belief in my own instinctual way of working. Identifying my work as minor, yet being required to transcribe the value of the work within the ‘major,’ (a university institution) is a fraught activity. Commoning is also similarly confounding to bureaucratic frameworks, as the ethics and values that motivate it do not conform to the logics of institutions, governments or corporations. Working in the minor and then comprehending it in terms of commoning allowed the subtler qualities of each to be magnified and made clear to me. Together, commoning and the minor demonstrate in various ways how elusive and mutable processes can persist in the face of negating or controlling forces and can navigate the major and dominant frameworks. Additionally, they endure without being ontologically delimited only by opposing the dominant frameworks or becoming pined to the stable foundations of certainty that are preferred by the major.
A movement of commoning through Interior design in the reconfiguration and domestic spaces for cohabitation as an interior designer, mother and urban dweller – North Fitzroy House

CHAPTER 9

Story 8: When I was about five or six my family moved back from England where we had been living. My mother saved the large wooden crate that had been used to ship our car and put it behind the shed in the back yard. She cut a door with a latch and a small window with a shutter on hinges in its wall. A second smaller crate rested on the roof, open on one side but suggesting a second story, an attic or annex. As a cubby house, the crate was very rudimentary, but it was the unfinished quality that I loved. My tiny house possessed a magical power of being able to become anything I wanted it to be. I painted on the walls and moved around bits of broken furniture, nailed up scraps of fabric and laid out pebbles and shells, arranging and rearranging the elements as I enacted various stories. The rough timber walls would transform as I played, made diaphanous by the stories unfolding, and the props that enriched the narratives.

9.0 DREAM HOUSE

The house I live in now was built in the early 20th century, but was extended twice in the forty years proceeding, once out the front and once towards the back, making it a peculiar hybrid of eras and uses. The house is accommodating and generous in its nature and the many adaptations of its spaces are emblematic of its character. I have a relationship with this house that I see as bi-directional. It is the first house I have owned, and buying it, then later managing to keep it in unlikely circumstances has taken enormous effort, but also luck. It is more precious to me for having almost lost it, and I am aware the alignments that enabled me to keep it would probably not occur again. The house anchors us in a community that cares for us and it allows us to be hospitable and to share things we might otherwise be anxious about. This is the home my children will look back on, where their childhood memories will be housed. It is the first I have lived in for more than a year or two as an adult and knowing we can't be told to leave at any moment has altered the way we live more than I had expected it would. The house and I look after each other, supporting and adapting in order to fit together as situations change, things move or deteriorate, and time passes.

The front part of the house had long ago been a doctor’s surgery but in the eighties an artist, an Italian oil painter, lived here and took down all the walls to make an open art studio for himself. When we bought the house, the studio area was so full of canvases leaning on the walls that we were surprised by tiny glittering lead light windows hidden behind them. The artist had worked there for decades and was reluctant to leave, but his marriage had ended and the sale forced. We used the studio as a living room and a playroom. I kept a bench in the corner where I would prepare for teaching or make the figurative sculptures I sometimes exhibited.2

After several years my circumstances changed. My husband moved out and was pressing to sell the house, but my children and I wanted to stay in the neighbourhood and house that we were at home in. To stay, I needed to find a way to take over the mortgage and buy his share from him. I began working for an architect as an interior designer and kept casually teaching at RMIT. I started an art school in the front space with my sister, Madeleine Griffith, who also had three young children. We installed old glass doors to screen off a corner as an office, bought old school chairs and built tables and a website.3 The space was also available for other organisations that we were interested in. Garland magazine4 launched there and other music and art groups held performances and exhibitions. The name we gave the school, Assembly Rooms, referred to our hope that would become a space of assembly, conducive to sharing ideas and meeting people through creative work.
I had help with the rest of the house, from travellers who would come and stay with us. They would contact me through a website\footnote{https://www.helpx.net/} that connected people able to provide board and food in exchange for help with whatever was needed. Often the initial two-week period would extend; Jo came from Scotland and stayed for half a year before moving on to New Zealand, Annabelle and Aurelia, identical twins from France, lived with us for five months and then continued to return each time they passed through town. These people brought the world into our house and their enthusiasm for being in Australia was contagious.

A few years later when I began a full time position teaching at RMIT University, I was no longer able to put time into the Assembly Rooms. As well, our family had changed again and my partner and his two youngest children, slightly older than mine, were moving in. John and I used the large open studio as a bedroom and the two youngest boys continued sharing their room and our daughters now shared as well. John’s son had his own room although his older brother, a young adult, would stay in there too when he came over. I was still trying to buy the house and we realised we had to look for ways to cover part of the mortgage, and to convince the bank to give me the loan. The art school had already allowed me to imagine the house as more than just our private home. John is a builder and we realised with his skills we could turn the front studio where the art school had been into a two-bedroom apartment to rent out.

Fig 9.1 Students working in the Assembly Room. Image credits: Emma Byrnes.

Fig 9.3 Floor plan; before and after the renovation.
The apartment, including the plumbing and electricity, a kitchen, bathroom and laundry, was built for less than $11,000. We constructed it over three months at night and on the weekends. Almost nothing we used was new as we found discarded, but often barely used materials, cabinetry and appliances through friends and at building sites. Riding home, I would stop to pull the brass handles off a desk for the kitchen cupboards or unscrew taps from sinks left out with the bins on the nature strip. A friend was getting rid of an antique sideboard that we incorporated into the kitchen joinery. By adding timber strips to the pair of narrow Deco glass hall way doors, we made them wide enough for each bedroom, matching the other doors already in the space. To bring light into the bathroom we had the existing tiny leaded and bevelled glass windows replicated to match the ones that sparkle in three other walls. We initially built a loft over the bathroom thinking it could be a storage space for the second bedroom, but when the tenants moved they asked us to add a rail and ladder so mattress could fit on the platform, tucked out of the way and leaving the floor space open. Rearranging the floor plan of the house in this way meant our family of seven could stay where we were, and three more could be accommodated. Most nights the house now holds ten people, more than twice the inhabitants of a few years ago.
However, the new apartment meant we had lost half of our previous living space and we realised we needed to find more room for our five children. The previous year, Loren (see story 5) had built a loft platform for my (then) ten-year-old daughter’s bed and bookshelves. The tiny room had very high ceilings, so the platform extended from one side to the other, doubling half the floor space. Balcony railing ran along the front, keeping her from falling out but still leaving it open and light. Loren invited my daughter to help in the whole process; they discussed and designed it together and she went to his workshop to help with the sanding and varnishing. The little staircase leading up to a private platform is enchanting, often exacting pleas for one just the same from her friends when they visit (fig 9.4).
Shortly after we installed my daughter’s loft, my middle child expressed a desire for some space of his own, a spot in his shared room where he could keep his treasures and cards laid out and retreat from his siblings when he wanted to. John and I attached ply-wood walls to his bunk bed, adding a solid platform in place of the top bed and carpeting it with a bright patchwork of sample squares a sales person had left at my work in the architects’ office. The ply walls have three small windows cut out and a scalloped edge around the top; a cross between a castle and a cloud (fig 9.5).
John’s daughter also needed a space of her own as my daughters’ Balcony Bed was too small for two. By moving the washing machine into an existing cupboard and cutting out one of the kitchen cupboards to house the freezer, we realised we could turn the laundry as a bedroom (fig 9.6). She had told us her dreams of a little place to read and to keep her favourite books, sky blue paint and a wall she could write on. Without the sinks and appliances, the laundry was a little larger than we had imagined, but still not big enough for a bed, a desk and her clothes. The ceiling was lower in this room compared to the rest of the house, so we designed and built a different platform, this time supported by big drawers at one end for all her belongings and a hidden reading area and bookshelf under the other end. Three steps take her up to her bed. Leaks and holes had ruined the timber floor, so we bought a carpet remnant and thick underlay, making it softer and quieter than the rest of the house. The two girls share their rooms between them, each preferred for certain activities. Beneath the bed, on jungle patterned pillows leaning against the sky blue wall she had longed for, both girls curl up and read, feeling that they are in the centre of the house but also tucked away in their own private world. The same idea was also adapted for the eldest boy in his equally small bedroom. The base of his loft holds a large drawer that pulls out to be a bed made up for his adult brother when he visits (fig 9.10). Everyone has a sense of their own space, but not so much that we do not spend most of our time together.

The house is not renovated and the bathroom and kitchen are relics from the forties, the walls shed tiles and the plumbing is sensitive. Most of the windows are stuck open or shut, the roof leaks and the floor buckles as the massive ginkgo tree growing less than a meter from back wall burrows and heaves its roots below. On every side, apartments and extensions overlook our yard, but the minuscule forest of trees I planted is beginning to make dense, green caves around a small grassy mound. The dogs and cats wander through the undergrowth and rest on the cool, damp soil when it is hot. A hammock is half hidden in the leafiest corner and platforms to perch on are nailed into the tree above.

Almost twenty years after leaving New York, I am still making and remaking my home with others. I realised through this house that for me, interior design is the opportunity to occupy and implement spaces that allow for dreaming, however it is a very different kind of dream to what is usually seen in glossy magazines on interiors. Similarly inventive approaches are used in this home to those that I developed through the ‘affective necessary labour’ of transforming a raw industrial space in New York into something that were conducive to producing other forms of life. These are not dreams of a finished or refined house, predicated on calculating resale value or speculating on the real estate market. Rather, this way of dreaming seeks ways domestic space can be parafunctional; a device for dreaming not in the interstitial spaces left by urban planning or gentrification, but camouflaged in suburbia.

---

9.1 HOUSING FUTURES

In Australia, real estate has been foremost method of wealth creation over the last few generations. As all land near the city is valuable every building is subject to privatisation or financial driven developments. Alternate models of living are more entrenched in other cultures, even western European ones. The Bangruppen model, (meaning "building group") from Germany is co-developed by collectives as multifamily buildings with private living areas as well as shared spaces. They usually incorporate various sized dwellings and economic levels. The escalating cost of housing in Australia has lead to variations on this model beginning to appear in Australia. The Property Collective" in Melbourne started with a shared building for their own friends and family but have since continued to bring like minded people together to purchase and develop single house blocks that can be converted into a series of individual town houses. The architects behind the ‘Nightingale model’, although concerned with more than just affordability, implement a similar concept.3 This is a collective of architects who have a shared philosophy for housing that is socially, financially and environmentally sustainable. They specifically seek to offer an alternative to the usual development approaches that primarily wish to maximise returns and are trying to redefine what it means to live in an apartment community in Australia.

Their first building, ‘The Commons’ constructed in 2007, functioned as a prototype by which they developed many of their ideas. The collective sees this as a model that can be scaled up and also easily replicated in other cities. A review of the model in Architecture AU concludes that by ‘engaging with considerations typically seen as outside the purview of the discipline, though, for the lives of its residents it has already proven to be transformative.’ The real estate agent involved in the sale of the site to Nightingale, explained how their model initially confounded him, illustrating the limits of commercial frameworks as the single measure for value. ‘It had no car parking, no air conditioning. I just couldn’t understand the product because I had to compare it to others.’5 Attitudes like his are changing as the level of interest all the Nightingale projects means the estate industry is forced to recognise there are other facilities that are more important than car parking to many inhabitants. Nightingale are currently developing an entire street in Brunswick, Melbourne, as a precinct that is able to also utilise the street space and other activities that need larger spaces such as support rainwater harvesting and food production. The council is allowing them to test run this proposition in the existing neighbourhood by using the street as a temporary park.

[Fig 9.11 The Commons by the Nightingale Group. Occupants in the shared roof garden. Image: Diana Snape.]
An existing interest in co-housing and housing collectives such as Nightingale and Bangruppen, was the basis for a studio I ran at RMIT University to explore further democratic, affordable, sustainable and community-encouraging homes. I taught this studio along with an old friend, Loren Dalgano Lockwood (Loren had built the first loft for me in my daughter’s room and is also mentioned in Story five). Loren has spent time managing humanitarian shelter programs and assisting in research and the development of materials, manuals and training programs in countries struck by disasters. When I first meet him, I was in high school and he was living in squat he had built up with friends to make art and hold performances in the old barracks in Canberra. I can see now that for both of us, our ideologies and interest in other ways of living and the housing that supports it, had been initially forged through similar lived experiences; physically transforming cheap, large, non residential spaces for social living and making creative work along with others.

In the studio we ran together, the students were introduced to a range of approaches in a series of lectures from proponents of alternative housing models; including inhabitants of the ‘Moora Moora’ cooperative living housing collective outside of Daylesford, and Rachel Goldlust, a Melbourne based academic and founding member of ‘Earthship Australia’. Their views and experiences of housing and community were radically different to those of this particular student group, who were all from very conventional or suburban areas of Melbourne or Asia. Their very limited knowledge or contact with alternative ways of living is evidence of how invisible other ways of living are rendered by dominant culture, even for those studying spatial and interior design. The students also visited ‘The Commons’ by the Nightingale collective and various other co-operative living communities in Melbourne.

Visiting and hearing first hand about alternate ways of living had a profound effect on the students existing conceptions of what is necessary for making a home and a community. Pairing the students with a friend of Loren’s or mine, who would be their ‘client’ for the project extended their comprehension. Before meeting and interviewing their client the students discussed the potential sensitivities within the dynamic and practiced their interviews together, ensuring they approached their client with respect. The clients were all people who often find traditional home owning in Australia either impossible or not satisfactory for their needs as they did not fit into the more widely served demographics; they were on low income, volunteers, artists, elderly, immobile in some way, single people, single parent families, recent immigrants, carers or blended families that vary in size in different periods.

A commoning perspective shifts inhabitants from conceiving space as mostly private to largely shared. This immediately relocates many activities back into the public domain and has the effect of making visible plurality and difference within communities. It demonstrates and encourages a willingness to be open and an ability to adapt, and to negotiate, difference. To introduce this attitude through spatial design we asked the students to invert the traditional suburban housing ratios of 20 percent public space to 80 percent private space. Through their research and interviews the students identified other problems within current housing and community models and began to develop their own approaches for infilling existing sites.

The site the students were given to locate their project was selected because of its parafunctional characteristics (fig 9.11). Situated behind a dance theatre in Carlton close to the centre of Melbourne, the block can only be accessed by a lane way and has no street frontage at all. This lends the site a curious atmosphere similar to being in a walled or secret garden. It feels it is from another time, perhaps when empty blocks piled with detritus and waiting to be reconfigured in various ways were more available, laden with possibility but not necessarily ones that are familiar. On the site there are several ramshackle tin sheds. One is inhabited by a friend who is slowly reconfiguring it into a home and music studio, relying entirely on solar power, a wood stove for heating and cooking, and a single cold tap. Along with his friend he bought the block with, he has plans to build and sell additional housing to finance their own homes and workspaces and they were interested in hearing what the students might come up with for the site.
In response to the scale and location of the site, many of the students employed the philosophies and precedents of the ‘tiny house movement’ that creates low impact, affordable and very small scale housing for individuals and collectives. Along with producing a design for their clients, they had to work with each other to situate the design in the site and utilise and program the shared space, producing an overall scheme. The students’ projects were presented to the owners of the site and also to their own clients, who reported that through the interview process they had learnt more about what was important to them in a home and how they would like to live. The design responses helped them visualise broader alternatives to what is traditionally offered. The owners of the site began to think about their future development in terms other than purely pragmatic and financial, considering more consciously passive building design and shared green space.

The theoretical collective, The Uncertain Commons, speak of how the practices of speculation have shaped our world. In Australia speculation has been heavily focused on the housing market. Uncertain Commons explain how speculation essentially lassos the future, be it financial or conceptual, and draws it into the present. For them this makes speculation ‘a modern apparatus for erasing the future by realising it as the eternal present.’ They differentiate dreaming from speculation, describing how dreaming ‘lets the present be formed by the futures of the past, to allow the present to be affected by what could have been yet never was and might one day still be’. The ways we live need to be redeemed from speculation by the market. This could happen in a multiplicity of ways, some that we know of, and some that we have not yet found. Interior design practice can occupy a nexus where it can both make the spaces that enable other forms of dreaming, or create dreams that lead to other ways of inhabiting space. However, it is more frequently used to ‘speculate on the future’ enforcing on the future the frameworks that are shaping today. Through other ways of working with interiors; thinking of them, making them, teaching them, inhabiting them, the future interiors, the ones we will make and that will make us, can be conceived of differently.

Parafunctional space activates a resonance between the form of the space and the relations of the inhabitants, and back and forth in reverberation, transforming both through interrelation with the other. The spatial and social conditions that are created through a disposition towards commoning find values outside those entrained by a real estate market. In turn, a disposition towards commoning can be developed through spatial experiences that lie outside of mainstream interior and community arrangements. Design study asks students to find ways to imagine something new, essentially to shift between a concrete and haptic reality and one that is visualised and represented. Fred Moten notices how for children, a ‘toy box’ is like a ‘tool box’, in that the toys are devices that encourage new thinking and imagining new worlds. ‘If you pick them up you can move into some new thinking and into a new set of relations, a new way of being together, thinking together. In the end, it’s the new way of being together...”

---

Stefano Harney and Fred Moten, *The Undercommons: Fugitive Planning and Black Study* (Wivenhoe; New York; Port Watson: Minor Compositions, 2013), 113.
and thinking together that’s important, and not the tool, not the prop." Design studio teaching provides prompts that, similar to the way toys do, facilitate moving to new thinking, but also can propose new relations. There is a connection here between the toys or tools that open up other ways of imagining, and the nexus formed between dreaming and spatial experience discussed in the last chapter. The spatial experience can prompt new relations and from these come new ways of thinking and being together.

As something new emerges, the device (it could be a toy or a tool but in this research it is the experience and arrangement of spaces that provide this prompt) adapts and accommodates, which in turn alters the physical form or the perception of the device. This makes a resonance, a reverberation between two ways of being that opens up alternatives that are not either of the things that already exist, but something new. Certain prompts in the class room, like certain toys in a play room and certain affective experiences in life, transport the dreamer and puncture through commercial imperatives. Deflated and meaningless they no longer obstruct new dreams for a transfigured future. 16

16 I have written more about these ideas in "Process of Commoning in the Production and Proliferation of Shared Space." The Plan Journal, The Shared Project vol. 3 [2018], no. 2 [Fall] which takes as its subject how modes of operation, design strategies and public engagement are being redefined for "the sharing society."
A future movement of commoning through interior design teaching and pedagogy – currently unfolding.

CHAPTER 10

**Story 9:** I have been thinking about the first year students. It is my first time coordinating this year group and I want to start with something together doing things that will bind them as a group and draw out ideas and interests they can then follow further. We will spend three days together on a site, away from the university, working together and sharing meals. The first project will encourage observation and develop a relational understanding of spatial conditions. There will be a series of provocations that move the students from drawing spaces around them, to drawing onto the spaces, to using linear materials; tape, wire rope and string, drawing those lines through spaces. With these materials they will physically explore, observe, trace and delineate the spaces around them, locating their relation to, and within, their environment. The students will learn simple weaving, knitting, knotting and other conjoining techniques to make and design forms from the string, learning skills through the processes of making as they individually create an inhabitable space which they will work on from the interior outward. Eventually they will interconnect the element they have made with those of others until they all come together, an intermesh of threads between each other and out to the wider context. For the final project they will identify moments or elements of interest in their previous enquiries and find other students that have similar interests to form small groups. Developing on the weaving techniques of the previous work, scaling up and designing through the act of making, they will produce an inhabitable ‘foley’ for the site. Each folly will refer to the interests and processes that preceded it but will be transformed, enlarged, expanded, and challenged by negotiating with their group. The position of the folly within the site will be carefully considered and the folly should be inhabitable in some way by at least two people. Within the follies, the material or atmospheric qualities, the view out or in, the scale, or the processes through which it was made, will develop, explicate, complicate or demonstrate varied relationships to the site, the individual and the collective ideas and interests that have emerged over the previous three days. The final night we will have a party, invite friends and family to share with the students what they have made and done. We can light the follies from the inside and as dusk falls they will glow and twinkle, leading the guests over the site.

10.0 COMMONING PEDAGOGY

This research is currently occurring within the student design studio as a space of engagement that can be guided by processes of commoning as a teaching approach. The interstices of processes of commoning and teaching practice began to appear when I started a full-time position in Interior Design at RMIT University in 2016. I have become much more aware of how a pedagogical approach can reflect my research interests and creative approaches.

The research moved in this direction is encapsulated by Tim Ingold’s observation:

Research is as much about the discovery of questions in practice as about the answering of them by way of practice, and the former continually overflows the latter. In short, real research is neither practice-led nor problem-oriented, in the sense that the practice or problem is the initiator from which everything follows; rather practices and problems engender one another, as chicken and egg, in the educational process of leading life. Nor is it even possible, in this process, to set curiosity aside from care.

This view is evident in the various movements described in the previous chapters that enlarged my own understanding of commoning. A disposition towards commoning values is evident in many aspects of my life and practice, and the ways in which it materialises continues to engender further engagement. My main occupation now is design teaching and my interest and practice has become focused through that lens.

---

1 A folly is a small ornamental building that sits in the landscape in a particular way often suggesting another purpose beyond just decoration. The Oxford English Dictionary lists folly as deriving from the French word folie that means madness and also delight.

The proposition to construct small inhabitable spaces situated in the landscape alluding to or producing some other purpose draws on work developed in the Building Movements project. The four installations produced within the Design Hub were described as ‘foley-provocations’ by Pia Ednie-Brown, “Architecture of the Occasion,” Architectural Design 85, no. 3 (2015): 100-105.

My approach takes as a starting point the classroom, or in this case the design studio, as a place of commoning. The studio is already a site where shared interest are located, and a space within which creative, social and psychological processes unfold. A commoning perspective makes the shared nature of this experience more central, and is able to contribute to and expand that existing framework. The emergence of community in the student group is fostered though their own processes of commoning that appear in response to the teacher introducing participative commoning processes to the classroom. This is an interstitial process where commoning is occurring differently, but symbiotically for the various participants.

Using commoning processes in teaching to then produce commoning situations creates a kind of loop where the processes that are developed are also those that produce the inter-relations and work in the first place. A ‘commoning of commoning’ however does not become circular or repetitious, as it is always subject to new openings. When a ‘swerve’ (discussed in Section 6.3) appears in the loop through the variability brought into play by the contributors and conditions, new paths are opened up. A group of artists, architects and social theorists at the Academy of Fine Arts in Vienna explored this way of working over two years in 2015 and 2016. The group organised (through commoning processes) a wide range of events that examined the concept of commons in artistic research in spaces, practices and utopias, resulting in a book.3 Their approach involved integrating commoning into the processes and methodology of the collective, as well as it being the subject of all their work; the work is made by commoning, it is commoning and it is about commoning. They see this approach and subject as a way to 'rethink and undo the methodological premises of Western sciences, arts, and architecture, and to raise unsettling questions on research ethos, accountability, and the entanglement of power and knowledge.'4


4 http://spacesofcommoning.net/
Building Movements and Collective Commons were the first incursion into commoning within the space of teaching. The studio that I taught with Loren explicitly dealt with alternative housing models and other pragmatic concerns of commoning but had not unfolded through commoning. The subject matter remained objective, even when it came directly from people engaged in living in alternative ways (see Chapter nine). Building Movements had a different structure as it incorporated commoning into its processes rather than taking it as the subject. As commoning processes underpinning all the relations throughout Building Movements, the project has been able to continue opening up and unfold in ways that were not predicted, affecting how I worked in the future, beyond the actual time of the event. Since that project I have realised that ‘commoning commoning’ is a way of working and is also what is produced; it is simultaneously the subject and the process. This approach is particularly well suited to learning as it ‘showing’ rather than ‘telling’. By working from this position, auxiliary interests such as emergent process and flattened hierarchies can be addressed obliquely, becoming the part of the generalised atmosphere where the learning occurs.

The subject and the process coming from the same ‘material’ has been a characteristic that has appeared in most of the projects in this research. In Consumed (discussed in Chapter four), Picture Yourself (discussed in Chapter six), and Collective Commons (discussed in Chapter eight) it was largely apparent in the documentation that emerged in various ways (as a by-product or more directly) from the same processes that produced the work. In AfterImage (discussed in Chapter seven) it occurred through the viewer and the actions that made the work, being in the work. The more literal description of the technique in AfterImage meant when this same pattern occurred in the teaching methods I developed for Building Movements (Chapter eight) it was easier to recognise (the moment of recognition causing the swerve in looping ways of working is discussed in more detail in Section 6.3). From this it became clearer how the technique of integrating the subject, processes and outcomes could apply to teaching, and also use, and be of use to, commoning.
Commoning is intrinsically participative, as it must be actively entered into. For Peter Linebaugh, who first introduced the term commoning, 'entering' is understood as a constantly renewing and renegotiated attitude. (This idea is developed in relation to participatory practice and discussed in Section 1.4). Ingold draws a similar correspondence between education and participatory creative practice. In his view:

the first place to find education is not in pedagogy but in participatory practice: not in the ways persons and things are symbolically represented in their absence, but in the ways they are made present, and above all answerable to one another, in the correspondences of social life. Knowledge grows along lines of correspondence: in commoning, wherein they join; and in variation, wherein each comes into its own.

Student engagement in participatory learning activities, usually designed or created by the teacher for the students, is widely seen as positive; participatory practice in the classroom bringing to learning an openness to appropriation and variance. Ingold describes this approach to education as 'a practice of attention' where attentiveness and the attendant qualities of care are centralised, forming a bi-directional engagement with mutual learning and mutual learning processes. The teacher and students together develop and renew the implements, methods and processes that allow those whose futures the design education will effect, to be able to continue to influence the processes of learning.
A bi-directionality between the students and the teacher needs to be fostered within the classroom dynamic. Whereas an academic collective (such as the interdisciplinary group behind Spaces of Commoning or ‘The Commoner’s Society’ that commenced in 2018 and will run for two years out of the Sandeberg Institute in Amsterdam) come to the processes equipped with some knowledge of the subject and how to initiate commoning practices, when engaging students in these processes the teacher has to shepherd the project. This occurs by contagion from their own example and attitude, through being attentive to the dynamics and opportunities as they appear and by initiating processes that can continue to unfold and grow in ways the teacher can not predict. The teacher comes to the project or class with a pre-conditioned disposition, bringing their pre-existing or external life and creative interests into the room but letting them continue to grow in conjunction with the relations that form in the classroom.

In a commoning class authority is not held tightly but instead the teaching practice is also a learning process that the students are contributing to. When this unfolds in view of the students they can see they are feeding back into the teaching approach and the learning is bi-directional. An atmosphere of bi-directionality encourages a recognition of loops as patterns of learning, and develops in students a capacity to then recognise loops particular to them, a reverberation between learning and knowing, which as Bollier points out is a process that ‘helps elicit insights that we already know’10. Loops (discussed in more detail in Section 6.3) appear as a re-cognisance in the individual; an awareness that was is being undertaken has, in part, occurred or was experienced in some way before. The loop becomes the means for growth when the moment of recognition causes a twist that is specific to the learner. This is their unique design practice and knowledge becoming apparent to them.

---

10.1 FUTURE MOVEMENTS

My own teaching practice, like the creative practice documented here, follows ‘paths of variance’¹¹ that appear as the current interests and involvements unfold. I have become more cognisant of how my creative practice can inform my teaching through writing and reflecting on my other creative projects. In 2017, I began with two other teaching colleagues, Chris Cottrell and Andrew Miller, to consciously try to institute a more communal and supportive atmosphere in the student body. We endeavoured to incorporate more peer to peer communication, collaborative working and feedback between the students and more access points into the projects so diverse strengths could find purchase on the work, rather than privileging a specific approach or more evident abilities. We wrote a joint paper about these efforts that was published in the first issue of IE: Studio¹² in 2017.

These ideas are being extended in 2018 through a new teaching role coordinating first year. Coordinating presents an opportunity to expand the scale of my approach. In the second week of their first semester the students will spend three days working intensively at site works, making work, an exhibition and also forming the social connections that will help them see their peers as a community. The students will work separately and together on various projects over the three days, hear lunchtime lecturers from graduates with interesting practices, produce documentation of their work and the processes and create and curate an exhibition. Gathering to make and share food transitions people from strangers to friends and the students and teachers will prepare and eat at least two meals a day together. The exhibition will be framed as an event and celebration made by the students for each other and their family and friends.

The different elements of the intensive will all be guided by Ingold’s observation that walking, weaving, singing, story-telling, observing, drawing, writing ‘all proceed along lines of kind or another’¹³ and his interest in ‘improvisatory practice’ as ‘lines along which things continually come into being.’ At the beginning of the intensive each student will be given a collection of linear materials and implements that can make lines; pencils, chalk, string, tape, wire, raffia, wool, thread. These are their ‘prompts’, requiring the students’ engagement to be anything other than mute implements or limp fibres, inviting play, experimentation and generative process in order to become something. The various perspectives and the processes of making will begin to accumulate and entwine, an ‘entanglement of things’¹⁴ through which that each student can pick out their own path.

It is hoped that the approaches and prompts used in this intensive develop in the students an interest in combined and exploratory thinking and making, an openness to unfolding processes, a understanding of how interior design is a relational practice as well as social connections with each other at the start of their design education. In her book Teaching to Transgress, bell hooks explains how the classroom can be ‘a location of possibility’. She goes on, ‘in that field of possibility we have the opportunity to labour for freedom, to demand of ourselves and our comrades, an openness of mind and heart that allows us to face reality even as we collectively imagine ways to move beyond boundaries, to transgress’.¹⁵ A pedagogical practice that is interrelated and informed by a commoning creative practice provides an entrance into new territories for learning and for teaching. For hooks, education is the practice of freedom.¹⁶ Commoning processes in the classroom are move toward the kind of learning and teaching that is a practice of freedom. Within the often conflicted and constricted terrain of intuition, commoning orients the disposition of the teacher towards being adaptive, intuitive and alive with attentiveness, provides resistance to the values that corporate management have brought to tertiary education, and seeks the interstices where other approaches, attitudes and futures can be fostered.

¹¹ Ingold, Anthropology and Education, 41.
¹² https://interiodecorators.co.uk/edges
¹³ Tim Ingold, Lines: A Brief History (USA and Canada: Routledge, 2007), 1.
¹⁵ bell hooks, Teaching to Transgress: Education as the Practice of Freedom (New York: Routledge 1994), 207
¹⁶ ibid 10.
When it occurs in the design studio class, mutuality replaces conventional hierarchies, while acknowledging that the relationship is structured around a power imbalance. The atmosphere of mutuality in a class is produced through a ‘dynamic process of joint exchange.’ It is a charge that is capable of acting as an agent of change in the patterns and learning processes of individuals and the group. Mutuality in the classroom can be encouraged through attentiveness, and a capacity, to tend to the conditions that encourage its emergence. Tending to the conditions does not expect or guarantee mutuality, but can still orient a myriad of other processes and relations away from hierarchy, intolerance, competition and individualism. Setting the course through the learning experience by the processes of tending to the conditions for mutuality has the effect of mutuality becoming a guide for negotiating difference, conflict and navigating towards common ground.

A capacity to tend creative mutuality equips the teacher to maintain attentiveness to the environs and an orientation towards commoning, despite the unbalanced levels of input during the lumpy and uneven process of instituting a shared commoning. Slowly, over time students see themselves as mutually responsible for their learning, they can see how and why their input is necessary, making a more bidirectional dynamic overall. In this way the creative mutuality that emerges within the classroom facilitates a growing and interconnected social and creative praxis. With the realisations that commoning is also central to my teaching approach, my research interests and creative work has come into a correspondence with my employment. Through finding a resonance with processes of commoning across all areas of my life, my research interests, home life, creative work, and employment are integrated for me a way I can now realise I was seeking when I started this research.

---

![Image](image_url)

**Fig 10.7** The proposal discussed in this chapter was realised as a three-day intensive held in the students’ second week of university at Siteworks in Brunswick in 2018.
CHAPTER ELEVEN: CONCLUSION

11.0 HOW THIS RESEARCH WAS ADDRESSsed

This research offers an understanding of how varied approaches centred on emergent experiences and affective values can transform the spaces and social systems that we inhabit. It has also developed a way of thinking about how a spatial design practice can inform a mode of living/becoming and engaging, that is broader than a project, a profession, or a pedagogy. Instead it becomes a transversal approach that starts to merge disparate areas of life, such as work, leisure and creative practice, through developing a unified ethical framework. This view has come about through recognising commoning processes within my projects, but also finding it resonates with many facets of what I do and believe.

This thesis describes the projects in largely chronological order, demonstrating the emergent and accumulative processes that are within both my practices and processes of commoning. The research has relied on diverse theorists and practitioners who have been relevant at various stages contingent to the work that was being undertaken. The diversity was necessary as the projects are different in their approach and modalities. A wide variety of texts and theories served as useful tools in helping me think through and critique the creative projects and what they revealed. As such, I lay no claim to a cohesive philosophical terrain operating at the foundation of the research. Rather, the pragmatic and discursive terrain of 'commoning' becomes a primary reference point. As my awareness of commoning grew over time, the disparate theoreticians and practices that informed my understanding of my work, began to connect with those involved in commoning, ultimately developing a stronger understanding of how commoning could inform creative practices. The introduction to this thesis gives an overview of the current discourse around commoning and concludes with revealing an underlying observation about the affective aspects of commoning and the capacity of this to develop creative practice.

Commoning brings to creative practice an ethical framework that can inform and guide it on every level while still maintaining the freedom to develop distinctly individual and particular creative approaches. The disciplines and activities associated with commoning are varied, meaning there is no universal typology of commoning. Discussing its manifold forms, David Bollier observes that commoning is 'living social systems of creative agents.' Together these creative agents produce the 'language and socio-political-economic project for honouring the particularity of lived experience - and more, for honouring the generative and intrinsic human value of such particularity.' The same base values can manifest through a multiplicity of adaptations specific to the task, territory or interests. The ethics that are embedded in commoning mean that its primary focus is on 'reasserting greater participatory control over resources and community life.' Commoning is by nature expansive and inclusive, offering a counterpoint to the commoditisation that seeks to influence or instrumentalise many forms of creative practice. Beliefs founded in market culture disintegrate as experiences with commoning accrete; most significantly through the individuals’ capacity to negotiate difference, a sense of extended duration, and the emergence of values not widely prioritised by capitalist and neoliberal cultures. The existing epistemology within commoning can be utilised by creative practice endeavouring to establish a course relative to the dominant fields. This is not because commoning has resolved the issues, but simply because it is continually negotiating them.

It was only over an extended time frame that the distinct projects came in concert with each other through a lens of commoning. As individual projects they operate similarly to movements within music, where self contained parts conceived as a whole eventually produce a more complete picture. Becoming aware of the shared characteristics and values in very different spaces and creative projects demonstrated the transversal nature of commoning; able to initiate and inform varied practice and roles. The diversity of these projects also described how commoning is a transformative agent; once internalised it is capable of producing an ongoing orientation

towards similar work and experiences, and proliferating the processes and values through further creative practice. These projects are described as movements as they maintain a degree of independence, brought together over time through commoning emerging as a consistency or a ‘theme’2 that can be traced through all the project work.

- A movement of commoning inside the creeping trajectory of urban gentrification through creative communities in warehouses in Brooklyn
- A movement of commoning through early on-line magazines and commerce as editor/curator/producer of Small Magazine
- A movement of commoning through participatory creative practice as a creative producer of Consumed
- A movement of commoning through highly commercial space as both a creative producer and a participatory creative practitioner with Picture Yourself
- A movement of commoning through experientially manifest conceptual space, a diagramming of the workings of the ‘dreaming device’ as a spatial explorer/reflective thinker with AfterImage
- A movement of commoning through the inter-mixture of being a teacher and creative practitioner, and a collaborator in Building Movement, and a designer in Collective Commons
- A movement of commoning through interior design in the reconfiguration and domestic spaces for cohabitation as an interior designer, mother and urban dweller in the North Fitzroy House.
- An emerging movement of commoning through pedagogy and interior design studio teaching.

My initial experience of commoning is related in Chapter one and outlines the enduring impact of living in a creative community in loft spaces in New York in the early 1990s. Although it was a period that was always personally important to me, I have since recognised that this experience shaped how I think of creative and social practice as combined, and is also the basis for my interest in how commoning and creative practice intersect and support each other. A discussion on the initial community of practice helps position both this creative practice and the forms of commoning with which it most closely aligns.

Chapter two then explored the inadvertent and intentional roles that creative practice plays in urban development and gentrification. Commoning processes enrich communities and territories, which ultimately renders them visible or more attractive to development and market interests that in time enclose and destroy those very practices and ways of living. Chapter two proposes how hybridised, open or ‘parafunctional’ spaces can develop new modes of creative and social practice. These spaces are proposed as valuable in ways that the market cannot recognise. Parafunctional space is understood as a device that enables the time and terrain for dreams to emerge. Its occupation through creative practices and commoning produces a bidirectional resonance between activity and dreaming; new futures are imagined and brought into existence, and the form of existence brings forth new ways of imagining.

The third chapter introduced an online magazine, Small, that was in production for five years. The magazine attracted a community of collaborators, and required the development of various different ways of fostering individual creative practices within a collectivising format. The systems that were used in this work informed future projects that were also concerned with making fields of relation that connected disparate individuals with each other. Small initiated the idea of using commercial space as ‘armature’ that was then able to support very different activities. The concept of creative mutuality that became increasingly central to the research and was first identified through this project, Small.

2 'The term ‘theme’ is used in the musical sense, (as is ‘movement’) where each variation on a theme is different but can still be traced back to the larger structure and seen to run throughout the piece.
Chapter four discussed a project that had significant impact on this research – *Consumed* – an installation work that lasted for seven days and involved ten artists working alone or in pairs in 24-hour cycles. This was a complex and challenging work to produce, but ultimately became a way of meaningfully exploring processes of commoning in a creative event with a specific location and duration. It also led to examining the role that duration and documentation play in enforcing or disrupting power structures. *Consumed* enabled reflection on forms of failure and how they can provide impetus to future works.

Mutuality and creative mutuality are addressed next in Chapter five which explains how the concept of mutuality, and more specifically creative mutuality, became more central to my thinking. Reflecting on *Consumed* made clear that although I set out initially with fairly intellectualised aims, what I was actually seeking was that sense of creative mutuality that I had experienced in earlier projects, particularly living and working in the lofts in New York and during Small.

Chapter six discussed another installation project, *Picture Yourself*, this time undertaken in a shopping mall. This project occupied existing commercial conditions and brought into focus the necessity of a more nuanced understanding of the role of the participant as influenced by Rancière’s views on the subject. Reflection on this project lead to a recognition of the loops in the technologies and concepts reoccurring throughout in my projects, and identified loops as way of moving the practice forward by folding back through past experiences, both conceptually and through the use of technology. Recognising the repeating structure of loops as forming subjective meaning, led to understanding other recurring elements as conceptual lenses for the work.

Chapter seven functions differently to the other projects. AfterImage developed the concept of an ‘inhabitable diagram’ that physically enmeshed the role of producer with that of the audience. The project was made up of loops between illumination and projection and these qualities physically resonated with Jane Rendell’s analogy of constellations as devices for bringing disparate elements together across time and space. This connection had the effect of constellating the diverse projects in this research, bringing previously unnoticed elements, such as technological and conceptual loops, into concert across the works. The experience of inhabiting the diagram spoke directly to being both a creator and participator in any experience, and also enabled a different way of understanding through more abstract and analogous visualisation processes. This produced a new perspective on the projects in relation to each other and to the affective capacity of creative work to transform how a practitioner creates and interprets other projects across wide and varied experiences.

The next two projects were developed in tandem and are introduced in Chapter eight. *Building Movements* was the collective title for four inhabitable installations within a university building made collaboratively with students and peers. *Collective Commons* was web based and developed alongside *Building Movements* as an emergent documentation platform for use by a group. The complexity of these projects, individually and together, afforded a deeper insight into earlier concerns with ethical approaches and awareness of social relations – both within collaborative projects and beyond to the audiences of the event through direct encounter or via documentation. Working as both a teacher and a practitioner and making the works in an institutional building introduced how processes of commoning and tending to creative mutuality within creative projects could inform a pedagogical approach.

Both these projects and the way of working explicated by them – collaborative, open ended, inclusive and interested in plurality – together correlated my practice more clearly with commoning processes. Seeking existing correspondence between commoning and creative practice developed an understanding of commoning as a being in the minor. The practice and approaches not dominated by the major within the wider society or even its own direct environs. The minor creative commoning practice quietly disassembles the dominant forms into something new. Rather than reinforcing the ontological superiority of the dominant systems by constant dissension with the major, agitation against the dominant system can occur through the processes that make the creative works, meaning they are politicised without taking a visible
stand, protesting or producing statements. Framing the political qualities of the work in this way is also useful for understanding how commoning can become more than an alternative to the existing systems, locked in a perpetual conflict and a limited framework of win or lose against the dominant powers. Instead, the minor shifts the perspective outside of the preferred frameworks and values dominated by the major powers.

The research passes through a larger loop in Chapter nine where the experiences of physically making interior space that first encouraged a disposition towards commoning in New York, became again central to my practice. This was also a return to ideas discussed in Chapter two, which discusses ‘dreaming devices’ and how certain spaces encourage imagination and making to combine in the production of new ways of living. Correlations between interior design concerns and processes of commoning develop how commoning processes can retrofit existing interiors and create new interiors that allow for different dreams to emerge. This is a ‘minoring’ of interior where the sublimated qualities in the practice are instated over the commoditised aspects; relational, social, inclusive, adaptable, tactical and emergent processes are valued, all qualities shared with commoning. A minor interior design uses commoning processes in the production of spaces. Interior design is the implement or tool, that through reshaping the space, manifests the dreams and ‘glimpses of a different future.’

The research concludes through exploring how commoning processes, understood and developed through creative collaborative and spatial practice, can be integrated in pedagogical approaches. This research seeks to find how the values and processes of commoning can underpin learning and teaching, specifically in interior design study, and how the design studio model of teaching can be integrated with the values and conditions that encourage creative mutuality.

11.1 CONTRIBUTIONS OF THE THESIS

This thesis makes three contributions, which I have summarised here.

11.1.1 Method for approaching commoning in collaborative and spatial creative practice

This research is underpinned by consistent concerns and interests, however these were only identified and articulated through reflexive and emergent processes, rather than situated in the foreground from the beginning. The research focused originally on an interest in how collaborative and participatory practice could evade the more conforming spatial and social aspects of commercialisation, and despite long ago abandoning that as a specific line of enquiry, in many respects the concerns continued to be addressed. Without any foreknowledge of the emerging paradigm of commoning the understandings have developed through the processes of being involved in the work and the research. The comprehension of what is actually a longstanding orientation is a reflection of the fact that my outlook and disposition had already been influenced by the affective characteristics of commoning, without being aware that it was a form of commoning. This in itself is reflective of the nature of commoning; continually in the ‘processes of becoming’ rather than registering preconceived outcomes.

The writing here has traced a path through a series of diverse projects, linking them to broader ideas and concerns to uncover and develop a creative spatial practice occurs ‘in common’. Throughout the work there has been a concern with; equality and quality of social interrelations, open and unfolding processes and the development of new frameworks for valuing and evaluating creative work. These characteristics are not always self-evident as they are varied and also emergent, developing contingent to the previous work and the existing conditions. Collectively the projects located the central proposition and interest of this research; that the elusive quality of creative mutuality can emerge from creative collaborative practices by tending

3 Stavrides, Common Space, 31.
to processes of commoning within that practice. An orientation towards creative mutuality provides a guiding principle for the ethical and social production of collaborative works. This results in a commoning creative practice.

Several key pivots were identified in this work and aggregated over the research to become a more collectively more coherent. Extended duration, conceptual and technical loops, documenting for plurality and open processes were particularly significant to developing an understanding of commoning specific to my creative practice. These elements are ‘key pivots’ as they are important characteristics of the creative projects and are also processes that come out of, or occur within, commoning in general. Correlations like these in my practice and commoning suggested how activities that function dually can draw the creative practice into commoning and commoning into the creative practice. The doubling of these areas of interest enlarges the opportunities to condition the social and spatial surrounds in ways that encourage mutuality to appear. Commoning and creative practice can then emerge through each other rather than forcing either to navigate or respond to a structures or frameworks imposed by the other.

The pivots were processes in their own right but also all referred to underlying values, meaning they manifested in pragmatic but also more conceptual forms. This made it possible to work with commoning and creative practices simultaneously and allowed the more elusive qualities and values of each area to appear through the work. Working with the pivots are openings for bringing commoning into play at various levels, in creative practice but also in through the design studio teaching.

The openings and approaches are:

**Open processes.** This begins with nurturing an ability within individuals, both in collectives as well as on their own, to exist in and work with emergent, contingent and unfolding processes. A willingness to use open processes is easily foreclosed by institutional, corporate preferences for knowing what is coming, speculating on return value, the existing metrics of success and value. These preferences keep design teaching and creative practice focussed on refinement and iteration and following 'paths of variance.' How this openness appears in commoning is described in Section 1.2, and is drawn through the creative research at various points, responding to perceived failures and successes in Consumed (see Section 4.5), in the loops located throughout (Section 6.3) and making use of mistakes and misunderstandings in Building Movements and Collective Commons (Section 8.2). The underlying approach that moved these works from individual projects to a method of research was a strengthening ability to remain open despite the discomfort of frequently being lost. Embracing open ways of working resists corporatisation of education and commodification of creative work. Open processes require agility and adaptability in order for a practitioner to stay with them through uncertainty, and to remain receptive to possibility.

**Affective seeding of creative commoning.** Recognising commoning as proliferating from an affective personal experience encourages acts of providing or seeking creative commoning. It also requires locating interstices where creative commoning practices can be produced or encountered. Through relational and intersubjective processes, seeds of commoning embedded in creative practice can propagate and flourish in the future, in ways that are not yet known. This proposition is described by the lived experience of this process in New York (described in the Introduction and Chapter one) and Small (discussed in Chapter two). The later realisation that occurred through this research was these events were both experiences of creative mutuality situated within commoning attitudes resulting in a profound and transformative effect on my future practice. This suggests that commoning is proliferating because of individual moments of affective experience, and that through seeking to engender the conditions for similarly meaningful encounters, creative practices (particularly those that are impermanent or temporal) that share ethical, social or political concerns with commoning can continue to have impact beyond their immediate moment or encounter.

---

Allow for duration. In creative practice, a sense of an extended duration facilitates the emergence of the more elusive sense of mutuality. Combined, temporal conditions and mutuality support a commoning disposition that can resist instrumentalisation of creative practice by encouraging more situated and sustainable relations with the social and spatial contexts that surround us. Our use and understanding of time has already been effectively colonised, impacting sustainability in any form; creative, social, environmental, political. The importance of deliberately considering time in creative work is described when temporality initially came up as a deliberate tactic in the project *Consumed* (Chapter four). Duration in commoning practices develops care for all forms of the future; a perspective that changes the social, spatial and material relationships and emphasis in creative work.

**Be tactical.** Being tactical rejects a position of expertise or authority. A tactical approach is a practice of being attentive to shifts and changes, able to deviate from predicted courses and respond to and resist external forces such as attenuating resources or enclosure. Michel de Certeau’s descriptions of tacticians (discussed in Section 1.3) offers an approach for finding within territories apparently smothered by the market logic, alternate trajectories, relations and ways of operating. Tactical response is explored in the projects across different terrains; for inhabiting commercial space in *Consumed* (Section 4.1) and in *Picture Yourself* (Section 6.1), working with failures (in Section 4.5) and negotiating bureaucracy (in Section 8.1). Being tactical finds new ways to navigate familiar terrain to seek overlooked spaces to deploy processes of creative commoning.

**Locate, attend to, and foster loops.** Loops emerge as a passage taken through an idea or a project that triggers in the individual a sense of resonance. This is a re-cognisance, an awareness that becomes known to the self through a return through or to something more familiar. Commoning processes within creative practice maintain an openness and emergence which at times is disorienting. The recognition or existence of loops is a passage between the anxiety and exhilaration of a life ‘made strange’ relieved by a return through more familiar territory (described through examples in Section 5.3). A flash of recognition made from points connecting across time and space, brings two previously disconnected elements into a temporary or enduring consonance. In these projects, using loops in pragmatic ways (for example, in the film and projector technology of *AfterImage* or the documentation collection system in *Consumed*), had the unintended effect of producing conceptual loops through a cognisance of new inter-relations between practice and broader concepts or interests. These would cause a jump or a shift forward in thinking (the swerve or twist that Jane Rendell describes discussed in Section 6.3). The moment of connection to the past becomes a leap into the future, making clear that creative commoning processes have a dynamic force that moves work forward. A comprehension of loops, an ability to attend to them and look out for them eventually forms overall patterns that develop new opportunities without reverting to a closed or predictable system or outcomes.

**Attuning to difference.** A creative commoning practice is one that negotiates difference, rather than simply locates similarity or familiarity. This understanding and disposition produces an attitude of attention, care-taking and inclusivity within, and by, creative practice. The necessity of this becomes particularly clear in complex and multi-directional projects such as *Building Movements* (Chapter eight) that involved multiple entities (both directly and indirectly) with varied levels of interest, experience or power over the processes. Attuning to difference occurs in constant negotiation with shifts in the surrounds and spatial and social conditions that make for variance in involvement, interest and attitudes. It is an adjusting to difference from an attitude of acceptance and care that makes commoning a practice of inclusivity. Within creative, spatial, and collaborative work, a practice of commoning can avert exclusionary tendencies and guide and encourage inclusivity and care.

**Narratives of plurality.** From a commoning perspective, documentation and capture of ephemeral and collaborative works should not be an ancillary afterthought. These elements mediate how the work is accessed and interpreted in the future, and without care can easily perpetuate singular narratives, predicted outcomes, the necessity of metrics and a preference for using commercial values. Privatisation, ownership, copyright and other tenets of the market depend on easily comprehended singular narratives and ownership. The extent of this produces hegemonic understandings of much more complex relations and conditions. Attuning to
difference rather than seeking or enforcing monotheistic narratives results in more complex social relations that, over time, entrain people in working with and validating views other than their own. Attempts to directly engage with plurality were central to Consumed (Chapter four) addressed through documentation and a temporal framework. These concerns continued to re-emerge in the system behind Picture Yourself (Chapter six) and Collective Commons (Chapter eight) that is entirely made up of multiple perspectives. Documentation is the creation of artefacts, making a history with effects in the future. To make new creative futures we need to find ways to document what we are doing now that does not pander to the commercial denominator, and challenges limited or idealised versions of collaborative social and spatial activities. Documents for the future need to be made in common and include and make visible, plurality, complexity, openness and conflict. When documentation in creative practice mediates plurality into a singular narrative it eliminates exposure to variance, and consequently shuts down opportunities to become familiarised with it. This cauterises many points of departure from which new potentials, not yet known might develop and undermines the values and rewards of making work in common.

11.1.2 Relationship between commoning and creative practice

Processes of commoning that create a consistency across the diverse works in this research, were for a long time only registered as the currents or instinctual interests that encouraged me to travel certain directions. The ability of commoning to function inter-subjectively – producing within an individual in a group a profound orientation towards certain interests, activities and attitudes – is significant to creative practice in general. This view has developed through a prolonged period where submerged processes of commoning occurred or appeared in varied ways within diverse creative projects. Eventually this culminated in the realisation that rather than applying commoning systems to a creative practice, commoning develops in correspondence with the creative practice, profoundly affecting the kind of work, the relational conditions, the underlying interests, and the desired effects of any work undertaken. In this way commoning is internalised as an oral or ethical orientation, a way of navigating the creative practice through its own particularities.

Commoning and a collaborative creative practice already share certain qualities, most obviously an interest in encouraging participation, finding ways of working together, and the bidirectional effects between inhabitants and the spatial and social conditions they exist within. The open, inclusive forms of commoning are continually inviting in new participants. Creative participatory practice has long struggled with how to manage a relationship with participants. It is a dynamic that can easily become didactic or effectively assimilated by commoditising forces that instrumentalise creative practice and perceive audiences in terms of consumers. Commoning remains open as it ‘directs actions towards constant negotiations with others as potential co-commoners.’ The effect of this is an awareness that commoning is a potentially unlimited community. Instead of seeking to negotiate the various meanings and roles of audience, producer, participant, creative participatory practices could begin to consider themselves entangled within in an expanding field where new subjects are shaped and formed by the principles of equality and inclusion.

Commoning processes present ways to navigate contested social, economic and creative terrains. The navigation is guided by values that are not configured by capitalist or neoliberal systems. The dialogue between commodification and creative practice has become so entrenched it appears inescapable or at least locked in constant conflict. Commoning unlocks that binary by exposing the wholesale acceptance of that logic as a failure of imagination, the result of a convincing sleight that supports the endurance of neoliberal ontology. A commoning creative practice is reoriented by values entirely foreign to capitalism so less easily subsumed. Although enclosure is continual, this process is re-framed as capitalism following creative practice; failing to keep up with the mutable and innovative ways a commoning creative practice can locate, occupy and transform interstitial spaces, relations and social conditions. As the coming creative practices multiply and connect, the transformative spaces will also multiply.

Both commoning and creative practice are inherently about making (things, situations and conditions) and hybridised approaches. Using both increases the innovative and creative potentials of either. Stavrides points out that commoning does not follow pre-existing patterns but instead it is always in the processes of inventing itself through translation across modalities; ‘the inherent inventiveness of commoning which always opens new fields and new opportunities for the creation of a common world always in-the-making.’ In this practice, commoning and creative practice came together within parafunctional spaces seen as ‘dreaming devices.’ In these forms of spaces, new ways of producing life emerge over time through the inter-mixture of a social and creative life that is constructed on two planes simultaneously; the physical or pragmatic, and the intersubjective. This is a form of ‘affective labour’ that can operate on various scales where creative practice is not didactic or instructive, but is able to enact or enable transformative change that emerges from the desires of those involved. Separating the notion of dreaming device from requiring a specific and parafunctional space meant the approach could continue despite no longer having access to the kind of sites that first encouraged it. Creative practices guided by commoning processes (as discussed in Chapter 2 these processes resonate conceptually and practically with the idea of parafunctional) and can then construct their own devices for dreaming in other, possibly more contested places or conditions. This ability means creative projects can make both the physical and psychological space where similar dreaming can occur. This is a way of seeing collaborative creative work as potentially operating as, or becoming, a dreaming device itself, one that can be instated anywhere.

As the concept of commoning becomes better known, and multi-disciplinary projects and practitioners explicitly engaged with processes and ideas of commoning begin to work with each other, commoning will develop consciously and variably through creative practices and projects. As others come in contact with these projects and practitioners, an interconnected but always differentiated fabric of varied commoning creative practice can begin to form. As this occurs it will pose increasingly credible and durable alternatives to the current systems that condition how we creatively produce and relate to the world. This research is not a guide for how to merge commoning into a creative practice to produce a predetermined outcome. Instead it develops a terrain for interrelated or corresponding processes that contribute to the creation of certain conditions that demarcate themselves from neoliberal concerns and values and produce their own atmospheres that are conducive to their own emerging forms of life.

11.1.3 A sense of creative mutuality as a guiding principle in practice

A concept of creative mutuality a was developed from several perspectives through this research. This began with an understanding of mutuality as the sense within commoning that encouraged a shift from operating from a position of personal gain being the foremost motivator to desiring to contribute to what is shared and benefits everyone. Mutuality cannot be deployed in the service of capitalism as the attitudes that bring mutuality into lives (see Section 4.7) are not easily comprehended or copied by capitalism. It also can not be enforced by commoning processes and instead tended to and grown through distributed care taking.

Creative mutuality incorporates mutuality but is focused on and appears through a project. My understanding of creative mutuality was first seeded in the creative projects and events we undertook in the loft spaces in New York but became more important to me through my relationship and work with Christine on Small. Christine and I entered into the project with a latent sense of mutuality based on our shared experiences and living and working together in the past. The shift from this generalised feeling to what I now understand as creative mutuality occurred through our joint focus on the project. The project becomes an entity and a dynamic force between those involved. It was creative mutuality that sustained our focus and kept us committed to making Small magazine for five years despite fluctuating levels of commitment from one or the other of us at various times. Creative mutuality in a shared practice or project brings disparate elements and people into an orbit of differentiated relations.
Creative practice and commoning, when brought into a correspondence or resonance with each other, are influenced over time by each other. Through their relations they make new conditions that manifest in a multiplicity of ways specific to the particular variations, interests, practices, situations and social structures using them. These emerging conditions can be tended to; nourished through care, to encourage and sustain creative mutuality. The dispositions of those involved, the processes they use and the conditions that appear, correspond with each other in what is described by Tim Ingold as ‘interstitial differentiation.’ This refers to processes of life that develop alongside each other, growing and changing in relation to each other, rather than becoming an undifferentiated mix. It is for this reason that mutuality can not be imposed, and also is difficult to enclose, as it only emerges in the interstices of correspondence that are always relationally changing. Mutuality in commoning is understood in this research to be at root of the transformative experiences of commoning processes. This lead me to seek a similar agent in creative practice. The shared creative project is the locus of the common interest. Creative mutuality can not be applied or forced, but it can be encouraged by tending to all the elements in correspondence around the work. In this way the project becomes the conductor through which currents of mutuality travel, sustaining further creative engagement and a deep sense of care for the work and others involved in the project.

Through this research I have become aware that at the core of the projects was a desire to continue to experience and share mutuality formed through creative work. My projects sought ways that creative mutuality, rather than being an occasional and surprising side experience in a collaborative creative work could become central. An experience with creative mutuality develops the abilities of those involved to recognise, nurture and value that experience, increasing the likelihood of it re-occurring. In my own projects creative mutuality often remains elusive, however this is also the source of its power; seeking it or maintaining it motivates me to continue with the projects and the research. In this practice a commitment towards locating and tending to mutuality emerged in conjunction with other social and political concerns, constellated by the guiding principles of commoning.

11.2 POSSIBILITIES FOR FUTURE WORK

More and more research and projects concerned with commoning are appearing every day in many disciplines and countries. Bollier believes this is because commoning is a ‘generative paradigm’ as once people ‘have learned to see the world through the ‘lens of commoning’ it is the perspective from which other interests are encountered. The disciplines ignited by the interest in commoning are diverse but the interest forms a common ground from which they can develop new hybridised ways of working together. Processes of commoning are how practices of commons are developed; through negotiating difference around a shared interest or focus. The growing engagement with the concept of commoning reveals the extent of contemporary concerns around collapsing social, environment, economical and urban conditions. These are conditions that impact the spaces we inhabit and should be of central interest and importance to creative spatial practice.

My initial interest in the interior, subsequent study, then work and now teaching in the same field, is directly rooted in my experiences in New York where I was able to re-purpose existing space into interiors that suited, supported and invented my life and creative work. Living with others in shared warehouse spaces meant re-considering conventional housing and becoming aware of the limits it affords to new forms of life and society. As we adapted the interiors, various parts of life could come together and produce new arrangements that created, supported and reflected the hybridised and relational lives unfolding within them. There is currently very little work on commoning form an interior design perspective. There is more interest in commoning from landscape design (parks, community gardens) urban design (public space) or architectural (housing models). When interior design appears in to connect with commoning it is usually as an ancillary component of a larger architectural proposal, often restricted to more pragmatic decisions on incorporating shared spaces such as ‘common rooms’ or laundries into larger developments.

8 Ibid., xiii.
9 Commoning is referred to frequently as a new paradigm (by Bollier, Randall Joy Thompson, Silke Helfriche, et al.). Thomas Kuhn’s cycle of scientific knowledge describes the stages that culture goes through and explains how a new paradigm emerges in response to a crisis in the old model. Proponents of commoning place the world in the ‘model crisis’ stage on Kuhn’s cycle. This is period is followed by ‘model change’ as people adopt a new perspective as the old model fails, resulting in a paradigm shift. For more information on Kuhn’s cycle see: http://www.think.org/sustain/glossary/ModelRevolution.htm
From a commercial perspective contemporary interiors are largely seen as a refined backdrop for lifestyles, mediated by the market. Interior spaces communicate subliminal or overt messages about the inhabitant’s taste, socioeconomic position or ‘brand’ within which various ‘lifestyle’ programs can be staged. In Australia, a house is the most valuable asset many people will ever own (or hope to own) and to maximise its resale potential any alterations to the interior must be generic enough to attract a wide demographic entrained by popular media, renovation shows and real estate agency values. The necessity of interior design is shifted to another territory when we appreciate how our psychological, political, social and spatial conditions are entangled with the spaces we inhabit. The market acknowledges this entanglement between self and space to an extent, selling the idea that our sense of self, or at least an external projection of it, can be bolstered by the aesthetics of the interiors and objects we purchase and arrange.

Beyond these economic drivers our interiors have the capacity to function as dreaming devices (see Section 2.0) that can develop new conceptions of self and community, integrate with the production of our own lives. Dreams do not flick-on fully formed, but emerge in relation to the real physical or psychological materials of life. Bachelard draws attention to the phenomenological reverberations between our imagination, dreams and the materials, textures and spaces we inhabit in the *Poetics of Space*, describing details of interiors that hook into the imagination and open the inhabitant to dreaming. The interiors he reflects on are antithetical to the straight lines, shining surfaces and modern conveniences of contemporary developments and celebrated in the mainstream media. Current economic structures privilege the complete and programmed space and renovation programs culminate in a finished and fixed outcome, uninhabitable corporally or by dreams.

Interior experience is in constant co-production with our psychologies and personal cultures and so the spaces we inhabit are intimately connected to the subjectivities of any individual, and therefore the wider community we exist within. Choosing to make, inhabit and create spaces that could encourage other psychological outlooks and activities in our immediate interiors also produces different cultures to those dominated by consumerism, and can help make our shared future into a different form. Complex, hybridised and parafunctional occupation of space can afford new and unknown ways of living to emerge. As commercial forces promote interiors that encourage greater self-consciousness, conformity and consumerism, a commoning interior is entangled with other things, struggling to bring to the surface different relations to our world and to each other.

My commitment to processes of commoning in spatial creative practice and interior design education, is grounded in a belief that even a fleeting encounter with the spatial and social conditions encouraged by commoning and that foster creative mutuality, can take seed, as it did for me, and manifest in not yet known, transformative futures for others.
BIBLIOGRAPHY


Bax, Sander, Pascal Gielen, and Bram Ieven, eds. Interrupting the City: Artistic Constitutions of the Public Sphere. Amsterdam: Valiz Antennae, 2015.


Cross, David, and Claire Doherty, eds. One Day Sculpture. Bielefeld, Germany: Kerber Verlag, 2009

De Angelis, Massimo. “Crises, Movements and Commons.” Special Issue: Commons Class Struggle and the World. Borderlands 11, no. 2 (2012).

De Cauter, Lieven. “Commonplaces on the (Spatial) Commons.” In Interrupting the City: Artistic Constitutions of the Public Sphere, edited by Sander Bax, Pascal Gielen, and Bram Ieven, 256-269. Amsterdam: Valiz Antennae, 2015.


Harney, Stefano, and Fred Moten. The Undercommons: Fugitive Planning and Black Study. Wivenhoe; New York; Port Watson: Minor Compositions, 2013.


Helfrich, Silke. “How Can We Bring about a Language of Commoning.” In Patterns of Commoning, edited by David Bollier and Silke Helfrich, 73-115. Amherst, MA.


All images are the work of the author unless otherwise credited.