

COMMONING THE ARTS?

A FIELD REPORT

In 2014 I was approached by the Dampfzentrale in Bern and asked to come up with an artistic concept to rethink the institutional aspects of the Dampfzentrale art centre. Squatted in the 1980s, this former power station, grew from an artist run space over the years into a rather prestigious and classical institution — or so they complained. As I didn't feel right to taking up this invitation as an individual artist, I made a proposal to transform the centre temporally into

In the field

political economist Elmar Ostrom, for the arts context. Trying to develop a commons economy, as described by American base my thoughts and reflections on my personal experience of To elaborate on the generic characteristic of the commons, I will

social desirability as an open and diverse bricolage. This generic characteristic of the commons is not, in itself, a deficiency; on the contrary, it is this genericness of the commons that allows us to understand institutionalising processes of the generic. This generic characteristic of the commons is basically the commons may be, the concept of the commons is basically revolution to restore capitalism. As diverse as the interpretations of democracy, it is often accused of being merely an alibi-capitalist opposition. Whilst the commons can be seen as a restoration of democracy, or as the third government system beyond the communist movement, or as a moral concept rather than a political one, the commons is glorified as a subversive anarchist world, as much as criticised as a moral concept rather than a capitalism. Seen as a way towards a re-localisation of the globalised solution for the financial crises, for others it is economic romanticism. The projections into the commons are numerous: for some it is

the solution for the financial crises, for others it is economic romanticism as a second discursive hyper-reality. The art world is critically immersed in this discourse and in the process of acculturating something that might be already theirs. There are a vast amount of artistic practices that have taken on the commons discourse and have tried to adopt and practise commoning principles in the making of their institutional frameworks.

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a commons. The Swiss Alps provide multiple examples of transnational
commons structures, such as the regulation of the waters, the use
of the meadows and woods, and the maintenance of walkways.
Inspired by these structures, a group of about 20 artists created an
experimental working context, through which they tried to apply
those ancient, but highly sustainable economies onto the fluctuating
practices of contemporary art.

We started with an interest in the fundamental differences
between exchange and sharing. Exchange demands a distribution
of goods between different entities, from where they can be brought
into a barter. This declaration of ownership is the basic principle
of the market economy. Currenties make this bartering easier;
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Sharing instead, is an economy of responsibility. Here it is not
the goods that are distributed, but the care-taking procedures – and
the goods that are distributed, but the care-taking procedures – and
as ownership is obsolete, a fair distribution has to be organised
collectively. This economic form of a shared responsibility for the
usage of common goods is what is usually understood as the basic
principle of the commons. But our understanding of the commons
slightly shifted by dealing with the following questions: What does
slightly shift by dealing with the following questions: What does
care mean when, taken, by the arts? How does such an understand-
ing impact the identity of the artist and the concept of authenti-
ty in artworks? What has to be taken care of? The artwork, the
artist, or the creative process? What are the goods or resources that
have to be maintained? And finally how can critique be shared?
What kind of goods are ideas? What constitutes an artist if not
these shifts in economic principles, with their impact on the link
between individual and the social, mitigate us more as a problem
than as a solution. Trying to understand those differences, and their
impact on us and the social body, was our basic interest.

How it works

For this we closely looked at a theory that claimed to know the
conditions under which commons structures can work sustainably.
In 2009 Elinor Ostrom received the Nobel Prize in Economics for
breaking the fundamental neoclassical argument of the 'Tragedy of
the Commons', an article by Garrett Hardin published in 1968. Hardin

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ciameia that every commonly owned good will be overused due to
the egoistic impulse of human nature. The individual, so he suggests,
only takes care when the resource is its private property – and we
all know how the primacy of privatisation invaded the furthest
corners of our contempary lives.
With her concept of Governing the Commons (published as
a book in 1990), Ostrom proved the opposite and showed that under
certain conditions commons structures actually function more
sustainably and socially valuable than any privatised economy.
Ostrom bases her argument on one side on broad empirical
studies in diverse economic sectors all over the globe, and on the
other side on game-theoretical reflections with a fundamentally new
perspective on the prisoners dilemma. Even though it would provide
a striking analysis of creative processes, I don't wish to elaborate
further on these aspects here. Rather, I would like to talk about our
experience on the ArtCommons with Ostrom's notion of rules
and resources in relation to their applicability in the arts context.
In her paper Design Principles and Threats to Sustainable
Organization that Manage Commons (1999) Ostrom defined eight
basic principles under which she saw commons structures all over
the globe, of different qualities and sizes, which are all managing
their resources perfectly well. These principles are pragmatically
tuned for resources like fishing grounds, water reserves, biospheres
or energy. They have a grass-roots democratic – yet often resticting
touch, which in the first place does not feel comparable to interresting
in artistic terms, nor productive in an open, flexible, non-discrimi-
nating society, based on imaterial labour and a creative knowled-
ge industry. There is, for example, principle number 1), Define clear
boundaries; it asks for a clear outline of the resources and the group
of users, which can be criticised as exclusive. Or principle number
5), Develop a system, carried out by community members, for
monitoring members' behaviour, and principle 6), Use graduated
sanctions for rule violations, which sound more like a neighbourhood
watch programme than rules for an artist society. Many artists also
might be critical towards principle 3), Ensure that those affected by
the rules can participate in modifying the rules. This might disregard
the authority of the author and the uniqueness of the artwork.
Finally, principle 4), that claims the importance of being accepted
by outside authorities, might be seen to stand against the importance
of autonomous and subversive capacities of art.

with every new project. Our rules are in a state of constant change, often informally negotiated, and our resources have first to be inventoried before they can be used. Our main means of internal communication are written words in emails, on Skype, in text messages, or on Facebook. And our driving motivation is to catch general political feeling of a broad artists' community, but nonetheless less easy to apply in their concrete working contexts. Despite these difficulties of adaptation in different contexts, trying to apply those principles in an artistic environment radically shifts the incentive by which we produce art. The difficulties of a direct application show how deeply we have incorporated the capitalist principles of accumulation of private property and the neoliberal image of the self, mulation of rural communities at traditional common lands like those tried to stress the case by looking at her theory.

In order to confront our own entanglement with capitalism we have to stress the case by looking at her theory. Ellinor Ostrom uses as example the famous example of Grimdelwald, spoken from the Dampfbahn in the Bernese Alps. Martanne delwald, son from the mountain community (Bergschaft) of Grimdelwald, told the story of a local legend in the Bernese Alps. Martanne Ostrom studied this common over the course of 30 years and compared it with the famous example of Trostle, which Ostrom describes in her book. With the personal help of Martanne Tiefenbach compared it with the famous example of Trostle, which Ostrom Ostrom's principles are well applied for example the common in Grimdelwald because the role-model which we — the common in Grimdelwald created the role-model which we — experienced — tried to translate into an artificial artistic economy.

Firstly, our research focused on the definition of our resources. What are our meadows, pastures, cattle, and cheese? What is the work of wedding, or, wedding, and how do we organise it? Is there an abundance of goods, or do we carefully need to build up our resources?

But how could we translate principles and rules that are valuable under rural conditions in the agricultural sector into an international urban society and the art sector?

the cultural value of the moment!

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Many of these factors are fundamentally different when aiming at people, spread all over Europe, with self-assigned tasks that change to create a contemporary commons for the arts. We are a loose group that are passed on from generation to generation. All these make engagement of the commoners lies in the traditional cultural values clearly outlined as soil, water, air, and air, the driving motivation for the is the spoken word. While the resources of this common are about 30 years. The main means of communication with each other are usually held by one member of the common over the course of of the work in the woods and on the meadows, with cattle and cheese, rights and responsibilities for the resources. Tasks and coordination village are members of the common and automatically have the changed three times in the past 600 years. Only people living in the in 1404. The rules established in this letter were only marginally sealed in the foundation letter of the Bergschaft Grimdelwald was sealed in the transition of the common over the course of 30 years and compared it with the famous example of Trostle, which Ostrom

of our resources as clearly as possible. The exclusiveness of the group begimning the selection of people was rather random. Close friends were directly approached and were encouraged to invite their acquaintances, and we also sent out an anonymous open call for certain families with each other, we started to restrict our open gesture and defined the ArtsCommer as someone who had worked least one day in the ArtsCommer. This system allowed exactly at least one other current ArtsCommer. Looking back at the reality of how and when people engaged in the ArtsCommons, and hence provoked a lot of discussion. Looking back at the moment was in charge of integrating them into their practice. The every newcomer as a potential ArtsCommer, and every ArtsCom- never applied. A formal perspective was next to useless. We approached different distant and close relations to the ArtsCommons, the differ- for a clearly defined boundary obsolete.

In many cases we experienced similar things. Discussing the practice was only possible because of the intensive discussions on a concrete formal level. Yet, discussing them made many of the issues of the commons visibile and concrete. It could even be the case that the informal discussion of the rules of conviviality, and the emerging practice of merging our art forms into each other that created what I identified as the common. It was the difference and relation between the abstract contribution in a parallel world through the practices that all of us emerged in a parallel world reinforcing them. The concrete reality relevant, than applying and enforicng them, mostly more utopian characteristics — was, in a playful manner, and their rules — speculating on their effect, their political relevance, and their a concrete formal level.

Commons beyond resource management
from breaking with capitalism and doesn't even have this ambition. On the contrary, it established the commons as a pragmatic solution. Ostrom's research surely makes an important statement — yet, it is far from breaking with capitalism and doesn't even have this ambi-

creasing a sustainable economy for a specific group of people, with a specific issue or resource. The pragmatic leftist justification for this common and the private is obviously the other way round! First and foremost, things are common in the broadest sense, and any human capitalistic biosphere.

But this disregards that the historical struggle between the capitalist, bioticphere. Both demands the clear declaration of an individual position, accountable for the effectiveness of its personal individuation. The machine is efficient. It creates desires that an individual can recognize and accept as their own. The individual creates itself along the lines of these desires and becomes exactly what the system needs — a unity that is identifiable and flexible according to the needs of the machine.

Since the romantic invention of the author, artistic culture clearly poses large and interesting problems regarding the image of society in a neoliberal society. The myth of the artist as the individual in a neo liberal society, the myth of the artist as the image of the culture and this figure becomes the role model of any worker within this economy. The demand for flexibility, full-time personal engagement omitting any adequate remuneration, creativity as the driving motivation in any kind of work, and for individual competitiveness by starting a unique selling point, are all concepts have their roots in the work-life behaviours of artists from the 1960s on. Created by the illusion of observing the society from a specific outside position, the contemporary artist finds him / herself as the prototype of the new general workers model in the centre of mainstream society. If we don't want to perpetuate this model, we have to invent a new work-work (labor-out-ouvre) relation — the relation between our performance and our product on the one side, and a new relation between individual development on the other side.

Both relations are challenged nowadays. The individual is at the same time object and subject, target and (partially self-made) individual developments and the future of the society on the other side. And our product on the one side, and a new relation between individual and our product on the other side.

of our resources as clearly as possible. The exclusiveness of the group that had access to it, exploitation remained to be defined. In the beginning the selection of people was rather random. Close friends were directly approached and were encouraged to invite their acquaintances, and we also sent out an anonymous open call for certain families with each other, we started to restrict our open gesture and defined the ArtsCommer as someone who had worked least one day in the ArtsCommer. This system allowed exactly at least one other current ArtsCommer. Looking back at the reality of how and when people engaged in the ArtsCommons, and hence provoked a lot of discussion. Looking back at the moment was in charge of integrating them into their practice. The every newcomer as a potential ArtsCommer, and every ArtsCom- never applied. A formal perspective was next to useless. We approached different distant and close relations to the ArtsCommons, the differ- for a clearly defined boundary obsolete.

generic field, where individualization can take place and be developed state of affairs, then it will rather be a commons that opens that common environment the commons as an alternative to the current common entities will not be able to cope with this complexity.

If we envision the generic field for different web of relations. Any partitioning into private or interpretations and projections in which different actors can generate a concrete and specific outcome. Rather, it opens a field for have a generic field for a tolerant to tolerate an corporation of everything. The generic is incapable of subsuming things as it doesn't oppose of a tollerant to tolerate an corporation of a biotic nature, I imagine, is the re. This 'all-inclusiveness' and generic nature, I imagine, is the common has to be expanded into the general bio- and non-biosphere callly unspecific, and all-inclusive. The generic characteristic of the I see the potential of the commons better interpreted as radi-

tion of the goods of this world.

The commons simply understood as a practical tool for better resource management takes this situation too short and doesn't make a big difference in this sense. It still addresses the individual (together with other individuals) as being in charge of the regulated exploitation a mostly stressful paradox.

The commonality that surrounds us. This creates sometimes playful but redundant individualism is kind of a running idle in the complex relationships, authorised by a unique individual artist is enabled us to take part in the market. But the desire for a singular, individual artwork, authorised by a unique individual artist is enabled what capitalism and its control mechanisms demand from us. They what capitalism is nearly impossible to identify — even if it is exactly, an artwork) is nearly impossible to identify — even if it is exactly outlined. Self that produces its unique authorised product (for example, a clearly equal activity, intelligent and community partners. A seen as and subjects (avatars, friends, institutions, etc.) have to be seen as complex environment objects (computers, commodities, nature, etc.) are impossible to be worked from individual perspectives. In such a change, or the 'financial crisis') that the human sphere produced ungraspable general intellect, the hyper-objects (like the climate singular body, the amount of meta-knowledge that floats through every corner.

'too big to fail' — even if everyone knows that it is crumbling in radical changes seem to be impossible. The system itself seems to be too big to fail — even if everyone knows that it is crumbling in its environment.

In this respect the commons has to be seen as the field, where transindividuality can be developed and experienced. The rules and regulations that a commons society would give itself might be useful to bureaucracy. The effect of a bureaucratic commons-machine on specific cases; as a basic approach to the commons, it only leads to bureaucracy, and the social body will be not much of a difference from the current machine. It can only land in what David Graeber describes in his book *The Utopia of Rules: On Technology, Shyness and the Secret Joys of Bureaucracy* (2015), as 'Dead Zones of Imagination'.

I'm aware, that such an outline does not give a clear image of a potential future institution — for, or beyond the arts. But the vision of an institution that manages itself as a commons and sees this commons as a zone for active transindividuality, where an individual's development never reaches with the development of the social body, fills my zone of imagination with hope.

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In relation to the social body as much as the objects that populate its environment.

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