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Introduction

Guido Ruivenkamp and Andy Hilton

The conceptual shift of the common: from commons to commoning

There has been a proliferation of work on commons-related issues in recent years, or the ‘discourse of the common’, as this field of social study may be dubbed. The employment of the original notion of access to land in feudal Britain for a contemporary equation of commons with natural resources shared and jointly managed by a group of people (community) has not only been extended but also deepened. Analysed in various dimensions, such as subtractability and exclusion (Ostrom & Ostrom, 1977), it has been extended through a qualitative expansion of the types of resources considered, to include, for example, information and cultural commons (Benkler, 2000). This is relatively well-known and widely discussed. But it has also been deepened with ideas about interpersonal and human–nature relations and ultimately the nature of society, which is rather less often considered. This is an important development, since it represents a fundamental conceptual shift, from ‘commons as resources’ to ‘commons as relational social frameworks’ (Bollier & Helfrich, 2015), marked also by the evolution of the noun form of ‘common’ into the verb ‘commoning’ to denote the continuous making and remaking – the (re)production – of the commons through shared practices (Bresnihan, 2016). It is this reading of commons on which we focus in the present volume.

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The original contemporary focus on commons as resources was characterised by a debate around the (in)effectiveness of their collective management, stimulated by Hardin's (1968) 'Tragedy of the Commons'. Hardin's doomsday scenario of an inevitable overuse of common pool resources leading to their devastation was criticised in at least three ways: it was erroneously built on the assumption of an open access system without specific principles of excludability (Suga, 2103); it problematically presented a small-scale problem (grazing cattle on common pastureland) as a universal phenomenon applicable also at a large scale (Ostrom, 1990); and it assumed common property to be the core issue (land, in Hardin's model), rather than private property (cattle) and the individualist utility-maximising behaviour (overgrazing for personal gain) (Harvey, 2012). Thus, it (wrongly) concluded that only national or private management could prevent a devastation of resources.

In response, Elinor Ostrom and colleagues set about dismantling the powerful myth of this so-called 'tragedy' by presenting a range of empirical examples in defence of the commons. Essentially, they showed that the management of common property resources (CPRs) such as forests, fisheries and land by a user-group organisation (UGO) could be extremely efficient (Ostrom, 1986, 1990 see Ostrom, Tiebout & Warren, 1961). They also extended the idea of commons-as-resources to commons-as-services, including the local provisioning of water and policing. On the basis of a variety of case studies, they identified certain principles and conditions favourable to the production of institutions of community-based resource management and thus to be incorporated into management policies. This work was successful in challenging the reductive narratives of the

‘tragedyists’ – yet the community-based management models nevertheless tended to be based on the same, essentially liberal assumptions. Their models, too, referred to the need to channel individualistic behaviour (self-interested rationality) and establish another (albeit alternative) property regime. Indeed, they allowed the same, neo-classical economic paradigms of the tragedyists to return through the back door, ultimately, one might argue, reducing the perspectives and potentialities of the diverse economies (Gibson-Graham, 2006, 2008) and non-capitalist social relations, with their different practices and subjectivities.

As noted, however, a gradual conceptual shift away from this commons-as-resources model and could still be observed, even triggered by the debates among the various theoretical strands within the resources model – e.g. Heller’s (1998) ‘tragedy of the anticommons’ and Lessig’s (2001) ‘intellectual property rights as commons’. Notwithstanding the differing assessment of the feasibility or otherwise of jointly holding and managing resources, the participants in this debate all departed from the notion that a remedy for the unregulated access to resources could only be realised through social arrangements. Indeed, references were made to a wide variety of social arrangements, such as institutional control of resources, substantive community systems of management, the capacities of self-organisation and self-regulation by the resource users and principles of excludability. Thus, commons-as-resources became intertwined with commons-as-social-arrangements.

This conceptual development of the doing and making of commons has involved a direct and profound engagement with the everyday activities and experiences of the commoners through which commons are composed – that is, with commoning. It indi-

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cates a quest for different modes of (re)production. And it sets out with a consideration of the ways in which capitalist enclosures have de-valorised and rendered invisible the myriad, situated relations and practices of reproduction that exist between people and the manifold resources on which they rely (Federici, 2001; De Angelis, 2007; Shiva, 2010). Thus, in the shift towards commons-as-practice, a dual operation can be discerned in the activities of commoners, as focused on resisting the logic of capital accumulation while also (or through) creating new forms of working, living and being in common. In this way, commoning becomes committed to political action and a focal juncture of social struggle.

Thus, the present volume takes the commons as a key domain through which social struggles about societal futures evolve, acknowledging that there is a continuous backward and forward movement of enclosure, commoning and de-commoning. That is, in this struggle the creation of spaces for commoning provokes counter-efforts by the dominant forces of capital to politically decompose the initiatives of the commoners with new processes of enclosures and disposessions. Commons-based initiatives may, for example, be integrated as subordinate aspects *within* capital, ultimately supplementing rather than challenging it (Dyer-Witheford, 1999; De Peuter & Dyer-Witheford, 2010). Indeed, apparently commons-oriented initiatives such as informal cooperatives regularly morph into business enterprises, while carbon-trading models operate to sustain the hegemonic economy of ownership and competition. Similarly, not all forms of enclosure can be dismissed as bad by definition, even from the perspective of the commons. The idea of community as a user group necessarily involves exclusion (of non-members, while, as David

Harvey (2012) points out, the production and enclosure of non-commodified spaces in a ruthlessly commodifying world is surely a good thing. There is, of course, a constant need for critical reflection to interpret the social relevance of commoning practices.

In line with a post-operaistic approach, we perceive the commons as a conceptual space of social struggle through which alternatives are even now being tested, explored and lived. This feeds into a politics of hope that not only identifies alternative spaces within the overarching logic of capitalist accumulation but also suggests possibilities for a life in common here and now. We consider commoning not only as an alternative economy but also – and rather – as an alternative to economy (Gibson-Graham 2006; Dawney, Kirwan & Brigstocke, 2016). Thus, approaching the commons movement as a social struggle for the creation of new forms of relationship, our objective is not to passively and objectively describe processes of enclosure and commoning but rather to search actively and subjectively in support of practices that can create new futures. And it is thus that we apply a broadly autonomist perspective on the practices of commoning, as a quest for an independence from the ordering temporality of capital(ism).

Finally, by way of a rider here, we should note that this volume is not limited to a narrow reading of the conceptual framework of autonomism. It elaborates on and thus goes beyond this – just as, in fact, the autonomists did themselves in applying an original reading of Marx that went beyond Marx (Negri, 1991), while also investigating contemporary commoning realities and presenting projects for further development. The articles compiled here, therefore, embrace a variety of approaches to commoning and autonomism, moving between abstract analysis and empirical example, with investigations into conceptual

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frameworks, observations on current practices and proposals for a commonist future.

Five autonomist principles for commoning

Five issues or themes may be identified as shared concerns raised by the contributions gathered here – sometimes overtly and sometimes between the lines – and which we regard, anyhow, as crucial to an autonomist approach to commons. Although not intended as exhaustive, this listing does, we believe, serve to identify five autonomist principles for commoning.

First, the authors generally highlight the broad context of current macro-socioeconomics, with several looking at theories and practices as specified by the contemporary period of cognitive capitalism and immaterial labour (Boutang, 2002; Hardt & Negri, 2004: 109; Gorz, 2010). Although taking different approaches to a variety of topics pitched at different theoretical and concrete levels, each of the authors in some way critiques the operation of capital, explicitly and/or implicitly rejecting (the dominance of) the prevailing paradigm of neoliberal development; they indicate and explicate ideas and initiatives that go beyond the individualistic life-styling of contemporary enclosures and the attendant universalising commodification. Very generally, one might say that the various contributions here all follow an immanent research approach, one in which theories and practices of commoning are explored from within and through the struggles and social relations of the present epoch.

Second, the authors generally avoid the focus on commons as shared resources and rather perceive commons as the creation of new forms of sociality, as new collective practices of living,

working, thinking, feeling and imagining that act against the contemporary capitalist forms of producing and consuming (variously enclosing) the common wealth. There is, therefore, a general reluctance here to consider commons as things (goods) in need of regulation and protection by private and/or public governmentalities (governing mechanisms); indeed, the private–public binary of the now classical capitalist–socialist opposition is little employed or even referenced. The commons are rather perceived as societal transformations and even, by association, as levers for these, as opportunities entangled within the cooperative and communicative forms of production of cognitive capitalism; these, in turn, are revealed and/or enabled through ruptures (cracks) (Holloway, 2010) within the actual social relations and realised through the development of alternatives to capitalist production and consumption practices.

Third, this search for societal transformation through practices of commoning also implies a vision and presentation of research in which the theoretical conceptualisations about commoning are formulated not primarily from an objectivist but rather from a perspectivist approach. This is an approach characterised by a search for possibilities and initiatives that actively aim to change the societal context in which the development of knowledge is situated and the political constructed. The idea of a certain commitment to ‘going beyond the actual to find the possible’ leads the perspectivist knowledge researcher to strive for effective truths (Negri, 1991; Virno, 2004) – that is, to develop insights into actual concrete practices for possible societal transformations. Empirical description, therefore, is directly bound to intent (determined by the subject’s perspective) rather than imagined as disconnected (idealised as objective abstraction).

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Specifically, the authors here refer to practices of societal transformations and the struggles and practices of commoning from the subjective perspective of the multitude – perceived as a collective subjectivity of mutually interacting individuals (singularities) exercising agency – particularly as set against the enclosures and dispossessions of expanding cognitive capitalism and seeking opportunities for the construction of a real alternative. The concept of the multitude is employed as an autonomist perspectivism, wherein the common develops as an alternative to capital, either external to it or within it. Indeed, we hope that the plurality of ideas presented in this volume may stimulate reflection and elaboration of the possibilities for realising a transition towards communist practices in our actual, day-to-day living conditions.

Related to this quest for the transformative power of the multitude for a more communist future, a fourth theme evident in the contributions here is that of a generic quest to understand whether and how the multitude in this present epoch of biopolitical production is able to create alternative living and working situations and maintain its autonomy and resistance to the living and labour forms of cognitive capitalism. Two different and opposing positions can be discerned – although many intermediate positions also emerge – concerning the constituent power of the multitude to realise such a transformation towards a more communist future.

The first and the more optimistic vision, expressed by Hardt and Negri and referred to by various contributors, is that due to the increased commonality of knowledge production and the immanence of autonomous work, conditions emerge in which immaterial labour and the multitude can break free from their domination by capital. As we enter a new era of automation,

information and communication – the foundational basis for biopolitical production – increasingly developed cooperatively in and through networks, formed and managed by the immaterial labourers and within which the labourers themselves have become the bearers of the means of production, then these networks and thus the means of production are no longer provided by capital but rather reside within labour. In this vision, it is the living labour and its attributes that are now the most important forces of development, representing the mass intellectuality of the post-Fordist workers instead of the general intellect of the biopolitical production. This implies that the production of knowledges, ideas and communications actually occurs through forms of cooperation internal to labour and external to capital, intrinsically undermining the attempts of capital to organise enclosures and appropriate the wealth produced by labour. It follows, therefore, that a communist future is slowly being realised through the very immanence of autonomous work and cooperative forms of labour, one that can no longer be relegated to capital's techniques and strategies of control and which thus also provide the conditions for a liberation of the multitude.

The second vision rejects this assumption of an imminent, liberalising trajectory of cognitive labour that will increasingly work for itself and no longer for and under the domination of capital. Instead of the assumption of a growing autonomy of cognitive labour from capital due to the expanding cooperative, communicative forms of production, this vision observes the opposite, namely a growing control on the part of capital over the life, work and social psyche of cognitive labour, particularly due to new information and communication technologies that control its mind and desires, the 'soul' (Berardi, 2009). Thus, the

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valorisation of cognitive labour by capital is no longer limited to specific areas of exploitation, as in Fordist production, but slowly covers – informs, directs, colonises – the entirety of our lives. It is the whole human as desire rather than just labour as human capital that has become the object of techno-social domination; and it is precisely this, the social libido itself and all the ways in which it is expressed (intelligence, imagination, sociability, etc.), that has been captured. In this vision, the performative power of capital in respect of cognitive labour through information and communication technologies shaping human desires appears irreversible and prevents the realisation of the optimistic vision of the multitude breaking through the web of the empire's power (only occasional 'victories' are possible now, and these may only operate as safety-valve mechanisms).

Although apparently much bleaker, this second vision need or even should not be interpreted as negating all agency, as denying the autonomy and creative power of human activity. It may rather be represented as an exaggerated plea aiming to elicit an appropriately profound response, so that we may better identify the contexts of desire and thereby distinguish the ways in which this autonomy takes shape within the actual context of heteronomous technospheres (the realms of information, communication and biotechnologies) dominating the multitudinous psychospheres, such as the realms of affect, ideation and imagination. It is a plea at least for a consciousness that may re-innovate resistance and the autonomy of the multitude(s) and the analysis of this. This second vision may thus be understood as a call to seek ways in which the new mass intellectuality can develop anew so as to recreate itself in relation to the general intellect of the high technospheres of the contemporary knowledge economy.

This choice of visions and interpretations and the potential for 'positive' outcomes implies some basic questions. Can multitudes generate *social spaces* in which new commonalities are established? To what extent is cognitive capital able or unable to absorb such initiatives and contain the mass intellectuality within its structures? The overriding sense of the contributions here, we suggest, is of a non-deterministic thesis in which – alongside the immanent empowerment of cognitive labour and yet also the subversion and manipulation of this by and for capital – there arise opportunities for an alternative, non-capital-based development. These, simply, may or may not be taken. In line with the political valorisation of autonomy, in fact, this emphasises choice and possibility, a plurality of futures. The utopics and dystopics envisioned for cognitive labour in the period of supposedly 'late' capitalism may thus offer contemporary and forward-looking extremes as reference points within which we seek to navigate possibilities for commoning.

This links to a fifth theme, a concern with the multitudinous practices of commoning and creation of social spaces as evolving within (the contradictions of cognitive) capital and state (which are thus transmuted) or outside the world of commodities (to be realised in a world of commons) or both (within and without). Referring to these three positions and considering them strategically, in terms of multitudinous practices of commoning, the total effect, we think, is of the emergence of a combined vision of the common – so again, a liberal plurality – wherein the cumulative effect is not just one of complete rupture or escape, but rather an ongoing development, including and incorporating ruptures and expanding free spaces along the way.

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This is an evolutionary view that nevertheless makes claim to the revolutionary moment, valorising but without hinging on any particular short-term success. It is progress as process, antagonistic to and incompatible with capital, yet also developing within and so conditioned by it. It indicates commoning as an emergent practice designed in specific contexts and performed by people daily as they move in and out of commons and capitalist/statist contexts (environments, circuits). And it represents, we believe, the range of commoning activities and analyses considered by the articles in this volume.

Contributions

Regarding the internal structure of this volume, rather than divide the contributions into sections – which would arguably frame the discussion in a certain, prescribed way – we have followed a more horizontal, rhizomatic approach. We present the pieces in a loosely linked, narrative-type sequence of which the logic of connection – set, roughly, within a framework of moving from autonomism to commoning – is, inevitably, just one of many that we could have chosen.

The volume starts with a discussion by **Mathijs van de Sande** looking at how the resistance of the commoners can be conceptualised in terms of a prefigurative power of the multitude to create autonomous social spaces, referring to Negri's concept of *potentia* or *constituent power* and Holloway's concept of *power-to*. Van de Sande stresses that Negri's constituent power is always already present in the here and now, composing a space within capitalist structures and relations wherein these relations are changed. Holloway's *power-to* concept, on the other hand, represents the potential of a radical alternative that reveals itself as a moment

of rupture, a crack in the texture of capitalism. Van de Sande explains how these different understandings of actions of resistance have specific implications for terminological usage. The concept of the common (singular) *within* capitalist structures is both a precondition for and product of the multitude's resistance to capitalism (Negri); in the plural, the commons are distinctive, momentous and potentially decisive breaks (Holloway).

Then, **Elise Thorburn** reflects on how the multitude can organise its prefigurative power in relation to the specific configurations of cognitive capitalism in this epoch of biopolitical production. Thorburn's analysis critiques Hardt and Negri in relation to the multitude's inevitable emergence in spontaneous and elementary forms of communism through the cooperative nature of its labour, since any movement with political directionality must be consciously organised; she sees their notion of immateriality as overemphasised, particularly in respect of reproductive work as uncovered by feminist analyses; and she regards them as underestimating the effect of capital's division of workers, even in an era of production that requires greater degrees of cooperation, communication and collective labour. Thus, emphasising the need to actively establish politically reorganised forms of struggle that include but are not limited to work, Thorburn suggests the model of the assembly. Referring to her personal experience of the Greater Toronto Workers Assembly, she argues that the specific class composition of biopolitical production can achieve a radical break from the hold of capital (empire). Thus transformed through a practical politics of the common, it follows, the uncentred, disunited multitude of Hardt and Negri may be realised as an internally differentiated but unseparated heterogeneity.

Next, focusing generally on Negri's oeuvre and particularly on the issue of instituting the common as a project of democratic action, **Sonja Lavaert** offers a conceptual history and overview of the multitude. Lavaert sets out by stressing the important role played by Negri's experiences with *operaismo* and his study of Spinoza for the development of an alternative line of modern thought in which ideas are considered as being politically relevant, as having a potential power (*potentia*), insofar as they are related to human vitality. This involves an imagination or subjectivity that cannot be standardised; it represents an immanent perspective shaped by the actions of the multitude and thus a constituent power antagonistic to the constituted power of state institutions. It was this reinterpretation of democracy as an immanent perspective of the multitude as the condition for a politics in general that led to Negri's empire–multitude pairing. Lavaert ponders the relationship to the multitude and resistance of expression for Negri in love and art and laughter, as well as how the immanent analysis of the multitude concept/practice also brought him to advance the idea of a perspectivist knowledge, related to Machiavelli's call for effective truths. Thence, she reviews Virno's question about how a partial and antagonistic perspective of the multitude can pretend to universality and Agamben's search for a method of knowledge that isolates a particular case in its context, claiming that this method may make a new totality comprehensible. This leads her to the *general intellect* concept introduced by Marx, referring to Virno's remarks that the general intellect has irreversibly changed the labour process and yet offers a route towards emancipation.

It is this search for effective truth that brings **Franco Berardi** to stress that the multitude has to reconquer its autonomy in the

actual epoch of what he dubs *semicapitalism*. Berardi narrates the victorious struggle of the industrial workers' movement against the disciplinary rule of the factory and the response of capital with technological innovations instituting a flexibilisation and deregulation of labour that dissolved the political force of the workers' movement. Thus, labour has been fractalised, divided into units of time and activity that are bought and deployed in now the de-territorialised space of a global, recombinant capital. Then, the screen links (cell phone, tablet, etc.) become the assembly lines of cognitive labour, shaping relations between the fractal worker and recombinant capital in the ever more technologically integrated network, while the flow of information reduces and strips the self-reliant social activity of the cognitive workers, submitting their mental energies to the accelerating rhythms of capitalist production and reversing the social autonomy into a pervasive dependence of emotions and consciousness. The only way to go beyond the psychopathological present in which precariousness, isolation and competition take the place of solidarity, according to Berardi, is thus a self-organisation of cognitive work. This implies a disentanglement of the general intellect from the capitalist gestalt that operates as a psychosocial power governing daily life in which debt has become the general frame of subjugation and autonomy now takes the form of (re)claiming a right to insolvency.

In his contribution, **Pieter Lemmens** reflects on this, stressing that the liberation of the common from capital supposes first of all a liberation of the multitudinous desires from the conditions of today's cognitive and consumer capitalism. Referring to the work of Stiegler and Berardi, Lemmens argues that the Hardt–Negri analysis of multitude fails to adequately take into account

the new technical and libidinal conditions of today's general intellect, which precisely frustrate the process of social recombination necessary for the multitude to become autonomous. Critiquing Hardt/Negri along lines not dissimilar to Thorburn (above), Lemmens further disputes their assumption of desire as an inherently positive force, since the general intellect is strongly conditioned by the technologies of the mind (involving traditional and digital forms of communication), which are systematically annexed by cognitive and consumer capitalism. Emphasis is then placed on the relevance of the flow of libidinal energy crossing three interacting systems – referred to as psychic organs, social organisations and technical organs – wherein it is important to conceive the latter in terms of *pharmaka*, meaning that they are intrinsically ambivalent with respect to their conditioning and can thus act not only to discipline but also for self-construction in processes of de-proletarianisation. The digital information and communication technologies, it follows, also carry the potential to support new processes of psychic and collective individuation and hence may also function as tools of autonomy, resocialisation and freedom.

Driven by an overarching preoccupation to mutate the mainstream modes and generate new modes of production and governance from below, **Massimo De Angelis** discusses various elements for a systems theory of commoning. He argues that today's social revolution is nothing other than a diffusion of commoning in which the circuit of commons – a distinct (autonomous and autopietic, i.e. self-regenerating) social system, just like the capital and state circuits – expands as it struggles to take things into its own hands, self-governs on the basis of different and often clashing, internally generated codes

and reproduces itself through a set of interrelated practices and values. De Angelis stresses that the phenomenology of commons is grounded in daily life and its social relations of commoning, where commoning is the activity of commoners in organic relation both to the commons (the pooled resources that need to be sustained and reproduced) and to one another. Thus, it becomes a recursive life activity that regenerates and develops those very social relations that are constitutive of the commons. The strength of a commons system then depends on the balance and density of all the relational circuits and extent to which we subordinate the operation of capital to the commons' values of equity, sharing, solidarity and conviviality. This leads De Angelis to conclude with a discussion of the mutation of societies towards a commons hegemony on the basis of boundary commoning, the commoning that produces a structural coupling between and among different commons systems constructing a new, wider and growing sphere of interdependent commons.

This analysis can be understood as elaborated in the contribution by **Murat Öztürk**, **Joost Jongerden** and **Andy Hilton**, in which concrete practices of commoning are described in the limiting contemporary context of smallholders (rural families, the peasantry) in Turkey. Here, commons as social practices are investigated through the ways in which smallholder families and communities move in and out of capitalistic and commoning structures. First, they resist the logic of capital to commodify (they valorise their land and maintain traditional commons); then they articulate a new dual circuit system, combining these commons with financial inputs, including new, non-commodity exchanges based upon kith-and-kin linkages extended by mobility and migration. Thus transcending the rural–urban division

of space, the practices of commoning are viewed as productive of re-spatialisation of the common; new spatial lifestyles involving a variety of residence and migratory patterns have emerged that incorporate both a maintenance and (re)generation of commoning values. Thus, the entry of capital into traditional village life has brought about the development of new forms of social commoning that combine the rural and urban and sense of belonging for extended settlement patterns with dual- and multi-place living structures underlying a novel solidarity-network-based commons.

Femke Kaulingfreks and **Ruud Kaulingfreks** refer to central urban squares and parks as another social space in which a sense of the common is created, in this case one that disputes and sometimes usurps the authority of the central power. The physical assembly of large numbers of people in squares – and other, sufficiently similar spaces (like parks) – has proven to be an effective method to surprise and pressure state powers on the part of the disempowered (multitude) struggling to open up another world. Central to this is a topological analysis of the square as an inherently democratic, egalitarian space that awakens a sense of commoning (even as the governing disciplinary powers aim to control it). The political agency of the mass here is not based on a shared programme or identity, but rather on the coming together itself. The multitude is experienced and expressed as a set of singularities that can act politically because, in its internal diversity, it has a longing for a more just and egalitarian governance, for a life that is fundamentally in common. Square protests should not be judged on their demonstrable long-term outcomes, therefore, let alone with respect to their immediate impact on institutional structures; rather, their value

lies in their expression of a prefigurative politics, as a practice movement in which certain political ideals are experimentally actualised in the 'here and now'.

In the article by **Jose Louis Vivero-Pol**, another process of commoning is described related to the common right to have food and be well nurtured. Starting from a review of the failures of the current, globalised, industrial food system – following three historical waves of enclosures and privatisation of common resources – Vivero-Pol introduces the possibility of a paradigm shift from the presently dominant corporate food regime towards one premised on a commoning of food. A transitional framework is identified composed of the growing movements for food sovereignty (mainly in the rural South) and alternative food networks (linked especially to the urban North) as a sort of grand coalition of a counter-hegemonic movement, which Vivero-Pol terms a *food commons regime*. This he envisages as a re-valorisation of the non-commodity dimensions of food and agriculture in the establishment of a tri-centric governance system, involving the state and private sector as well as grassroots movements, with new roles for each. Vivero-Pol proposes that within this system, a partner state takes the role of facilitator, supporting alternative, grassroots initiatives that enable polycentric, bottom-up developments for basic foods in which food provisioning is gradually driven by an ethos that focuses more on social aims and satisfying human needs than on profit.

Staying with agriculture, **Guido Ruivenkamp** discusses the production of seeds for food crops in the context of a societal struggle that can go in the direction of either commoning or commodification. First, Ruivenkamp offers an overview overview of the transformations of seeds as natural commons into

commodities. Then he stresses how this has also changed the social relations regarding the seeds, shifting knowledge from peasant communities to public and private research institutions, which also involved a change in the material/immaterial composition of the seeds that enabled the institutions to control the labour of cultivation. Ruivenkamp refers then to the responses of various multitudinous practices of re-commoning seeds. These consist of efforts to challenge the mode of ordering imposed by the commodified seeds, recompose im/material forms so as to revitalise local resources and activate common knowledge production, such as through the development of flexible, non-hierarchical networks that re-valorise peasant knowledge. A commonist food production, it is suggested, will be based on these innovative practices, steered by alliances of peasants, farmers, researchers, consumers and citizens, to rewrite the embodied, politicising content of the seeds for re-territorialisation, re-peasantisation and care-ful agri-cultures.

Finally, broadening this discussion, **Stefan Meretz** looks at how commons may become the elementary social form of a new society, analogous to the commodity for (cognitive) capitalism. Meretz emphasises that capitalism should not be perceived as an external system of power but rather as an internalised and objectified system of how we produce and reproduce our livelihood. Thus, he argues, undoing capitalism requires a new way of producing our livelihood, one that can potentially replace the old form of the commodity and its mediation of the reproduction of individual as well as of social life. This new mode of production is based on peer production, a form of commoning that changes not only the social relations among producers and users but also the purpose, shape and usability of the means

of production and the resulting products. From a categorical skeleton of a peer-commonist society based on the logics of inclusion, Meretz looks at the practical issue of its scaling up to the level of a full societal mediation. For this, he introduces the concept of *stigmergy* (from behavioural studies of termites) as a type of self-coordination in large decentralised systems in which subsequent actions reinforce and build upon each other, leading to the spontaneous emergence of coherent, apparently systematic activity. Then, he elaborates a five-step ('germ form') model and compares two concrete cases of business initiatives operating with a peer-commonist practice as examples of a trend he observes as being already underway.

Final remarks

This volume is presented as a selection of readings on the subject at hand rather than an attempt at a full review striving for a 'model' presentation. That said, there are two areas of deficit that perhaps ought to be noted, referring to time and place. For the former, we have to acknowledge that the speed of current events relative to the pace of writing and publication means that some of what was treated to as contemporary at the time of writing has since been passed by. While this may occasionally impinge already, we think it should not overly impact on the analysis that is primarily set in a present seen in terms of decades rather than years. Thus, for example, reference to specific protests and neoliberal measures remains pertinent, we believe, even where the specific political conditions and economic situation mentioned appear already historical. While the hopeful era of Occupy and the street protests of spontaneous multitudes may have already become a distant memory currently overtaken by a

new reality of resurgent nationalisms and the alt/far right, this is itself just another passing phase, we believe, in the longer term unfolding dynamic of emerging common(s).

Regarding place, we would not consider criticism of a Western-centric bias to be misplaced. Indeed, moving from the ‘developing country’ case study of Turkey, an obvious line of geographical development would be consideration of developments in the Middle East and North Africa, thinking of the local dissenting responses to autocratic regressions post-‘Arab Spring’ in a region where ‘governance, state control, and legitimacy are being contested’ (Cambanis, 2017). Nevertheless, we also feel that a concentration on the West is not so inappropriate, since it is in the siting of the ‘advanced’ economies that autonomist thought has developed and which thus most meets the conditions of its analysis.

Finally, we would like to emphasise that our summaries of the various contributions are the result of our personal reading and interpretation. We are aware that there is in all the pieces gathered here a rich ensemble of ideas, and suggestions for which many other ways of presentation may have been championed, centred more, for example, on autonomy, forms of constituent power or instituting the common. We hope, nonetheless, that this volume will stimulate the reader to continue thinking and acting for a more sharing, egalitarian and person-centred – or commonist – society, ‘here and now’.

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