

# **Commoning the Biennial or the Biennialisation of the Commons?**

Examining how Large-scale Periodic Exhibitions Learn from Urban  
Common Spaces: Athens Biennale 5-6, *OMONNOIA* (2015-2017) and  
documenta 14, *Learning from Athens* (2017)

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## Abbreviations

AB: Athens Biennale

AB1: 1<sup>st</sup> Athens Biennale, Destroy Athens (2007)

AB2: 2<sup>nd</sup> Athens Biennale, HEAVEN (2009)

AB3: 3<sup>rd</sup> Athens Biennale, MONODROME (2011)

AB4: 4<sup>th</sup> Athens Biennale, AGORA (2013)

AB5-6: 5<sup>th</sup> to 6<sup>th</sup> Athens Biennale, OMONOIA (2015-2017)

AB6: 6<sup>th</sup> Athens Biennale, ANTI (2017)

BB7: 7<sup>th</sup> Berlin Biennale, Forget Fear (2012)

CDA: Critical discourse analysis

dX: documenta X (1997)

d11: Documenta11 (2002)

d12: documenta 12 (2012)

d13: dOCUMENTA 13 (2015)

d14: documenta 14, Learning from Athens (2017)

ERL: Exhibition Research Lab

LJMU: Liverpool John Moores University

MNC: The Midnight Notes Collective

PoB: The Parliament of Bodies, documenta 14's public programme

RttC: The right to the city

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## Abstract

This research project explores the relations between biennials, which are periodic, large-scale, international city-wide exhibitions, and common spaces, spaces shaped by commoning, collective creative practices of self-management, cooperation and solidarity. It contributes to the nascent field of exhibition studies and is addressed to biennial makers and researchers interested in the intersections between art, curating, exhibition making and activism.

Bringing together the biennial, an exhibition considered hegemonic in contemporary art, and commoning, a key concept in discussions about alternative socio-political, economic and urban futures, the research project responds to a knowledge gap in literature. In the aftermath of the squares movement of 2011-2013, the wave of protests in which several squares were occupied, addressing a critique to neoliberalism as well as fostering commoning, biennials became the most prominent exhibitions both hosting and being contested by activist practices. However, relations between biennials and commoning remain underexplored. Although some of the issues examined apply to other art institutions, this is the first study to attempt an in-depth investigation of the relations and contradictions that traverse art and commoning with a focus on biennials and the city.

The research project focuses on two case studies: the Athens Biennale 5-6, OMONOIA (2015-2017) and documenta 14, Learning from Athens (2017), two examples that shared intentions to learn from common spaces in Athens. It grounds the cases in the attention that the city drew as a vantage point to learn from collective grassroots practices contesting austerity, in a period marked by neoliberal crisis. Drawing on biennial literature and recent spatial approaches to commoning, the research employs qualitative data gathered during fieldwork and semi-structured interviews with artists, members of collectives and curators.

Examining biennials and common spaces together, two phenomena that both converge and contrast each other, the thesis expands knowledge with regards to the limits and potentials of biennial-making and city-making in their encounter. Conceptualising biennials as ‘threshold infrastructures’, the research project examines how biennials inhabit the threshold between the neoliberal and grassroots extremes of the spectrum of urban imaginaries, between accumulating power and distributing power, between collective practice and labour. These tensions are conceptualised as a dialectic relation between commoning the biennial, or

introducing more horizontal practices in biennials, and the biennialisation of the commons, a term which points to the risks biennials pose for entangling commoning in the power asymmetries that they shape. The research project asks how to potentialise this relation, that is, trace qualitative features that contribute to rethink biennials, as well as the relation between biennials and the city, conceptualised through the two-fold prism of commoning the biennial and commoning the city. In accounting for these challenges, I suggest to ground biennials in everyday city life and be attentive to the relations they institute as events with discursive, spatial and infrastructural capacity. In navigating the ambivalences of the threshold, artists act within and against the biennial, disrupting biennialisation, while claiming both the biennial and the city as a commons, even if temporarily so.

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## Declaration Page

No portion of the work referred to in the thesis has been submitted in support of an application for another degree or qualification of this or any other university or other institute of learning.

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## Foreword

This study was conducted at Liverpool John Moores University's Exhibition Research Lab, which is devoted to the study of exhibition practices and histories. Although this is not a practice-based PhD, my practice as curator of exhibitions and producer of artworks has influenced the broader interests, motivations and the research choices made in this thesis, as well as the biases that may underpin it. My previous studies in art history (BA, MA National University of Athens) and cultural studies (MA, KULeuven) laid the foundations of my interest in contemporary art. Whether as member of art collectives or as curator and producer in waged roles, my collaborations with artists in public spaces, in art-occupations, community art centres and artist-led spaces in Athens, Brussels and the North of England shaped my exhibition-making practice.

Formative for my interest in art, commoning and the city was my involvement in the collective Reconstruction Community (RC) in Athens. Together with artists and theorists, I was one of the founding members of the group, which was partly initiated to reflect on the anticipated first Athens Biennale (AB1) *Destroy Athens* (2007). Beyond this first reason of coming together to observe the emergence of a biennial in the city, the group quickly became a space for testing forms of collaboration and self-organisation in the city. Without a legal form and with zero budget, we experimented with horizontal decision-making processes, which meant lengthy assemblies, of forty to fifty members at times, that were not spared from power dynamics related to class, gender and social capital. Meetings took place in a flat at the Exarcheia square, an area which has been central for the history of anarchist and left radical cultures in the city, as well as the target of ongoing state-led police evictions in the last decade.

Though preceding my research, the RC experience was catalytic for my motivation to research art's relation and potentials with regards to collective action, social justice and urban space. With RC, we organised the performance based event *Tunnel 14*, in a moving tram, to raise awareness on the citizenship rights that are ongoingly being denied to second-generation immigrants in Greece. At another instance, we participated at the occupied self-managed Agora Kypselis, joining twenty-one associations, to prevent the municipality's



plans to demolish the market in order to erect a shopping centre.<sup>1</sup> Researching on the Agora Kypselis during this investigation in 2018, I found out that the market was meanwhile managed by Impact Hub, a non-profit organisation, which is part of a global network promoting social entrepreneurial models such as start-ups, co-working spaces and creative cities, a shift that is indicative of the municipality's agenda in the period that this thesis looks at.<sup>2</sup>

In writing this thesis, I gradually became aware that many of the elements that make up the above experience are echoed in the two case studies of this research. Despite the initial scepticism towards the Athens Biennale by groups of artists, its gradual engagement with grassroots collective practices in the years that followed, ultimately attracted the attention of documenta 14 in Athens in 2017. documenta 14's advent to the city raised questions and reactions among artist groups, similar to the ones that AB1 had triggered. The 2015 migration crisis and the question of citizenship set the tone in documenta 14's public programme, echoing the preoccupations we had in the RC group, while the interest in learning from and engaging with occupied common spaces became the major point of intersection between my two case studies.

The importance I see in the biennial's relation to the city is shaped by my working experience in biennials in the roles of assistant curator, co-curator, producer, mediator, as a volunteer, under temporary contract or waged. Unquestionably, these experiences have shaped how I perceive biennials as workplaces that, on the one hand, offer opportunities to access the highly networked realm of the contemporary art world and on the other depend on and cultivate precarity. When I had just moved to Brussels from Athens, my first experience with a biennial, as a volunteer mediator for the Contour Biennale for moving image (2007 and

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<sup>1</sup> Some of the groups and actions active in 2008 and 2009 are listed here (in Greek): <https://www.asda.gr/elxoroi/kipsagora2.htm>. In a press article, two years after the occupation of Agora Kypselis, Rigopoulos (2008) describes the initiative as a 'peaceful occupation' which is located next to one of the most commercial streets of Athens (Fokionos Negri) and in one of the most diverse neighbourhoods, Kypseli. Language lessons to refugees, theatre games with children from the ethnic minorities, chess, film projections, a market with biological products were some of the activities taking place. For a report in English see here: <https://www.asda.gr/elxoroi/kipsagora.htm>.

<sup>2</sup> As one can read online, The 'Impact Hub Athens is part of an International Network of social driven professionals and a variety of high impact creative professionals that are dedicated into prototyping the future of business. From social inclusion and social integration to environment and fair trade, Impact Hub Athens is engaging expertise from its worldwide presence and creating a net of intercultural, high impact community that acts locally and internationally'. For more see: <https://athens.impacthub.net/who-we-are/?lang=en>.

2009) was a veritable opportunity for me to enter the cultural sector in a new country. As a volunteer at the first and only edition of the *Brussels Biennial* (2008-2009) I developed an interest in biennials as spaces of encounters and institutional synergies.<sup>3</sup> My roles as cluster curator for *TRACK*, a city-wide exhibition by the contemporary art museum S.M.A.K. in Ghent (2012) and as assistant curator at Liverpool Biennial (2016) were informative as to the differences of working from within a museum and its more solid infrastructures and resources and from a biennial, which needs to generate resources periodically, for each edition. These experiences have shaped my understanding of biennials as sites of collegiality, excitement and intense labour in conditions of impossibility to produce many projects that enter in dialogue with the city. On both occasions, I worked with artists who sought engagement with diverse communities in the context where their art takes place. For example, I think of Koki Tanaka and the reactivation of a student protest march in Liverpool; the unlikely encounter between sheep and boats in a public square in Ghent conceived by Ivo Provoost and Simona de Nicolai and the conflicted feelings of involving undocumented migrants as day labourers in a project by Christoph Büchel.

Although I do not use a personal and self-reflexive mode of address throughout the whole thesis, by drawing attention to the above experiences, my aim is to inform the reader about the questions that have driven my research: questions on what acting collectively can mean in the field of art and exhibition making in the city, what a biennial can mean for an art scene and the city, who is included, who is excluded; what is the role that commoning can play for art, curating and exhibition-making, and what role they can play for commoning. While biennials and common spaces may be underpinned by sharp antitheses, intersections emerge as individuals and groups participate in both, navigating the city as it is shaped and claimed by grassroots and top down groups and processes.

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<sup>3</sup> The Brussels Biennial 1 was realised as a network of contemporary art institutions from Belgium and the Netherlands and included the participation of the Bangladeshi Drik, Images, Communication & Information Technology from Dhaka; the Belgian B.P.S.22, espace de création contemporaine de la Province de Hainaut from Charleroi (Pierre-Olivier Rollin); Extra City, Centrum voor Hedendaagse Kunst from Antwerp (Anselm Franke); and MuHKA (Bart De Baere), Museum van Hedendaagse Kunst Antwerpen from Antwerp; the Dutch BAK, basis voor actuele kunst from Utrecht (Mária Hlavajová); Van Abbemuseum from Eindhoven (Charles Esche); and Witte de With, Centrum voor Hedendaagse Kunst from Rotterdam (Nicolaus Schafhausen and Florian Waldvogel) and the Moroccan L'appartement 22 from Rabat (Abdellah Karroum).  
<https://www.bozar.be/en/activities/1942-brussels-biennial-i>.

## Introduction. Concepts and Rationale

In setting out the key aim of this research project, the focus lies in examining the relations between biennials, which are periodic large-scale international, city-wide exhibitions of contemporary art, and collective, creative urban commoning practices, conceptualised with the term ‘common spaces’ (Stavrides, 2016). By drawing on the respective bodies of literature that study these phenomena, the research investigates and makes new sense of the relations between art, commoning and the city, and the underlying processes that create these relations with a focus on biennials.<sup>4</sup>

This thesis examines how two different, but interrelated case studies, the Athens Biennale 5-6, *OMONOIA* (2015-2017) and documenta 14, *Learning from Athens* (2017) shared intentions to learn from and engage with common spaces emerging in Athens, Greece during a period of economic and political crisis. The thesis situates the two case studies in the period that comes after the pitfalls and critique that biennials faced in their variegated engagements with activism following the squares’ movement of 2011-2013, the wave of protests that include the Arab Spring (2010), the Syntagma square occupation (2011), Occupy Wall Street (2011) and the Gezi park occupation (2013). While informed by broader discourses, crucial for defining common spaces in this research is the context of Athens and examples of art occupations, self-managed parks, neighbourhood assemblies, squats and refugee solidarity spaces, whose spread was catalysed by the Syntagma square occupation in 2011 (Arampatzi, 2014; Stavrides, 2016).

Bringing biennials and commoning together, means bringing, respectively, one of the most popular exhibitions of contemporary art and one of the most privileged concepts in discussing alternative socio-political, economic and urban futures, in the midst of financial, social and ecological crisis. To bring biennials and commoning together means to navigate the

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<sup>4</sup> In this thesis I follow the common convention in biennial literature of using the term biennial to refer both to the Athens Biennale, and documenta. I use the English term biennial to refer broadly to such events and retain the term biennale for the Athens biennale. When adopted by recent biennials, the term biennale usually implies a reference to the Venice Biennale, the first such event to be organised. Despite its different periodicity, documenta is commonly included in the histories of biennials, as its development shares with biennials selection processes, discursive frameworks and professional networks (Niemojewski, 2010; O’Neil, 2012, Green and Gardner, 2016; Kompatsiaris, 2017). See Glossary in the Appendix.

ambivalences, tensions and contradictions that underpin both phenomena on their own and in their interrelation. In this research I engage with both phenomena as contested. None of them are neutral, but viewed in relation to the values, practices and meanings one attaches to them (Stavrides, 2016c; Kompatsiaris, 2017).

Biennials are large-scale international exhibitions of contemporary art, which have been proliferating since the 1990's. It is estimated that there are currently about 150 biennials across the world (Kolb and Patel, 2018; Bethwaite and Kangas, 2018). Since the founding of the first biennial, the Venice Biennale (1893), biennials evolved historically through waves of global dispersal in different urban contexts – a process described with the term biennialisation (Marchart, 2008; Sheikh, 2010, Filipovic et al., 2010; Papastergiadis and Martin, 2011; Frascina, 2013; Green and Gardner, 2016; Kompatsiaris 2017; Kolb and Patel, 2018). This historical evolution has shaped biennials as a largely heterogeneous model of art production and presentation, difficult to define with a one-fits all definition. Anyone can name an art event a biennial (Block, 2000; Kompatsiaris, 2017; 2020). Yet, naming an art event a biennial communicates the desire to inscribe it in a field of shared codes, values and anticipations, which includes prestigious events such as the Venice Biennale, documenta or the Bienal de São Paulo (Frascina, 2013; Kompatsiaris, 2015, 2017; Smith, 2017). Almost every biennial shares the common features of large scale, periodicity, international and interdisciplinary character and a guest curator or curatorial team, which is invited to conceptualise a group, thematic or survey show, which often includes different venues and works in public space.

As an exhibition modality spread around the globe, biennials are significant for shaping the knowledge, codes and norms of contemporary art (Ferguson and Hoegsberg, 2010; Marchart, 2008; 2014; 2019). As city-wide exhibitions, biennials have a more pronounced relation to public space, than ticketed art fairs or museum exhibitions, which tend to remain confined in white cube spaces (Kompatsiaris, 2020).<sup>5</sup> In their host cities, biennials are often initiated by public bodies (city, regional or state), they make use of various venues and sites, ranging

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<sup>5</sup> Without equating publicness to public space and while recognising that biennials incorporate or merge with other forms of exhibitions – like the museum exhibition or the art fair (Smith, 2017; Barragán, 2020), nonetheless, most biennials include exhibitions that are not ticketed and tend to have works outdoors, inviting visitors to move across the city to experience them. See also: Paco Barragán (2020) *From Roman Feria to Global Art Fair, From Olympia Festival to Neo-Liberal Biennial: On the "Biennialization" of Art Fairs and the "Fairization" of Biennials*.

from derelict buildings to established cultural institutions, and they commission artists to produce site- or context-specific works in public spaces (Smith, 2016; Oxenius, 2017).

The term commoning is part of a cluster of kin terms, such as the common, commons and urban commons. How one defines common/s is a question on the political meanings that one sees in them.<sup>6</sup> Philosopher Jacques Rancière (2010) writes that the very definition of politics is about negotiating and disputing what is to be considered and valued as common and which forms it may take. Therefore, if the common/s are ambivalent, contradictory and contested, it is because their meanings are connected to social antagonisms and the claims that cluster around them (Harvey, 2012; Stavrides, 2016). The common/s raises different associations and invites many meanings: it may refer, among other, to material or immaterial self-managed resources or struggles for them, such as land or culture, user-produced content in online technologies, or, for global ecological movements, to the planet itself (Berlant, 2016; Elias, 2016; Tyzlik Carver, 2016).

In this research, the common/s draws on critical post-Marxist scholarship. It points to a political category that denotes a tensed relationship with state/market and a path of emancipation beyond them (Hardt and Negri, 2009; Harvey, 2012; Federici and Caffentzis, 2013; Dardot and Laval, 2015). In the plural, the commons refer to social practices and collective struggles which may institute the common, which, in turn, refers to a political principle for instituting a cooperative society beyond capitalism (Hardt and Negri, 2009; Harvey, 2012; Dardot and Laval, 2015; Bianchi, 2018). Despite different theoretical emphases, Marxist approaches share in common that they contrast the ‘neo-institutionalist’ approach by political economist Elinor Ostrom (1990, 1994) who defined commons as ‘social institutions of community-based resource management’ (Ruivenkamp and Hilton, 2017, p. 2). Theorising commons as a ‘third way’ alongside the state and the market, Ostrom’s communities were consensus-based and viewed as compatible with capitalist social relations (Borch and Kronberger 2016, p.3).<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> I borrow the term common/s from feminist commons scholar Silvia Federici (2016) and art theorist Angela Dimitrakaki (2016) and use it throughout the thesis to point to convergences between different theorisations that adopt either the common or the commons as a key term. See glossary in appendix.

<sup>7</sup> Ostrom’s research countered ecologist Garret Hardin’s (1968) views that individual interests and relations to the market inevitably lead the co-managing of resources to fail, provoking the ‘tragedy of the commons’. His arguments were based on the overuse (of land) due to overpopulation, to explain the tragedy behind the possibility for self-organised collective action (Ruivenkamp and Hilton, 2017). As De Angelis (2017, p. 144) discusses, Ostrom showed that Hardin’s case was about open access

Commoning is one third of a three-fold critical definition of commons. A commons includes three constituent elements: a) a community b) resources, goods or services c) managed through commoning practices that refer to the social relations and sharing processes that make the commons (Kip et al., 2015; STEALTH. Unlimited, 2015; Stavrides, 2016, p. 2; De Angelis, 2017, p. 10). In using the verbal form of commoning, this research draws on the recent emphasis scholars put on studying commoning, which is defined as the social practices of cooperation, horizontality and self-management that shape commons (Midnight Notes Collective, 1990; Hodkinson, 2012; Caffentzis and Federici, 2013; de Angelis, 2013; Stavrides, 2016; Huron, 2017).

Common space is another key term in this research and relates to urban commons in particular. My definition draws on architect Stavros Stavrides (2016, p. 2), who defines common spaces as ‘sites open to public use in which, however, rules and forms of use do not depend upon and are not controlled by a prevailing authority.’ Common spaces are distinct from public and private spaces, since they emerge through commoning, practices that define and produce goods, services and spatial relations. Common spaces take shape as a group of people comes together, organises from the bottom-up, defines a commons by reclaiming urban space and shapes a social space through commoning, through practices of sharing and cooperation that strive for horizontal and equal relations. This often means rejecting monetary exchanges, assembling to take decisions together and maintaining spaces through rotating systems for tasks, while negotiating the power relations inherent in social processes (Argyropoulou, 2015; Stavrides, 2016). Forging solidarity and participation, common spaces challenge neoliberal austerity and dominant, top-down urban governance models. A key feature for this thesis is that they contribute to redefinitions of public space and open up the city as a site for exercising politics and collective urban imagination (Harvey, 2012; Arampatzi, 2014; Argyropoulou, 2015; Stavrides, 2016).

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and not a commons. For Ostrom, a commons requires a clear group that has a legal right to include and exclude members. Ostrom (1990, 1994) demonstrated with empirical studies that communities can efficiently manage and maintain ‘common-pool resources’ by defining boundaries and devising rules for collective access, decision-making and conflict-resolution, as well as ‘relations of trust and reciprocity’ (Ostrom, 2009, p. 10). However, Ostrom (1990, 1994) conceives commons as natural resources managed by aggregations of individuals motivated by rational self-interests, which makes the commons compatible with capitalist social-relations (Harvey, 2012; Borch and Kornberger, 2016; Ruivenkamp and Hilton, 2017).

The relevance of bringing together biennials and common spaces is both due to their convergence around the notion of space, public space in particular, and due to the tensions and contrasts between them. As in common spaces, the relation to space and spatial production is constitutive to biennials. First, biennials are dispersed spatial events or ‘distributed events’ as per art historian Terry Smith (2016, p. 9). They are dispersed in a dual way: in their host cities and globally, in urban contexts across the world. Second, biennials are exhibitions which place display in a broader discursive environment, dealing with social and political issues through talks, workshops, publications and other educational activities. The discursive feature typifies what several curators and scholars call the ‘discursive biennial’ (Papastergiadis and Martin, 2011; Adajania, 2012; Kompatsiaris, 2017). Between an academic conference and activist gathering, the discursive biennial is thought as ‘an interdisciplinary site of knowledge production, education and social engagement’, as art and media theorist Panos Kompatsiaris writes (2017, p. 186).<sup>8</sup> Third, in addition to the spatial and the discursive, biennials have the capacity to generate material, immaterial and relational infrastructures of contemporary art in the city. Discursive biennials supported the entry of the common/s in the politicised vocabulary of contemporary art (Kompatsiaris, 2017). As spatial events, biennials helped site-specific, participatory and collaborative art and curatorial practices, which intersect with commoning, to take central stage in contemporary art. As infrastructures, biennials have the agency to enhance contemporary art scenes, generate new relations and new knowledge in the city (Filipovic, 2010; Niemojewski, 2010; Green and Gardner, 2016; Oxenius, 2017; Smith, 2017).

Yet, as the title of this thesis suggests, the contrasts between biennials and common spaces are sharp. Some of the contrasts relate to the values attached to biennials through the phenomenon of biennialisation.<sup>9</sup> In the first instance, biennialisation refers to the global

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<sup>8</sup> For the discursive biennial see: Ferguson and Hoegsberg 2010; Niemojewski, 2010; Papastergiadis and Martin, 2011; Adajania 2012; Kompatsiaris, 2017.

<sup>9</sup> At a basic level, the term biennialisation is used to periodise biennials and their expansion. A first wave is from the 1890s, with the emergence of the Venice Biennale (1895) and the Carnegie International (1896); the second wave from the 1950s on, which includes documenta (1955), and a third wave, from the 1990s on, which involves the emergence of peripheral biennials in Europe, like the Athens Biennale (2005), as well as many biennials in Asian contexts (Green and Gardner, 2016). Recent research reveals the different growth rates across geographical regions, locating for instance the European boom in the end of the 1980s and the Asian biennial boom in the late 1990s (Kolb and Patel, 2018). The roots of biennialisation are placed in the 1950s and 1960s by Green and Gardner (2016). Despite these acknowledgements, the 1990s is still largely synonymous with the burst of biennialisation. (Kolb and Patel, 2018). Their numbers are growing. It is estimated that there are currently about 150 biennials across the world. (Bethwaite and Kangas, 2018).

proliferation of biennials since the 1990's (Ferguson and Hoegsberg, 2010; Marchart, 2008; 2014; 2019). Biennialisation is, however a contested term. While some see the global diffusion of biennials as offering visibility to underrepresented art contexts and artists, others argue that biennialisation reproduces existing power relations and produces new asymmetries (Chin-Tao Wu, 2007; Filipovic, 2014; Bethwaite and Kangas, 2018). Given their global diffusion, art theorist Angela Dimitrakaki describes biennials as 'the hegemonic expression of the exhibition form in globalisation' (2012, p. 1). Philosopher Peter Osborne (2015, p. 3) discusses biennials as exhibitions underpinned by a 'self-institutional fantasy' for presenting a global art history. As biennials expand, they generate a 'crisis of overproduction' (Osborne, 2015, p. 186). The latter is not simply a matter of more, bigger and geographically spread biennials (Smith, 2017), but points to biennialisation as a systemic effect of capitalist production and accumulation.

If commoning shapes subjects, relations and spaces that seek to decommodify capitalist social relations in the city (Anarchitectur, 2010; Stavrides, 2016; stealthunlimited, 2017), biennials are embedded in processes that typify neoliberal governance and the commodification of cities. In this research, biennialisation denotes a circulatory logic tied to neoliberal globalisation, which not only shapes how art is discussed, produced and presented, but mostly, a process through which cities, artists and curators accumulate various forms of capital, economic, symbolic or cultural (Gielen, 2009; Green and Gardner, 2016; Kompatsiaris, 2017; Szreder, 2017). As biennials multiply, they promote competition between cultural agents and cities (Hardt, 2009; Sheikh, 2010). Considered as city-branding tools, biennials promote tourism, narratives of creative cities, which often rely on gentrification (Niemojewski, 2010; Sheikh, 2010; Kompatsiaris, 2017; Oxenius, 2017).<sup>10</sup> Many authors thus question whether biennials can enable critical perspectives, while tied to globalisation, neoliberalism, transcultural capital and neo-colonial flows (Osborne, 2015; Green and Gardner, 2016, Kompatsiaris, 2017). In this thesis, such critical perspectives are linked to commoning.

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<sup>10</sup> The biennial has been enquired in relation to capitalism (Bydler, 2004; Dimitrakaki, 2012; Sheikh, 2010; 2016); neoliberalism (Stallabrass, 2004; Kompatsiaris, 2014; Green and Gardner, 2016); immaterial labour and post-Fordism (Gielen, 2009; Hardt, 2009; Dimitrakaki, 2012; Kompatsiaris, 2014).



An important reason that makes biennials pertinent sites to study the relations between art and commoning is that in the wake of the squares' movements, biennials became key sites for the migration of ideas, subjects and practices of commoning beyond the squares' occupations *and* the most visibly contested contemporary art institutions. Both the affinities and the contrasts between biennials and commoning manifested in the period that connects to the squares' movement. Since the onset of the global financial crisis in 2008 and culminating in the squares' movement, social mobilisations set the tone in several countries, revealing the contradictions of neoliberalism as the key rationale of globalisation, and the importance of urban struggles in contesting them (Arampatzi, 2014). During Occupy Wall Street (2011), artist activists demanded the end of the biennial and proclaimed the biennial's death as institutions/events bound to neoliberalism and fraught with contradictions in terms of their left-wing rhetoric and actual politics (McKey, 2016; Kompatsiaris, 2017). While such tensions did not apply to all biennials to the same extent, and they concern most art institutions, biennials amplify contradictions exactly because their expansion, through biennialisation depends on neoliberal capitalism and its values (Kompatsiaris, 2020).

The 'Occupy effect', as artists Maya and Ruben Fowkes (2012, p.11) describe it, manifested in two key ways in biennials in the aftermath of the squares' occupations. After the encampments were evacuated by the police, large-scale exhibitions invited artists activists involved in Occupy to set a camp inside the exhibition space (the 7<sup>th</sup> Berlin Biennale (BB7), 2012) or endorsed artists that symbolically set up protest camps outside their venues (documenta 13 (d13), 2012). On the other hand, a series of artist-led protests, boycotts and withdrawals by artists who were invited to participate in biennials, demanded biennials to sever ties with repressive political regimes, sponsors involved in controversial businesses and promoting neoliberal city agendas (Sheikh, 2016; Green and Gardner, 2016; Warsza, 2017).<sup>11</sup>

If the squares' movement targeted neoliberalism as the hegemonic rationale of globalisation and denoted a legitimacy crisis of the state (Stavrides, 2016c; Bianchi, 2018) it also triggered a crisis of legitimacy in biennials, as Kompatsiaris argues (2017, p. 4). This crisis was caused by artists who targeted biennials as art institutions with strong ties to neoliberal politics,

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<sup>11</sup> At Sydney Biennial (2014) artists protested against the sponsorship by Transfield Holdings, a company involved in detention centres for refugees; a call to boycott Manifesta 10 in St Petersburg (2014) was launched by artists protesting against the Russian's government anti-LGBTQ laws and the annexation of Crimea; while artists protested against funding from Israel in the 31st Bienal de São Paulo (2014) (Sheikh, 2016, Warsza, 2016).

protesting and withdrawing their participation from them (Kompatsiaris, 2017). Biennials (BB7, d13) that staged artists activists raised the question: Are biennials useful for offering visibility and continuing the demands of the movements or are they opportunities for biennials to co-opt the movements and aestheticise radical politics? (Fowkes, 2012; Loewe, 2015). Withdrawals, boycotts or protest actions against the biennial's dubious politics raised another set of questions: Can such frictions and acts within and against the biennial move beyond the symbolic politics of protest and how far can they affect structural changes in relation to the neoliberal ties of the biennial and the art field at large? (Sheikh, 2016; Beech, 2017). The questions continue to be debated and, as artist and writer Dave Beech (2017, p. 19) argues, the boycotts are 'renegotiating the balance of power within art', a process that this research sees in relation to commoning the biennial.

The notion of potentiality is key for thinking and rethinking the relations between commoning, biennials and the city. I draw the concept of potentiality from Stavrides (2019) who thinks of commoning as a practice that may potentialise (relations in) space. Commoning is about envisioning and working in common to create spaces based on sharing, horizontality and equality. But not all forms of commoning are geared towards these values; to bring new kinds of relations in shared spaces, what is needed is to potentialise commoning, which means to challenge the meanings they create, the way the world is seen and organised, moving beyond the dominance of capitalist relations (Stavrides, 2019).

For philosopher Giorgio Agamben (1993) potentiality is about realising 'that things did not have to and do not have to be the way they are' (Balskus, 2010, p. 178). At the same time, potentiality cannot be reduced to existing reality and as such, it is not something that should only be understood through what it actualises (Kompatsiaris, 2011; Stavrides, 2016). What connects the 'squares movement' to biennial boycotts and withdrawals is that they both raised questions with regards to their capacity to effect structural changes in society and the art system, respectively (Srnicek and Williams, 2015; Sheikh, 2016; Beech, 2017). However, these views imply that these kind of acts only have meaning as temporary steps towards a final actualisation, a preconceived and concrete ultimate form. Rather, thinking of them with potentiality, I take such biennial engagements and contestations as attempts towards commoning.

This research analyses biennials as sites both hospitable and hostile to commoning.

This is the main idea behind the proposition to view biennials as threshold infrastructures. The idea of biennials as threshold infrastructures points to biennials inhabiting tensions between accumulating power and distributing power in the realm of biennialisation. It points to the negotiations that shape biennials as spatial exhibitions, as they act between dominant urban policies and grassroots urban creative practices, between public and common space. It points to the questions biennials raise and tensions they inhabit between collective practice and labour, when they host commoning practices in their realm. Overall, it suggests that biennials inhabit thresholds between facilitating and appropriating, capturing or enclosing commoning.

In thinking biennials as threshold infrastructures, the thesis expands thinking biennials with a feature which is less elaborated in biennial literature: the infrastructural agency biennials have (Niemojewski, 2010; Green and Gardner, 2016; Smith, 2016). In doing so, I enquire commoning and infrastructuring both as realities and anticipations in biennials, resting in existing and speculative practices. What thresholds and infrastructures have in common is that they invite to think of users, crossings, connections, but also separations and exclusions. I draw the term threshold from Stavrides (2016) who conceives common spaces as thresholds, to point to the negotiations and ambivalences that characterise their in-between position, as they are neither fully outside of nor fully absorbed by contemporary capitalism. I understand infrastructure with cultural theorist Lauren Berlant (2016, p. 393) for whom infrastructures are more open-ended than institutions and facilitate movements or the ‘patterning of social forms’. Commoning as infrastructure is thought with practices exploring new ways of being in common, troubling dominant forms of collective life (Berlant, 2016).

The title of this thesis ‘Commoning the Biennial or the Biennialisation of the Commons?’ points exactly to the various tensions that biennials inhabit and negotiate as threshold infrastructures. What is at stake in the aftermath of the movements and the biennial’s legitimacy crisis is a different city and a different biennial. To ‘common the city’ points to urban commoning as a practice that aims at a different city, one which is, however, not a distant aim, but tested everyday through the process of sharing and organising collectively by its users, beyond the dominance of capitalism (Linebaugh, 2014; Stavrides, 2016). To ‘common the biennial’ points to a practice that envisions a different biennial, one that challenges hierarchical relations, distributes power, engages with the city as it is being shaped from the bottom-up.

Commoning the biennial and commoning the city are in this thesis viewed in a tensed relation to the biennialisation of the commons. The latter points to the multiple risks that biennials, seen through the lens of their expansion, present for commoning. In shaping power asymmetries, exploitation and exclusions, biennialisation creates the conditions for limiting, capturing and enclosing the potentials of art/commoning in biennials. This is why I suggest that commoning the biennial and the city need to take shape within and against the biennial, that is against the features that make the biennial an ally in the capitalist production at large and that of the capitalist city in particular. If biennials inhabit thresholds, then the question is what kind of practices may potentialise biennials and their relations to the city? What this amounts to is how to challenge the meanings biennials create, the subjects, relations and spaces. Could commoning be a practice that can potentialise, in other words, transform biennials by challenging meanings and patterns in biennial-making and offer new city imaginaries?



Fig. 1. Under construction Group (2015) *Άντερ Κονστράξιον (Under Construction)*. Sign at the facade of Bageion, the main venue of Athens Biennale 5-6. Courtesy Under construction Group (Alexandros Laios, Maro Fasouli, Dimitris Foutris). Photo: Marilena Batali, © Athens Biennale 2005-2021, used under a Creative Commons AttributionNoncommercial license: <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/3.0/> (CC BY-SA 3.0). Available at: <http://tohumagazine.com/article/under-construction>. [Accessed 1<sup>st</sup> June 2021].

The image originally presented here cannot be made freely available via LJMU E-Theses Collection because of 'copyright'.

Fig. 2. d14, last public message with a design by Mevis & van Deursen. Message on Twitter. Twitter, 18<sup>th</sup> September, 2017. Available at: [https://twitter.com/documenta\\_\\_14/status/909736217000005632/photo/1](https://twitter.com/documenta__14/status/909736217000005632/photo/1). [Accessed 1<sup>st</sup> June 2021].

## Introducing the Case Studies

This thesis examines how two different, but interrelated periodic large-scale exhibitions, the Athens Biennale 5-6, *OMONOIA* (2015-2017) and documenta 14, *Learning from Athens* (2017) shared intentions to learn from common spaces. Grounding the research in the city of Athens, it argues that the case studies follow an intense interest in this period by artists, activists and academics to learn from Athens as a privileged vantage point for solidarity, urban commoning and collective grassroots resistances to austerity and crisis. This interest roughly starts with the debt crisis in 2008 and intensifies with the peak of the so-called refugee crisis in 2015 and a turbulent socio-political climate, which included the rise of a left-wing government and the prospect of Greece leaving the Eurozone (Arampatzi, 2014).

Several reasons make the two case studies pertinent for this enquiry. To be able to account for these reasons, it is necessary to first introduce them by considering the common double reading of biennials as being simultaneously institutions and events (Hlavajova, 2010; Kompatsiaris, 2017; Oxenius, 2017). Although strictly speaking my case studies are the exhibition events of AB5-6 and d14, the tensions between the events and their respective institutions (Documenta / AB) as well as between them as events play a role in apprehending their relations to each other, as well as to commoning and common spaces.

Catalytic for these relations was the announcement that the 14<sup>th</sup> iteration of documenta, one of the most significant exhibitions of contemporary art in Europe would move half of its programmes in the city of Athens, rather than only take place in Kassel, Germany, the exhibition's home city since 1955. Polish curator Adam Szymczyk's proposal to split the exhibition in two in order to 'learn from Athens and its citizens' was controversially received both in Kassel and Athens.<sup>12</sup> For the first time in documenta's history another city was going to be so central to the curatorial concept.<sup>13</sup> With d14's move, for the first time in its history,

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<sup>12</sup> See: <https://www.biennialfoundation.org/2014/10/documenta-14-kassel-learning-from-athens/>.

<sup>13</sup> Moving to Athens, d14 came closer to the itinerant biennial model of Manifesta, which takes place every four years in a different European city considered peripheral in terms of its art production (Oxenius, 2017). d14's move out of Kassel builds on Documenta 11 (2002) and documenta 13 (2012). In-between these two examples the question of decentralising documenta was often raised. For example, in his essay 'The Next Documenta Shouldn't Be in Kassel', philosopher Dieter Lesage addresses Carolyn Christov-Bakargiev (who had been newly appointed artistic director of documenta 13 (2012) arguing for a traveling documenta as perhaps the important next step in de-Occidentalising documenta, in the footsteps of Documenta 11, which was curated by Okwui Enwezor as an exhibition of several discursive platforms spread across different locations in the world (Lesage, 2010).

Athens would host two large-scale periodic exhibitions in overlapping times to each other. Established in Athens in 2005, AB was initially envisioned as a key partner for d14. Eventually, both cases received criticism, and their initially desired partnership did not materialise, a rupture which to this research speaks to the difficulties of commoning the biennial.

When viewed as institutions in the context of biennialisation and biennial histories, the two cases are asymmetrical in terms of their history, material and symbolic values. *documenta* is a historical example which impacts significantly how art is debated and practiced in a European if not global scale. Its power in legitimising or valorising practices is linked to its status as a ‘field constituting event’ in contemporary art (Kompatsiaris, 2017, p. 42). *documenta* was founded in 1955 by artist, teacher and curator Arnold Bode, with the aim to restore art, politics and urban development in post-war Kassel, as part of nation building processes in post-Nazi Western Germany (Buurman and Richter, 2017).<sup>14</sup> Generating significant income for the city of Kassel, the exhibition takes place across different venues, among which, the historical museum of The Fridericianum. Main *documenta* funders are the city, regional and federal bodies of the City of Kassel, the State of Hesse and the German Federal Cultural Foundation, as well as private donors. The artistic directors for each exhibition, who assemble a curatorial team, are selected through a complex process which involves an international committee and members of the funding bodies.

In contrast to the state-led *documenta* and most biennials, AB is not a public institution, when considering its history and funding. AB can be situated in a relatively small segment of recent biennials founded by creatives (Kolb and Patel, 2018). Founded by artist Poka-Yio, curator Xenia Kalpaktsoglou and journalist Augustine Zenakos, AB was not receiving structural state support, but operating with a mix of private and public funds, as most biennials do, for most of its lifespan (2005-2018).<sup>15</sup> The lack of structural funding led the co-founders to adopt a tight curatorial model, co-curating each edition together with guest

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<sup>14</sup> *documenta* was founded by Bode as part of the Bundesgartenschau (Federal Horticultural Show). Bode’s initial intention was for the exhibition to offer a documentation of the art perceived by the Nazi’s as degenerate. *documenta*’s name, from the Latin word *documentum*, which could be thought of as *docere* (Latin for teach) and *mens* (Latin for intellect) *documenta*’s educational and survey purposes are captured in its name (Grasskamp, 2009). Arnold Bode led the exhibition up until *documenta* 4 in 1968, and in 1972, Harald Szeemann was appointed as “Secretary General.”

<sup>15</sup> In this way, AB differs from the second biennale of Greece, the state-initiated Thessaloniki biennale, which was also inaugurated in 2006.



curators.<sup>16</sup> With a core team between five to ten members, often working in semi-voluntary roles, which expands to include invigilators and mediators, AB comes close to a self-organised initiative shaped by and relying on precarious economies. However, various AB editions involved activities in public space and AB relies on public, mostly municipal, derelict building in, earmarked for regeneration, central areas of Athens.

Viewed in relation to Athens, AB is a biennial with symbolic capital and embedded in the city's contemporary art infrastructures, which contrasts d14's ephemeral presence in the city. AB is a crucial entry point for anyone seeking to understand the Athenian art scene in the last fifteen years. Art critic Despina Zefkili (2021) observes that AB captures the efforts of the local contemporary visual art scene to evolve and position itself in European networks and a landscape of institutional devaluation, where private initiatives and foundations have been increasingly setting the tone.

As events, the two cases are interrelated and not separate biennials occurring at overlapping times in the same city. In fact, d14's move to Athens was premised on the important role of AB as an infrastructure for contemporary art in Athens. d14's advent to Athens might have contributed to AB's appraisal as a resilient and self-organised biennial (ECF, 2015). Catalytic for this appraisal was AB4 AGORA (2013), which was curated by a group of more than 42 co-curators and involved many Athens art collectives. According to d14's artistic director AB4 influenced his curatorial rationale to move an equal part of d14 to Athens (Szymczyk, 2015). Initially (2013-2015), the directors of AB and d14 explored possibilities for finding a common working ground between them in public gatherings and conferences, although some of the first gatherings received criticism for being opaque and exclusive (Fokianaki, 2016; Zefkili, 2017).<sup>17</sup> While other post-Occupy biennials were confronted with withdrawals and demands for defunding, AB4 seemed to be at the antipode of the biennial crisis, enjoying the support both of the bottom-up collective art practices in Athens *and* top-down prestigious European recognition, culminating with the European Cultural Foundation Award in 2015.

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<sup>16</sup> The co-founders acted as a curatorial trio under the acronym XYZ. Zenakos, a known art critic and columnist who used to write for the daily newspaper *To Vima*, left AB in 2011. He was involved with AB6, ANTI in 2018. In recent years Zenakos was editor-in-chief of *Unfollow*, a cultural political magazine and was co-publisher of the *Athens contemporary art review*.

<sup>17</sup> The first gatherings took place in December 2013 and March 2013 (Szymczyk, 2017).

Chronologically, my case studies start taking shape after the gestations of the ‘Occupy effect’ (Fowkes, 2012, p. 11) and the ‘biennial legitimacy crisis’ (Kompatsiaris, 2017, p. 4). They are not the first documenta and AB to be organised after Occupy / Syntagma. However, they integrate the questions that the square occupations opened up, the questions that the first post-squares biennials opened up and were underpinned by an urge to learn from common spaces in ways that differ. Hence, they can be situated in the framework of what McKey (2016) discusses as the ‘post-Occupy condition’ and what Stavrides (2016, p. 30, 83, 267) calls the ‘metastatic’ processes of the Syntagma square occupation, both terms capturing the catalytic role these events had for art/commoning and practices and art institutions. From the beginning, their curatorial statements pointed to this.

In 2015, AB5-6 opened its doors with an event titled ‘Synapse 1: Introducing a laboratory for production post-2011’ (18-29 November 2015). Under the directorship of anthropologist Massimiliano Mollona, the biennale was conceived as a two-year process that would culminate with d14’s opening in Athens. The quest was to rethink the biennale’s institutional boundaries, economies and forms of operating, by connecting it with the grassroots political and cultural organisations that emerged after the Syntagma square occupation in 2011 (Mollona, 2017).

Synapse 1 asks participants to imagine how these urban experiments developed in times of crisis may become permanent and sustainable alternatives to the dominant economic and political model? Synapse 1 also asks to imagine the grassroots economic and political practices developed in Greece and Europe’s South as new common ground for an alternative European project (Synapse 1, 2015).

‘documenta 14 is a commons’: this was the last message that documenta 14 released on its social media, to announce the closing of the exhibition, on 18 September 2017. The message came three years after the first announcement that d14 was moving to Athens. d14’s move had raised high expectations that the curatorial team would construct a perspective on the socio-political urgencies of our times by engaging with the particularities of Athens and enhance the city’s contemporary art infrastructures. Already its working title ‘Learning from Athens’ and the first press release referred to Athens as a relevant vantage point for North-South cultural production tensions and as emblematic for social, political and economic challenges in Greece, Europe and globally in the face of ongoing neoliberal crisis (documenta 14, 2014). What was to be learned from Athens? Responding to the question during an early

interview that was published at the time of the mass social mobilisations around the OXI referendum – which would decide if Greece was going to stay in Eurozone or not, Szymczyk articulated the intention as follows:

The people here are attempting to organise themselves. There are vacant buildings everywhere that are being taken over by artists, solidarity projects that provide help in a variety of fields, and immigrants. ... In this sense, Athens is also a refuge, because people are showing solidarity for one another. But outside Greece it is feared that this solidarity could be contagious like a virus: so that it doesn't spread, Greece has to be put under quarantine. (Tsomou, 2015, unpaginated).<sup>18</sup>

As events, therefore, both cases sought inspiration in Athens' common spaces as a means to rearticulate the relation of biennials to the cities from which they emerge. By moving part of its operations to Athens, d14 wanted to negotiate documenta's grounding as a 'host' in Kassel and claimed the position of the 'guest' in Athens. AB5-6 sought to rearticulate its relation to Athens by inviting artist activist groups practicing forms of commoning to co-shape its programme. Both cases intended to address their institutional boundaries and the biennial as a neoliberal institution, as well as made broader claims about contesting neoliberalism, capitalism or colonialism (Mollona, 2017; Szymczyk, 2017, p. 24). These institutional boundaries for each case mean different challenges, due to their different structures, economies, scales, histories and contexts and their relation to Athens.

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<sup>18</sup> The interview was published 3 July 2015, just two days before the OXI referendum. It was conducted by Margarita Tsomou, journalist, activist and dramaturg who was a moderator for AB5-6's general assembly and was later involved in d14's public programme, the Parliament of Bodies. The Parliament of bodies took inspiration from the 2015 protests and refugee crisis, as I discuss in the relevant chapter.



Fig. 3. Writing on the wall against d14, 2017, Athens. Photo: Sevie Tsampalla.



Fig. 4. Writing on the wall against d14, Athens, 2017. Photo: Sevie Tsampalla.

## Literature Review. Biennials, Space and Commoning

This research is situated in the fields of curating, exhibition making and exhibition studies. It is addressed to biennial makers, such as curators, artists or educators, as well as students and researchers of exhibition studies, with a focus on biennials. The research intervenes in biennial literature and concerns the relations and frictions between biennials and commoning, with an emphasis on spatial approaches to both. Although some of the matters examined in this thesis also apply to museums and other art institutions, to my knowledge this is the first in-depth investigation of the relations between biennials and commoning. So far, these relations have been underexplored in biennial-, art theory and commons literature, as this section shows. This section addresses the gaps, focusing primarily on literature that followed the squares' movement, which this thesis takes as a key moment for renewed discussions on the relations between art, commoning, biennials and the city.

The knowledge gap is significant for several reasons. First, biennials were among the earliest exhibitions to facilitate the entry of discourses and practices with affinities to the commons (see 4.1). Building on the politicised programmes of examples such as documenta X (1997) and Documenta 11 (2002), discussions and texts appeared in biennials around the time of the economic crisis, introducing both questions on the common as production and commons in relation to space. Michael Hardt (2009) published his essay 'Production and Distribution of the Common. A few questions for the artist' in a special issue on the occasion of the Brussels Biennial I (2009).<sup>19</sup> In this essay, Hardt (2009) argues that biennials are a mode of city branding that capture the social value (commonwealth) produced by cooperative relations in the creative economy. In this way, biennials turn artists to facilitators of capitalist city development, but they also raise the question of how artists may resist this capture and distribute the common differently from within biennials (Hardt, 2009). Around the same time, the Athens Biennale 2, HEAVEN (2009), hosted the discussion 'On the Commons: A Public Interview with Massimo De Angelis and Stavros Stavrides'. The interview introduced the importance of space in urban conflicts and movements, and, as it was later published on the e-flux journal, it became an early reference for thinking about space and commoning together (AnArchitektur, 2010).

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<sup>19</sup> The essay is derived from the special issue emerged out of a discursive programme co-produced by the first (and only) Brussels Biennial (2008/2009).

Second, although biennial engagements with activism after the squares' movement and the biennial crisis are understood with the increasingly growing significance of the values and practices of commoning in the arts, these relations are not articulated with the prism of commoning in the narrow biennial literature. The relations between biennials and commoning have intensified in recent years. Key for this intensification was that the first biennials after the squares movement acted as thresholds that denoted a passage of commoning from the square to the art institution.<sup>20</sup> Artist activists and artist collectives participated in square occupations, biennial curators invited artist activists who were part of movements to participate in biennials and artists boycotted or withdrew their participation, to protest against the biennial's neoliberal ties (Beech, 2016; Sholette, McKey, 2016; Szreder; 2017). The narrow biennial literature discusses the 'Occupy effect' (Fowkes, 2012, p. 11) and the crisis in biennials with terms like 'art as resistance' (Kompatsiaris, 2017, p. 100) or 'activist art' (Whybrow, 2020, p. 181). However, it is reluctant to articulate the frictions between biennials and movements as expressions, even if latent or incomplete, that point to commoning the biennial.<sup>21</sup>

Third, the biennial is absent in the various theoretical and practice-based proposals that attempt to rethink art institutions with common/s (Raunig, 2013; Athanasiou, 2016; Majewska and Szreder, 2016; Choi and Kraus, 2017). In this literature, the common/s offers ways for thinking alternative forms of organisation and for renegotiating binaries of public/private, inside/outside which have set the tone about the role of art institutions (Gielen, 2013). Moreover, most propositions do not focus on space as a constitutive aspect for rethinking these relations and rarely elaborate on commoning as a practice or a form of collective doing that brings forth questions on practice and labour, with the exception perhaps of Choi and Kraus (2017) who talk empirically about transforming Casco Art Institute: Working for the Commons, formerly Casco – Office for Art, Design and Theory in Utrecht, the Netherlands.

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<sup>20</sup> This gap is partly due to the fact that the post-Occupy biennial literature emerges in parallel with a growing literature on commons and art's relation to commons. I mainly turn to recent book-length contributions to biennial literature that appeared after the squares' movement, but there are articles that have been useful too, such as by Fowkes (2012) and Loewe (2015).

<sup>21</sup> I am only referring to biennial focused publications here, but similar terms are often used in related essays and by authors who are not focusing in biennials. For example: 'protest becoming art' (Loewe, 2015) and art as direct action (McKey, 2016).

In reviewing the literature, what this thesis argues is that there is a need to elaborate on the relations between biennials and commoning. To do so, it is necessary to move beyond the idea that commons are just discourses hosted in biennials, but also practices and spaces from which biennials try to learn from and with which they try to engage. A main argument, therefore, is that there is a need to spatialise the discourse on biennials and commoning, since it is spatial approaches that are lacking and could enrich both our understanding of the relations between biennials and the city, as well as the efforts to challenge biennials as art institutions as gestures that open up the imaginary of commoning the biennial.

### The ‘Occupy Effect’ and the Biennial Crisis

In biennial literature there are different positions with regards to the effect that the square movements had for the biennial crisis. This emerges across several recent publications that focus on biennials and which offer different perspectives that renew biennial literature (Green and Gardner, 2016; Kompatsiaris, 2017; Warsza, 2017). What can be called a position ‘within the biennial’ tends to overlap with a counter-hegemonic perspective, which accentuates not so much artists’ but curators’ agency to challenge the status quo through biennials (Green and Gardner, 2016; Oxenius, 2017). Taking a position ‘against the biennial’ in literature tends to draw on autonomist perspectives and accentuates mainly artists’ agencies to resist the biennial’s neoliberal ties (Kompatsiaris, 2017; Sholette, 2017). However, the connections to commoning remain scarce in the post-squares biennial literature, regardless of which position may be adopted.

Green and Gardner (2016) in their recent comprehensive monography on biennials, do not consider Occupy as a turning point for the biennial crisis, but see it as a result of the biennial’s rhetoric for inclusiveness and democracy in contrast to the inequalities they sharpen through global travelling. If anything, Occupy is ‘a curatorial methodology and a visual style’ (Green and Gardner, 2016, p. 259).<sup>22</sup> The authors argue that biennials that aspire to function as social and urban laboratories, often perform the ‘trope of democracy’ in

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<sup>22</sup> The authors refer to ‘the anarchistic Occupy movement of 2009’ (Green and Gardner, 2016, p. 259). In this way, they seem to refer to the first university occupations in California, after the recession, in 2009. Occupy Wall Street started in 2011 and anarchist strands were part of it. Yet, according to Hammond (2015) the demands were not primarily anarchist, that is targeted on the abolition of the state, but directed in organising the movement through horizontalism, prefiguration and autonomy, with practices of mutual aid and solidarity.

conventional indoors exhibition spaces (Green and Gardner, 2016, p. 257, 260). Besides, curating assemblies and collaborative or participatory biennials, are not a novelty. Post-Cold-war biennials in Latin America and the Arab region had employed similar discursive modes and spatial gatherings.<sup>23</sup>

By examining overlooked biennials from the 1950s until 2014, Green and Gardner (2016) take a position that reflects their attempt to decentre canonical biennial histories, which have been so far written from Eurocentric and North-American perspectives. However, commons are absent from their perspective and biennial contestations remain largely outside of their scope; their emphasis is on curatorial concepts and agencies (Green and Gardner, 2016, p. 256).<sup>24</sup> Moreover, they chose to give little clues as to how the long list of biennials they examine are grounded in their cities.<sup>25</sup> Hence, Kompatsiaris (2018) argues that the position that Green and Gardner (2016) take, is aligned with the Gramscian call of changing institutions from within, and could be complemented with a more in-depth engagement with the New Institutionalism curating practices of the 2000s, the ideas of autonomism Marxism and the ‘dynamics of refusal’ that challenge biennials in recent years (Kompatsiaris (2018, p. 288).<sup>26</sup>

In contrast to Green and Gardner (2016), the effect that the movements had on the biennial crisis are acknowledged as significant by Joanna Warsza (2017), editor of the anthology on recent biennial boycotts. The anthology is an extensive collection of statements and

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<sup>23</sup> Green and Gardner (2016) refer to similar modes in earlier biennials in Asia, such as the Fukuoka and Brisbane triennial or the Arab Art Biennale and the Bienal de Arte Coltejer. However, in his review of their book, Kompatsiaris (2018) argues that earlier examples, particularly of discursive biennials outside Europe, do not constitute a ‘turn’ as Green and Gardner (2016) suggest. Rather, for Kompatsiaris (2018) a ‘turn’ implies a paradigm shift which he locates in dX and D11, doubting that biennials which had fewer resources and lacked in ‘visibility’ could mean such a shift for biennial histories.

<sup>24</sup> Although the authors write in a footnote that they agree with the view of Sholette (2011) on biennials as part of deregulated capitalism, they also note that they find it incomplete, as for them, the view leaves out what they vaguely define as the ‘contingencies and affects that operate worldwide’ (Green and Gardner, 2016, p. 278).

<sup>25</sup> Overall, the authors are focused in sketching the broader socio-political context, rather than starting from a grounded perspective. An exception here is the way they discuss the Tirana Biennale I: Escape (2001) (Green and Gardner, 2016, pp. 209-221).

<sup>26</sup> The term New Institutionalism was coined by curator Jonas Ekeberg. Curators associated with this include Ute Meta Bauer, Charles Esche, Vasif Kortun, Maria Lind and Jorge Ribalta. For a critical appraisal on new institutionalism and the doubts that this constituted a new form of institutional critique, see Kolb & Flückiger (eds.), *On curating Issue 21, (New) Institution(alism)*, 2014.



contributions by theorists, artists and curators about their involvement or decision to withdraw from recent contested biennials and raises a fervent debate as to the potentials and limits of occupations, boycotts, art strikes and withdrawals (Beech, 2016; Sholette, 2016; Kortun, 2016).<sup>27</sup> However, although the anthology speaks the language of contestation, it is striking that it does not connect these contestations to commons. This, despite the fact that Warsza was co-curator of BB7 (2012), which hosted an encampment by artists activists from Occupy Berlin and raised issues connected to the movements, precarious artistic labour, collective resistances and commons (Stange, 2012; Kompatsiaris, 2017). The only explicit, but brief references point to Gezi park as urban commons and the acknowledgement by curator Vasif Kortun (2017) that the influence of the Gezi park occupation and the protests against IB13 were catalytic for his willingness ‘to transform the institution into a commons’ (Kortun, 2017, p.138).

Despite the plurality of voices in the above anthology, Warsza’s position comes in defence of those who chose to work with biennials, rather than boycott them (Szreder, 2017). What divides those who, as herself, persist in working with the problematic structures of biennials and those who boycott them, may be seen as a dilemma between ‘engagement and disengagement’ according to Warsza (2017, p. 215). In response to this, Szreder (2017) argues that by presenting these acts as a form of disengagement purports the idea that institutions can only be changed with curators’ concepts and by those who work from within them, rather than with collective pressures and struggles.

Panos Kompatsiaris (2017) offers the only post-Occupy publication that considers both curatorial perspectives and the pressure of struggles and explicitly links biennials and commons. First, Kompatsiaris (2017) sets a new example for biennial literature through an ethnographic perspective that counters the dominance of curators’ perspectives that set the tone in biennial literature so far (Roberts, 2017).<sup>28</sup> Drawing on interviews with artists, curators, workers and volunteers, he offers an in-depth analysis on BB7 (2012), and AB3

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<sup>27</sup> The examples are: 13th Istanbul Biennial (2013), Manifesta 10 (2014) 19th Sydney Biennial (2014), and the 31st Bienal de São Paulo (2014). Warsza was also curator of the public programme at Manifesta 10 (2014), which was boycotted by artists protesting against Russia’s war in Ukraine in 2014 and the Russian government’s anti-LGBT legislations.

<sup>28</sup> All publications discussed here can be considered significant contributions to biennial literature, since *The Biennial Reader* (2010) anthology, which set out a key entry point to biennials as a global phenomenon, but which mainly gathered perspectives by curators and less by scholars.

(2011) as cases that reveal the biennial legitimacy crisis. The latter is a questioning of the biennial's 'truthfulness', a gap with regards to what biennials say and do, even if a clear-cut separation cannot be drawn between saying and doing.<sup>29</sup> In particular, it is the discursive biennial that is in crisis, since its left-wing and politicised agenda creates anticipations for similar institutional politics (Kompatsiaris, 2017).<sup>30</sup>

Kompatsiaris (2017) views the relation between discursive biennials and commons as being at the core of the legitimacy crisis. This, especially since, class, labour and commons, which had appeared a decade earlier in critical art, came to occupy the centre of the discursive biennial's vocabularies in light of the movements (Kompatsiaris, 2017). Drawing on Hardt and Negri (2000), the author defines commons as 'ideas, objects, states and labouring conditions that elude the capture of the capitalist-value-form, being able to enable communal and collective forms of life' (Kompatsiaris, 2017, p. 69).<sup>31</sup> The author points to the risk biennials pose for capturing creative labour and radical potentials and turning them into spectacles and asks: 'What sort of horizontal, prefigurative politics could be enacted through a biennial, which essentially depends on the authority of the curator-superstar?' (Kompatsiaris, 2017, p. 67-68). However, Kompatsiaris (2017) only briefly discusses biennials and their engagements with post-Occupy activism through the prism of commons and he does not do so much from a spatial perspective.

### Commoning: Between Collective Practice and Labour

The theorisation of the common as an economic mode of production by Hardt and Negri (2004; 2009) has been widely disseminated in art since the 2000s and, in recent years, several authors draw upon the theorists, in order to discuss art and labour (Sholette, 2015; McKey,

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<sup>29</sup> Drawing on from J.L. Austin, (1975) and Judith Butler (2011), Kompatsiaris (2017, p. 61) acknowledges that speech is also a form of action. However, what he is concerned with is to examine how this 'gap' manifests and how it delegitimizes the biennial.

<sup>30</sup> The ethnographic analysis, based on interviews with artists, curators, as well as volunteers and trainees in AB3 and BB7, provides an excellent account on the positions 'within and against the biennial'. It is what kind of politics biennials can exercise when biennials are thought with the ideas of solidarity, community or cooperation that the movements accentuated.

<sup>31</sup> Beyond this short reference, the author draws his main theories from critical art theory (Bishop, 2012, Roberts, 2007) and the theory of communisation (2015). In fact, the author discusses communisation theory in his PhD (2015) but not in his monography (2017), which came out of his PhD research. The theory of communisation refers to a continuous process of instituting communist relations as necessary for overthrowing capitalism. What Kompatsiaris retains from these theories is that they see in Occupy a break with specific demands articulated with a single workers' identity.

2016; Kompatsiaris, 2017). Yet, as discussed in this section, besides Kompatsiaris (2017), biennial literature does not elaborate on commoning as a mode of production.

The above gap is not so surprising, when one considers that questions of labour are still nascent in urban commoning literature. For example, Amanda Huron (2017) notes that recent anthologies on urban commoning pay little attention to theorising the labour which is inherent in urban commoning. Commoning in the city is not remunerated, but it is collective labour which involves effort, time, physical and mental energies. A crucial question is therefore whether urban commoning becomes a different kind of labour that helps to open up new potentials, rather than just filling gaps in the capitalist city (Huron, 2017). At the same time, Huron (2017) notes the lack of feminist perspectives in urban commons literature, reminding us that commoning is also a feminist practice linked to social reproduction, drawing on scholars like Federici (2011; 2012).

Similarly, the growing body of interdisciplinary literature that examines relations on art and urban commons, emphasises commoning as methodology for artistic practice and research, rather than as labour and productive relation (Baldauf et al., 2016; Elias, 2016; Dockx and Gielen, 2018).<sup>32</sup> For example, Pelin Tan (2016) connects art and commoning through their engagement with transversal methodologies based on collaboration, affect or, alternative pedagogies and knowledge production. Amy Elias (2016, p. 4) points to the shared terrain of practices between commoning and participatory public performance-based works which rethink collectivity, community or sociality, but does not engage with commoning as a kind of collective labour.

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<sup>32</sup> The anthology *Spaces of Commoning Artistic Research and the Utopia of the Everyday* (2016) is the outcome of a summer school organised by a homonymous two-year research project by the Academy of Fine Arts in Vienna, which took place in 2014. Bringing together perspectives from art, architecture, and social science, the publication as a whole raises the question of commoning as methodology, and explores practices of commoning in housing, working, knowledge production and processes of unlearning in, mostly, urban, contexts. Indicative of the effort to trace analogies between socially engaged artistic practice and commoning is the publication *Commonism, a new aesthetics of the real* (2018) an outcome of the 'Making public domain summer school', part of a two-year research project co-initiated by Nico Dockx (Koninklijke Academie voor Schone Kunsten) and Pascal Gielen (ARIA), in Antwerp, September 2016. Covering a wide spectrum of art practices, tactics and policies, from the digital to the urban, and with an interdisciplinary group of artists, collectives and researchers, the school examined what role art can play in making public domain.

According to Dave Beech (2019) two reasons can explain the general reluctance of post-capitalist literature to engage with art: one is that work poses limits to emancipation and the post-capitalist life that commons envisions, and second, artists are viewed as privileged subjects who drive exploitation, rather than as subjects engaged in nonalienated labour. Technicians, assistants and fabricators support artists, but they tend to remain uncredited, while artists continue to be credited as authors or producers – observations that allow parallels to what feminists highlight as the ‘invisible labour’ of women (Dalla Costa, 2002; Federici, 2016) and what Sholette (2010) calls dark matter in the art economy.

Angela Dimitrakaki (2019) argues that if art is not considered with seriousness as part of labour struggles, it is because it is still idealised as non-alienated labour and because the art field often conceals the class interests behind the struggles it supports.<sup>33</sup> Across several essays, Dimitrakaki (2019, pp. 32-34) argues that if the art field is both hospitable and hostile to commoning, it is because of the ‘blurred lines between labour and participation’, the ‘overproduction of discursivity’, and because of the ‘idealisation of democracy which conceals and perpetuates the specific class interests behind the struggles that find shelter in the art field’ (2019, pp. 32-34). These observations hold true for biennials, with their emphasis on discursivity, sociality and participatory modes that are often more play than politics, as Green and Gardner (2016) argue.

In commons literature, De Angelis (2016) moves beyond the above reluctance and thinks of commoning as a way of organising a social labouring or a social doing. Building on John Holloway (2002) who speaks of the social doing that challenges capitalist production, De Angelis (2016) proposes commoning as a social activity that enters a dialectical tension between capitalism’s ‘power over’ (which in essence is about accumulation of power) and the force for new social relations, the ‘power to’ contest accumulation (De Angelis, 2016, p. 203).

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<sup>33</sup> That art is not labour but an autonomous practice, is premised on the bourgeois ideology which idealises the artist, as much as it sustains precarity and exploitation in the arts. When artistic work ceases to be considered an expression of individual creativity which is independent of the economy, this myth is debunked. On the other hand, with post-Fordism, artists become exemplified neoliberal subjects as entrepreneurs or virtuosos (Virno, 2004), as much as they are encouraged to be autonomous and creative, with their cooperation offering paths towards resistance (Hardt and Negri, 2009). The boundaries between life and art in the Post-Fordist model are blurred. Art, life, leisure and work are indistinguishable for the virtuoso worker of contemporary capitalism and the artist activist, as it spills over their home-, family- and free time (Kunst, 2016; Dimitrakaki, 2019).

From an interdisciplinary perspective, Massimiliano Mollona (2021) offers an important contribution with *Art/commons*, which bridges the discussions between art as practice and labour, as well as commoning and instituting. His publication brings an anthropological perspective, wherein he coins art/commons as a militant position that both critiques the hegemony of capitalism and creates post-capitalist imaginaries through aesthetics, politics and epistemology. Moreover, his contribution is important, since it emerges in part out of the author's involvement as programme director in my case study AB5-6. As such, he enriches the understanding of the relation between commoning and art, through the example of AB. Yet, similarly to Kompatsiaris (2017) who offers the other most explicit link between biennials and commons, the role of space remains somewhat limited and peripheral to the author's analysis (see Mollona, 2021, pp. 137-138).

Building on the term art/commons introduced by Mollona (2021) in this thesis I use the term art/commoning in a broad way, in order to refer to discourses and practices in art and curating, that are in proximity to the values that underpin common spaces. Art/commoning encompasses a whole range of art practices that enable cooperation, self-management or interdependence and collectivity, aspects at the core of common spaces. In this framework, a benefit of studying commoning with biennials is that this makes visible the tensions between practice and labour or production. Because negotiating with the definitions and meanings of public space is a defining feature of common space, I take this negotiation as crucial for art/commoning. This offers the possibility to enrich both the urban commons literature and literature examining commoning from within the art field, where such discussions are nascent, as sketched out above.

### Spatialising the Discourse

Thinking of the biennial as a spatial event and its city-making capacity in relation to commoning requires to ground biennials in their urban contexts. Yet, as argued, studying biennials in their urban contexts is still nascent in biennial literature (Karavida, 2014; Kompatsiaris, 2017; Oxenius, 2017; Whybrow, 2021). In contrast, biennialisation and biennials as local/global interfaces have enjoyed significant attention (Stallabrass, 2004; Sheikh, 2009; Bydler, 2004; Green and Gardner, 2016; Jones, 2017). This gap also connects to the attention that discursive biennial has known (Ferguson and Hoegsberg 2010; Niemojewski, 2010; Papastergiadis and Martin, 2011; by Adajania 2012; Kompatsiaris,

2017). To a large extent, many texts analysing the discursive biennial's critical potentials were written by curators who are often self-reflexive over their curatorial practice, but who rarely connect these potentials to their host cities or urban space (Ferguson and Hoegsberg 2010; Niemojewski, 2010; Papastergiadis and Martin, 2011; by Adajania 2012; Kompatsiaris, 2017).

Recent scholarship argues that biennialisation is a term too general to encompass the complexities through which biennials emerged historically and in different contexts (Green and Gardner, 2016; Niemojewski, 2020). In this regard, Bethwaite and Kangas (2018) argue that biennials involve politics, spatialities and values at multiple scales spanning bodies, cities and global flows. Rather than prioritising one above the other, these should be seen as co-implicated with each other (Bethwaite and Kangas, 2018). However, in their extensive literature review, Bethwaite and Kangas (2018) omit the relation to the city, reflecting that biennial literature tends to undermine the relation to the urban contexts in which they emerge (Fracina, 2013; Karavida, 2014; Kompatsiaris, 2017; Oxenius, 2017; Whybrow, 2021).

Kompatsiaris (2017) argues that the problem with biennialisation is that it is often presented as a 'frictionless' expansion that does not meet opposition in different urban contexts (2017, p. 9). In his view, we come to know very little about the 'situated complexities' that biennials are confronted with and hence, he calls for an ethnographic and context-sensitive approach (Kompatsiaris, 2017, p. 9). This research is aligned with this argument, choosing to ground the case studies in the socio-political and urban context where they emerge. Contrary, however, to Kompatsiaris (2017) and other recent biennial scholarship, which either bypasses or does not elaborate on biennialisation (Karavida, 2014; Oxenius, 2017), I chose to grapple with biennialisation, because biennialisation shapes the limits and potentials of biennials in relation to commoning.

Spatial approaches emphasising the relation between biennials and commoning are lacking, even when the engagements with socio-political contexts are examined in recent literature (Green and Gardner, 2016; Kompatsiaris, 2017; Oxenius, 2017; Warsza, 2017; Whybrow, 2020). Another problem is that biennial literature that engages with notions of the public or the urban, is often reluctant to ask what biennials can do to their host city – taking this question to be restricting biennials to local happenings and ignoring their multiple spatialities (Sheikh, 2009; Kompatsiaris, 2017). Moreover, biennial literature is reluctant to articulate the

biennial's entanglements with urban enclosures, processes which are opposing commoning, even when it points to the biennial's relations with the enclosing mechanisms of branding and gentrification (Sheikh, 2009; Kompatsiaris, 2017; Oxenius, 2017). This is why Chapter 4 elaborates on these matters.

Here, it is worth noting that, although Hardt and Negri's ideas (2004; 2009) have been privileged in the strand of literature that examines the biennial's relation to the immaterial mode of production, their writings on the common and to the city has received little attention. For example, Christian Oxenius (2017) in his unpublished PhD, he proposes to reconcile two key readings of biennials as institutions of late capitalist urban spatial production processes, and discursive events that produce new knowledge about the city. The author adopts Rancière's definition of the aesthetic and the political (which influences the definition of the common by Hardt (2009)), so as to account for how biennials (or culture broadly) involve simultaneously exchange and use value. (see chapter 4) However, Oxenius (2017) does not consider the common at all, leaving a gap to think further on this relation. Neither does Aikaterini Karavida (2014) elaborate on the common, even though she cites Hardt's text (2009) in her unpublished PhD on the Thessaloniki Biennial, even though she offers a comprehensive literature review with regards to the instrumental function of art, culture and biennials.

From the perspective of situating biennials in cultural and urban contexts, Nicholas Whybrow (2020) makes an important contribution. The author examines the extent to which biennials actively seek to engage with the social, cultural and political complexities of their host cities.<sup>34</sup> As such, the biennial's city-making capacity and site specificity becomes more accentuated. Moreover, in bringing a performance studies angle, Whybrow emphasises the work of art in the city as performance, as movement in space and time, and argues that the interaction between the artwork and its surroundings becomes an integral part of the artwork itself in biennials.

Therefore, in reviewing the key post-squares' biennial literature, the gaps that emerge are manifold: biennial literature either engaging with the repercussions of the squares movement

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<sup>34</sup> Whybrow (2020) examines the Folkestone Triennial in the UK, Sculpture Projects Münster in Germany, the Venice Biennale in Italy, Belgrade's Mikser Festival in Serbia and the Istanbul Biennial in Turkey.

for biennials or with the relations of biennials to their urban contexts does not yet connect to commoning and more specifically, to spatial approaches to commoning. Art theoretical approaches and interdisciplinary research examining art and commoning omit the biennial as a site that has acted catalytically in the dissemination of commoning in the art field, or which could be rethought with commoning.

In order to address the above gaps, this research proposes to spatialise the discourse, by enriching biennial literature through an emphasis on space and spatial approaches to commoning. Drawing on particularly from Stavrides (2016; 2019), I argue that examining biennials with spatial understandings of commoning is necessary in order to further knowledge on how the post-squares biennials continue to engage with activist practices and spaces. In examining through my case studies biennials and common spaces together, two phenomena that draw each other as much as they contrast each other, the thesis expands knowledge with regards to the city-making agencies afforded to biennial-makers (artists and curators) upon their encounter.

In proposing biennials as threshold infrastructures, I position biennials in a threshold space of tensions described at the introduction, between accumulating power and distributing power, between collective practice and labour, between dominant urban policies and grassroots urban creative practices, between public and common space - or else, between commoning the biennial and the biennialisation of the commons. The study counters the absence of biennials both in art theory and common/s literature. It does so by drawing on the conceptualisation of common spaces as thresholds and as 'expanding institutions of commoning' by Stavrides (2016) and juxtaposing them with art theoretical proposals that seek to rethink institutions through the concepts of instituting (Raunig, 2007; 2009; Athanaiou, 2016) and infrastructure (Berlant, 2016). The intention is to trace qualitative features that can help think towards potentialising biennials, as well as the relation between biennials and the city, through the two-fold prism of commoning the biennial and commoning the city. Examples from the Syntagma square occupation and common spaces in Athens inform how I understand commoning and common spaces. The analysis of the case studies prioritises a context-sensitive perspective, which looks at how processes and artworks within the cases studies connect with socio-political urgencies and urban processes in Athens.



## Points of Departure and Research Questions

Several biennials in the period around the squares' movement engaged with common/s as paths towards social, urban and ecological transformation beyond capitalism.<sup>35</sup> Curators invited artist-activists to participate in biennials. Biennial gatherings took the form of assemblies, reminiscent of the assemblies on occupied squares and common spaces. Artist-activists contested biennials. All these developments suggest that we are possibly amidst a 'biennial turn' to the common/s. However, in this thesis, the common/s is not just posited as a theme that biennials explore or a practice that they host.

My point of departure is that commoning is a crucial lens through which biennials are challenged and that biennials are crucial sites for negotiating the tensions and contradictions that traverse relations between art, commoning and the city. For this reason, this thesis examines the biennial as a threshold infrastructure, examining it through biennialisation (Chapter 3), through its spatial politics (Chapter 4) and through the questions it raises regarding commoning as collective creative practice and productive activity or labour (Chapter 5).

The primary research question in this study is:

- Can commoning offer a way to potentialise the relations that emerge within biennials and between biennials and the city?

Although art/commoning may be hosted in biennials, the contrast between biennials and common spaces remains. Intentions to learn from common spaces is an acknowledgement that biennials, being hierarchical organisations that accentuate unequal relations in the art system, are distant from common spaces, which strive for horizontality as a way of governance. In thinking biennials and common spaces in tandem, several questions are raised as to what biennials may learn from common spaces and how they put it into practice. Can we reimagine biennials and their hierarchical relations through the qualitatively different

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<sup>35</sup> For example, building on a first discussion between De Angelis and Stavrides during AB2 (2009) the subsequent AB editions engaged with commons: AB3 (2011), AB4 (2013) and the case study of this research: AB5-6 (2015-2017). Other examples include the 9<sup>th</sup> Gwangju Biennale (2012) 'ROUNDTABLE'; Venice Architecture Biennale (2012) 'Common Ground'; the U3 | 7th Triennial of Contemporary Art in Slovenia | 'Resilience' in Ljubljana (2013); the Seoul Architecture Biennale (2017), 'Imminent Commons'.

relations (Federici, 2016, p. 386) that common spaces strive for? Can we and how may we think of commoning, in order to challenge and potentialise the relations between biennials, art and the city. To potentialise means to challenge meanings and patterns in biennial-making, distribute power and offer new configurations for the relations that emerge within and against the biennial.

The sub-questions are:

- How do biennials try to learn from common spaces?
- What kind of potentials do curatorial gestures to learn from common spaces activate with regards to new forms of commoning to emerge?

These two questions involve identifying the reasons why biennials attempt to learn from common spaces, which purposes this learning serves, what biennials identify as worthy of learning, and through whom and in what ways they mobilise commoning. Biennials are curated events and this question mainly concerns examining the tools curators or curatorial agents in biennials use in order to create a context where commoning can be explored as discourse and practice. While curators are not the only agents, I take their role in biennials for setting the initial parameters and conditions as significant, since they retain a certain degree of authority over the processes and outcomes of biennial exhibition making. It involves examining the kind of interpretations, meanings or positions on commons, particularly through curatorial statements, framings and discursive programmes.

- How do artists negotiate the ambiguities and limits with relation to the biennials' urge to learn from commoning in the city, while biennials remain embedded in dominant urban policies and spatial production?
- Can different versions of the city be enacted by practicing commoning within and against the biennial?

This question considers the tensions biennials inhabit as spatial events with an accentuated relation to the city and public space. If biennials are largely seen through city branding, gentrification and experience economy, how do artists negotiate the ambiguities and are there ways that contest or even subvert dominant urban policies and the biennial's spatial politics? Posing this question from the context of the biennial is pertinent, since the biennial is the exhibition par excellence where art, commoning and the city meet.

- When biennials suggest commoning as a curatorial, organisational or institutional model of distributed biennial-making and governance, how do artists and collectives negotiate the space and conditions that biennials offer for forms of cooperation and sharing?
- How do artists negotiate the tensions between commoning as collective creativity and commoning as collective labour or productive activity, when they participate in biennials?

Collaboration in the commons is different from collaboration in biennials or the broader art field. While the first is a form of voluntary collective activity, participation in biennials ideally involves remuneration and is set in a context of relations based on production (Dimitrakaki and Lloyd, 2017). Yet, the lines between commoning as practice and labour are blurred, inviting to think beyond strict dichotomies. To enquire these aspects, I chose to interview curators and artists with experience both in biennials and common spaces who were invited to participate in my case studies, as the next section elaborates.

## **Methods and Methodology**

Informed by the literature review and building on the research questions, this section offers reflections on the method and methodological issues, including the rationale for choosing a qualitative research, case study research design, as well as the process of data collection and analysing. For the data collection, the research relied on texts produced by the two case studies, analysing them through critical discourse analysis (CDA), fieldwork and semi-structured interviews. Complementing the methods discussed in this section, the Appendix includes a glossary of key terms, as well as illustrations and timelines that contextualise the case studies in the sociopolitical context of Athens.

This thesis considers exhibitions as objects of art historical study, and studies the two case studies in their relation to the city of Athens and common spaces, by drawing on insights from social history of art and social research. Working within critical social research, means situating the research in a framework that explores why and how contemporary capitalism prevents, limits or enables social activity and how practices, meanings and interpretations can effect change (Fairclough, 2013). Working within social history of art highlights the need to examine contexts and ideologies. It therefore tries to identify how context influences the

production of works of art. Drawing on Clark (1999; 2001), a social history of art studies relations between artists, art practices, artworks, institutions and broader political and historical circumstances (Clark, 1999, p. 9-20). Another reason that makes social history of art relevant is that offers broad theoretical substrata, which include Marxism, feminism, post-colonialism, while the methods of analysis are often drawn from a variety of disciplines, such as sociology, critical theory and post- structuralism (Harris, 2001, p. 46). In this framework, this perspective on what is to be studied as the context of art, encompasses social and political activism. Although the focus of this thesis is not on single artworks, the relevance of this approach is that it grants attention to a context sensitive analysis, which in this thesis is applied to the exhibition-making process and examines how the two cases engage with common spaces in the context of Athens.

Each method employed was meant to generate answers in relation to all research questions. However, the analysis of catalogue texts, handouts and press releases, contributed to the exploration of the first research question: namely, how biennials mobilise commoning and how they present their effort to learn from common spaces? The selection of texts as well as their analysis is structured around two key themes pertaining to: a) how they communicate their engagement with the city of Athens b) how they communicate their effort to learn from and engage with common spaces.

In order to analyse the texts, I draw on the concept of discourse by Foucault (1969) and Fairclough (1993). Foucault focuses on larger units of analysis (narratives, statements and discourses which operate across different texts and areas of knowledge), arguing that discourse can exclude, limit or repress alternative ways of constructing knowledge about a certain topic (Foucault, 1969). Following Foucault, the analysis of the written texts produced by AB5-6 highlights the effort to construct the biennial as a space for learning from commons, while d14 clearly shows a preference for sustaining the image of Athens as a city of crisis, and largely excludes references to Athens as a city of commoning and its relation to the Athens art scene, including AB. This is particularly important given the different relation each has to Athens and the power asymmetries and material resources between them, as

explained in the section that introduced the case studies and which are also reflected in the unequal production of texts between them.<sup>36</sup>

Fairclough (1995; 2013), on the other hand, argues that critical discourse analysis (CDA) sets out to explore ‘discourse as a political practice’: how discursive practices, events and texts are ideologically shaped by relations of power and struggles over power, how discourse sustains or can change power relations and how power structures and knowledge creation are entangled (Fairclough, 2013). Fairclough argues that CDA is relational, dialectical and transdisciplinary. In focusing on social relations, CDA acknowledges the complexities that underpin them. Dialectical relations (such as between discourse and power) are relations between objects which are different from one another but not entirely separate. Fairclough argues that analysis is not just about following pre-established methods, but a theory-driven process of constructing ‘objects of research’ in a transdisciplinary way, which allow for various ‘points of entry’ (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992 in Fairclough 2013, p. 5).

CDA was appropriate, because it suited the qualitative nature and aims of this research. Both case studies in this research unfolded as relational processes, inviting a large number of individuals or collectives, anticipating a transformative process (Fairclough, 2013). The relation between biennials and commoning is analysed dialectically. Moreover, following Fairclough (2013) was useful for constructing the relation between biennials and common spaces through a transdisciplinary lens, but within the tradition of critical social research. In this way, this research is concerned with dialectical relations between biennials and commoning/common spaces, and the challenge is to find ways of connecting categories and relations between them.

A case study research was chosen, because the goal is an in depth examination that looks to engage with the complexities and particularities of the selected cases (Bryman, 2012). Case study methodology uses empirical investigation that focuses on a particular context, using different sources and methods for collecting data (Wisker, 2008). The specific case studies

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<sup>36</sup> In the case of AB5-6 and d14 asymmetries are reflected in the primary sources (press releases, curators’ essays and artists’ texts) and secondary sources (reviews of the exhibitions and articles). In the case of d14 there is an abundance of both, as the edition included several publications and a website with extensive material and documentation. In AB5-6 primary sources are mainly press conference texts and speeches and online documentation (panels and performances) and significantly less printed material, due to the fact that the edition was interrupted.

were selected following the main criterion in this kind of research design, namely the fact that each case offers a variation of a topic – in this case an engagement between biennials and commoning, as well as the context of Athens, given their different relation to Athens. In choosing a case study research and focusing on the relation between my case studies and the context of Athens, my contribution acknowledges the need to address the ‘situated complexities’ through which biennials unfold (Kompatsiaris, 2017, p. 9). In focusing on AB5-6, the research also extends the timeframe and the analysis of recent biennial literature, particularly of publications which examine either the first biennials after the movements (Warsza, 2016) or previous editions of the Athens Biennale as case studies, AB1 and AB4 (respectively, Kompatsiaris, 2017; Oxenius, 2017).

By choosing just two case studies, the breadth of the research may appear somewhat limited, as it is grounded on this specific momentum that d14’s advent created for the cultural scene in Athens and its findings may not be easily generalised. However, I argue that it is exactly this exceptionality that makes the two pertinent cases to study. This particular momentum whereby two biennials of a different calibre and a different relation to the host city take place at the same time and in a complex relation to each other is rare, if not unprecedented, in biennial histories. The analysis of two case studies which are differently positioned in Athens, can enrich the discussion on the ‘situated complexities’ through which biennials unfold as ‘global and grounded sets of practices’ (Kompatsiaris, 2017, p. 9) and in particular the post-squares and post-crisis examples, in their variegated engagements with common spaces.<sup>37</sup>

The fieldwork included visits to Athens and Kassel, in order to attend public events of the two case studies. Initially, I had considered a more in-depth engagement with the ethnographic method of (non-participant) observation. However, this choice had to be reconsidered due to practical reasons, as my presence in Athens could not be continuous and I could not attend internal meetings that would have allowed me to observe the same

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<sup>37</sup> Based on the understanding that the two cases are asymmetrical when we consider their institutional power, some comparisons between their institutional structures and processes, financial means and histories are briefly outlined in the introduction. These asymmetries are also reflected in the primary sources (press releases, curators’ essays and artists’ texts) and secondary sources (reviews of the exhibitions and articles). In the case of d14 there is an abundance of both, as the edition included several publications and a website with extensive material and documentation. In the case of AB5-6 primary sources are mainly press conference texts and speeches and online documentation (panels and performances) and significantly less printed material, due to the fact that the edition was interrupted.

participants across various times, an aspect recommended in such a method (Bryman, 2012). For this reason, my focus switched to attending public events organised by the case studies and interviewing became a key research method. Therefore, I cannot claim an anthropological ‘deep hanging out’ as a long-term localised research which involves active participation (Rosaldo cited in Clifford, 1997, p. 219) in the behind the scenes operations. This is important to note, as my analysis draws primarily on engaging with the case studies as events, rather than as organisations. However, the attendance of such events produced observations which were used in particular for the analysis of the public programme events of the case studies.

Two criteria were important for the selection of interviewees: the first was to engage with participants who could offer insights on the differences and convergence between practicing commoning within biennials and within common spaces. A second criterion was to engage with interviewees who were involved in some capacity in both AB5-6 and d14, because they could offer valuable insights on their experience of both cases. Based on this reasoning, I distinguished between these categories of interviewees: a) co-founders, artistic directors, curators or programme directors of the cases studies b) individual artists who are members of collectives or collectives who engage with commoning practices and common spaces and participated in the case studies c) contributors to public programmes or artworks, either in a waged relation to the cases or invited as guests (theorists, artists, activists) and d) theorists, artists and curators, activists or curators who engage with commoning and biennials, but who did not participate in the case studies (some in previous editions of AB or Documenta).

The decision to interview participants in the case studies was taken because in this way more contextual information could be gathered (Wisker, 2008). 20 semi-structured or open-ended interviews were conducted with artists, curators and members of collectives, to gain insights on what the experience of their participation was in the case studies (or in other biennials).<sup>38</sup> This more inductive approach was appropriate, because the aim was to explore the

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<sup>38</sup> Consent forms and participant information sheet were emailed prior to the interview and overall the LJMU ethics procedures were followed. Interviews opened with a brief presentation by myself, making sure that the interviewee understood that the interview would be recorded, transcribed and later, if needed, anonymised for her or his name as well as any other individual named within the course of the interview. The interviews were tape-recorded or registered online, and I have proof - either signed forms or email correspondence that the interviewees gave me their permission to name them in this thesis.

experiences of participants and their views on the relations between the exhibitions, discourses and practices of commoning. In addition, unstructured conversational interview style was opted for engaging with category d) of the sample, namely artist activists, curators or cultural practitioners who were involved in art occupations, in previous AB editions or other biennials that engaged with commoning.<sup>39</sup> These conversations were useful for collecting data that helped me to situate my case studies in a broader context of relations between biennials and commoning.

Semi-structured interviewing resonated as a way to address the limitations resulting from choosing a case study research. The limitation of generalising from individual case studies is how to arrive to more generalisable findings that can be applied to other cases too, according to Bryman (2012, p. 69). Rather, as he writes, the question is in how far the data can support, connect to or even generate new theoretical arguments informing the study. Semi-structured interviewing, in particular, enables the researcher to be open about what they need to know about, creating the possibility for concepts and theories to also emerge out of the data they collect through the open-ended interviews (Bryman, 2012).

Opting for semi-structure interviews offers the advantage that one can have both comparable responses, since a corpus of similar questions are asked to each interviewee, but also it responds to the need to have more diverse answers (Wisker, 2008). On the other hand, a disadvantage in this type of interviewing is that it can be time-consuming and challenging to trace patterns of similarities and differences emerging out of open-ended interviews (Bryman, 2012). To address that, I decided to use an interview guide and a corpus of standardised questions. Each interview began with questions which were the same and related to the curators' or artists' practice, familiarity, engagement or position towards commoning. The next set of questions focused on the relations between the artists and collectives with the biennials they participated in. The last part of the interview opened to questions that emerged out of the conversation. (See Appendix) Next, in order to be able to create a comparable ground for assessing the responses, I organised the transcribed interviews in an excel document, to facilitate tracing affinities and differences between answers.

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<sup>39</sup> Among them were Eleni Tzirtzilaki, who was involved in the Embros occupation and together with Nomadiki Arhitektoniki, a network/collective she has initiated had participated in AB4, as well as in AB2 and Anna Laskari, who is an artist who has also participated in Embros and different biennials.



Bar one, I had no prior relation to the interviewees. For most interviewees, an initial contact was live in Athens. The interviews were conducted in English or Greek, 5 of them face to face and the majority via Skype.<sup>40</sup> The interviews took place after the closing of the exhibitions, a timing which may have impacted both positively and negatively the process, as the distance provided enough time to them for reflecting on their experience, but also intervened in how they remembered the events.<sup>41</sup> Whenever there was a cluster of similar answers by different interviewees, I anonymised the interviewees, as the emphasis is not on who said what, but the fact that similar matters were raised by several participants in the process. Direct quotes are cited eponymously and I have confirmed this with the interviewees.

This is not a practice-based PhD and it is not one which uses auto-ethnography. However, my positionality, as a curator and organiser of exhibitions has influenced the motivations, the research choices, as well as the challenges related to the research and the interviewing process. I perceive myself both as an outsider and in some proximity to the Athens' art scene, since I studied and lived in the city for a decade and continue to have bonds to it.<sup>42</sup> Most times this simultaneous distance and proximity facilitated the initial contact. Many of the individuals I approached, as myself, inhabit simultaneously multiple roles as artists, curators, researchers, producers or art workers. Some were reluctant to be interviewed. I consider this as part of the intense interest in Athens and d14 at the time I was visiting Athens for fieldwork. Many people were doing their own fieldwork and some were reluctant to share their experience due to their relation to the case studies (in waged roles or not) or due to the prospect of publishing themselves.

Reflexivity is central to qualitative research and for questioning the researcher's relation to knowledge, relationships with the research context, data and subjects/participants as well as

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<sup>40</sup> The difference between the live and digital encounter affected the length of the interview - with the former lasting on average around 1-1.5 hour, while the latter on average 2-to 2.5 hours.

<sup>41</sup> I did not conduct some initially planned interviews, as the effort of pinning down a date to meet online or in person proved disproportionately time consuming. This was the case particularly with individuals that worked for d14 and had busy travel agenda's.

<sup>42</sup> I refer here mainly to my earlier involvement with Reconstruction Community and the more recent involvement with Nomadiki Arhitektoniki. These bonds are primarily affective, social and based on friendships and participations in projects or processes that navigate the muddy terrain of art activism. All of them have been voluntary and not remunerated.

the validity of research (Corlett and Mavin, 2018).<sup>43</sup> The question of voicing and positionality were important questions to address in the process of collecting data and interviewing. I became gradually aware that my positionality affects the research process, particularly the interactions and the power dynamics between myself and the interviewees (Edwards and Holland, 2013). However, I could not entirely avoid expressing opinions or engages in less formalised discussions, an aspect which had to do with my own positionality as someone with links to Athens and working experience in biennials.

Acknowledging biennials as social spaces, which emphasise the experiential, biennials require resources to travel to experience contemporary art, shaping the viewer of contemporary art as a ‘classed subject’ (Smith, 2009, cited in Dimitrakaki and Lloyd, 2015, p. 14). Similarly, as a biennial researcher, I needed to be mobile in order to conduct research. Having my student flat in Athens as a basis enabled lengthier stays in Athens for the fieldwork. I was fortunate to receive LJMU funding to support travelling to Athens and Kassel. The financial support received from LJMU facilitated my participation at conferences, which I list in the Appendix.<sup>44</sup> Among other, useful was presenting at the conference *Urban Struggles in Mediterranean Cities: The Right to the City and the Common Space*, School of Architecture, National Technical University of Athens (May 31 – June 3, 2018, Athens, Greece).<sup>45</sup> Next to financial support, shared responsibilities as a mother of one required arrangements with my partner and relying on family and friends for child care.

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<sup>43</sup> This approach on positionality and self-reflexivity includes becoming conscious and articulating the motivations and interests underpinning the research (Corlett and Mavin, 2017) and being aware of my position in relation to the field of research. As part of outlining my positionality, I include in the foreword a brief account into the personal motivations of this study with regards to the focus on Athens, commoning and biennial exhibition histories.

<sup>44</sup> I presented early stages of my research during the *Art Institutions & Performance Art*. International workshop for PhD candidates and Public Symposium at Justus Liebig University, Giessen, Germany (June 22 - 23, 2017) and during the *Contemporary Research Intensive*, Research Pavilion, Venice, Italy (Tuesday, October 3 – October 4, 2017). The second resulted in a conversation with Anne Kolbaek-Inversen in the publication which came out of it. Research postgraduate seminars at Liverpool John Moores University during my PhD and the reading group Exhibitions/Conversations co-initiated with fellow PhD researcher James Schofield, supported by the ERL at LJMU, were a fruitful environment of exchange with peers on matters such as self-organisation and institutional critique.

<sup>45</sup> The title of my presentation was Tsampalla, S. (2018) Commoning (in) documenta 14 (2017) and Athens Biennale 5 to 6 (2015-2017)? Periodic exhibitions of contemporary art amidst the local/global narratives of commons. In: International conference *Urban Struggles in Mediterranean Cities: The Right to the City and the Common Space*, School of Architecture, National Technical University of Athens, May 31th – June 3th, 2018, Athens, Greece.

## Outlining the Thesis Structure

The thesis is organised into seven chapters and the Conclusion. Chapter 1 outlines the conceptual framework, the main theories and concepts I have chosen to work with towards defining commoning. The chapter enquires about the political potentials of commoning, using as its backbone the definition of common space by Stavrides (2016; 2019). Through the notion of the threshold, commoning is defined as a practice which negotiates boundaries of public space, of community and identity against and beyond enclosures (Stavrides, 2016). The chapter thinks of collective creativity as crucial for commoning the city, drawing on urban sociologist Henri Lefebvre (1968, 1992) and thinks of cooperation in art as a mode of production with Hardt and Negri (2009). Both view collective creativity as central to the capitalist production of the city and its contestation. Via philosopher Jacques Rancière (2006) it defines politics in close connection to art/commoning as a practice of dissent that can challenge norms and create new ways of seeing and doing the city. The chapter synthesises different theoretical propositions that think of commoning as a practice that strives for openness, difference and for reconfiguring power relations (Raunig, 2009; 2013; Moten and Harney 2013; Athanasiou, 2016; Berlant, 2016).

Chapter 2 turns attention to Athens. It outlines how the rise of collectivity, art occupations and commoning marked Athens as a paradigm in art and grassroots urban practices (Arampatzi, 2014; Argyropoulou, 2015; Fotiadi, 2017). Building on the theorisations of chapter 1, it complements them with artist activists' accounts and ethnographic research that focuses on the Syntagma square occupation and common spaces in Athens (Argyropoulou, 2015; Fotiadi, 2017; Tzirtzilaki, 2020). The chapter traces how commoning practices on the squares prioritised collective creativity, while rearticulating the relation to public art, public space and art institutions. The occupied Embros theatre serves as a key example to discuss how common spaces grapple with the difficulties of negotiating power relations, while trying to remain open in form and to the city.

Chapter 3 examines the questions biennialisation raises with regards to the political potentials of biennials. The main argument is that the problem of sharing power in biennials is shaped by biennialisation and the co-implicated politics, spaces and values that it involves (Kompatsiaris, 2017; Oxenius, 2017; Bethwaite and Kangas, 2018). The chapter outlines two key readings of biennialisation and connects them to common/s. The first sees biennials with

the capacity to propose new worlds and offer counter-hegemonic potentials. As platforms for postcolonial critique, biennials are thought with decentering modernity and Western epistemologies, through debates and representations of the subaltern or ‘cultural other’ (Marchart, 2010; Enwezor, 2010; Hoskote, 2010; Green and Gardner, 2016). The second follows theorisations which place artistic production and creative talent at the core of the immaterial/biopolitical model and post-Fordist production (Lazzarato, 1996; Boltanski and Chiapello, 1999; Virno, 2004; Hardt and Negri, 2000; 2009). This strand emphasises biennials as apparatuses of circulation that do not produce commodities, but subjectivities and social relations, centred on the figure of the international artist and curator (Sheikh, 2009; Gielen, 2009; Tyzlik-Carver, 2016). Drawing on Tyzlik-Carver (2016) who looks at how curating and commoning become apparatuses for making subjects, the chapter ends by raising questions with regards to distributing power as requiring a biennial practice on the threshold that is ready to push commoning the biennial, reflect on the risks and resist the biennialisation of the commons.

Chapter 4 thinks of biennials with their city-making capacity and elaborates on biennials as threshold infrastructures. The notion of threshold by Stavrides (2016) and infrastructure by Berlant (2016) are brought in conversation with biennial literature that sees an infrastructural agency in biennials (Niemojewski, 2009; Smith, 2016). Here, I draw on authors who highlight how biennials generate economic value for cities, particularly as city-branding tools in the post-Fordist production model (Hardt, 2009; Sheikh, 2010). I extend this by highlighting city-branding in relation to urban enclosures, a perspective not taken by biennial literature so far (Sholette, 2015; Tsavdaroglou and Kaika, 2021). The chapter ends by expanding on the biennial’s infrastructuring agency by arguing to ground biennials in the interdependencies they are part of in their host cities and to think of them with everyday city life.

Chapter 5 examines the tensions between collective creativity and production that art/commoning raises when it enters the space of biennials. Artists that participated on the squares’ occupations paused production and experimented with art/commoning. However, this was not a final break with production, neither with the art institution. Art/commoning in common spaces is a kind of volunteering based on values of mutual aid, solidarity and equality. Art/commoning in biennials and art institutions, is based on labour and production relations. Reflecting on these issues, art theorists Dimitrakaki and Lloyd (2017, p. 9) argue

that art is a ‘troubled commons’, because by accepting art/commoning as gift or unremunerated work what is denied is that art is also productive activity. While taking on board these arguments, I argue that art/commoning is also troubling commons, as it pushes us to continuously examine the new tensions and boundaries between art as collective creativity and production. What is at stake is creating new combinations and forms of cooperation oriented towards qualitative different relations, that ultimately produce new subjects and spaces of art and political action, navigating the tensions within and against biennials

Chapter 6 examines the AB5-6 and chapter 7 examines d14. In both cases I examine how they mobilise the commons and how their intention to learn from common spaces in Athens manifests. I apply the twofold prism of commoning the biennial and commoning the city in both. I argue that the two become indistinguishable in AB5-6: to common AB relies on a process of commoning the city, since AB5-6 invites artists activists from common spaces and asks them to co-shape AB5-6’s programme and potentially change the institution. Limits and potentials emerge both in terms of revising the biennale through commoning as an organisational model and when situating AB5-6 at the threshold between bottom-up and top-down claims to common the city and to shape it as a collective work of art (Lefebvre, 1968/1992).

Chapter 7 argues that in order to understand how d14 engages with common/s, it is not sufficient to trace the various understandings of the common/s that run through its programmes. Rather, it requires to examine how d14 mobilised the common/s for its political and curatorial positions in relation to the complexities that the exhibition was situated in Athens, including the critique it received and the unmaterialised partnership with AB. Similar to AB5-6, d14 too had the ambition to transform the institution of documenta and to shake its relation to Kassel, by ‘learning from Athens’. The chapter takes as a starting point that this intention, at least initially, overlapped with an intention to ‘learn from commoning’ and the AB as a situated and close to common spaces biennale (Szymczyk, 2015a and 2015b). However, the unmaterialised partnership with AB5-6 and the critical reception to d14, which run in parallel to d14’s progressive unfolding, co-shaped the shifting positions and reluctances in terms of how d14 articulated its relation to Athens, its artistic scene and how it positioned itself with regards to commoning, both as discourse and practice.

In the Conclusion, I outline key research insights gained through the questions and conceptual framings I explored and suggest possible ways forward based on the aftermaths of

my case studies and how the limitations of my research can become starting points for future research.

## Chapter 1. Commoning the City and Commoning Art Institutions

The city is relatively under-theorised in both the neo-institutionalist or critical strands in common/s scholarship, even though not entirely absent (Huron, 2017; Bianchi, 2018; Enright and Rossi, 2018). Hardt and Negri (2009) make an important contribution in seeing the city as the locus for the production of the common. In theorising enclosures dialectically with commoning, militant commons scholars highlight the importance of occupying public space and self-organising for breaking the dependency of our reproduction from state and market (Federici and Caffentzis, 2013).

The ongoing global urbanisation, the entrenchment of neoliberal forms of urban governance, the wave of square occupations and the emergence of urban commons contributed to a growing literature that ‘spatialises’ or ‘urbanises’ the commons (Kip et al., 2015; Enright and Rossi, 2018; Karyotis, 2019). (Stavrides, 2015; Huron, 2017). This turn to the urban has raised the commons into a key discourse for explaining urban struggles and movements for alternative forms of social and political organisation (Harvey, 2012; Borch and Kronberger, 2015; Dellenbaugh et al, 2015; Kip, 2015; Kratzwald, 2015; Stavrides, 2016; 2019; Huron, 2017; Enright and Rossi, 2018). In light of such events, urban commons are crucial for ‘commoning the city’ (Stavrides, 2016; 2020; Özkan and Büyüksaraç, 2020).

First, this chapter enquires about the possible meanings that commoning the city may acquire. In this research I chose to work with the conceptualisation of common space proposed by Stavrides (2016; 2019) because it encapsulates key challenges in urban commons, as spaces that fight enclosures, negotiate tensions with public space and the boundaries of identity and community, grappling with the sharing of power in the city, as a site where differences and conflicts manifest. The emphasis on the significance of space for commoning requires to bring together common/s, politics and conceptions of urban space and the city into dialogue with one another. In particular, Lefebvre’s (1968/1996) RttC in combination with urban commons theories sets the foundation for enquiring the political potentials of common space, together with the definition of politics by philosopher Jacques Rancière (2006). It is from these conversations between commons, urban commons and the RttC that the practice of commoning the city is fleshed out as a collective political act that reimagines the city.

Second, this chapter thinks about the possible meanings of commoning art institutions. A question that intensively preoccupies critical art theory and urban commons literature in the aftermath of the squares' movement is what kinds of institutions are needed in light of the collective forms of social organisation tested in movements and common spaces (Huron, 2017; Sholette, 2015; Athanasiou, 2016; Raunig, 2013; Nowotny and Raunig, 2016; McKey, 2016; Stavrides, 2016). Art/commoning on the squares questioned the legitimacy of art institutions, but the question 'what kind of institutions do we want?' persists and is articulated in a twofold manner. On the one hand, the question is how to create new institutions or infrastructures of and through commoning (Sholette, 2015; McKey, 2016). On the other hand, the question is what to do to and with existing institutions, so that they too can support commoning (McKey, 2016). Although these directions imply different positions towards existing art institutions and involve different strategies or tactics for constructing new ones, in this research I understand both as expressions towards commoning art institutions.

To think towards this direction, I take as a starting point the proposal for threshold institutions or 'institutions of expanding commoning' by Stavrides (2016) and its key features: openness, difference and the sharing of power. I discuss them with proposals of instituent practices and the 'institution of the common' by philosopher Gerald Raunig (2007; 2013); the uncommon institution by Athena Athanasiou (2016) commoning as 'infrastructure for troubling times' by Lauren Berlant (2016) and the undercommons by Fred Moten and Stefano Harney (2013). In bringing them together, I want to link commoning to questions of instituting and infrastructuring. The aim is to trace the common qualitative features they propose for rethinking art institutions. While critical art theory preoccupied with questions on instituting and commoning excludes biennials from the discussion, I will be drawing on these questions to approach biennials in subsequent chapters.



## 1.1 From Common/s to Commons Spaces

For example, De Angelis (2010; 2017) defines commons as social systems based on a community which governs resources (non-commodified means for fulfilling needs) and their relations through ‘horizontal doing in common, commoning’ (De Angelis, 2017, p. 10). Harvey (2012) sees (urban) commons ‘as an unstable and malleable social relation’ between a certain group and the common – a social or physical aspect from the environment that is crucial for the group’s life or livelihood and which should be collective and non-commodified (Harvey, 2012, p. 73). Such conceptualisations acknowledge that commons involve resources, practices or institutions shaped by a community that defines a common and organises their relations horizontally (Kip et al, 2015; Huron, 2017; Karyotis, 2018). Yet, such definitions may also be applicable to relations that are closed or refer to homogenous communities, an aspect which becomes particularly crucial for urban commoning (Stavrides; 2016).

In the recent literature on urban commons, several scholars ask why it is necessary to theorise urban commons as distinct from commons and how urban conditions shape their political potentials (Kip et al., 2015; Kratzwald, 2015; Huron, 2017).<sup>46</sup> Many urban theorists agree that cities pose challenges to theorising and practising commons because they are sites of ongoing change, anonymity and difference (Harvey, 2012; Huron, 2015; Kip et al, 2015; Stavrides, 2016). The first problem thus in urban commons concerns their boundaries, how open they can be, whom they include and exclude, whom do they benefit (Kip, 2015; Stavrides, 2016; Huron, 2017; Karyotis, 2019). Second, if commons generally invite us to rethink the public/private dichotomy through state/market entanglements, urban commons invite us to think about how they relate to public space. How can we position urban commons in relation to the shifting and overlapping boundaries between private and public spaces in the city, given that public space is increasingly being privatised and enclosed? (Anarchitektur, 2010; Kratzwald, 2015; Sohn, Kousoulas, Bruyns, 2015; Dimitriou, 2016; Stavrides, 2016; Bianchi, 2018). A third problem concerns the kind of social relations or

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<sup>46</sup> Here it is useful to think how Ostrom’s theorisations are viewed as inadequate for the city. Next to emphasising on rural areas and homogenous communities, Ostrom (1990) sees the overuse of ‘common pool’ resources decreasing the value of a commons. Urban theorists Borch and Kronberger (2015) argue that Ostrom’s theorisations are not useful for studying cities, since the commons in the city are not pre-existing resources which wait for subjects to exploit them and that the more the city (its streets, parks, squares etc) is used, the more its value increases.

institutions of commoning that are needed, given that the city reveals social conflicts, as diverse urban actors are antagonising for the shaping of the city (Kip et al., 2015).

In this research I chose to work with the definition of common space by Stavrides (2010; 2016), because it encapsulates the above key questions in urban commoning. Stavrides (2016) follows the three-part definition of commons, yet he emphasises both the verbal form of commoning and the role of space for the political potentials of the commons. Common space is not a pre-existing resource which needs to be collectivised or ‘communised’ (Stavrides, 2016, p. 260). Following up on a relational understanding of space that echoes Lefebvre (1996) and Massey (2005), common space is not simply a container of subjects and social relations, but which actively shapes them.

There are several benefits in adopting this definition. First, rather than assuming that commoning is emancipatory or anticapitalist, commoning may gain emancipatory potentials through certain spatial qualities connected to the idea of the threshold. Space is thought as of as potentiality and commoning as a practice that may potentialise space. Since space is relational, what is at stake is how to potentialise (i.e. emancipate) social relations in space. The second significant concept here is that of ‘threshold spatiality’ (Stavrides, 2016, p. 54-61). Spatiality refers to the conditions, qualities and features of space, rather than specific spaces and their physical aspects (Massey, 1999; Stavrides, 2016). Any space emerging out of commoning points to a ‘common world’. The challenge, however, is how to capture the complexities that underpin commoning without conceptually narrowing it down as a practice and a space that reproduces and sustains bounded worlds (Stavrides, 2015; 2016), but how to think and practice commoning as a process of sharing oriented towards openness and porosity, across its constituent elements of community, commoning and space.

The threshold becomes therefore a key conceptual tool to examine how commoning may acquire emancipating qualities (Stavrides, 2010; 2015; 2016; 2019). Thresholds make us think of doors, entry and exit points, crossings and passages. Thresholds are characterised by porosity and openness, but they also point to a state of limbo or ambivalence (Stavrides, 2016, p. 57, Volont, 2021, p. 4). Hence, the threshold points to ambivalences, negotiations and the crossing of boundaries that commoning grapples with in cities, especially as cities are sites of otherness, social antagonism and enclosures.

Difference is a defining quality of the urban as a cultural process and any new space, meaning space that may move beyond the capitalist city, needs to accentuate difference (Lefebvre, 1968; 1996; Kip, 2015, p. 50). The city is where we encounter strangers, and, by relating to each other, we give shape to new kinds of frictions or bonds. Daily interactions construct urban space, making that cities are ‘where different stories meet up’ as Massey writes (1999, 134, cited in Cochrane, 2018, p. 23). Understood in this way, space is a process which remains open, constantly ‘becoming’ and never finished (Massey, 2005, p. 9 cited in Stavrides, 2010, p. 1).

The urban (space) and the city are not the same, yet the distinction between them is not easy to make.<sup>47</sup> With this in mind, it is also useful to think of geographer Nuria Benach (2015) who calls us to consider the city not as a category of analysis but as a category of practice and as a process, rather than a place (Wachsmuth, 2014 in Benach, 2015) an observation which is useful for keeping the boundaries between the city and the urban open in this research. In this sense, when I refer to Athens as the urban context of this research, I understand it through change as a key process in cities. While drawing my main definitions from Athens’ common spaces in this thesis, I do not take the urban or the city as strict physical or territorially defined entities - an idea founded on how Lefebvre (1983) challenges a distinction between urban as global and the city as local, in distinguishing three socio-spatial levels that interact with each other: the global, the urban and the everyday. The everyday is where the potentials for subverting the capitalist production of the city emerge through ‘the possibility that the quotidian acts over the urban and the urban over the global’ (Lefebvre, 1983 in Benach, 2015, pp. 76-77).<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>47</sup> Urban theorists Kip et al. (2015) distinguish between the city as a locally specific place and the urban as a set of processes that connect places and spaces, defining thus the urban through connectivity (Huron, 2017). The urban for Kip et al. (2015) mediates between everyday life and the demands for capital accumulation. In critical urban theory, the urban is more abstract, while the city refers to a specific place, which makes Kip et al. (2015) note that much of the literature so far has examined commons in the city, rather than how urban processes shape them.

<sup>48</sup> Lefebvre (1996) conceives of the city as both *echelle* (scale) and *niveau* (level). The former points to urbanisation as a global process that connects places and flows of capital, including people and commodities (Kip, 2015; Kip et al., 2015; p. 16-17; Huron, 2017). The latter points to the urban as a cultural process that mediates between everyday city life and the demands of capitalist accumulation and political hegemony (Kip, 2015). The way Lefebvre (1977) pointed out that there was revolutionary potential in everyday life and urban revolts opposed the Marxist canon, which undermined the role of the urban in working class struggles (Harvey, 2015).

### 1.1.1 Enclosures and Commoning: A Dialectical Relation

This chapter engages with commoning as a struggle for a different city, which both articulates a critique to the capitalist city and generates new kind of spaces and social relations. To introduce this argument, this section turns first to discourses of the commons. The city might not be always emphasised, yet commons are theorised as a critique or struggles against and beyond capitalist enclosures. More recently, critical geographers spatialise this discourse and expand on the relation between commons and enclosures as a complex, dialectical, historical and tensed socio-spatial dynamic between antithetical processes, which becomes particular important in urban contexts (Hodkinson, 2012; Sevilla-Buitrago, 2015).<sup>49</sup>

Commons historian Peter Linebaugh (2008) first introduced the term commoning to refer to acts of sharing and mutual aid, which were enclosed in the historical commons.<sup>50</sup> In Marx's analysis, enclosures enabled the rise of capitalism, by separating producers from the means of production, a separation known under the term of 'primitive accumulation' (Midnight Notes Collective, 1990; Hodkinson, 2012; de Angelis, 2019). Revisiting Marx, the Midnight Notes Collective (MNC) (1990) argued that enclosures and commoning are ongoing, rather than a past phase of capitalism (De Angelis, 2004; 2019). With the 'new enclosures' they referred to the crises that underpinned neoliberalism's rise in the 1970's, focusing on how 'debt crises' are constructed in order to legitimate economic restructuring processes, which include

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<sup>49</sup> Neoliberalism refers to a set of doctrines that concern processes of economic regulation, but it is also an organizational, political and ideological reorganization of capitalism that relies on the institutionalisation of "free market" doctrines in different contexts (Brenner and Theodore, 2010).

<sup>50</sup> Enclosures were violent acts and legislations imposed by the nobility and the clergy, which fenced off land and seized natural resources, displacing in this way communities and dispossessing them from the social, material aspects of the shared territorial practices, languages and institutions associated with commoning (Linebaugh, 2008; Sevilla-Buitrago, 2015). This was a long process which took place between the 15th and the 18th century in the medieval feudal English or European agrarian systems. In this system, land was owned by royals, manor owners (and those dependent on their land) or the Church (Hodkinson, 2012; Caffentzis, 2016). The common people relied on rights and customs for trespassing wastelands, forests or fisheries, for which they had to constantly struggle for and negotiate against landowners (Caffentzis, 2016; Linebaugh, 2019). Linebaugh offers insights into the multiple ways that dispossession of English commoners offered a model for the seizure of indigenous lands in the colonies and the foundation for enslavement and racism (Linebaugh and Rediker, 2000 in Sevilla-Buitrago, 2015). Federici (1998) has shown that women's' bodies were at the core of the dispossession of the commons. Women were demonised as witches; their activities became non-work and they were subjected to imposed patriarchal rules over reproduction.

privatising lands and repressing worker's rights (Barbagallo, Beuret and Harvie, 2019; De Angelis, 2019).

Therefore, militant scholars conceive commons as struggles against their appropriation or enclosure by capitalism; with enclosures pointing to processes of exclusion, marketisation and privatisation (The Midnight Notes Collective, 1990; Anarchitektur, 2010; De Angelis, 2004; 2019). The political potentials are about strengthening anti-capitalist commons and expanding them as autonomous spaces for non-commodified relations (Caffentzis and Federici, 2013; Caffentzis, 2014; 2016; de Angelis, 2017, p. 213; De Angelis, 2019, pp.218-220). (De Angelis, 2019, p. 217).<sup>51</sup>

Militant approaches are dialectical, premised on the idea that capitalism needs to rely on resources that are or made to look as outside of it, such as unpaid labour, natural resources and commons (Kratzwald, 2015). Feminist scholars like Silvia Federici (2010; 2012; 2016) argue that commons need to be connected to the reproduction of everyday life and the role of women's unpaid work for capital's reproduction. Federici (2012) studies how women collectively organise and shape mutual bonds of sharing and caring in the commons, against patriarchy, state violence and land expropriations.<sup>52</sup>

Therefore, militant approaches offer at least a double shift, from Hardt and Negri's (2009) emphasis on production and waged workers and immanent theory, which argues that there is no outside of capitalism and that new forms of the common emerge from within; as well as from Ostrom's (1990; 1994) homogenous communities (Caffentzis and Federici, 2014; De

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<sup>51</sup> The MNC's militant scholarship has sought to make visible intersections between struggles otherwise seen as disparate in globalisation, as well as crises and movements. The protest movements of the 1960s, anti-colonial struggles, Italian autonomist Marxism, the Women's Liberation Movement and The Zapatista's movement and recent forms of commoning provide examples for their conceptualisations. Barbagallo, Beuret and Harvie, 2019, p. 1).

<sup>52</sup> Federici's approach stands in contrast to Ostrom's (1990; 1994) homogenous communities and the national, racial or patriarchal norms that shape exclusions in them (Caffentzis and Federici, 2014; De Angelis, 2019, p. 217). Critique to Federici notes that she does not avoid naturalising femininity and emphasising domestic labour (Gonzalez, 2019). However, her contributions are significant for feminist takes of the commons. Building on her views, feminist scholars emphasise how the social processes that reproduce the subjects that are needed in capital happen outside of the working hours, but contribute to the production of labour power (Vas and Barbagallo, 2019). Issues of housing, child care, health care, education, family life are issues to engage with as part of the unpaid reproductive labour, which most often traditional Marxist theories have undermined. See Vas, Nic and Barbagallo, 'WTF is Social Reproduction?' in Barbagallo, Beuret and Harvie, 2019, pp. 137-149.

Angelis, 2019). As Federici (2016, p. 386) writes, the commons require to view community not as a homogenous ‘... grouping of people joined by exclusive interests...but as a quality of relations, a principle of cooperation, and a responsibility to each other, the earth, the forests, the seas, the animals’. In this sense, commoning is not per se horizontal, but, rather, a commitment to develop in common horizontal and egalitarian processes of sharing with human and non-human relations (Federici, 2012; Federici and Caffentzis, 2013; Linebaugh, 2018).

In his work, David Harvey (2005, 2007) argues that the city is shaped by the inhabitants’ daily struggles against the neoliberal governance of profit-making and enclosures, which tend to destroy the city as ‘a social, political and liveable commons’ (Harvey, 2012, p. 80). Enclosures are a mechanism of neoliberalism, a ‘state-aided class-project’ that, in moving power to private parties, serves the interests of the capitalist class or the bourgeoisie.<sup>53</sup> Harvey uses the notion ‘accumulation by dispossession’ to refer to the financialisation of the global economy and imposed debt mechanisms by institutions like the International Monetary Fund (IMF).<sup>54</sup> Although the restructuring processes that neoliberalism involves are not applied in the same way everywhere, privatising public utilities and public institutions and commodifying environmental commons and cultural assets are key mechanisms of enclosure (Harvey, 2007).<sup>55</sup>

Cities are important laboratories for constructing the subjectivities that neoliberalism desires and where neoliberalism tries to capture the socially produced common or commonwealth of the multitude: subjectivities, common knowledge, languages, images and affects (Hardt, 2010, p. 136 in Enright and Rossi, 2018). Competition, entrepreneurialism and production shape the identity of the homo economicus, whom Foucault (2014) describes as the

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<sup>53</sup> This idea by Harvey is problematised by authors like for example Vilde Skorpen Wikan (2015), who in ‘What is neoliberalism and how does it relate to globalization?’, argues that globalisation is a much richer process than the rich elites’ project to increase their economic gains and that the causality between neoliberalism and globalisation is not a given.

<sup>54</sup> Harvey conceptualises enclosures as responses to capitalism’s need for finding new terrains of profit (surplus value). Accumulation by dispossession enables state deregulation and leads to managing crises through speculation. See: [https://blog.p2pfoundation.net/david-harvey-on-primitive-accumulation-and-the-enclosure-of-the-commons/2019/05/16?\\_cf\\_chl\\_jschl\\_tk\\_=pmd\\_mHdTvzPMZGkVgZG6pfgNQPZpMZ1U7WWM\\_Es0n6r.tA9s-1633355124-0-gqNtZGzNAjujcnBszQZR](https://blog.p2pfoundation.net/david-harvey-on-primitive-accumulation-and-the-enclosure-of-the-commons/2019/05/16?_cf_chl_jschl_tk_=pmd_mHdTvzPMZGkVgZG6pfgNQPZpMZ1U7WWM_Es0n6r.tA9s-1633355124-0-gqNtZGzNAjujcnBszQZR).

<sup>55</sup> In this regard, Brenner and Theodore (2010) speak about ‘actually existing neoliberalism’ to point out that the interaction between neoliberalism and specific urban contexts, which bring different outcomes that manifest across spatial scales, from the local to national and beyond.

‘entrepreneurial man’.<sup>56</sup> Therefore, neoliberal governance affects more than how the city is built and how we navigate it, it shapes a set of embodied habits that we internally normalise.

Drawing on what Foucault (2009) describes as ‘mechanisms of social normalisation’, Stavrides (2016, p. 14) discusses enclosures in relation to urban ordering processes. The latter are efforts to continuously control the city, by seeking to create spatial relations and behaviours that can be predicted, hence repeated in space and measured by economic parameters. For example, the way space is organised affects how we walk around a shopping mall or a commercial street, with all sorts of triggers prompting us to consume, while we are moving through spaces controlled by surveillance mechanisms. Normalisation is thus not exhausted in the organisation of the physical living environment, but shapes subjects, relations and the experience of the city. Understanding normalisation as a project of domination and power relations means that capitalism needs to reproduce such normative behaviours and spatial relations for its reproduction, while marginalising certain groups and praising others through narratives of active citizenship (De Angelis, 2007; Arampatzi and Nicholls, 2012; Hodkinson, 2012; Stavrides, 2016;).

Therefore, enclosures involve multiple mechanisms and stretch over different aspects of city life. As political economist Massimo De Angelis writes, they are a comprehensive capitalist strategy to enclose any space where the social relations we develop threaten our dependence on capitalism and hence, capitalism’s reproduction (2007; Hodkinson, 2012, p. 507). Urban geographer Stuart Hodkinson (2012) provides a useful summary, defining the ‘new urban enclosures’ with: a) privatisation, as a legal process which determines who has the right or not to access or use a space (e.g. through physical barriers, but also through surveillance mechanisms); b) dispossession, a process which denies those excluded the possibility to engage in activities linked to what has been enclosed, as well as the knowledge acquired through commons, and c) capitalist subjectification, a process which aims to subject life in the capitalist logic of accumulation, the profit-making logic of the market, either through waged labour, through consumption, entrepreneurship or property ownership (Hodkinson, 2012).

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<sup>56</sup> The focus on entrepreneurialism shifts the focus from consumption and man as consumer which is thought to define the so-called homo-economicus in liberalism (Foucault, 2014, p. 147 in Deaton, 2019).

In the above accounts, the city is not just its buildings, but the subjects and relations that make it and which are in an ongoing tension with the forces that strive to control the city. These perspectives suggest that a key challenge in commoning is how to be a process that not only opposes enclosures, but how to transform subjects and relations different subjectivities and social relations in ways that they can contest the ubiquitous values that neoliberalism prioritises in the city and generate new ones beyond them (Stavrides, 2016; Enright and Rossi, 2018; Karyotis, 2018; Chatterton, 2020).

### 1.1.2 Common Spaces: Troubling Boundaries of Public Space, Identity and Community

The dialectical relation between commoning and enclosures shapes commons. However, several authors argue that the lens of enclosures frames commoning as defensive and reactive to capitalism, rather than as an affirmative practice generating transformative social relations (Dardot and Laval, 2019). Moreover, as capital appropriates the commons for ‘repairing’ or ‘fixing’ crises and cities, it becomes difficult to support clear distinctions between capitalist and anti-capitalist commons, individualism and collectivity and private and public space – aspects that are key areas for commoning in the city (Velicu and Garcia-Lopez, 2018; Gonzalez, 2019). Common spaces are not outside of capital, not immune to power relations, and commoning does not guarantee a collective ‘common subject’, as even militant scholarship sometimes suggests (Federici, 2016; Nasioka, 2017; Velicu and Garcia Lopez, 2018; Gonzalez, 2019). Along these lines, some call to grapple with how class, race and gender shape power relations and the risk of enclosure also within commons (Stavrides, 2016; Bianchi, 2017; Velicu and Garcia-Lopez, 2018).

What interests this section is how the relation between common space and public space becomes a focal point for expanding the discussion. While most definitions of commons include thinking about a community, Stavrides suggests that taking the notion of the public as a starting point pushes us to think about the commons in more complex ways (Anarchitektur, 2010). In this context, it is necessary to conceptualise common space as distinct both from public and private space (Stavrides, 2016). The contrast between common and private space is obvious. Private space is ruled by the market logic, while common spaces are not defined by private interest and monetary relations. Public space may be managed and controlled by state and authorities, but it becomes entwined with private space in neoliberal governance, as public space is increasingly defined by exclusion and privatisation (Hodkinson, 2012;



Federici and Caffentzis 2013; Stavrides, 2016; Federici, 2017; Huron, 2017; De Angelis, 2017).

A main difference between public and common space is that public space is institutionalised and shaped by hierarchical relations, while common space emerges from the bottom-up through horizontal relations and sharing (Dimitriou, 2016). Not only do common spaces denote a different kind of ownership of space, but, in experimenting with new forms of social organisation, they challenge the very idea of ownership (Stavrides, 2016, p. 261).

Commoning is not about a small number of people privatising or communising public space (Stavrides, 2016). In sum, common space cannot be equated with public space, not only because the former is based on different criteria of ownership, as Harvey (2015) suggests, but because it cannot/should not be judged through the criteria of ownership, use, or value, on which public or private spaces are founded (Stavrides, 2016). Common space is about negotiating the meanings of public space and its relation to private space, ‘...transforming their historically shaped antithesis into a myriad of new syntheses’, according to Stavrides (2016, p. 261).

There are, however, other arguments regards the relation between commons and public. For example, some authors argue that the commons could be used to defend public space or even emancipate it (Federici and Caffentzis, 2013; Kratzwald, 2015; Dimitriou, 2016). Federici and Caffentzis (2013) think that it is necessary to connect the struggles of the public to the struggles for and through the commons, so that they can strengthen each other. Commoning should not be a way of withdrawing from defending public goods like health-care and education or public space, which the state should guarantee. Instead, because the public is a repository of past labour and struggles, we should fight to ensure that the public is not privatised (Federici and Caffentzis (2013).

Another perspective proposes to think of the public as commons and the commons as public. For example, architect Orsalia Dimitriou (2016) proposes the equation as a way of enhancing democratisation processes in the public sphere. In her argument, commons are not independent of public space, as they are always shaped in relation to it. Even if they occupy public space or squat private or public buildings, common spaces use public services, infrastructures or resources, such as water or electricity. Common spaces too need to retain a

certain public character, if they are to retain their openness and oppose common spaces oppose the normalisation or enclosure of public space (Dimitriou, 2016).

If a community points towards a homogenous group of people, the notion of the public points to encounters with others and relations between different communities. Accordingly, conceptualising commons with public space moves away from similarities and emphasises how people may negotiate their differences and conflicts in their effort to come together. In this line Stavrides (2016) argues that commoning may be a practice against capitalist enclosures, but commoning too may be conceptualised and practised as an enclosed activity. For example, gated communities or far-right political groups also practice forms of commoning, but only benefit a closed community. This is why Stavrides is sceptical towards how Harvey (2012) and De Angelis (2016) think of enclosure as a strategy that commoners may choose out of necessity, in order to protect their relations against threatening situations (for example, by restricting access of a commons to others). The problem with such conceptualisations is the risk of enclosing commoning as a process that concerns an urban enclave (Stavrides, 2016). ‘Enclaves’ are spaces shaped by normative encounters, with well-defined boundaries where homogenous communities strive to secure their reproduction, but without addressing inequalities or expanding their boundaries (Stavrides, 2015). Instead, threshold common spaces should challenge any form of permanent enclosure, which ultimately threatens the prospect of potentialising commoning as an emancipating practice (Stavrides, 2015).

Common spaces viewed as thresholds are in-between spaces where different identities meet, rather than spaces destined for specific communities. Here, the anthropological term of liminality is used to think of how subjects may depart from a previous identity position and enter a process of negotiation through commoning (Stavrides, 2016; Karyotis, 2018). Commoning then can be thought as an exercise in negotiating between the ‘I’ and a process that shapes a ‘we’. However, there is no guarantee that this process leads to a collective subject – ‘the commoner’. (Stavrides, 2016; Velicu and Garcia-Lopez, 2018). Rather, community is conceived as an ‘emergent community’ or ‘coming community’ (Agamben, in Stavrides, 2016, p. 177); one that takes shape through open processes. Stavrides (2016) argues that political subjectivation does not need to refer to processes that result in collective identities, but to new forms of coordination and interaction. Inhabiting the threshold may be about standing between what we perceive as fixed identity positions and a process which we

don't know how it may transform us, since we co-shape it through interacting with others. Therefore, commoning is a process of exposing us to others and embracing the unknown.

In this regard, Judith Butler (2005) and Athena Athanasiou (2013) raise useful questions regarding how subjects are formed (Velicu and Garcia-Lopez, 2018, p. 61). Butler (2005) argues that although we assume that our identity is fully formed, in fact, identity is fluid and something we do not fully understand. As subjects, we are always constituted in performative ways, through our actions and our relations with others, while we fight within and against the power relations that shape us. As Butler and Athanasiou (2013) put it:

...commoning may be analysed as an ongoing political struggle to perform the 'within/against' of power and agency – a relational constitution of our collective selves – which faces us with the opacity (boundedness) of selves rather than a fully-formed alternative communal subjectivity (Butler and Athanasiou, 2013, p. 100, cited in Velicu and Garcia-Lopez, 2018, p. 61).

## **1.2 The Right to Common the City as a Work of Art**

Having sketched commoning as a critique and struggle against enclosures and the capitalist city in the previous section, this section turns attention to commoning as an affirmative practice that may potentialise another kind of city. Following critical urban theory, to common the city emerges at the intersection of urban commoning with Lefebvre's (1968; 1996) conception of RttC (Anarchitektur, 2010; Purcell, 2014; Kip, 2015; Karyotis, 2019; Stavrides, 2021). Second, it looks into the theory of Hardt and Negri (2009), who offer a significant expansion of the common in the realm of culture and the city, which is of direct interest to this research. Third, it engages with the writings of Rancière (2006) which offer the possibility to think of commoning with tensions between production and practice, aesthetics and politics.

Although commoning and the RttC are two distinct vocabularies which may offer different tactics for activists or may be appropriated differently by capitalist interests, both help to articulate the idea of 'commoning the city' with two aspects that are important for this research: collective creativity and participation in urban life.<sup>57</sup> Both can be thought with

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<sup>57</sup> For example, Karyotis (2019) argues that the right to the city is often a demand addressed to public authorities, municipalities etc., while commons refers to an autonomous top-down practice that shapes a political community.

Lefebvre's concept of 'autogestion', which points to an ongoing practice in self-management and a continuous negotiation of democratic participation in the city (Purcell, 2014, p.8). This, in essence, is about the possibility to imagine and create a variety of social relations, against and beyond the capitalist production of the city (Harvey, 2012; Stavrides, 2016; Karyotis, 2019).

Lefebvre (1996) conceived of the RttC as the right to inhabit and change the city, collectively creating it as an 'oeuvre'; a work of art which remains in-progress (1996, pp. 173-4, cited in Stavrides, 2020, p. 1d; Kip, 2015, p. 42). This idea builds on how he conceives space as a trialectical process where conceptions, perceptions and lived experiences of space interconnect (Lefebvre 1991, p. 20). 'Lived space', in particular, is shaped by symbolisms and images, and involves not only how we experience everyday life in the city, but also how we can appropriate spaces against state and capitalism and create new spatial imaginaries.<sup>58</sup> Space for Lefebvre (1977) is the dominant form through which capitalism is produced, consumed and reproduced. While capitalism tends towards abstract or homogenous space which conceals the contradictions and conflicts of social life, struggles over urban space make differences and conflicts over ownership, use, meanings and values of urban space tangible (Lefebvre, 1977, p. 344).

The RttC is not an individual, but a collective political right to change the city. In his interpretation of the RttC, Harvey (2008, p. 23) speaks of a radical claim and an exercise of collective power over the processes of urbanisation. While for economic systems urbanisation is a process of profit (surplus value or exchange value) that involves the accumulation of material wealth, the RttC calls inhabitants to produce space as use-value, which has to do with symbolic gains and aspirations for living well (Harvey, 2003; Purcell, 2008; Santos Junior, 2014). To change the city means to change society: 'The right to the city is, therefore, far more than a right of individual access to the resources that the city embodies:

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<sup>58</sup> 'Perceived space' emerges out of daily reality and is connected to production and reproduction. 'Conceived space' is more abstract and involves representations of space (e.g., creative ideas about space or laws). Lived space is the combination of perceived and conceived space. In conversation with Lefebvre's work, Harvey (1973, 2006) conceptualises space as absolute, relative (space as a relationship between objects) and relational (objects containing relationships to other objects). As such, he also conceives of space dialectically, arguing that space is neither of these types, but that all three can simultaneously emerge.

it is a right to change ourselves by changing the city more after our heart's desire' (Harvey, 2008, p. 23).

The idea that the city is a collective work of art finds echoes in the theory of the common by Hardt and Negri (2009). As they write: 'The metropolis is to the multitude what the factory was to the industrial working class, for the production of the common' (Hardt and Negri, 2009, p. 250; Enright and Rossi, 2018). The multitude is the productive force that has replaced the traditional working class in globalisation and in contemporary cognitive (or knowledge-based) capitalism (Ruivenkamp and Hilton, 2017, p. 9).<sup>59</sup> The latter is marked by a shift to immaterial labour, which does not produce things and commodities bound to the logic of scarcity, but requires intellectual and affective labour and produces social relations – hence it is also called a biopolitical model of production (Hardt, 2009). Hence, the metropolis is not only its buildings and infrastructures, but also 'the cultural practices, intellectual circuits, affective networks and social institutions' that make it (Hart and Negri, 2009, p. 154).

Since biopolitical labour requires creative skills, artists and art practice are crucial for this economic model, which blurs divisions between work and life, economic production and political action. As capital becomes social relations, it needs to capture the socially produced common / common wealth and put it at its service, but, immaterial products can escape their instrumentalisation by capitalism and create new opportunities of cooperation, that may undermine capitalism from within.<sup>60</sup> However, their theory comes with certain limits. In rejecting dialectics, the immanent perspective of Hardt and Negri (2009) is criticised as a passive or limited form of resistance, which ends up affirming capitalist development as an

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<sup>59</sup> The conceptualisation of the multitude draws on the lessons of Italian workerism or Operaismo. Workerism (operaismo) or autonomist Marxism is an Italian Marxist movement from the 1960s that lays the emphasis on the autonomy workers have to bring change, rather than emphasising capital's agency (Ruivenkamp and Hilton, 2017, p. xii). Autonomism developed in the 1970s in relation to workerism. Both were efforts to place class-struggle at the core of Marxism, which had been fallen into the background after the influence of Antonio Gramsci's writings which emphasise the role of cultural and political struggle (Charles, 2017). Autonomism emphasises the role of working-class struggle in capitalist development and focuses on the possibilities to subvert it also as everyday resistance (to the present form of capitalism) and create 'new forms of working, living and being in common' (Ruivenkamp and Hilton, 2017, p. vii).

<sup>60</sup> Hardt refers to Arendt's distinction between work or economic production as an instrumental activity which is typical of the commodity production of the factory, while political action for Arendt is speaking in the presence of others and not exhausted in its end points but rather is a continually open sphere of communication and cooperation.

inescapable totality, that, moreover, does not consider divisions and inequalities within the labour forms of the multitude (Frederick Harry Pitts and Jon Cruddas, 2020).<sup>61</sup>

Conceptualising commoning as a practice on the threshold offers a more adequate prism to point to how common spaces are neither fully absorbed by contemporary capitalism, nor entirely against its influence (Stavrides, 2016, p. 7). Moreover, when focusing on commoning as a practice in the city, the collective subject of change is not only the working class or the productive subject of the multitude, but the dweller, the user of the city (Karyotis, 2019; Castro-Seixas, 2021).<sup>62</sup> Artists and creatives are included, but are not the sole agents of exercising politics and affecting change in the city. For example, interpreting the exclaim that the RttC is both ‘a cry and a demand’ (Lefebvre, 1968), Marcuse (2009, p. 190) connects the cry to those excluded from material or legal rights (e.g. the homeless, those discriminated or persecuted due to race, religion or gender). The demand refers to those ‘alienated’ from decision-making processes in the city and obstructed from exercising their creativity (young people, small entrepreneurs or artists) but who aspire to another social, political and creative life in the city (Marcuse, 2009; Domaradzka, 2018).

Imagination and the desire to change connects commoning and the city as a collective work of art. Commoning emerges in specific inhabited spaces and historical contexts, but at the same time it is about reclaiming urban imagination (Stavrides, 2020).<sup>63</sup> In this sense,

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<sup>61</sup> Many authors point out that the multitude's political activities are not clear (Harvey, 2009, van de Sande, 2017) and that the conceptualisation of the common as something which exists to be captured or escape capitalism is limiting (Deleixhe, 2017; Dardot and Laval, 2019). Autonomist theorist Franco Berardi (2009) is less optimistic with regards to the potentials of the multitude to break free from capitalism, arguing that network communication technologies increasingly control not just the body, but the ‘soul’, subjecting us to more competition in neoliberal capitalism (Ruivenkamp and Hilton, 2017, p. 9; Lemmens, 2017, p. 186). John Holloway notes that struggle is undermined in Hardt and Negri’s theory and that capital is understood as a ‘function of the working class’ rather than its ‘product’ (van de Sande, 2017, p. 45, 46). Moreover, Federici (2012; 2016) argues that their theory does not grant attention to the exploitation of (manual) labour-power in the ‘Global South’ and extractive processes, like mining, required for sustaining the world of online communication networks in the ‘Global North’ (Federici, 2016; de Angelis, 2019).

<sup>62</sup> For Lefebvre (1968; 1996), this subject relates to the working class, but does not refer strictly to the industrial workers – rather, the emphasis is on the everyday production of life (Mitchell, 2000; Stavrides, 2010; Harvey, 2012). Harvey (2012) sees the right as both a class struggle and a struggle for citizenship rights, arguing that it is necessary to take a certain distance from the traditional Marxist interpretation that focuses on the relation between capital and labour and in doing so would be tying the right to the city to the workplace. See Santos Junior, 2014.

<sup>63</sup> In this regard, Stavrides (2016, p. 34) describes commoning practices as a) projective, since they gesture towards possible forms of life-in-common; b) expressive, as they point to values shared, and;

commoning connects to ‘lived space’ – which involves city experience and space conflicts – and is equally about appropriating existing spaces and producing new meanings and spatial imaginaries (Arampatzi, 2014; Santos Junior, 2014). What is at stake is another, yet to-be-created city, which includes the right of inhabitants or dwellers to occupy public space, intervene, and participate in urban life. Taking this a step further, Stavrides (2020) argues that the real challenge is not how to participate in predefined top-down decision-making processes, but to shape them together through spatial practices that emancipate city life. In this sense, the question of ‘commoning the city’ becomes a question for exercising a political collective right to reimagine the city and transform it into the collective work of art that Lefebvre (1968, 1996) calls for.<sup>64</sup> In running through the above interpretations, commoning thought with the RttC can be defined as a practice of collective creativity and participation in urban life. In this regard, we may also speak about ‘the right to common the city’ as crucial collective political right for the radical reimagining of the city.

### 1.2.1 Art/Commoning, Dissent and Politics in the City

In discussing commoning as a collective political right to change the city, drawing on Lefebvre (1968, 1996) and Hardt and Negri (2009) in the previous section, we can already trace a tension between practice and production, a tension which is important in this research for defining art/commoning and situating it in biennials. The difference between practice and production is important for conceiving politics in Lefebvre (1991; 1992). Politics are connected to creation, an act that breaks with institutionalised orders, while production (although it includes creation) is also about repetition and reproduction and this means it can help to stabilise social norms, rather than destabilise them (Mullis, 2021). The question of challenging and destabilising given norms, therefore, is crucial for the political potentials of commoning. In order to elaborate on this aspect it is useful to turn to Rancière (2006), who defines politics and aesthetics in relation to the common. In particular the notion of dissent in the theory of Rancière (2006) is relevant for my research, because it helps to think of how common spaces emerge out of the unauthorised or ‘illegal’ occupation of space, in contrast to biennials and the legality they offer to artists to work with public space.

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c) exemplary, because they may establish relations that move beyond dominant models of sociality (Stavrides, 2016, p. 2).

<sup>64</sup> For an account that emphasises a reading of the right to the city with creative play, see (Castro-Seixas, 2021).

First, Rancière (2006) defines politics as a process which involves a confrontation between the political and the police, both of which are understood spatially (Mullis, 2021). The police is a principle which strives to maintain or establish a dominant social order, what Rancière calls the distribution (or partition) of the sensible' (le partage du sensible) (Rancière, 2001, p. 8). This keeps society divided into groups, positions, and identities and imposes what is to be considered as a legitimate way of doing, saying and being (Kaika and Karaliotas, 2014; Stavrides, 2019). In contrast, politics is a process of dissent by groups of people who are rendered invisible or unheard ('the part of those who have no part') or, in Lefebvre's terms those excluded from the RttC. While 'partage' tries to limit what can be experienced or imagined as possible, politics disturbs the fixed subject positions and identities that police desires. Therefore, politics involves two crucial aspects: processes of political subjectivation and the production of 'dissensual spaces' that can host those who have no part and who strive for equality (Swyngedouw, 2011b, p. 376 in Kaika and Karaliotas, 2014, p. 4; Tsianos and Tsomou, 2016).

Both art and politics relate to aesthetics, but each creates different types of dissensus (Rancière, 2006). As politics, art may reveal what we share in common and challenge what is sayable, sensible, thinkable, and hence possible (Hardt, 2009). Conceived in this way, art is not autonomous.<sup>65</sup> However, as much as art is not autonomous, art can also never be fully equated to political action, because it often lacks the relation to political subjectivation processes (Volont, 2021). While there is an ongoing debate about the limits of how Rancière (2014, p. 32) criticises art that takes the form and content of political art (Volont, 2021) - exclaiming that there can be no good political art, what interests me more here is how he acknowledges that artists who do enter the muddy terrain of art as direct political action are confronted with the challenges that radical political groups face. To make something visible requires a public manifestation and a form of empowering of those who were invisible. At the same time, to question the normal order of things (which comes with asking what is considered normal, by whom and why) requires dissent, which means acting against or beyond what is legally permitted.

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<sup>65</sup> As Rancière writes: 'We no longer think of art as one independent sphere and politics as another, necessitating a privileged mediation between the two - a 'critical awakening' or 'raised consciousness' (Carnevale and Kelsey, 2007).



Building on Rancière (2006) and Lefebvre (1992), Stavrides (2019) theorises commoning as creativity through sharing in and through space, that can challenge the police and the unequal distribution of visibility that it strives for. In this sense, commoning and aesthetics are about intervening in the world and how it is or might be possible to be experienced (Stavrides, 2019). Returning to Rancière (2006) this could be articulated as a kind of reordering that is shaped in common and presents a challenge to the sensible. From such processes, ‘the metropolis once again becomes the site of politics, if by politics we mean an open process through which the dominant forms of living together are questioned and potentially transformed’ (Stavrides, 2015, p. 11).

The city emerges both as a limit and a possibility in the theorisations of Lefebvre (1992) and Rancière (2006). The clash between police and politics and the conflicts that shape the RttC are about the struggles for different modes of space production. Building on these ideas, the challenge for art/commoning is how to navigate the limits and possibilities, as well as the ambiguities and paradoxes that concern the fluid borders between art and life, aesthetics and politics, practice and production. In this sense, crucial for the political potentials of art/commoning are processes of redistribution, that open up new and subversive potentials for aesthetic and political meanings.

If redistributing power, social norms and relations and negotiating the meanings and boundaries of public space and of community are constituent elements of commoning, thinking about art/commoning can also be viewed as a negotiation of these elements in the art realm as well as, broadly, a negotiation of art’s boundaries. If common spaces are redefining the boundaries of public space, could we think of art/commoning as redefining the boundaries of public art?

Art theorists mainly discuss commoning in relation to public art or to community-based, socially engaged art – some arguing that commoning signifies the end of socially engaged art (Sholette, 2015), while others, that it does not make public art redundant (Stafylakis, 2015). The latter argument comes in defence of public art, because it has a long history in demonstrating the social conflicts that shape political life and opposing idealisations of social cohesion. The problem with commons discourses is that they undermine this long history, according to Stafylakis (2015). Instead, drawing on Oliver Marchart (2004-2005), Stafylakis (2015) argues that public art is not to be equated with a space or an institution, but with the

creating of a conflict among people, institutions or ideas - this bonding through conflict is exactly what defines a public artwork. The idea of community as a fully shaped entity is criticised also in the realm of art. For example, Miwon Kwon (2004), in her research on site-specific art, had criticised Mary Jane Jacob's *Culture in Action* (1993) project for idealising community, with artists coming to the rescue of marginalised communities.<sup>66</sup>

Yet, this critique is not absent from commons debates, as this section shows and art/commoning, understood beyond the idealised notion of community comes close to the kind of public art that Marchart (2004-2005) describes. If, as Stavrides (2016b) suggests art can be potentialised by commoning relations, art can in return be a key practice for fighting any forms of enclosure that threaten commoning and open commoning to new ways of thinking, doing and imagining (Stavrides, 2016b). 'If art may be a field of experimentations that expand and challenge established patterns of feeling and thinking, then the practice of art-as-commoning can possibly explore patterns of feeling and thinking shaped in common' (Stavrides, 2016b, p. 2). Commoning is thought here as a blurring of art practice with social and political praxis:

Both the production and the reception of art will be transformed if a work of art is to be considered as a common good rather than a good that supports acts of distinction and is connected to symbolic or economic capital accumulation. Actually, commoning the arts will contribute to the blurring of boundaries that separate art's production and reception. Artists-as-commoners and commoners-as-artists: creativity may possibly overflow the boundaries of art through commoning (Stavrides, 2016b, p. 2).

### **1.3 Commoning Art Institutions**

This concluding section discusses art/commoning in relation to the (public) art institution. Similarly to the different positions to public space in urban commons literature, there are different positions towards the art institution. To do so, I take as a starting point Stavrides (2015; 2016, 2016b) who conceives of 'threshold institutions' or 'institutions of expanding commoning' and connect them to proposals for rethinking art institutions with commoning in the aftermath of the social movements. The emergence of common spaces, like the art

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<sup>66</sup> *Culture in Action* was an art exhibition in Chicago (1993). It is considered a significant event in the development of public art for the exchanges it created between artists and communities, but not without the criticism cited here briefly here.

occupation Teatro Valle in Rome inform the discussion (Raunig, 2014; Athanasiou, 2016).<sup>67</sup> Biennials are absent from these theories, but museums or other art organisations provide examples for theorising institutions of the commons.<sup>68</sup> In drawing from these approaches, the intention is not to sketch out the ideal institution of commoning, but to think of the qualitative features that make it, as they emerge out of a synthesis of discussions that bring together commoning with the notions of instituting and infrastructuring.

Stavrídes (2015; 2016, 2016b) conceives of ‘threshold institutions’ or ‘institutions of expanding commoning’ through three characteristics and the processes that address them: that of openness, difference and the sharing of power, thought with processes of comparison, translation and negotiation. Comparison points to commoning as a form of collaboration that recognises and allows to compare different practices and subjects in common action. Translation creates the ground to negotiate exchanges between subjects, actions and views, and individual, cultural or religious habits. Finally, negotiation refers to the need to have mechanisms that secure an equal distribution of the power to decide. These three qualities can oppose processes of enclosing the community and create relations that are open to renegotiating what is to be considered common along the way, in other words an open-ended process of co-producing ‘a common world-in-the-making (Stavrídes, 2016, p. 50). Transversality is an important dimension that connects proposals that think towards ‘commoning the art institution’, since they all ask how to articulate the relation between the

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<sup>67</sup> For example, Raunig (2009) conceptualises the ‘institution of the common’ already around the time of the financial crisis and drawing on *Commonwealth* by Hardt and Negri (2009). In his earlier conceptualisation, Raunig (2009) described the ‘institution of the common’ as one that reconfigures neoliberal pressures for content and audience numbers, that addresses labour inequalities, its own colonial entanglements and tries to find funding with ethico-political criteria and, instead of spectacle, engages in durational projects with various social and environmental ecologies and audience participation. By now, his theorisation is informed by many examples that engage with instituent practices and which move towards the direction of ‘institutions of the commons’ (España and Raunig, 2021, unpaginated). These include art activist practices and art institutions which reshape the boundaries between art, politics and the city and which experiment in self-transformation, either in terms of content, theory, discourse or forms of organisation.

<sup>68</sup> In their recent article, ‘Monstrous Complicities’, España and Raunig (2021) refer to many examples that they see as moving towards the direction of institutions of the commons: Shedhalle in Zurich, which from the 1990s on explored radical feminist critique, Kunsthalle Wien, which is run by the curatorial trio WHW since 2020, and also big museums of contemporary art like the Van Abbemuseum in Eindhoven, run by Charles Esche, curator often cited in the framework of New Institutionalism and exploring transnationalism and decolonial educational projects, or the MACBA in Barcelona, a museum which connected to social movements throughout the 2000s, and even the Museo Reina Sofía in Madrid, which has often presented political exhibitions and engaged with cooperations, such as Fundación de los Comunes, a cooperative network.

art institution and commons from an emancipatory perspective, but without keeping a strict boundary between the two. Thinking and acting in transversal ways means not privileging theory, art or activism, but crossing them through struggles that oppose representation and work towards new forms of organising and living together (Raunig, 2011). Some propose to see the temporary suspension of art as production which the social movements brought, with what Virno (2004) and Negri (1996; 2017) conceptualise as exit or exodus, a term which points to a critical questioning, but which is neither a pure negation neither a pure affirmation of the institution. Hence, although institutions point to hierarchical organisational relations and commons to horizontality, these proposals tend to rethink institutions with open and fluid processes of instituting and commoning (Raunig, 2009; 2013; Athanasiou, 2016).

Similarly to how commoning may be a process that continuously creates forms of being in common (Stavrides (2016, 2019) instituting is a way to think how to shift from the institution as a hierarchical and rigid space to a ‘constant becoming’, drawing on Raunig (2007, p. 1). In this sense ‘instituting means occupying existing institutions and inventing new instituent practices to be implemented within them’ (Raunig and Ray, 2009, p.12).<sup>69</sup> These not only target the rigidity of the institution, but also of ‘institutional critique’ as a de-politicised and self-referential notion (Kompatsiaris, 2011; España and Raunig, 2021).

Instituting is thought with processes of reorganising, reinventing and reterritorialising (Raunig and Ray, 2009, p. 3). The idea is not to maintain things as they are, but also not to arrive to establishing a new arrangement (Raunig, 2007, p. 1). In this sense, distribution is viewed as an ongoing prefigurative practice. Raunig (2006) calls for a ‘critical attitude’, one that does not have an endpoint, but generates transformative, that is, emancipatory potentials, that distribute the social, creating new possibilities of coexistence, work in transversal ways and that catalyse processes beyond the rigid boundaries of the fields where they emerge (Kompatsiaris, 2011).<sup>70</sup>

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<sup>69</sup> Raunig and Ray (2009) propose instituent practices as the third wave of institutional critique. Institutional critique refers to strategies that attempt to redefine institutional critique with activism. Institutional critique are critical practices from the late 1960s and early 1970s when artists challenged museums and galleries, attempting to subvert their rigidity. Artists that are often referenced here are Martha Rosler, Hans Haacke, Mierle Laderman Ukeles, among other.

<sup>70</sup> Raunig’s thesis is that Rancière (2006) develops the problem of distribution based on Deleuze and Guattari (1968) which, summarised, distinguishes between two types of distribution: one which involves more fixed notions like properties and territories and one which is nomadic, which resists enclosure and distributes itself in space without limits (Raunig, 2007).

Moving away from the institution to infrastructure, Berlant (2016, p. 393) proposes to think of commoning and its redistributive qualities as an ‘infrastructure for troubling troubled times’. Her proposal embraces commons as a concept that attracts many contradictory meanings, but questions essentialising or normative understandings of the commons as an unconflicted and harmonious coming together (Baldauf et al., 2016; Berlant, 2016; Stavrides, 2016c). Berlant (2016) describes infrastructure as an organisational model consisting of patterns, habits and norms of use. The idea of ‘troubling’ points to a performative agency that highlights a collective struggle to change established normative patterns of social life, repair what is broken, and define the terms of transition towards new forms of collective living. (Berlant, 2016).

A shared question is how to retain an open process that works against closure, enclosure or normalisation (Raunig, 2009; Athanasiou, 2016; Berlant, 2016; Stavrides, 2016, 2016b). Openness can also be taken as incompleteness, ambivalence and ambiguity, which are seen as enabling (Stavrides, 2016; Berlant, 2016). Along these lines, Stefano Harney and Fred Moten (2021, unpaginated), propose to think of instituting processes as incomplete, never settling in a fixed state. This even makes them ungraspable, because they simultaneously refuse to settle with predetermined rules for social relations, while they are in the process of shaping something new (Argyropoulou, 2021). The authors use the notion of fugitivity to move beyond the proposed terms exit (Virno, 2004) or exodus (Hardt and Negri, 1996; 2017) to emphasise motion, or even disorientation, as a way of moving beyond the ‘obstacles’ that organising together poses (Habermas, 2013, p. 11).

Negotiating power, restricting the accumulation of power and addressing normalisation is at the core of commoning the art institution. Michel Foucault’s (2009) writings on power offer here a shared theoretical substratum (Raunig, 2009; Athanasiou, 2016; Stavrides, 2016). Foucault (2009) rejects power, but talks about power relations. Power relations are not external to institutions, not reducible to institutions, but diffused across all kinds of social interactions (Athanasiou, 2016, p. 682, Stavrides, 2016). Accordingly, neither instituting nor commoning are thought as processes free from relations of power and domination (Nowotny and Raunig, 2016; Stavrides, 2016). For example, the question in instituent practices is how to refuse certain forms of governance and engage with self-governance, collectively shaping alternative forms of social organisation based on horizontality. Horizontality is about

accepting that power is constituent to human relations (Stavrides, 2016, p. 272) and part of transitioning towards a different way of governing (Raunig and Ray, 2009, p. 9).

Comparing and translating differences between people of different class, gender and cultural backgrounds are crucial in common spaces, according to Stavrides (2016). Similarly, Athanasiou (2016) emphasises difference, but she proposes to think of the institution as a condition of possibility for ‘un/common space’. Un/common spaces are thought beyond the idea of a common identity, as spaces that bring together all those whom neoliberal crisis and ongoing colonisation produces as precarious, racialised and dispossessed, non-citizens, such as refugees and undocumented migrants.<sup>71</sup>

Building on Butler, Athanasiou (2016) argues that public spaces and art institutions not only make our lives more liveable, but they also normalise, precarise and exercise violence upon us. To navigate this duality, the task is not to save or reclaim the traditional liberal institution, but to institute ‘otherwise’ and performatively from within and against it, ‘as if it were possible’ in the conditions of impossibility that capitalist crisis creates (Athanasiou, 2016, p. 679, 683, 690).<sup>72</sup> The position of ‘within and against’ that Athanasiou (2016) proposes is ambivalent and can enable two possibilities. On the one hand, it is about working against the institution’s normalising power or exploitative nature, which perpetuates inequalities. On the other, it is about defending the public institution against neoliberal instrumentalisation and undermining through privatisation, both processes creating closure (Athanasiou, 2016). As such, Athanasiou (2016) suggests a performative occupation of the institution to counter normalisation, which, similar to Raunig (2009, 2013), is not purely non-institutional or anti-institutional, horizontal or vertical, but questions such binaries. However, in contrast to Raunig (2013) and Stavrides (2016; 2016b) Athanasiou (2016) comes in defence of public space and the public art institution. The anthropologist raises the need for public space to survive as ‘infrastructural good’ (2016, p. 689), arguing that occupations of public space are also a claim not for the ability of infrastructures to divide and produce in- equalities,

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<sup>71</sup> Here, the notion of hospitality meets the kind of being together that Moten and Harney (2013) propose as a way of being homeless. Homelessness is not about not having a house, but a kind of desired dispossession and about sharing one’s house.

<sup>72</sup> Athanasiou (2016) borrows the notion of impossibility from Jacques Derrida, who thinks the possible as impossible, so as to prompt new ways of conceiving it.

precarious and vulnerable bodies (which they do), but for insisting on how they can enable an ‘inhabitable ground’ (Butler, 2015, p. 127, cited in Athanasiou, 2016, p. 681).<sup>73</sup>

## **1.4 Towards Commoning the City / Commoning Art Institutions**

This chapter examined the possible meanings that commoning the city and commoning art institutions may take. The chapter begun by situating the main definition of common space by Stavrides (2016) in urban commons literature, which argues that the political potentials of commoning relate to cities as sites of difference and social conflicts. Bringing in conversation urban commons, a definition of politics by Rancière (2010) and the RttC by Lefebvre (1968, 1992), commoning the city points to a practice that disturbs rigid social classifications, inequalities and norms, and opposed the dominant capitalist urbanisation forces that wish to control the city as a quantifiable, predictable or homogenous entity. Instead, to common the city means to strive for qualitative socio-spatial relations that are based on difference and unpredictability, and are collectively shaped by the inhabitants and their right to use public space (Stavrides, 2010; Harvey, 2012). To common the city is a right to create the city collectively and reimagine the social relations that make it, through sharing and cooperation and through collective actions of dissent that may open up new and subversive potentials for aesthetic and political meanings in urban space.

The chapter engaged with a dialectic understanding of the relation between commoning and enclosures, as complex processes that are not only economic but, understood with neoliberal urban governance, social normalisation mechanisms and biopolitics. If enclosure is a comprehensive capitalist strategy, the key idea of the threshold proposed Stavrides (2016) explored in this chapter, is a comprehensive metaphor that thinks about how to potentialise commoning, that is, enabling an emancipatory practice (Stavrides, 2015; 2016; 2019). Common spaces are understood as thresholds due to being porous and underpinned by ambiguity, neither fully outside of capitalism, nor are they fully subsumed by the capitalist logic. Commoning can be viewed as a practice on the threshold - a practice that negotiates and redefines the normative meanings and the boundaries of public space, of identity and community (Stavrides, 2010; 2016; Kratzwald, 2015).

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<sup>73</sup> With regards to the institution, Athanasiou (2016) does not only consider Occupy and the movements, but also points to left governments that rose around the time in Europe, like SYRIZA or the rise of Podemos in Spain.

To outline the possible meanings of ‘commoning the art institution’ I worked with the key qualities in threshold ‘institutions of expanding commoning’ by Stavrides (2016, pp. 40-61) and complemented them with critical art theory approaches that connect art, institutions and the movements (Moten and Harney, 2013; Sholette, 2015; Athanasiou, 2016; Berlant, 2016; Nowotny and Raunig, 2016; McKey, 2016). At the core of these proposals is not to shy away from power. To common art institutions emerges as a practice at the confluence of commoning, instituting and infrastructuring, a confluence which may reconfigure power relations, while remaining a process open to difference and not settling in a rigid form.



## Chapter 2. Art/Commoning in Context. Learning from Athens

The previous chapter enquired about the political and aesthetic potentials of common/s and the possible meanings that commoning the city and commoning the art institution may take. This chapter turns attention to the context that informs this research, Athens. It examines the role of art and artists on the Syntagma square occupation and common spaces in the city. A closer reading of Embros theatre, an art occupation which emerged a few months after the Syntagma square occupation was cleared out by the police in the summer of 2011, serves as a key example for illustrating how in the post-Syntagma period to common the city and to common the art institution converge and even become indistinguishable.

The chapter builds on the conceptualisations of common space and commoning the city and draws on various authors who conducted ethnographic research during and after the Syntagma occupation (Kaika and Karaliotas, 2014; Papapavlou, 2015; Stavrides, 2016). It also discusses Syntagma with key readings of Occupy by sociologist Yates McKey (2016) and artist, activist, Gregory Sholette (2015) who offer overlapping and divergent perspectives on how artists seek modes of collective action and self-organisation through commoning. In juxtaposing these two contexts, the chapter points to how Syntagma accounts emphasise collective creativity, while Occupy accounts retain an emphasis on artistic identity, even if they discuss how it was challenged during the occupation; the latter, however, offer the possibility to trace how the demand to ‘common the institution’ takes shape through commoning, as a two-fold practice of negation and affirmation on the occupations. (McKey, 2016).

Building on these debates, the chapter argues that the rise of art/commoning practices in Athens cannot only be explained with the effects of the crisis for the cultural sector, but also with longer policies that undermined the public sector, a rise of private art institutions, which run in parallel to the emergence of solidarity-driven common spaces. While sharing the argument that Athens is not a unique example, neither of crisis nor of resistance (Karyotis, 2018), by grounding art/commoning in the context of Athens, this chapter offers a necessary contextual layer, in which to subsequently situate my case studies and their interest in learning from and engaging with common spaces in Athens.

## 2.1 Crisis, Urban Conflicts and Collective Art Practices

The Syntagma square occupation was part of a wave of occupations, spanning from the Arab Spring to the Indignados in Spain, which revealed the contradictions of neoliberalisation and the importance of urban public space for expressing political dissent and contesting them (Arampatzi, 2014; Kaika and Karaliotas, 2014). The occupation was also a culmination of years of economic crisis, political instability and social mobilisations against the austerity policies introduced through an economic adjustment programme, agreed between the Greek government and Greece's creditors.<sup>74</sup> However, as argued, Syntagma cannot only be understood in relation to the crisis, but needs to be situated in earlier socio-political developments and urban conflicts in the city, especially in the aftermath of the Olympic games in Athens, in 2004. In this regard, the December 2008 urban uprising is considered a key moment of dissent that negotiated the relation to public space (Stavrides, 2010; Arampatzi, 2014; Kaika and Karaliotas, 2014).

In the period following the 2008 crisis, Athens became a privileged spot from which to learn about everyday resistances to the crisis and, vice versa, a case to be examined in a broader context of neoliberal crisis and its contestations.<sup>75</sup> The so-called 'Greek crisis', viewed by some as the longest recession of any advanced capitalist economy in recent years<sup>76</sup>,

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<sup>74</sup> The colloquial term 'Troika' was applied to refer to the creditors, namely International Monetary Fund (IMF), the European Union and the European Central Bank. The First Economic Adjustment Programme (or bailout package) was signed between the lenders and the Greek state – with the then government led by socialist party PASOK. In 2011 a coalition government was appointed, in order to implement the austerity agenda.

<sup>75</sup> 'But what is life like in a city that finds itself in the eye of the crisis storm, how does the everyday reality here compare to Athens' global media portrait? What kind of lessons might our city be able to learn from the outbreaks of capitalism's crises elsewhere, and what lessons might the Athenian example be able to offer, in return?' (Crisis-scape, 2014, p. 7) The citation is characteristic of the kind of questions that the attention to Athens has raised. The citation comes from the conference 'Crisis-scapes: Athens and beyond' (May 2014). The research project Crisis-scape aimed to effects of the crisis on Athens' public space. The foci of this particular conference were 1. Flows, infrastructures and networks, 2. Mapping spaces of racist violence, 3. Between invisibility and precarity, 4. The right to the city in crisis and 5. Devaluing labour, depreciating land. The conference holds a mirror to the broader attention to Athens from urban activists and artists. It took place five months before documenta 14 announced its intention to come to Athens (October 2014) and almost a year before AB5-6 opened its doors (November 2015). Learning from capitalist crisis and learning from Athens' grassroots contestations of the crisis –particularly urban manifestations.

<sup>76</sup> According to this argument, the Greek economy now suffered the longest recession of any advanced capitalist economy, overtaking the slump suffered by the US during the Great Depression in 1929. See: <https://www.chathamhouse.org/expert/comment/greek-bailout-imf-and-europeans-diverge-lessons-learnt>.

sharpened social inequalities, bringing decrease in wages and pensions, unemployment, rise of suicides, cuts in health, education and privatisation of public assets such as ports, airports and land, next to a brain drain due to emigration (Petropoulou, 2014).<sup>77</sup> Mainstream media and Greek or European public officials often highlighted the role of state corruption and demonised the Greek people as lazy, sketching the ‘Greek crisis’ as exceptional.<sup>78</sup> However, this exceptionalism fails to situate the case in ongoing acts of enclosure and capitalist crisis (Karyotis, 2017b).<sup>79</sup> Besides, recent reports show that, although the funds were meant to rescue the Greek economy, those were used to sustain and even increase public debt, contributing to cycles of indebtedness and what Italian sociologist and philosopher Maurizio Lazzarato (2012) refers to as the ‘indebted man’ (cited in Arampatzi, 2016, p. 3).<sup>80</sup>

Grassroots contestations against neoliberal austerity and for social transformation (during the crisis were expressed in urban space, including struggles for commons through work, education or art (Arampatzi, 2016; Karyotis (2017b). Several authors argue that these, including Syntagma, need to be understood with earlier urbanisation processes and urban conflicts (Kaika and Karaliotas, 2014; Stavrides, 2010; 2016; Karyotis, 2018).

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<sup>77</sup> The crisis brought a fall in the population by 3% because of emigration and a lower birth rate mark. In 2014, the average Greek salary had been reduced by 40% (Chatzidakis, 2014, p. 35). Heavy taxation and legalising housing confiscations has contributed to a housing crisis (Arampatzi, 2018).

<sup>78</sup> Karyotis (2017b) notes that although Greece has been a privileged spot for observing how a global paradigm shift plays out within the boundaries of a single nation-state, that of capital moving towards exclusion and dispossession even in the capitalist centres of the north. On the other hand, he warns against seeing resistance as the privilege of southerners, as the new normality imposed by capitalist crisis will disperse similar responses in the centres of the north too.

<sup>79</sup> In Greece, the privatisation of public assets and the undermining of middle class through heavy taxation were directly related to the Greek government’s agreement to pay out its debts to banks (that had lent money in the previous decade to many peripheral European countries). In this framework, research draws parallels between Greece and Eurozone countries like Spain or Portugal, but also Mexico (Petropoulou, 2014; Nassioka, 2017) as semi-peripheral cases where neoliberal policies were confronted by mass mobilisations (Douzinas, 2013; Petropoulou, 2014).

<sup>80</sup> Although the bailout officially came to an end in August 2018, the figures in 2018 were still telling: almost a fifth of Greece’s working-age population was unemployed and youth unemployment had reached up to 52%. This, at the moment the so-called rescue funds were settling at €288.7bn, the largest amount ever lent by international creditors. See: <https://www.ekathimerini.com/238569/article/ekathimerini/business/greek-unemployment-inches-up-at-the-end-of-2018>. Arampatzi (2014) notes that the report by the Berlin-based European School of Management and Technology published in the *Handelsblatt* 2016 shows that only 5% went to the Greek state budget, while 95% went to service previous debt and interest payments. The crisis increased suicide and poverty rates, triggered a brain drain and a fall in the population by 3% partly because of emigration. By 2014, the average Greek salary had been reduced by 40% (Chatzidakis, 2014, p. 35). Heavy taxation and legalising housing confiscations has contributed to a housing crisis (Arampatzi, 2018).

The city underwent major urban shifts from the 90s and on, related to tourism and the organisation of the 2004 Olympic games in Athens. Major infrastructural projects were realised in direct or indirect relation to the games, such as the new airport, the Athenian metro, the major highway ‘Attiki Odos’, alongside numerous sport venues, shopping malls and bridges (Dalakoglou, 2014; Kompatsiaris, 2017). These projects set off mechanisms for ‘accumulation by dispossession’ (Harvey, 2005) by privatising public lands (Petropoulou, 2014; Hadjimichalis, 2014). Processes of excluding and marginalising vulnerable populations from the RttC went hand in hand with surveillance mechanisms, which established what Rancière (2006) calls the police order (Dalakoglou, 2014). At the antipode of the beautified image promoted by the Olympic games, 18 workers died during construction works and drug addicts, refugees and homeless, who did not fit the polished image of the Olympics, were cleared out of the city centre (particularly Omonoia, the square which would host the AB5-6 activities in 2015). An entrepreneurial and consumption-led model of urban development marked a transition from a collectivist to an individualist culture based on commodifying the city and shaping an idea of citizenship based on national pride and neoliberal consumption (Pouliasi and Verkruyten, 2011, cited in Chatzidakis, 2014, p. 34).<sup>81</sup> These urban shifts were intense, because Athens lacked the heavy industrial past of cities like Paris or London, that transitioned from the post-industrial to the ‘creative city’ and creative classes’ (Florida, 2002, cited in Chatzidakis, 2014, p. 33).

A turning point with regards to public space and public art was the December 2008 uprising, which many see as challenging the consumption-led model and laying the seeds for the Syntagma square occupation of 2011 (Karyotis, 2018; Capuccini, 2018; Stavrides). The December 2008 uprisings burst out when the police shot to death 15-year-old Alexandros Grigoropoulos in Exarcheia, an area known for its radical and politicised spaces. (Argyropoulou, 2015; Dimitriou, 2016; Fotiadi, 2017; Tzirtzilaki, 2021). Young students, joined by precarious workers, Roma and artists, came out on the street to protest. Reclaiming public space, they expressed their anger by burning cars and shops, but they also occupied public buildings, schools, gathered around police stations and self-organised cultural events.<sup>82</sup>

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<sup>81</sup> Greece winning the Euro cup in 2004 and the Eurovision song contest in 2005, feeding a general sense of national pride in mainstream media and state-led narratives.

<sup>82</sup> Although destroying public property was part of December 2008, there were also silent protests, music performances and public debates and assemblies (Dimitriou, 2016).

December 2008 is thought as a catalyst of a broader ‘dissident awareness’ (Stavrides, 2014, p. 209) that gave shape to a ‘network of thresholds’ in the city (Stavrides, 2010, p. 2).

Artists and art occupations contributed to the broader context of dissent and solidarity with occupations and performative practices that gave visibility to intersecting struggles. A telling example was the occupation of the National Opera House (Lyriki) by dancers (February 2009). Renaming it ‘Insurgent People's Opera’, the artists showed solidarity with those arrested for the December 2008 riots. Taking a position against spectacle and the exclusion of ‘difference’ in the arts, they also expressed demands against police violence, workers’ rights and the enclosure of public spaces. Reclaiming culture and art as collective creativity, their actions moved beyond art as production.<sup>83</sup>

## **2.2 Art/Commoning: From the Syntagma Square Occupation to Occupy**

Most scholars converge in seeing the squares occupations as sites that denoted a confluence of space, politics and political subjectivation processes (Athanasίου and Butler, 2013; Kaika and Karaliotas, 2014; Stavrides, 2016). Syntagma, Occupy and the Arab Spring differed from earlier mobilisations in that they were shaped through the occupation of public space, negotiated its meanings and rearticulated it as common space (Harvey, 2012; Raunig, 2013; Stavrides, 2016, p. 165).<sup>84</sup> In this sense, the occupations are discussed with Lefebvre (1991)

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<sup>83</sup> The artists also stood in solidarity with Konstantina Kouneva, an immigrant worker and unionist who had been severely attacked with acid for defending cleaner’s rights. Kouneva, a Bulgarian immigrant and one of the most vocal defenders of cleaners’ rights was attacked with acid on December 2008 to silence her. Kouneva’s case, the most brutal attack on a trade unionist in the last 50 years, sparked protests and gave visibility to injustices against women’s’ immigrants in Greece. (Stavrides, 2010). The Occupiers of Lyriki in their manifesto characteristically declared: ‘Against art as a spectacle that is consumed by passive viewers. Against aesthetics that exclude the ‘Different’. Against a culture that destroys parks and public space in the name of profit.’ Through self-organised workshops and an open assembly, the occupiers raised the question of shaping cultural activities through collective participatory creative processes. For the first communique of the opera see: <https://libcom.org/news/national-opera-house-occupied-athens-turned-counterinformation-resistance-base-06022009>.

<sup>84</sup> In *Rebel Cities* (2012) Harvey observes that the 2008 crisis made obvious that neoliberalism is essentially an urban project which leads to the exploitation of spaces to the detriment of a city’s inhabitants. The links between anti-capitalist struggles and revolutionary movements to urban contexts, however, are strong across history, leading Harvey (2012, p. 115) to question whether the city is where deeper political global struggles manifest or whether it is that urban life under capitalism provides the basis for anti-capitalist struggles, including those expressed through urban commons.

as urban conflicts articulated in and through space and with Rancière (1995; 1999) as ‘spatialising dissent’ (Kaika and Karaliotas, 2014, p. 2; Stavrides, 2016).<sup>85</sup>

The aforementioned confluence was expressed through at least three kinds of horizontal practices, which are helpful to consider, not only because they reveal how commoning was practiced on the squares, but also because they continue in common spaces and are adopted by biennials in the aftermath of the movements: a) the assembly as the main organ for coming together, speaking in public and enacting horizontal decision-making processes, b) working groups in the encampments (for example collectively organised solidarity kitchen, garbage collection, a first-aid station) and communication (a web radio, a translation centre)<sup>86</sup> and c) performative and improvised collective music happenings, which often intervened to resolve tensions between protesters, as well as theatre or circular group traditional dances which contrasted with their joy and spontaneity the police violence (Kaika and Karaliotas, 2014; Leontidou, 2014; Papapavlou, 2015; Stavrides, 2016).<sup>87</sup>

Spatially, the boundaries between the several parts of the encampment were porous and could be crossed by everyone, shaping Syntagma as a threshold common space, according to Stavrides (2016, p. 166). Despite the distinction between an ‘upper’ and a ‘lower square’, the square was not fenced but open to anyone (Kaika and Karaliotas, 2014; Arampatzi, 2014).<sup>88</sup> Many ‘micro-squares’ (Stavrides, 2016, p. 166) emerged, with groups of people living in

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<sup>85</sup> Next to being spatially grounded on the squares, the occupations were also enabled through social media and virtual spaces for communicating with other activists and occupations. Therefore, some discuss them in terms of reterritorialising politics through de-territorialising communication technologies (Stavrides 2016, p. 165; Kaika and Karaliotas (2014, p. 9).

<sup>86</sup> There were for example working groups for communication, cleaning, technical support, a group of time bank, unemployment, social solidarity, alternative eco-communities, direct democracy. See analytically Giovanopoulos/Mitropoulos, 2011).

<sup>87</sup> For example, during one performance several people dressed in black gowns and pulled strings attached to a female figure dressed in white, illustrating the relation between the banks and Greece Stafylakis (2017), who refers to this example is critical of such artistic interventions which he sees as reinforcing the ‘nationalising’ of collectivity in the arts.

<sup>88</sup> The distinction is important to note, because it refers to differences in the ways protesters expressed their discontent towards political representation and its systems. In the upper part, which was closer to the Parliament, was often targeting verbally and visually corrupt politicians, but at times also adopted nationalistic and xenophobic anti-migrant rhetoric (Kaika and Karaliotas, 2014). The lower square on the other hand gave rise to discourses and practices that experimented with horizontal self-organisation and direct democracy. Anarchist and more traditional Left -wing groups were present mainly on the lower square. However, no political parties were allowed in either part. For example, members from the neo-Nazi Golden Dawn party, which attempted to be present were not allowed to join (Kaika and Karaliotas (2014).

tents, and each forming around a different focus, like a time bank, a first-aid centre, a meeting point for the homeless, etc.<sup>89</sup>

The spatial openness in Syntagma shaped osmotic encounters between different subjects and groups, opening up possibilities for subjectivation processes and new political imaginaries beyond representational politics (Arampatzi, 2014; Papapavlou, 2015; Stavrides, 2016). Echoing Rancière (1995; 1999), several authors argue that through bottom-up collective practices occupiers broke with pre-existing or fixed identities and shaped new political subjectivities (Kaika and Karaliotas, 2014; Papapavlou, 2015; Stavrides, 2016). The practices on the square were exercises on the right to speak for those with ‘no part’ in the social life (p. 4) and exercises in direct democracy, which disrupted the dominant order or representational politics (Kaika and Karaliotas, 2014, p. 4; Stavrides, 2016, p. 176).

In this context of shifting identities, artists too negotiated their artistic identity. Ethnographic research based on interviews shows how artists on Syntagma felt that they were part of processes of collective inventiveness, rather than of producing art (Petropoulou, 2014; Stavrides, 2016). Musico-ethnologist Maria Papapavlou (2015) shows that even if artists were part of the artists’ working group, most members were not professionally active in the art field. Moreover, even those with a creative background were not involved in tasks according to their profession, but in various activities – e.g. a scenographer would paint a banner or encourage those who were reluctant or thought themselves as lacking experience, to engage in creative activities.<sup>90</sup>

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<sup>89</sup> Similarly, the Gezi Park occupation also had no clear limits between the encampments and other parts of the park (Stavrides, 2016). This lack of well-defined borders facilitated the creation of exchanges, passages, and in-between spaces between the occupiers and those crossing or using the park.

<sup>90</sup> Drawing on Papapavlou (2015) although musicians came to the protest camps with the instruments they play, in their account, their participation in this broader context of politicising and self-managing processes transformed the way they relate to their practice, through the ongoing encounters with people who did not necessarily have artistic skills, but were motivated to participate. Broadly, the rejection of political insignia was also expressed in the way music that was typically associated with the Left was undermined by those who organised the radio group and what set the tone was a search for new forms of music and new forms of participation. As a member of the radio group notes, anyone who wanted to make radio was supported by those running it. The radio group pre-existed Syntagma, having been formed during the 2008 uprisings. A member of the group discusses how in Syntagma the group was constantly welcoming newcomers in their assembly, changing constantly the way they operated.

The art practices of Occupy are also theorised with commoning as an activity that strives for equality and collective resistance to capital dominating social relations (McKey, 2016).

Occupy accounts are useful, because they bring into light different approaches compared to Syntagma regards subjectivation processes, but also negotiations with art institutions and biennials in particular, which are lacking in Syntagma accounts, as discussed further below.

For McKey (2016) aesthetics and politics were immanently related in Occupy. Artists played a catalytic role in shaping visually and discursively the occupation, making protest banners and organising actions and workshops. Artists also took a more active organisational role. The Occupy assembly was launched by 16 Beaver, an art space founded by artists Ayreen Anastas and Rene Gabry, who organised seminars with commons theorists George Caffentzis and Silvia Federici and anthropologist David Graeber on ‘debt and the commons’ (McKey, 2016).<sup>91</sup> Artist Georgia Sagri, who resided between Athens and New York, had a catalytic role in calling occupiers to desert the representational space of the stage, with its spatial hierarchy of speaker and audience and adopt more horizontal forms for their gatherings (McKey, 2016).<sup>92</sup>

What was at stake for the occupiers was not only to protest against representational politics but also to reinvent art. Artists simultaneously negated contemporary art’s neoliberal antagonisms and ties to the market and reclaimed art as a site for direct action, radical imagination and commons, in what McKey calls ‘strike art’ (2016, p. 6, 19, 237, 238). ‘Strike art’ points both to practices of negation and affirmation, respectively, a rejection of ‘institutional enclosure’ (Szreder, 2017, p. 6) and working towards constructing ‘institutions of the commons’ (McKey, 2016, pp. 19-21).

Biennials were criticised by Occupy as serving the 1% (Occupy’s slogan was ‘We are the 99%’, to point to the wealth inequalities in the US context) alongside art fairs like Frieze or auction houses like Sotheby’s, that represent the formal and higher ranks of the art system

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<sup>91</sup> A month prior to Occupy 16 Beaver held seminars with commons theorists George Caffentzis and Silvia Federici and anthropologist David Graeber on ‘debt and the commons’ (McKey, 2016). See: [https://16beavergroup.org/silvia\\_george\\_david/](https://16beavergroup.org/silvia_george_david/).

<sup>92</sup> Sagri was also among the initiators of the occupation Take Artists Space, of the art gallery Artists Space in Soho. (Moynihan, 2011).



and implicated in branding and monopoly rent processes (Sholette, 2017; McKey, 2016).<sup>93</sup> In their letter to the Whitney Museum, the Arts and Labor group, which emerged out of the Occupy Assembly, called the museum to end its Biennial exhibition by 2014, calling it a ‘collusion with [a] system of injustice’ (Judkis, 2012, unpaginated).<sup>94</sup>

However, while Syntagma accounts emphasise collective creativity, Occupy accounts retain an emphasis on the figure of the artist. The artist is a precarious subject, part of the heterogenous crowds that make the multitude (Hardt and Negri, 2009; 2012; Sholette, 2015; McKey, 2016).<sup>95</sup> McKey (2016) overall highlights the role of artists in Occupy as grounded in their artistic identity and situates them in an avant-garde genealogy, which stays tied to a New-York-centric view of the art world (Checa-Gismero, 2016). Sholette emphasises the ‘creative dark matter’, a term that refers to artists, semi-professional, amateurs or other cultural professionals, whose labour is structurally necessary for the system and its hierarchies, but whom the global art circulation marginalises and renders precarious and invisible (Sholette, 2011, p. 2-3; Kompatsiaris, 2017).<sup>96</sup> Nonetheless, Sholette argues that Occupy denoted ‘the birth of a new artistic subject’ whose features are still taking shape (2015, p. 185).

With regards to art institutions there are differing views. Drawing on Sholette (2015), the commoning practices on the squares call for radical change in society and question the counter-hegemonic politics that are based on Gramsci’s theory of cultural hegemony and the idea of ‘infiltrating institutions’ so as to reform them (Kompatsiaris, 2017, p. 67).<sup>97</sup> If a

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<sup>93</sup> McKey (2016) is nonetheless sympathetic to the biennial’s discursive modalities and believes that biennials have broadened up artists’ representation beyond dominant centres.

<sup>94</sup> The letter is instructive, for it summarises all the biennial malaises associated with neoliberalism and capital accumulation: unethical sponsorship, unpaid internships and profit at the expense of artworkers – in short, the biennial promise of success as premised on precarious work and indebtedness of young artists (Art and Labor, 2011).

<sup>95</sup> Drawing on Hardt and Negri (2012) active on the squares were the represented, the mediated, the indebted and the securitised. The represented are those with the right to vote or to be elected, the mediated relate to the blurred lines between consumption and participation in corporate media networks; the indebted refers to indebtedness as a condition of social reproduction for workers. These are the dominant subjectivities of the crisis which need to be challenged. McKey adds a more spatial category: the displaced, those dispossessed in territorial terms ‘by foreclosure, gentrification, privatization, colonization and environmental disaster’ (2016, p. 19).

<sup>96</sup> Checa-Gismero (2016) argues that McKey (2016) seems to overemphasise the impact of Occupy on Black Lives Matter, which the author sees as recoding the demands of Occupy, undermining in this way the longer tradition of struggles in radical black movements in the US.

<sup>97</sup> Gramsci argued that institutions such as the church, schools and the media play an important role in shaping the dominant norms in society, by spreading the ideologies, values and beliefs of the ruling

relation to the institution is to be retained, then it is about artists struggles pushing art institutions for a more equal allocation of resources and distribution of power, by means of unionising.<sup>98</sup> But the real work of commoning art includes a range of bottom-up initiatives, collectives and art occupations, which may include practices of communisation, cooperativism or solidarity economics and alternative networks and circuits, which oppose or act outside mainstream institutions (Sholette, 2016; Szreder, 2017).<sup>99</sup> If Sholette (2015) seems more categorical in his rejection of using institutions, McKey (2016) puts more hope in the role that art institutions may play. In what McKey (2016) describes as the ‘post-Occupy condition’, artists and art institutions enter a process of learning from the social movements, their potentials and limitations. What is at stake is how to form broader ecologies of art and commoning from below (McKey, 2016). Characteristically, he ends his publication by underlining that a lot needs to be done to institutions if they are to support ‘movement-building art infrastructures’ practices that engage with commoning and move in expanded fields of social struggle and collective political organising (McKey 2016, p. 237, p. 242).

Despite the differing views, both Syntagma and Occupy highlight that in participating in osmotic environments of collective creativity and struggles in urban space, the activities on the squares and the presence of artists triggered processes of co-shaping art as commoning and of commoning as art, reclaiming art for counter-hegemonic and counter-dominant visions and exploring how public space, art and art institutions can be potentialised by commoning relations (Stavrides, 2016b, p. 2).

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class. However, Gramscian interpretations are also applied with regards to the squares ‘occupations. For example, Leontidou (2014) argues that the spontaneity on the squares’ occupations give new meaning to Gramsci’s idea of hegemony with regards to what kind of methods to follow.

<sup>98</sup> The forming of unions has taken place in big museums like MoMa, Guggenheim and the art fair Frieze. See also the Precarious Workers Brigade, a group from London, who organise around questions of precarious labour and support unionising of cultural workers. See also the google spreadsheet with 2000 museum workers sharing their salaries online to document in this way the vast differences in wages. See:

[https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/14\\_cn3afoas7NhKvHWaFKqQGkaZS5rvL6DFxzGqXQa6o/e/dit#gid=0](https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/14_cn3afoas7NhKvHWaFKqQGkaZS5rvL6DFxzGqXQa6o/e/dit#gid=0).

<sup>99</sup> Examples include: Working Artists for the Greater Economy (W.A.G.E.), ArtLeaks, Gulf Labor Coalition, Debtfair, Art & Labor (both offshoots of Occupy Wall Street), and a new Artist’s Union being organised in Newcastle, England in some of which Sholette is part of (Sholette, 2016).

## 2.3 After Syntagma 2011: Art/Commoning Between Public and Common Space

Taking further the approaches from the previous section, this section enters the period that follows the occupations. What Stavrides calls the ‘metastatic’ effects of Syntagma (2016, p. 30, 83, 267) acknowledges the catalytical role of the occupation in the emergence of common spaces. Commons spaces that involve artists and art/commoning practices, need to be situated both in the context of urban struggles and solidarity, but also in longer term deficits in the cultural sector, particularly the lack of support to contemporary art and an underfunding of public museums and institutions (Gazi, 2017).

If December 2008 catalysed dissent, Syntagma catalysed solidarity, giving rise to common spaces dispersed across Athens and further spatialised politics in the city (Arampatzi, 2014; Kaika and Karaliotas, 2014; Karyotis, 2018).<sup>100</sup> Even if some groups do not use the language of the commons to talk about their initiatives, they often practice forms of commoning based on solidarity (Arampatzi, 2014; Karyotis, 2017, 2018). Solidarity is theorised as a guiding principle and a creative force not only for countering austerity, but also as a condition for turning commoning into a prefigurative and emancipating process (Leontidou, 2014; Arambatzi, 2017; Stavrides, 2019). Turning to the etymological roots of the word ‘αλληλεγγύη’ in Greek, solidarity points to an act where one stands as a ‘guarantor of the other’ and hence, to a bond created through difference and interdependence (Stavrides, 2019, p. 200). Common spaces or ‘urban solidarity spaces’, as proposed by Arampatzi (2014; 2017), highlight the importance of everyday life in the neighbourhood for practicing politics, but, even if grounded territorially, solidarity is constructed through multi-scalar or relations with activists and organisations in translocal levels.<sup>101</sup>

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<sup>100</sup> More than 200 solidarity initiatives had been created across Greece in 2012 and 400 could be counted in 2016: Neighbourhood assemblies, self-managed parks and theatres, solidarity kitchens and clinics, social pharmacies, markets without middlemen, time banks and, refugee hosting occupied spaces (Arampatzi, 2018; Evlampidou and Kogevinas, 2019). Athens counted 38 solidarity outpatient clinics in 2014, a 41 % out of the 92 such initiatives across the country (Evlampidou and Kogevinas, 2019). See: <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S021391111830013X>.

<sup>101</sup> Arampatzi (2014, 2017, 2018) conducted ethnographic research among other with residents’ Time bank initiative and the Solidarity network of Exarcheia, both of which were formed in 2012 as a direct outcome of the post-Syntagma dispersal of activism. Arampatzi (2018) summarises the significance of such spaces: a) they form survival infrastructures for mutual support in an ongoing social crisis of reproduction; b) they broaden political struggle and resistance to austerity, counter anti-migrant policies, but also problematise charity, philanthropy or the NGO logic of aiding vulnerable people,

In the broader context of solidarity, there is a diverse range of common spaces where art/commoning plays a role. These may include a variety of engagements with art/commoning. I distinguish between a) art occupations, such as Embros theatre and Green Park b) initiatives that bring together artists, architects, urbanists with citizens and communities that act against urban enclosures and shape new meanings of art/commoning and the right to the city c) artist-run spaces which experiment with collaborative and horizontal art and curating or/and cooperative economy; and d) common spaces that use creative artistic practices, but whose focus lies elsewhere. For example, in the self-managed Navarinou park and the refugee solidarity space City plaza workshops with residents, children or anyone were regularly organised with the involvement of artists.

If there is something that helps to differentiate between the different initiatives it is illegality and the relation to urban enclosures. Art occupations like Embros and squats like City Plaza start as unauthorised acts of occupying a building owned by the state. Therefore, they start by taking an anti-authoritarian position. In contrast to other cities, where organisations rent out vacant spaces for temporary use by arts' organisations, most common spaces in Athens are squats and do not enter legal agreements with authorities, but fight against the state's neglect of public space.<sup>102</sup> Similarly, initiatives that bring together artists and communities are threatened by and fight against enclosures. The Residents of Mets Initiative is illustrative. The collective engages in a decade-long struggle against the state/private forces of enclosure centred around an archaeological site in the Mets area of Athens.<sup>103</sup> Artist run spaces are not

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and, c) they experiment with alternative social and economic ways for non-commodified social relations.

<sup>102</sup> For example, I am thinking here of the Brussels context which I am familiar with. For example, in 2020, the Brussels region authorised twelve temporary occupations in a site under regeneration. However, even if they give more time and security to artists collectives, often these partnerships remain temporary and artists remain dependent on the decisions of top-down public/private consortia. See: <https://usquare.brussels/en/news/brussels-region-picks-12-temporary-occupants-part-buildings-17-19-rue-de-manchester>.

<sup>103</sup> The collective often collaborates with Microgeographies, an initiative by social urbanist and curator Hariklia Hari, who speaks about it as a 'dispersed territorial narrative' which intersects and highlights different sites in Athens and the region of Attica, where communities (together with artists and architects) reclaim sites of historical significance and through self-organisation resist their enclosure (Hari, unpaginated). For example, the collective organised discussions about the histories of the site and urban murals were realised with artists and inhabitants. An interactive performance raised and suspended participants from a flexible metal cage, allowing them to observe the fenced archaeological site. The exhibition 'Accidental Guide of Urban Commoning' (2013) centred on how the residents envision the site's incorporation at the everyday urban life and titled was presented in a non-profit art space and later-on at AB4 and AB5-6. See: <http://microgeographies3.nonplan.gr/about-the-project>.

necessarily politicised, anti-authoritarian or anti-capitalist, but practice forms of commoning - some of them driven by a horizontal and cooperative entrepreneurial approach for sharing resources in terms of space and producing/showing work. While artist-run spaces emerged as the opposite pole of a strengthening of the private sector, increasingly they also depend on the private foundations' funding for their existence, making critics argue that critical art discourse is also hindered in this way (Traboulis, 2020).<sup>104</sup>

Despite the differences between them, all of the above examples could be viewed in relation to the lack of state support to contemporary art. Contemporary art represents a small segment within Greece's cultural sector and was never supported as much as classical heritage, which is more valued as part of the tourism industry (Gazi, 2017). The effects of the crisis in the cultural sector were particularly felt by public art museums.<sup>105</sup> Public funds for the Ministry of Culture were halved between 2013 and 2015 and contemporary art museums were struggling to pay staff and meet the running costs of exhibitions, resorting to redundancies (Gazi, 2017; Tziovas, 2017).<sup>106</sup> In contrast, private cultural foundations proliferated during the crisis period and support the Greek state in culture, art, education and health.<sup>107</sup> Either presented as institutional cooperation or philanthropy, this has created asymmetrical relations between the private and the public cultural sector, as well as an interdependence which comes closer to what political theorists Eikenberry and Mirabella (2017) call

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<sup>104</sup> For an outline of the foundations' increasing intervention in politics see Traboulis, 2020. <https://marginalia.gr/arthro/idiotikopoiontas-to-idiotiko-ta-idrymata-kai-i-apedafikopoiisi-toy-politistikoy-proiontos/>. A few examples illustrate this: The National Opera (Lyriki) and the National Library have been moved in the premises of the Niarchos foundation since 2017. The Hellenic Parliament's Library has moved in 2021 to the former public Tobacco factory, renovated by NEON. Perhaps nothing illustrates this more than the donation of masks both by Onassis foundation (13.5 million masks) and the Niarchos foundation (support of \$11.9 million) at the time of the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020. See: <https://www.onassis.org/news/onassis-foundation-has-sourced-and-secured-135-million-protective-masks-shield-our-doctors-and-nurses><https://www.snf.org/en/initiatives/covid-19-relief/>.

<sup>105</sup> For multiple perspectives on the effects of the crisis in the cultural sector, see the anthology that collects essays on the matter: Tziovas (2017) (ed) *Greece in Crisis. The cultural politics of austerity*.

<sup>106</sup> The example concerns the Macedonian Museum of Contemporary Art and The State Museum of Thessaloniki.

<sup>107</sup> Although each foundation may have a different focus, their cultural spaces intervene in art and public space, funding urban planning projects (the Onassis Foundation, opened in 2010), or art spaces and exhibitions in public space (NEON foundation by collector Dimitris Daskalopoulos, founded in 2013) or broader infrastructural (the Stavros Niarchos Foundation Cultural Center (SNFCC), founded in 2016). With residencies (Onassis Air), they create or sustain international mobility and artists as mobile subjects and with grants (NEON Outset) they offer various forms of material and symbolic support to artists and artists spaces.

‘philanthrocapitalism’.<sup>108</sup> This makes for another difference between the post-Syntagma context and the post-Occupy context. While in the post-Occupy context artists may put pressure on museums or art fairs to secure fairer wages and labour conditions (Sholette, 2015), in the post-Syntagma context, struggles for art take place through common spaces, rather than within public art institutions.

From December 2008 to the post-Syntagma period, the developments show that common space in Athens emerges through ongoing negotiations with public space. Public space may be produced top-down, through large infrastructural projects, control mechanisms and repression of dissent and commoning (in squats, occupied spaces and parks). On the other hand, the state shows inability in safeguarding the notion of the public from being privatised. In practice, both commons and public come into the reasoning of activists. For example, in the aftermath of December 2008, residents transformed an abandoned parking lot which was left in limbo between its public/private owners and turned it into a self-managed Navarinou Park, with their collective labour and forms of horizontal participation through assemblies, working groups, and performative actions. As they write: ‘Instead of monopolising ownership of the space, the Park gives priority to the commons and satisfies a specific social need: the existence of open public spaces for gathering and recreation.’ (Firefund, 2018, unpaginated).<sup>109</sup>

### 2.3.1 Embros Theatre: Potentialising a Common Space?

This section expands on Embros theatre, which was occupied soon after Syntagma 2011 and became a long-lived common space. My reading highlights questions concerning porosity, difference and the relation to public space, drawing mainly on the theoretical propositions of common spaces and threshold institutions (Stavrides, 2016) as well as instituent practices (Raunig, 2009; 2013).

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<sup>108</sup> Eikenberry and Mirabella (2017) use ‘philanthrocapitalism’ to refer to the role of rich individuals intervenes in governmental policies, while cultivating a positive image, as such actions present the wealthy as proponents of wealth redistribution.

<sup>109</sup> The quote is taken from a text that was written in 2018, when the residents tried to raise funds through crowdfunding, in order to add material in the children’s’ playground, which is the only playground in the area of Exarcheia. For the history of the park, see <https://www.firefund.net/parkonavarinou>.

Residents of the Psirri area, together with the ‘Mavili Collective’, a group of performance artists and theorists, occupied Embros on 11<sup>th</sup> November 2011, a few months after the police had forcibly evicted the Syntagma square occupation. The decision related to broader political reasons, the history of the building and the processes of gentrification and commodification in the area. The Ministry of Culture had left this historical building for 5 years to fall in disuse.<sup>110</sup> At the time Greece was without an elected government (Argyropoulou, 2015). Calling their act a ‘reactivation’, the group first organised a 12-day programme of talks, discussions and performances open to the public. While the reactivation started as an ephemeral dissident act, the groups continued to collectively manage the space. A year after the reactivation, with a new government bringing a renewed agenda of privatisations of public property and national assets, the occupiers faced the threat of eviction and arrest, sparking a wide wave of solidarity.

Embros poses the question whether we can consider it with the three key features of threshold institutions: openness, difference and the sharing of power. Being a building, Embros has concrete physical boundaries, differing from examples like the occupied Navarinou park, which is easily accessible. To experience what happens in Embros one needs to cross its doorstep. At the same time, Embros differed from existing squats in the city, which are anti-authoritarian and offer a place to dwell, such as the anarchist Villa Amalia.<sup>111</sup> At Embros, the aspect of difference and translation is less obvious than a refugee solidarity space like City Plaza, which brought together activists, refugees from different cultural, class and religious background and volunteers from all over the world.<sup>112</sup> Embros was a space mainly of and by artists, for art and cultural production.

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<sup>110</sup> Embros was initially a print house and then became a theatre. When the owner/director Tasos Badis died in early 2007, the debts of the theatre passed to the ownership of a bank and then to the state and had remained closed and deserted since then. (Argyropoulou, 2013).

<sup>111</sup> Villa Amalia was formerly the Second High School of Athens. It was occupied in the 1990’s and its occupants were evicted in 2012 by the right-government. In January 2013, 92 activists attempted to re-occupy the building and were put on trial later on (2018). In 2016, the building reopened as a school again. During the 23 years of squatting the building, it became a space for anti-authoritarians and anarchists, hosting screenings, talks and performances. The squat had a blog which documents its many activities and political stances. See: <http://villa-amalias.blogspot.com>.

<sup>112</sup> In City Plaza, activists and inhabitants did not assign specific roles according to skills or experience. This was a way to involve everyone in different tasks needed to maintain a common space. Moreover, this shaped a space beyond the rigid or fixed distribution of roles, where any newcomer can step in and take over a task (Stavrvides, 2019). In bringing together people from different backgrounds, assemblies are also mechanisms for translating and sharing power, requiring to work through class divisions and negotiate values and norms that are shaped by different cultural and social backgrounds (Stavrvides, 2019).

To think of Embros as a porous space is to think of it from an immaterial and relational perspective. According to architect activist Eleni Tzirtzilaki (2017) who was among the initiators, commoning was what was at stake in Embros. Testing new methodologies for collective creativity, creating collective work that would be artistic and political at once and collectively managing the space were aims and means at the same time (Tzirtzilaki, 2021). These included an open and porous policy for inviting and hosting artists beyond selection processes based on curatorial expertise or based on artist's or curator's CV and the relation to public space. Throughout the years, Embros' physical boundaries were extended through performative events that took place in the neighbourhood in front of the theatre. For example, Tzirtzilaki/Nomadiki Arhitektoniki organised festive communal gatherings with food sharing in front of the theatre or performative walking actions in the centre of Athens (Tzirtzilaki, 2018).

With regards to difference, Embros facilitated comparative grounds for practising art beyond rigid categorisations of what can be considered as art and what not. This was facilitated by being a space open to artists from various generations, disciplines, amateurs and professionals. In hosting artists, residents and artists who had been involved in previous occupations in the city, Embros opened up conversations with previous occupied spaces in Athens or elsewhere, like the Teatro Valle (occupied since June 2011) in Rome, as well as practitioners from abroad.<sup>113</sup> Hosting queer arts, anti-fascist festivals, disability arts events and performances with migrants in the city, who are marginalised from mainstream culture, Embros opened up a precedent for a different way of art, curating and instituting.<sup>114</sup> Events were free to audiences or with a pay-as-much-as you can contribution, a position against monetary relations and the commodification of culture. In these ways, Embros challenged boundaries between art, politics and life and potentialised new relations for making art and communities that dominant cultural spaces marginalise (Argyropoulou, 2013; 2015). In the spirit of Raunig's (2009) instituent practices, the activists were not necessarily aiming from the start to establish a political or art institution. With ongoing collective involvement, they

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<sup>113</sup> I was also invited by Nomadic Architecture to contribute with a text, which was read during the event and appeared in an online publication.

<sup>114</sup> See for example the event organised by the Greek Movement of Artists with Disabilities: <https://www.facebook.com/events/embros-theater-athens-greece/embros-theater-athens-greece/1457124047867572/>.



avoided fixed artistic identities and modes of governance (Kompatsiaris 2011, unpaginated).<sup>115</sup>

However, Embros was not an ideal community. The risk of enclosure ‘from within’ was part of the power relations and negotiations that shaped Embros. The uneven distribution of tasks in the maintaining of a space revealed gender or class-based inequalities (Kambouri, 2018). Foremost, the assembly revealed the difficulties of finding common ground (Argyropoulou, 2015). Initially the Mavili Collective had the decision power, but after a first year of police raids and tensions among participants, it was decided to hold an open weekly assembly. However, assembling often included violent incidents, leading eventually to the withdrawal of the Mavili Collective and other participants (Fotiadi, 2017; Argyropoulou, 2013; 2015; Tzirtzilaki, 2021). From then on, a rotational weekly assembly which was open to anyone outside of Embros was decided and different groups alternated in managing the space, in an attempt to share decision-making power (Tzirtzilaki, 2021).

### 2.3.2 Art as Critique to Commoning

This chapter situates the emergence of art/commoning practices and common spaces within a context of solidarity, crisis, urban conflicts and struggles, the undermining of the public institutions and the strengthening of the private sector. These socio-political environment shapes the interest of my case studies in commoning. The rise of collective creativity in Athens has drawn international attention to the city and gave rise to critique, a factor that is important to consider both because it contributed to d14’s move and because this attention also shaped the critical reception of both my case studies.

Commoning, collectivity and activism in art appeared to be flourishing in crisis-ridden Athens, attracting attention from international media, left-wing academics, activists and art

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<sup>115</sup> While the examples I refer to in this chapter emerge in relation to the turning points of December 2008 and Syntagma 2011, they can be viewed in relation to examples from other contexts. For example, the Embros occupation happened a few months after the Teatro Valle Occupation in Rome (June 2011). While both were initially meant to last for a few days, they lasted for years. Exchanges between the two spaces brought activists together. Teatro Valle became the first ‘legally recognised’ commons in Italy but eventually dissolved. Embros continues to be an active space for struggles for art and the city in Athens, facing a new moment of enclosure in May 2021, as police evicted artists and sealed up the building, leading to a new cycle of protests, re-occupation and performances in and around the building. See: <https://enoughisenough14.org/2021/05/21/athens-theater-embros-evicted/>.

professionals (Fotiadi, 2017; Zefkili, 2017). Praising the resourcefulness of the Athenian art scene, international galleries opened offices in the city to be part of this dynamic between art and crisis. Journalists referred to Athens as ‘the new Berlin’ or a version of London in the 80s, for the lack of art market and the availability of cheap empty spaces for artists (Banks, 2015; Sooke, 2017; Fairs, 2020).<sup>116</sup> This double-edged attention, between the demonisation of laziness (which set the tone in how mainstream media depicted the Greeks as responsible for the crisis) and the idealisation of collectivism as a Greek or Southern trait (Karyotis (2017a) created an ‘asymmetrical international reception’, according to art theorist Eva Fotiadi (2017).

Taking a critical stance towards common/s artists and theorists point out that in seeing the crisis as opportunity for collective creativity, what is undermined is the precarisation that crisis has meant for artists (Fotiadi, 2017; Zefkili, 2017; Kompatsiaris, 2020).<sup>117</sup> Artist/critic Kostis Stafylakis (2015, 2017) criticises the reading of recent collective art gestations in relation to December 2008 and Syntagma 2011 as a linear narrative of emancipation. According to Stafylakis (2017, p. 238) this selective reading of the Greek past raises crisis, resistance and the commons as the hegemonic narratives of the post-2011 era and constructs a unified resistive collective Greek identity caused by precarity and neoliberal enclosures. In contrast, there are performative practices which share radical and antifascist viewpoints, but reject nationalising tendencies and are not necessarily productive, but disruptive. They may

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<sup>116</sup> In an article titled ‘Art among the ruins’ the director of the London based Whitechapel gallery was noting ‘Athens today reminds me of London in the 1980s, when there was no art market’ (Banks, 2015). In another, artist Michael Landy, noted: ‘In many ways, Athens reminds me of London 30, 40 years ago. There are lots of empty buildings, and artists love empty industrial spaces, because they offer cheap central studios with potential exhibition spaces.’ In another article, Greek artist George Drivas compares Athens to Berlin: “In Berlin, in the ‘90s, there was this movement of small artist-run spaces, and now, in Athens, a lot of small artist spaces have emerged.”<https://www.bbc.com/culture/article/20170509-can-athens-become-europes-new-arts-capital?referer=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.google.com%2F>.

<sup>117</sup> By 2015, when my two case studies start taking shape publicly, solidarity and commons were becoming part of tourist promo packages. For example, The Guardian was prompting readers to have ‘a Greek solidarity holiday’ by visiting the self-managed Embros theatre (Mason and Skarlatos, 2015). The authors characteristically write: ‘If you’re going to Greece this summer to support the people, don’t just laze on the beach. Here are seven things to do beyond souvlaki and suntans’ (Mason and Skarlatos, 2015). In general, The Guardian titles from 2015 and on capture the attention that solidarity driven urban commons in austerity-ridden Athens has attracted. “Greece’s solidarity movement: ‘it’s a whole new model – and it’s working’” (Henley, 2015). ‘Athens’ unofficial community initiatives offer hope after government failures’ (Smith, 2016). In March 2018, The Guardian had to cancel its offer for a 7-days tour to the debt-ridden country at the price of £2,500, after being criticised for this kind of ‘crisis-porn’. See: <https://www.keeptalkinggreece.com/2018/03/29/guardian-greece-vacation/>.

be self-managed labs and academies (such as Temporal Academy of Arts (2014), Twixt Lab (2014) or networks that form a fluid ‘large-scale collective critical specificity’ (p. 250) that give visibility to queer, LGBTQI+ feminist activist practices who often experiment with overidentification, such as KavecS, a duet which consists of Stafylakis and Vana Kostayola or the queer art duet FYTA.

The rejection of the idea of the collective as institution or ‘instituting agency’ or even the very idea of the collective characterises some of the above initiatives, according to Stafylakis (2017). However, this can be nuanced, in my view, when we consider how some artists activists talk about the necessity of negotiating between different institutional ‘hats’, as crucial for the visibility of their art practices and struggles in the city. The founding of AMOQA (Athens museum of Queer Arts) (2015) is a good example, as the first space that emerges from and engages with the queer communities in the city. The founders speak about the discrimination that they had to overcome in their search for renting a space to host their activities in Athens. They also talk about instituting anti-institutional positions is a process negotiated by its members, rather than as an aim in itself or a fixed position. Rather than rejection, therefore, negotiation sets the tone. Nonetheless, the critique to art/commoning is a significant strand of art activism in the city which, moreover, shapes significantly the critical reception and articulation of both my case studies’ positions to commoning.<sup>118</sup>

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<sup>118</sup> Moreover, the critique is directly related to AB. Stafylakis is a long-time collaborator of AB and expressed his critique towards art/commoning from within AB5-6’s discursive programme. Some of the fluid collective formations he describes performatively disrupted AB5-6 and d14’s public artworks.

## 2.4 Commoning the City through Art

This chapter examined how common spaces in Athens counter austerity politics, give shape to new forms of social organisation and reconfigure the relation with public art and public space (Arampatzi, 2014; Stavrides, 2016). Art collectives and occupations exploring art/commoning emerged in close relation to austerity, urban struggles and a longer-term underfunding of public art institutions by the state. These processes cultivated an image of Athens as a new paradigm in art and collective grassroots urban practices, which often idealised the relations between crisis, the city and commoning (Arampatzi, 2014; Argyropoulou, 2015; Fotiadi, 2017).

The chapter showed that if the city is shaped by ‘collective inventiveness’ (Stavrides, 2016, p. 6), this is not just the work of artists, but includes them. Bringing art and urban struggle together, art/commoning and common spaces challenge top-down and predetermined ways of making the city. Far from intervening in the city with permanent and spectacular monuments, they invite to think how ‘art can become a praxis and poesis on a social scale’ (Lefebvre, 1968, cited in Whybrow, 2011, p. 18).

If art practice can be a way to fight against the enclosing of commoning (Stavrides, 2016), the example of Athens showed this in a twofold way. First, the experience of practising commoning, as shared by artist activists involved in Embros, dispels romanticised notions, revealing the complexities for negotiating openness, difference and power – the features that create the conditions for threshold institutions (Argyropoulou, 2015; Tzirtzilaki, 2021). Second, artists and theorists who stand critically towards commons, point out the risk of raising resistance as a ‘national trait’ and the crisis as a precondition for artistic creativity (Stafylakis, 2015, 2017). This critique, coming from two different stands, therefore, highlights the risk of normalising and instrumentalising commons from both directions: from the bottom up and from the top-down.

## Chapter 3. Commoning the Biennial or the Biennialisation of the Commons?

The term biennialisation points to the biennial expansion as a process which shapes the codes of how art is produced, presented and discussed, creating new knowledge about it (Ferguson and Hoegsberg, 2010). Some authors use the term to argue that, biennials homogenises contemporary art, by recycling artworks, artists, curatorial themes and discourses across different events that emulate each other (Stallabrass, 2004). When biennials are introduced with biennialisation, they are also often discussed as exhibitions shaped by tensions between global processes and local contexts and asymmetries between central and peripheral art contexts (Niemojewski, 2010; Osborne, 2015; Smith, 2016; Bethwaite and Kangas, 2018; Kompatsiaris, 2017; 2020).

As commoning is for common spaces, so is biennialisation for biennials: a process that shapes the subjects, spaces, relations and politics biennials involve. Most importantly, if commoning is about finding ways for sharing and distributing power (Stavrides, 2016; 2019), biennialisation is a process for accumulating power, bringing biennials at the antipode of common spaces. In this chapter, I co-implicate two readings on biennialisation, which help to consider biennials with two different approaches to common/s. The first reading sees biennials with counter-hegemonic potentials and a capacity to propose new worlds (Groys, 2009; Marchart, 2008; Smith, 2016). I think of this view on biennials with commoning as practices for creating common spaces and common worlds (Stavrides, 2016; 2018). The second reading can be connected to the common as a mode of production, since it thinks of biennials with their circulatory logic and the capacity to shape subjectivities and accumulate various forms of capital (Sheikh, 2014). In both readings, the figure of the curator and the act of curating emerge as key for the limits and potentialise that biennialisation shapes. Reflecting on those, the chapter brings biennial literature in conversation with writing on curating and commoning by Magda Tyzlik Carver (2016) and artistic circulation by Kuba Szreder (2021) who help to extend thinking on the power relations in biennialisation and the potentialities that may be activated from within and against biennialisation.

### 3.1 Making Worlds: Biennials as Hegemonic Machines and Global Forms

The contemporary biennial can be distinguished by a strong will to negotiate its peripheral condition, to represent the ambitions of its host city, and to form infrastructures for contemporary art and the public sphere. The self-reflexivity, time- and site-specificity, rhetorical armature (increasingly interdisciplinary discourse that incorporates postcolonialism and non-Western positions), supporting new forms of discursive and socially conscious art and giving rise to the new type of curator are equally distinctive features. (Niemojewski, 2010, p. 91).

A good entry point for discussing contemporary biennials as a post-1989 phenomenon and thinking of their world-making agency is the definition by Rafal Niemojewski (2010), which brings together the spatial, discursive and infrastructural features.<sup>119</sup> The definition points to the infrastructural capacity of biennials in promoting ‘peripheral art scenes’ (2010, p. 95). The argument is part of a first strand in biennialisation literature, which debates the biennial’s potentials to redistribute power through the prism of cultural domination and hegemony (Enwezor, 2010; Dimitrakaki, 2012, Filipovic, 2014). This strand, also called the ‘agonistic curating’ approach (Kompatsiaris, 2017, p. 13), because it is widely adopted by curators, is influenced by the writings of political theorist Chantal Mouffe (2009). Based on Gramsci’s idea of ‘infiltrating institutions’ so as to bring change from within them, Mouffe (2009) argues that antagonism and hegemony are key for defining the political and that art practices can play a crucial role in the struggle against capitalist domination (Kompatsiaris, 2017, p. 67).<sup>120</sup> In this sense, biennials should not be solely viewed through economic indicators, but as part of struggles for progressive politics and pedagogies in a globalising public sphere (Papastergiadis and Martin, 2011); as exhibitions that redistribute cultural power (De Duve, 2006, p. 681) or even trigger resistance, dissent and emancipation (Hoskote, 2010; Oren, 2018).

In this regard, I draw on sociologist Oliver Marchart (2008; 2010; 2020) who defines biennials as ‘hegemonic machines’ that mediate between the local, the national and the transnational (Marchart, 2014, p. 2). For Marchart (2014), biennials make proposals not only

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<sup>119</sup> The definition is based on the third Bienal de la Habana (1989) In literature, there is disagreement about the ‘origins’ of biennials, debating whether they should be considered with the Venice Biennale or with the third Bienal de la Habana. In this thesis I align with the latter, drawing on various authors (Niemojewski, 2010; Weiss et al., 2011; Osborne, 2015).

<sup>120</sup> In his conceptualisation of hegemony Antonio Gramsci (2005) argues that the dominant ideology of society reflects the interests of the ruling class and is shaped through institutions.

for understanding the world as it is, but also as it can be, as they may enable alternative world-making. A new world map may emerge out of the spread of biennials, one that not only reaffirms, but also decentralises the West and symbolically legitimates ‘marginalised discourses’ and struggles (Marchart, 2014, p. 2). Other authors stress the need to examine how biennials in Southern regions developed a kind of ‘critical regionalism’, forming ‘South-South’ alliances as a way of countering colonial and post-war politics, between the 1950s and the 1980s (Hoskote, 2010; Green and Gardner, 2016, p. 81).<sup>121</sup>

In thinking of biennialisation with the above readings, we may think of biennials as discursive infrastructures that facilitated the entry of the common/s in art through curatorial concepts and art practices. This entry coincides with the canonisation of the discursive biennial, which Kompatsiaris (2017) sets chronologically at documenta X (1997) and Documenta 11 (2002). The political vocabularies explored by dX and D11 coincide with a post-1990s curating, which was informed by radical politics and postcolonial studies, including the renewed attention to commons as anti-capitalist struggles, inspired particularly by the Zapatista uprisings (1994) and the anti-globalisation movements in militant Marxist scholarship (Klein, 2001; Federici, 2010; Caffentzis and Federici, 2013).<sup>122</sup> Curator Okwui Enwezor offered an influential staging of the idea of the multitude, to refer to the new possibilities for resistance emerging in globalisation for avant-garde artists and art collectives in particular (Dimitrakaki, 2003; Green and Gardner, 2016; Kompatsiaris, 2017), an idea which still echoes in d14’s curatorial rationale.<sup>123</sup> Such alignments of art and curating to anti-globalisation and autonomist theories created the ground for the post-2008 and post-2011 biennial (Kompatsiaris, (2017).

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<sup>121</sup> For Southern Biennials, see the 3<sup>rd</sup> chapter in Green and Gardner, 2016, pp. 81-108.

<sup>122</sup> In 1994 the indigenous population Zapatistas with the Zapatista Army of National Liberation appropriated and communised large land parts in Chiapas, Mexico, sparking international solidarity for their struggles against the government of Mexico and its systematic dispossession of lands and violent attacks against indigenous cultures. Several Marxist and militant scholars writing on the commons are closely associated with or theorise commons inspired by the Zapatista movement, among whom, John Holloway, The Midnight Notes Collective (George Caffentzis, Pieter Linebaugh, Silvia Federici, Massimo de Angelis) and Stavros Stavrides.

<sup>123</sup> See also Negri, *Art and the multitude* (2011) The original in French was published in 2009, at the same time as the text I am referring to. The dissemination of Hardt and Negri’s ideas are not restricted to biennials. Indicative, see Negri’s presentation at Tate Britain, 19 January 2008 on ‘Art and immaterial labour’, which is included in this publication and where Negri connects art and immaterial labour.

Recent biennial literature argues that biennialisation should not be fully equated with globalisation (Green and Gardner, 2016; Bethwaite and Kangas, 2018; Niemojewski, 2021). Biennials combine the desire to articulate the artistic and cultural particularities of their host cities, but are always outward-looking, making the notion of translocality (Kompatsiaris, 2017) more apt to approach their politics. What is also challenged is the binary opposition between the economic/symbolic or exchange/use values, arguing that biennials are not to be understood as a straightforward exchange between aesthetic values that are traded with economic, but rather in tensed or paradoxical relations (Sassatelli, 2016; Kompatsiaris, 2017; Oxenius, 2017). In this regard, Kompatsiaris (2017, p. 9) and Christian Oxenius (2017) argue that the dichotomy between global and local or concepts such as ‘glocalisation’ (Kompatsiaris, 2017, p. 10) are not useful anymore to describe the tensions that biennials inhabit, they suggest to think of biennials as ‘global but also grounded set of practices’ or as ‘global forms’, drawing on anthropologists Ong and Collier (2005) (Kompatsiaris, 2017, p. 9; Oxenius, 2017, pp. 38-39).<sup>124</sup> Rather than seeing the diffusion of biennials as a network of institutions, it foregrounds the view of biennials as a ‘non-homogenous assemblage’ (Oxenius, 2017, p. xviii).

Biennials may be connected to commons through their world-making capacity (Escobar, 2015). Commoning is a process of world-making and strives to make other kind of futures possible in dialectic relation with capitalist enclosures and from within power relations. Accordingly, common spaces are defined as ‘those spaces produced by people in their effort to establish a common world that houses, supports and expresses the community they participate in’ (Stavrídes, 2015, p.10; 2016, p. 31). However, as we saw in chapter 2, for commoning to gain emancipatory potentials, this world needs to be geared towards a world of equals and a future towards non-capitalist relations. Commons are worlds or communities in movement, but this movement is not driven by accumulation, but the redistribution of the sensible (Rancière, 2006), which, in essence, is about the redistribution of power (Stavrídes, 2016). Thinking here briefly with the undercommons, commoning is a practice of refusing that which creates the conditions of inequalities and inventing worlds beyond these inequalities (Moten and Harney (2013, p. 5).

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<sup>124</sup> Both Kompatsiaris (2017) and Oxenius (2017) borrow the term ‘global form’ or ‘global assemblage’ from Collier and Ong (2015, p. 11). ‘Global forms are phenomena that enable tensions and contestations, which encompass contradictory notions, such as capitalism, neoliberalism, citizenship, nation, human rights.



Could we take the world-making capacity of biennials as a potential for commoning the biennial? What kinds of opportunities and limits appear as biennials reimagine and enact new worlds? Who can participate in co-creating this world? Research shows that biennialisation often reproduces cultural hegemonies and existing power dynamics, not necessarily following the logic of centre versus periphery (Wu, 2007, Filipovic, 2014; Bethwaite and Kangas, 2018). Marian Pastor Roces (2010) doubts that biennials, many of which were founded on colonial and capitalist values, can be transformed into spaces for social justice (Bethwaite and Kangas, p. 6). In such arguments, the Global North or global art centres still have more power to valorise art, artists and discourses (Bethwaite and Kangas, 2018). Wu (2009) shows by analysing the participation of artists in documenta across decades, that the fact that biennials proliferate does not mean that more artists from undermined art scenes get more chances for visibility, neither that inequalities based on race and gender are absent.<sup>125</sup>

### **3.2 Making Subjects and Capturing the Common: Biennials as Apparatuses for Circulation**

The second reading of biennialisation explored in this chapter draws on post-Fordism and emphasises that biennials do not produce commodities, but subjectivities and social relations (Hardt, 2009; Gielen, 2009; Dimitrakaki, 2011; Kompatsiaris, 2017). Biennials are apparatuses which ‘biennialise’ their subjects and are interpellating them, that is, producing them ideologically, according to Simon Sheikh (2014, p. 4).<sup>126</sup> Biennialisation has been crucial for the rise of the so-called international artist and curator, entangling them in capital flows, as ‘models for global citizenship and (upward) mobility (Sheikh, 2014, p. 4). These tend to be networked individuals, who often live and work in at least two cities simultaneously, move from project to project and are busy networking in exhibition openings and on social media, in order to generate their own capital. For these ‘entrepreneurs of the self’ (Foucault, 2008, p. 226), the biennial is among the most prestigious art projects they can

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<sup>125</sup> Wu Chin-Tao (2009) offers an apt observation, as she likens the global art world with a spiral that retains hierarchical relations. The author has conducted research in the artistic asymmetries that biennials (re)produce and which shows that artists of non-European or non-Western origin who leave in Western metropolises still have more chances to circulate in biennials than others.

<sup>126</sup> On this, Sheikh (2014) draws on French philosopher Louis Althusser, who distinguishes between two kinds of apparatuses: the repressive and the ideological. The former is about the public realm mechanisms of power and control such as the police. The second belongs to the private realm which passes through communication and culture. (Sheikh, 2014). Sheikh (2014) writes about three elements: stylisation, capitalisation and internationalization

be involved in, since it offers opportunities for visibility, networking and further circulation in the art world.

Biennials are therefore apparatuses for ‘a mise-en-scene of contemporary subjectivity’ according to Sheikh (2014, p. 2). Sheikh (2014) refers to how biennials extract and capture the labour of those who remain less visible, but he leaves out of his scope the notion of the common. Although Sheikh (2014) offers an entry point to consider how biennials shape subjects, drawing on Foucault (1980), more can be said about how apparatuses shape hierarchical and unequal relations.<sup>127</sup> To extend these ideas, I expand on the common by Hardt and Negri (2009) and draw on Szreder (2021) and Magda Tyzlik Carver (2016) who, drawing on Foucault (1980; 1990), each offer the tools to extend the arguments on how curating and circulation shape subjects and power relations.

Thinking with Hardt and Negri (2009), biennialisation captures the common, the socially produced value based on cooperation. Biennialisation shapes significantly who is worthy of circulation and who is marginalised or excluded in the art world. Being ‘biennialised’ (Sheikh, 20014, p. 14) is not only about becoming international, but it is also about being precarised. While circulation contributes to securing subsistence and income, it also requires a kind of investment by the artist or curator who often does not see immediate economic gain, but is caught in a process of accruing reputational and social capital (Szreder, 2021). Along these lines, sociologist Pascal Gielen (2006, p. 127) sees biennials as a ‘post-institution for immaterial labour’ based on the flexible labour, opportunism or cynicism that biennials may cultivate. Rather than ethical positions by individuals, these features are to be understood as structurally linked to the networked modes of production and the temporalities of project-based work that biennial recurrent cycles promote (Szreder, 2017; 2021).

The common produced in biennials includes various forms of labour and relationalities. Biennials welcome those who Szreder (2021, p. 194) calls the ‘projectariat’, those moving from project to project, with short-term contracts. Biennials also welcome the ‘creative dark matter’, volunteers or technicians who remain or rendered invisible, but who are necessary for sustaining the hierarchies of the art world (Sholette, 2011, p. 2-3). The common emerges

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<sup>127</sup> Sheikh (2014) only makes a brief reference to how Agamben (2009) interprets Foucault’s notion of apparatus.

out of the surplus value that involves production relations, but also volunteering, informal interactions and networking in biopolitical ways that blur the boundaries between production and reproduction, professional and personal life, art and activism. If, as art theorists Angela Dimitrakaki and Kirsten Lloyd (2017) note, art is the social relations that make the art field, biennials in particular accentuate this idea, by placing the artwork and the exhibition in a wider context of social interaction. Besides, discursive biennials offer the opportunity not only to artists, but also to speakers, theorists or activists, to accumulate discursive capital and to continue to circulate in biennial circuits (Szreder, 2017).

Following the Foucauldian understanding, Tyzlik-Carver (2013) argues that a curator can also be considered as an apparatus of power. Foucault (1980) defines apparatus (*dispositif*) as a set of heterogeneous elements, including actions, institutions, discourses, forms of subjectivation, power strategies and struggles that responds to an urgent need. Viewed as systems of relations, apparatuses repeat power relations in both explicit or implicit ways, in discursive and material ways. At the same time, Tyzlik-Carver (2016) shifts the emphasis from the figure of the curator to think of curating as an apparatus that is more and more a practice where the individual is preoccupied with the management of the self. Expanding the notion of curating by adopting a posthuman perspective, curating is not only shaped by humans, but through interactions that also include objects and technologies (Tyzlik-Carver, 2016).

Moving a step further, Tyzlik-Carver (2013) defines both *commoning* and *curating* as apparatuses of governance and self-control, connected to the problem of subjectivation and governmentality. The interaction between curating and commoning may challenge the binary of individual and collective and offer the possibility to think about curating as a practice for reconfiguring power relations, according to Tyzlik-Carver (2016, p. 12). The argument of Tyzlik Carver (2016) offers a dual benefit from this perspective, since she thinks of curating in / as common / s or as a common practice as a 'speculative intervention' (2013, p. 7) that through their interaction looks to activate new agencies, forms of knowledge and organisation. Tyzlik Carver (2016) examines how the self is complicated by the ways curating in / as commons /s facilitates forms of collaborative production that mobilise immaterial labour. Hence, she proposes to reconsider immaterial labour in its potential to become an emancipatory practice that does not end with reproducing capital relations, but actively develops immaterial practices of commoning that can reconfigure power relations.

Linking these thoughts with biennialisation, neither the figure of the curator, neither the act of curating are bypassed. Rather, they become part of what Tyzlik-Carver (2011, p. 1) describes as ‘curating as a practice on the edge’, as they find themselves on the threshold between facilitating and appropriating common/s, between commoning the biennial and the biennialisation of the commons. From within this threshold space, they are called to make choices that may potentialise commoning from within and against biennialisation, triggering new re-distributions of power.

### **3.3 Potentialities: From Accumulating to Redistributing Power?**

This chapter sketched how biennialisation shapes the politics, subjects and spaces that biennials produce. Biennialisation can be dialectically analysed, as a tension between creating counterhegemonic or supporting hegemonic perspectives, between accumulating and distributing power. Art historian Amy Elias (2016, p. 7) argues that both circulation and commons use the same technological means of transmission, making it difficult to determine when a meeting between them is emancipatory or not. For example, internet and social media are privatised, profit-making and surveillance spaces, but they can also generate new common spaces (Elias, 2016). In thinking of biennials as events with counterhegemonic potentials, but also as events for accumulating various forms of capital and power, we understand better how biennials are about co-implications (Elias, 2016; Kompatsiaris, 2017; Szreder, 2017; Bethwaite and Kangas, 2018). In this regard, we may take commoning the biennial to mean strengthening the biennial’s counterhegemonic potentials, by promoting, for example, artistic and curatorial practices that contest Eurocentric art canons and promote non-Western contexts. And we may think of the biennialisation of the commons with how biennialisation sustains asymmetries between different contexts, while circulation concentrates capital in a few individuals, capturing or extracting the surplus value of cooperation that biennial-making requires.

If common spaces are thresholds where one may cross the line from the individual towards the collective, biennials are thresholds that one crosses in the hope of establishing their name as an artist, curator or successful art professional. While the former is a negotiation of subjectivity, the latter reinforce the subject of the international and successful art professional, particularly the figure of the curator. The problem of commoning the biennial, understood as a process of distributing power, particularly for curating in the realm of

biennialisation, is therefore not only a matter of conceiving concepts and exhibitions that enhance inclusion and participation whether it is towards subaltern subjects, ‘unknown’ art scenes or underprivileged neighbourhoods and communities, but also working from within and against the hierarchies and privileges that biennialisation sustains. To work with such a potentiality requires a different kind of curating, which engages with commoning not only as a discourse or exhibition theme or even inclusion of new art scenes, but as a practice that looks to redistribute power. Viewed with the two interrelated perspectives of world-making and subjectivation, to potentialise commoning becomes a question of challenging how biennialisation reproduces subjects and relations that sustain power asymmetries, by extracting, capturing and enclosing commoning in hierarchical relations. On the contrary, moving to the direction of commoning the biennial requires to set in motion practices of cooperation, to think how to redistribute power and create new worlds within, against and beyond biennialisation. These questions become pertinent especially in the case of d14, which, moving to Athens, considered a peripheral art scene, mobilised the common/s and raises questions in terms of how it redistributed its symbolic and material capital, while accentuating with its move the circulatory logic of biennialisation.

## Chapter 4. Making City: Between Enclosing and Commoning

If the biennial's world-making capacity and circulatory logic prompts to ask what kind of worlds biennials create and for whom (Kompatsiaris, 2014, p. 77, 2018, p. 3) thinking of their city-making capacity with commoning brings one to ask what kind of city and for whom biennials create. Biennials create multifaceted encounters between art institutions, artists, publics and their host city. This is why to potentialise the relation to the city is the most important aspect for this research. Building on literature that links biennials to space and the city (Hardt, 2009; Sheikh, 2009, Sholette, 2017) this chapter asks how artists and curators, may work from within the ambiguities of this infrastructural threshold when they assume the role of the biennial maker.

The chapter focuses on two aspects where the potential to common the biennial meets the potential to common the city. My argument is twofold. To ask how to potentialise commoning relations in the city, necessitates to ground biennials in the interdependencies that they are part of and to ground biennials on everyday city life. The everyday does not coincide with the local, neither is a stable ground. The everyday, in its connection with space (public or common) and the complexity of city life is where global and local merge, where enclosures, but also transformative experiences emerge (Lefebvre, 1968, 1981). Grounding requires also a kind of opposite movement, that is, to unsettle the biennial's relation to space. If commoning is a practice on the threshold, which challenges the normative distributions of the sensible (Rancière, 2006), what is at stake is creating new and collective ways of seeing and doing in the city, against the biennial's neoliberal urban ties - it is about commoning the city within and against the biennial.

### **4.1 Threshold Infrastructures Between Public and Common Space**

Although the connection to infrastructure in biennial literature is piecemeal, various authors view biennials as enhancing contemporary art infrastructures in their host cities (Filipovic, 2010; Niemojewski, 2010; Green and Gardner, 2016; Oxenius, 2017; Smith, 2017). As city-wide exhibitions, the Venice Biennale and documenta are 'events with infrastructural power' for they generated material and immaterial infrastructures, including exhibition venues, new

theories and practices and networks (Niemojewski, 2010; Green and Gardner, 2016; Bennett, 2017).

A recurrent argument links the emergence of biennials with an infrastructural need, since many biennials were founded in reaction to contexts with relatively weak local art institutions. According to Filipovic (2010) biennials emerge in contexts unwilling or unable to support the most experimental contemporary cultural production and offer artistic and curatorial renewal, acting as ‘temporally punctual infrastructures that remain forever contemporary’ (Filipovic, 2014, p. 47). More recently, Terry Smith (2017, p. 11) sees biennials becoming more and more necessary as ‘infrastructure builders’, particularly in contexts which suffer from neoliberal cuts.<sup>128</sup> These arguments correspond, respectively, for AB, a biennale which emerged in a context of scarce state support to contemporary art and d14, which raised anticipations for enhancing art infrastructures, when it moved to Athens (Tran, 2017).

To think of the biennial as a spatial infrastructure, is to think of its relation to public space. First, they are often initiated or funded by public (government, city or region) or private bodies (foundations, businesses, corporations) and less by artists, although AB is here a case in point.<sup>129</sup> The authorised use of public space by biennials means artworks come after permissions and studies of feasibility and safety, according to regulations defined by city administrations. As such, biennial art interventions differ from illegal and ad hoc urban interventions of artists collectives that practice commoning in the city. Most importantly, biennials are supported by sponsors and municipalities who often promote neoliberal cultural policies or work together to make public space exclusive and enclose commoning in the city. Biennials are not threatened by enclosures, in the ways that common spaces are.

Yet, thinking of biennials as spatial infrastructures connected to commoning means thinking also how biennials supported the move of art outside of gallery walls, with site- and context-specific as well as ‘participatory art’ practices that activate relations between artists, curators and art institutions with communities (Kwon, 2002; Bishop, 2012, p. 1). Biennials have been

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<sup>128</sup> Among the examples Smith gives to point to the trend are documenta 11, 13 and 14 with their events and exhibitions in Kabul and Athens respectively.

<sup>129</sup> For example, I discuss in the chapter of the AB5-6 the example of the Performance biennial, which was initiated by artists activists who had initiated Embros and Green Park.

crucial for practices and values that hold a significance for commoning in the city, such as community, collaboration, collectivity and participation. These terms are emphatically present in art since the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and associated with the rise, among other, of socially engaged art (Kwon, 2002), which sees artists engaging with communities (Elias, 2016). Literature discusses such practices with various ‘turns’, like the ‘educational turn’ (O’Neill and Wilson, 2010) which denotes the adoption of alternative pedagogical methods in art and curating; the ‘social turn’ (Bishop, 2006) which points to art with a social interventionist character; the ‘collaborative turn’ (Lind, 2007) and the ‘performative turn’ (Jackson, 2011) all of which, interrogate art engaging with questions of community, collectivity and sociality.

As Stavrides argued on the occasion of Athens Biennale 2, HEAVEN (2009), thinking commons with the notion of the public realm and public space pushes to acknowledge differences and negotiations and thus may challenge normative understandings of commons based on community (Anarchitektur, 2010). Biennials offer multiple ways to think about an ambivalent relation with public space. Biennial makers perceive biennials as public spaces even when there is no work in public space, because they enable interactions and debates on the public sphere (Oxenius, p. 353). Anyone working with a biennial finds themselves inhabiting the threshold between their perceived ‘publicness’ and the possibility to activate spaces shaped by some form of art/commoning. In this sense, in taking biennials as threshold infrastructures I point to how they can act as infrastructures on the one hand for public space and public art and how they can potentially negotiate the meanings of public space and public art via practices and discourses of art/commoning.

## **4.2 Artists, City-Branding and the Common**

Crucial for the biennial’s city-making capacity and the potential to create new distributions in relation to city space is of course the relation with artists. My starting point for approaching the matter is the essay ‘Production and Distribution of the Common. A few questions for the artist’, which was published in a special issue on the occasion of the Brussels Biennial I (2009).<sup>130</sup> Hardt (2009) interprets Rancière (2006) but shifts the focus on the economic as

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<sup>130</sup> The essay is derived from the special issue emerged out of a discursive programme co-produced by the first (and only) Brussels Biennial (2008/2009).



another parallel relation to the aesthetic and the political.<sup>131</sup> The author discusses how in the post-Fordist economic model, city authorities, governments or regions and capitalist planners see artists as crucial for the narratives of branding and creative cities that give opportunities to the ‘creative class’ (Hardt, 2009, p. 25-27). Biennials promote city branding and capture the common. In this way, despite coming with the benefit of recognising art as a mode of production, biennials involve artists in capitalist city development (Hardt, 2009).

The core question for Hardt (2009) is how artists may find new ways to produce and distribute the common from within biennials. ‘How can such artistic skills and talents be deployed in a democratic project of the defence, production and distribution of the common?’ (Hardt, 2009, p. 28). While in this text Hardt (2009) does not offer blueprint answers regards this question, he nonetheless points to two aspects. The first is about how immaterial products may escape instrumentalisation by capitalism – here, the biennial- and create new opportunities of cooperation. The second is about artists connecting their struggles to broader workers’ struggles.<sup>132</sup> In this sense, both points prefigure the debates that the involvement of artists in the squares movement and in biennial contestations raise, a few years later.

To think of possible answers to the above question of what kind of agency can emerge from within the biennial, the next sections expand on the question of branding and think of two aspects from Rancière’s (2006) definition that Hardt (2009) leaves out of his scope: the police principle and dissent. To do so, I unpack approaches which take a different critical stance as to the limits and potentials emerging out of the biennial’s branding function. The next two sections locate potentials in the biennial’s function as a global/local interface (Sheikh, 2009; Papastergiadis and Martin, 2011). The last is dismissive and more aligned to the biennial’s ties to neoliberal urban planning and governance (Stallabrass, 2014; Sholette, 2017).

Expanding on branding is important, because branding is not only a mechanism that captures the creative potentials of artists, but it also involves artists in enclosures. Via branding, biennials are connected to strategies that lead to urban enclosures, coming once more to stand

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<sup>131</sup> Hardt (2009) argues that Rancière (2006) implies that the common is fixed, given or natural and only shared at the level of distribution.

<sup>132</sup> More specifically, the author refers to protests of workers in the entertainment industry in France in the period between 2003-2007, protests which raised demands for basic income. (Karavida, 2014; Oxenius, 2017).

at the antipode of common spaces and within the order of the police. Police strives for fixed positions, while dissent strives for a redistribution of the sensible through the production of ‘dissensual spaces’ (Swyngedouw, 2011b, p. 376 in Kaika and Karaliotas, 2014, p. 4). Can dissent, a meeting or a clash between politics and the police happen if biennials side with the police order and retain the entanglements between private and public space, rather than unsettle them? The challenge is at least twofold: how to work towards the direction of reconfiguring how we sense and make the city and the creation of dissensual common spaces (Rancière, 2010, p. 139).<sup>133</sup>

#### 4.2.1 Experience Economy, G/local Interfaces and Publics

Branding launches cities in global competitive markets in order to attract investments, tourists and high-income residents (Tsavdaroglou and Kaika, 2021). Each event claiming the name biennial also claims a part in this global competitive network and needs to cultivate a particular identity to distinguish itself from others (Sheikh, 2009; 2016, Kompatsiaris, 2017). The collective creative and symbolic capital attached to a place (in this thesis, Athens) is significant for it shapes what attracts flows of capital (here, as they are generated through biennials) in specific cities (Harvey (2001).

Following this reasoning, Sheikh (2009) connects city-branding to the commodification of the city and sees biennials as part of the ‘experience economy’.<sup>134</sup> Applying David Harvey’s concept of ‘monopoly rent’ (2001, p. 405), Sheikh (2009) sees branding crucial for biennials

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<sup>133</sup> Asked about biennials on the occasion of his participation in d14, Negri defends the necessity to insist on engaging with biennials. It is worth citing his answer: ‘Obviously these places must be regarded as battlefields, as places of confrontation and collision, of conflict and rifts’ (Negri in Gielen and Lavaert, 2018, p. 106). The question is how to escape the biennial’s ‘control function’, as this kind of institutions may be ‘arenas of a fight for the truth, of critique of ideology and production, places where the discourse of power is exposed, but they are always also marketplaces (2018, p. 106).

<sup>134</sup> Economists Pine and Gilmore (1998) first used the term experience economy to refer to a mode that has followed the agrarian, industrial, and the service economy, whereby businesses must sell memorable experiences to their customers, making memory itself the product to be sold. The authors distinguish between four realms: entertainment, education, the escapist and aesthetic, which are thought from the perspective of the customer’s active and passive participation and different levels of immersion. For example, the consider that the escapist realm requires being immersed in action and participation, while visiting a gallery is an aesthetic experience where they may have little effect upon. Biennials can be thought to move across these realms, as they offer both the educational (talks, workshops), entertaining (concerts and performances) and the aesthetic (visiting galleries) while the escapist could be though with how audiences need to traverse the city to experience the artworks.

as part of inter-city competition.<sup>135</sup> To cities, biennials come with the promise of revenues, economic and cultural capital tied to the audiences and tourist flows they attract (Basualdo, 2003; Stallabrass, 2004; Hardt, 2009; Sheikh, 2010; Sassatelli, 2017; Kompatsiaris, 2020; Oxenius, 2017). On the other hand, biennials need to assert their position within expanding global professional networks of contemporary art, by capitalising on a city's cultural or symbolic value (Bydler, 2004; Sheikh, 2011). In order to establish a niche market and attract international audiences, each biennial needs to highlight any particularities of their host city (Sheikh, 2009, pp. 71-72). Therefore, both give value to each other: the city to the biennial and the biennial to the city. The brand of each biennial emerges at an in-between space where 'The lure of the local meets the glamour of the global' according to Sheikh (2009, p. 73).

Biennials commodify the experience of the exhibition and the city, according to Sheikh (2009, pp. 71-72). Contrary to art fairs, biennials are not always directly connected to circles of gallerists and collectors, where art works become commodities to be sold in the market (Basualdo, 2010). In contrast to art fairs, biennials are shaped by curatorial concepts, however broad these may be (Tang, 2011).<sup>136</sup> The city becomes experienced through a curated exhibition which might not have as immediate goal to sell artworks, but which remains connected to the market, but can also include more experimental works, like video installations, performances or ephemeral site-specific projects.

From within this function of commodifying the city, but which requires the biennial's more 'public' character and the curator as facilitator of encounters between works, artists and the city, Sheikh (2009) sees critical potentials emerge. This is also what Papastergiadis and Martin (2011) suggest in 'Art biennales and cities as platforms for global dialogue'. The authors locate the discursive biennial's strength in the social encounters they produce and the

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<sup>135</sup> Harvey (2001) constructs this argument in relation to the wine trade. An exclusive vineyard can sell its wines as commodities, but also itself - the land, resources, and location - which has to achieve a symbolic quality besides its actual taste, in order to generate revenues. Exclusivity and branding are crucial in generating monopoly rent, which is achieved when a producer can generate an increase of surplus and income by being the only producer of a certain commodity in a regional economy, or through the uniqueness of the brand in a more global economy. Champagne for instance comes to denote both the wine and the land/the region. Factors such as specialist publications and international competition also affect the wine market and can often add further value (Harvey, 2001).

<sup>136</sup> However, biennials are also places where artworks and artists become valorised, shaping strongly their market value. Moreover, biennials and art fairs are also drawing closer to each other (Smith, 2017). See also: Paco Barragán (2020) From Roman Feria to Global Art Fair, From Olympia Festival to Neo-Liberal Biennial: On the "Biennialization" of Art Fairs and the "Fairization" of Biennials.

possibility to address broad issues on ‘art, city and politics in an expanding world’ (p. 47). The authors praise the IB 2007 curator Hou Hanru for curating in a manner reminiscent of Lefebvre’s (1968) dialectic understanding of the city as a ‘battlefield’ from which to imagine other urban, social and democratic projects, against the modernist vision for city development, the privatisation of public space and in defence of the public sphere.<sup>137</sup>

However, the problem with ‘agonistic curating’ is that the emphasis is on the curator’s agency in activating g/local interfaces to the expense of the biennial’s connection to everyday city life (Papastergiadis and Martin, 2011; Green and Gardner, 2016). While locating the biennial’s potentials at the intersection between Lefebvre’s RttC and imagination, the authors prioritise biennials as platforms for a transnational or ‘cosmopolitan cultural sphere’ or a ‘digital multitude’ (Papastergiadis and Martin, 2011, p. 51, 56).<sup>138</sup> Moreover, they give little insight regards the ‘specific cultural realities of everyday life’ that may subvert dominant forces of urbanisation (Papastergiadis and Martin, 2012, p. 52). In this sense, their approach remains tied to the privileged subjects of cosmopolitanism; it does not consider the inequalities of globalisation nor the RttC as ‘an urban politics of the inhabitant’ (Purcell, 2002).<sup>139</sup>

In contrast, Sheikh (2009) sees potentialities in the interconnectedness that biennials offer, but calls to reflect on how biennials are part of the same structures that shape both the idea of Fortress Europe and the identities in-the-making that migration shapes (Sheikh 2009).

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<sup>137</sup> Here, the example they offer is the 2002 Gwanju Biennale curated by Esche and Hanru, which invited artists from 25 collectives, non-profit and experimental art groups to make works not on aesthetic grounds as per the authors, but in response to ‘the specific cultural realities of everyday life’ (Papastergiadis and Martin, 2011, p. 52). The quest, as they note, was to undermine from within their own curatorial agency, by trusting the self-organising and networking skills of the small-scale collectives, a gesture which finds echoes in AB5-6’s experiment in distributing curatorial agency among collectives in Athens. They also discuss and Hu Hanrou’s 10<sup>th</sup> Istanbul Biennial (2007) as an example which critically engages with Turkey’s urbanisation processes and Nicholas Bourriaud’s engagement with the Moscow Biennale (2007) as an engagement with the urban that invokes Lefebvre’s approach on the city as a site for struggles. Here too however, their emphasis is on the discursive approach of the curator and his project in terms of engaging with ‘Global economy’s landscape’ (Bourriaud, 2007, cited in Papastergiadis and Martin, 2011, P. 50).

<sup>138</sup> Here they discuss Enwezor’s Documenta 11 (2002), whose dispersal of discursive ‘Platforms’ across the globe is taken as an example that shifts the emphasis on the encounters and the dialogues that can be activated between different contexts. Yet, again, we come to know very little as to how these platforms relate to the host cities.

<sup>139</sup> In a similar vein, Green and Gardner’s (2016) recent contribution can be considered as being more preoccupied with the spatialities of biennialisation/globalisation, rather than how the many examples they examine relate to the particularities of the host cities.

Biennials inhabit a simultaneous here/elsewhere where the local should not be perceived as static, since we are connected to different places, in physical, mental, emotional and professional ways (Sheikh, 2009). Hence, Sheikh (2009) does not ask what biennials can do for the city, but what kind of hybrid forms of knowledge, publics or counter-publics they can produce, what kinds of participation, citizenship, subjectivity and territoriality they call for (Sheikh, 2010, p. 158). As he puts it:

It is improbable that a biennial can exist without taking part in such processes of capital accumulation, so the question is rather, can they do something else simultaneously? That is, can they produce something other than merely more symbolic-turned-real capital for the involved cultural producers, curators and artists alike, something else in terms of interconnected global political transaction and translation. While biennials remain spaces of capital, they are also spaces of hope (Sheikh 2009, p. 78, 79; 2010, p. 163).

The example of AB1 ‘Destroy Athens’ (2007) is useful to think of the above. AB entered the space of biennialisation as a brand-conscious biennial *and* a subversive one. AB1 performed a double re-branding: of the biennial model and ‘rebranding of antiquity’, against Athens’s dominant stereotypical representations as unbearable to live metropolis or as the cradle of democracy (Kalpaktsoglou and Poka-Yio, 2013). The title ‘Destroy’ Athens was meant to contrast the one of ‘Live Your Myth in Greece’, which the Greek National Tourism Organisation was using around that time to promote the country, while the curatorial rationale emphasised the ways biennials, cities and collectivity are entangled in processes of subjectivation.<sup>140</sup>

#### 4.2.2 Biennials and Enclosures

If the city seems to disappear behind the cosmopolitan mobilities or blends in the interconnectedness in the aforementioned approaches, a problem with dismissive approaches is that they sketch the city as a mere background and artists as having little agency.<sup>141</sup> For

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<sup>140</sup>Rather than a curatorial statement, a fragmented first narrative was meant to emerge with the ‘Suggestions for the Destruction of Athens’, a mini-edition published prior to the exhibition. This included a collection of annotated excerpts from a diverse array of philosophers, poets, critics and curators, among whom we find Rene Block, Hans Ulbrich Obrist, Simon Sheikh, Sylvia Plath, Ted Hughes and Giorgio Agamben. A number of excerpts are drawn from Hardt and Negri’s *Empire* (2001). More on AB1 and branding, see Kompatsiaris, 2017, pp. 137-139.

<sup>141</sup> On that note, Oxenius (2017) discusses how the term ‘festival’ is seen negatively by most biennial makers he interviewed, because of the negative connotations – the term ‘festivalisation’ or

example, in *Art Incorporated*, art historian Julian Stallabrass (2004, p. 42) regards biennials as clear-cut neoliberal tools regards labour mobilities and multiculturalism, situated between global corporations seeking to art wash their profile and municipalities seeking to promote tourism.<sup>142</sup> Yet, economic approaches are relevant, because they point to the material consequences that branding has, being part of enclosure mechanisms.

Disinvestment, entrepreneurialism and privatisation of public space are part of city-branding. These lead to socio-spatial inequalities, gentrification and displacement and mostly affect the more precarious of the urban population, like migrants or squatters in common spaces, who are undesirable for profitable urban development (Arampatzi, 2014; Tsavdaroglou and Kaika, 2021). Aligned with critical geography arguments that see festivals for city image-making and tourism offering ‘quick fix solutions to city image problems’, Sholette (2010; 2017) criticises biennials as ‘urban art fairs’ and sees their expansion resembling capitalist ‘disinvestment cycles’ and ‘the deregulated operation of deregulated finance capital’ (Kompatsiaris, 2017, p. 72).<sup>143</sup> Biennials trigger ‘infrastructural collapse’ of neighbourhoods or cities and eventually lead to gentrification. In this process, artists are first desired as facilitators of regeneration, but also run the risk of being displaced by wealthier investors and middle class who can afford to rent or buy as property values rise (Sholette, 2017).

Activists who initiate common spaces in the city and artists or informal collectives exist in parallel but also intersecting realms, as Sholette (2017) points out. They may collaborate or even clash with each other. What is certain is that branding implicates them in situations where art-washing meets a commons-fix in the city. A decade later than Hardt (2009), Sholette (2017) sketches a sharper image on how artists, critics, curators and cultural institutions are embedded in the capitalist production of the city:

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‘festivalism’ have been used here - and because it is often associated with different media, like dance or music. See also: Peter Schjeldahl, “The Art World: Festivalism,” *The New Yorker* (July 5, 1999, p. 85)

<sup>142</sup> As he writes, ‘the biennial for the author ‘performs the same function for a city – with all its crude jostling for position in the global market – as a Picasso above the fireplace does for a tobacco executive’ (Stallabrass, 2004, p. 42).

<sup>143</sup> For the full citation see Kompatsiaris, 2017, p.72) : this machine-like circuit resembles the deregulated operation of deregulated finance capital -invest in an underdeveloped region of the globe, boast that capital has made infrastructural improvements and increasing multiculturalism’ actively deplete these same regional economies through ‘open’ borders and so-called free market policies favouring wealthy nations, then remove the primary investment at the first sign of economic contraction (Sholette, 2010, p. 86 cited in Kompatsiaris, 2017, p. 72).

We see a similar, asymmetrical triumvirate of forces engaged in an urban battle for the very soul of modern cities all over the world today as: 1.) local residents and activists seek to hold on to common space through squatting or other mechanisms, 2.) artists and informal collectives give birth to street art, graffiti, theatre and music, and cultural collectives sometimes in cahoots with, but also at other times at odds with the first group and 3.) meanwhile the financial and real estate sectors carry on their nefarious profiteering as outlined above. All of this is so abundantly visible, so entwined with the art establishment, and so impossible to avoid in Athens today, nevertheless, this all-too-obvious conflict was almost completely absent from the smart and sophisticated installations of Documenta 14, the renowned curatorial showcase for contemporary art that occurs only every five years and traditionally happens only in Kassel, Germany. (Sholette, 2017, unpaginated)

Sholette (2017) almost sketches artists as unwillingly participating in biennials and caught in a web of processes that instrumentalise, capture and enclose art, commoning, individual and collective creativity. Nonetheless, Sholette (2017) is not fatalistic. The author argues that to resist what I would call the ‘biennialisation of art/commoning in the city’ is to first map out one’s complicity, to join the networks that claim the city against capitalist enclosures and challenge their power. Tellingly, Sholette (2017) raised the above points during a side-event initiated by artists-collectives participating in AB5-6, a biennial which attempted to mediate between common spaces and artist networks in the city *and* criticises d14, a documenta which was attracted by Athens’ creative capital, as it manifests through art/commoning infrastructures in the city.<sup>144</sup> This, prepares the ground to think of how biennials, during and after the squares not only try to learn from common spaces but also enter in processes of cooperating with them, raising further questions of instrumentalisation, co-optation *and* opportunities for the creation of new common spaces.

### **4.3 Potentialities: Infrastructuring the City**

To work towards grounding biennials as a prerequisite for commoning the city, I expand on infrastructure by drawing on Berlant (2016), who sees infrastructure as an organisational model consisting of patterns, habits, and forms of use that mediate affective, social, material or economic exchanges and mobilities. Infrastructures differ from system or structure, because, infrastructures – be it roads, bridges or norms - and here, biennials as events, are not

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<sup>144</sup> In June 2017 the artist was invited to present his recent book by the cooperative art group C.A.S.A., participants of AB5-6 but who organised this event independently, at the occupied Embros theatre – an aspect which points at the intersections of the ‘networked oppositional culture’ and biennials. The author’s arguments are already part of Dark Matter (2010). In Athens he was invited to present his recent book *Delirium and Resistance* (2017).

just given, but can be performed, negotiated and changed. According to Berlant (2016) infrastructures of commoning are spaces for negotiating and reconfiguring the structural conditions that determine how we work and live together.

A benefit of applying this definition is that it emphasises social and material mediations, interrelations and interdependencies. This is why it is perhaps fitting to use the term ‘infrastructuring’ to point to the processual and relational aspects implied.<sup>145</sup> Without the task of building up collections and often without permanent venues, biennials relate with museums, art organisations, municipalities or property developers for sourcing venues and technical support to host their exhibitions, institutions (museums, art schools, universities, galleries) collectives, communities or informal artistic networks. Biennials do not always leave permanent material traces in cities, but they mobilise people, discourses and objects and shape and reshape alliances between various institutional entities and cultural agents, even if periodically and temporarily. Even branding requires of the biennial to mobilise synergies and alliances (Stallabrass, 2014) – a point I retain as it anticipates the importance of alliances for the biennial as infrastructure and for ‘branding’ d14’s move to Athens as a gesture of solidarity towards Athens’ cultural scene.

Thinking of the infrastructuring agency of biennials is where to common the biennial may overlap with the call to common the city. Infrastructures are there to be used, argues Berlant (2017). Each biennial bears the potential to function as an infrastructure that not only repeats, but also transforms relations between cultural agents in the city, refusing to settle with given instituted relations and alliances (Raunig, 2013; Stavrides, 2016). The infrastructuring however, as it manifests through the selection of biennial partners and artists, is not only a process of including, but also excluding, since it defines who matters as interlocutor in the cultural spatial production that biennials mean for the city. The question is how the partners are invited to use the biennial infrastructure and what kind of voice they have in the process of exhibition-making. Can they question the biennial’s role? Are they just asked to host artworks and events or are they involved in co-shaping the process of exhibition making? Do

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<sup>145</sup> The notion of ‘infrastructuring’ is applied with different meanings in different disciplines and practices, from sociology, information, to organizational and information studies. What interests me here are the qualities that it implies with regards to an attentiveness to process, practice, and relations. The use of the term infrastructuring is introduced in science (Star and Bowker, 2002). Commons and infrastructuring are brought together in participatory design (Karasti 2014, Karasti & Blomberg 2018).



they engage in a process of reshuffling relations that potentialises the biennial's city-making capacity with RttC values for co-creating the city as a collective oeuvre?

To think of biennials as infrastructures for commoning the city, there is no better starting point than the body and a basic action that biennials require: to walk the city. The artists and audiences of biennials may be implicated in privileged mobilities of cultural traffic (Bennett, 2017) as they often need to travel to a biennial city, but every stage of biennial-making involves walking the city.<sup>146</sup> Prospecting locations is a *sine qua non*, especially for artists who are expected to submit a proposal for commissioned site-specific work in public space. This walking exposes artists' gaze to random triggers, but their walking is geared towards concrete outcomes. That is, finding inspiration and translating it into a successful proposal that will be financially supported by the biennial and its funders.<sup>147</sup> For budget reasons, this prospecting usually lasts only a couple of days and is done under the pressure of locating extraordinary locations in the city, with the help of the biennial team, who will present already a selection of areas, sites or venues.

During install, producers will walk to venues to supervise the building of artworks and, once the exhibition opens, mediators will walk or cycle the city to open and close venues and to resolve maintenance issues. During the preview days, biennial crowds will be visible in the city, with their tote bags and a map of biennial locations in their hands. The map is their tool in search for the spectacular, unique and extraordinary that biennials offer, through artworks in particular locations. These visits too tend to be fast-paced walks in the city, to see as much as one can with less costs.<sup>148</sup> The day often closes with an opening event which serves as a networking tool for the professional audiences. Being present, see and be seen is part and parcel of such events, without taking away that new relations can be forged during such encounters.

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<sup>146</sup> As a curator and producer, I often picked up visiting artists from train stations and walked with them to biennial offices, took them to bookshops and cafes and guided them through the city with the help of guides and historians, in order to introduce them to anything from historical landmarks to community-run spaces, non-places like supermarkets (Augé, 1992) or urban voids - empty lots that have the potential to be activated through commoning (Tzirtzilaki, 2021)

<sup>147</sup> Biennials often need to generate extra funds per project or new commission and thus often apply for project-based funds, next to whatever other global funds they may have at their disposal.

<sup>148</sup> 'Visiting is sometimes like watching a sophisticated army of curatorial truffle pigs' as Oxenius observes (Bennett, 2017). Some of these visits are funded by biennials, or are accompanied by an event where professionals may participate, but in essence biennials invite professionals for networking reasons.

Walking then is how biennial manifests as a tool for city-promotion, networking and the ‘experience economy’ (Sheikh, 2009). Especially for their walking audiences, biennials seem to offer a way ‘out of the everyday’ as ‘eventless’ into the eventful and the experiential.<sup>149</sup> The modern split between the two, argues Eran Dorfman (2014, p. 5) tends to equate the everyday with the ordinary; late modernity brings ‘the crisis of the everyday’ in the sense that that it perceives new actions and events that transcend the everyday as strikes or shocks. The fast-paced biennial experience of the city stands opposite the emphasis which Lefebvre’s puts: ‘The city must be a place of waste, for one wastes space and time; every- thing mustn’t be foreseen and functional, for spending is a feast’ (Lefebvre, 1987, p. 36).

Following Lefebvre (1958), what is needed is to move beyond conceiving the everyday in opposition to the extraordinary, but to see one as part of the other (Dorfman, 2014). Through repetition, everyday life becomes both a process that encloses and that grounds us in what we perceive as familiar, but it is also where conflicts and subversive acts may transcend the everyday (Dorfman, 2014). Lefebvre (2003) argues that the street serves as a meeting place (topos), for encounters, for playing and learning. It is in the disorder of the street that change and possibility, the sharing of ideas, meanings and experiences make the best of urban experience, one that should be open to all, providing possibilities for interaction and the seeds for a collective being. By appropriating the street, ‘use and value can dominate exchange and exchange value’ (Lefebvre, 2003, p. 18).

Drawing on Walter Benjamin, Stavrides (2016) writes that the *flâneur* is a connoisseur of thresholds: someone who knows how to discover the city as the locus of unexpected new comparisons and encounters (Stavrides, 2016, p. 233) or the kind of everyday tactical or microbial processes that De Certeau (1984) writes about. However, the figure of the flâneur is also a male individual, rather than part of a collective appropriation and reconfiguration of the city. As such, to reclaim the act of flânerie and think how to expand the figure of the flâneur in both the direction of excluded or invisible bodies and of collaboration in the city are crucial for potentialising art and the biennial’s relation to the city.

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<sup>149</sup> I borrow this phrase from Eran Dorfman (2014, p. 1), who borrows it from an advertisement for the Deutsche Bahn, the German Rail Company.

To think of potentialising city-making should start by thinking that not all bodies are welcome in public space and not all are welcome to walk the city with the biennial. Feminist critical urban scholars study how cities are often planned by and for white-skinned, heterosexual and able-bodied subjects.<sup>150</sup> Intersectional readings note how even the welcoming of white women may be at the expense of queer and black bodies' feelings of safety in certain neighbourhoods. To think of commoning the city with decolonising potentials, we may think of how Moten and Harney (2022) propose to rediscover the commons as a world-making project that draws on Blackness and Black Disability Studies, and navigate between institutions and apparatuses, in order to dismantle the knowledge power that makes some bodies valued more than others and that tries to dictate what certain bodies can or should do in the city. Reversing enclosures and normalisation processes, Black women and migrants in cities like Athens, resist the hostility of the urban environment, by practicing a kind of city-making that is based on commoning 'as an urban politics of care' (Kern, 2021, p. 52).

Walking is a fundamental bodily action through which the biennial is grounded on the city, but which also visibly distinguishes biennial-goers and brings them closer to enclosures, when they visit derelict sites that biennials use as venues, acquired through private / public developers. Enclosures are about who is excluded and who is 'worthy of interaction' in the city (Kern, 2021, p. 168). Enclosures take the form of commodifying and privatising public space, gentrifying neighbourhoods, excluding and displacing people. Gentrification, for example marks certain bodies as undesirable and 'out of place' (Kern, 2021, p. 170) and welcomes other bodies as markers of city development and growth – such as middle-class hipsters to creatives, artists and biennial-goers. In this sense, the challenge is how to rethink biennials with commoning not as a practice that reproduces these divisions, but as a practice oriented towards reinventing ways of living and reordering social positionings beyond racialised and gendered inequalities?

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<sup>150</sup> The role of women as feminine identities based on consuming has been highlighted also by Jane Jacobs (1961), who pointed out how suburbia in American cities shaped the domesticated image of the woman who stays at home and takes care of the children, while the male becomes the bread winner. (Kern, 2021).

## 4.4 Towards Commoning the Everyday

In this chapter, I situated the question ‘What can artists (and biennial makers) do?’ within biennials and against their neoliberal ties to branding as a key mechanism of enclosures. The possible answers were connected to commoning the city and the biennial as an infrastructural threshold, which points to the tensions they inhabit with regards to producing the capitalist city and resisting it. The question on how artists may redistribute the common within/against biennials, provokes different answers. It is about: connecting art to broader social struggles (Hardt, 2009); creating new kinds of publics from within the biennial’s implication in experience economy and in asymmetrical flows (Sheikh, 2009); and, from within its position in enclosures, revealing to artists the importance of joining those who claim the city from the ground (Sholette, 2017).

In summarising the arguments, most authors do not elaborate on public space, neither everyday city life as the locus of potentialities. For example, Papastergiadis and Martin (2011) praise curating that addresses urbanisation by starting from the everyday, but nonetheless, they prioritise cosmopolitanism. In emphasising interconnectedness, Sheik’s (2009) view does not exactly look on the ground and is still tied to the spatialities of globalisation. Yet, in seeing potential in the creating of hybrid forms of publics, the argument is useful, as it comes close to what more recent approaches see as a core challenge for the relation between art and commons. While commons invoke the notion of communities in space – be it actual or virtual, publics come from a modernist tradition and refer to ‘communities of address’ constructed through language and circulating discourses (Elias, 2016, p. 6). As Amy Elias (2016) writes, the spatial logic of the commons and the temporal logic of publics meet each other and to rearticulate their relations is urgent if we are to reshape the relations between art and commoning. Constructing new commons involves rethinking and constructing new publics and emphasising the relations between different communities, rather than an entity with rigid boundaries (Elias, 2016; Stavrides, 2016).

This is why I suggested to shift the emphasis to infrastructure, so as to move from institution/event and to ground biennials in the interdependencies they generate, and to shift from public (space) to the everyday, beyond the sharp divides between the ordinary and the extraordinary, experience and the everyday. Taking an empirical take and using the theories of Berlant (2016) and Stavrides (2016) in conversation with Rancière (2010), Lefebvre

(1992) and feminist approaches to the city, I think of the question ‘what can artists do?’ as a question of reshuffling and challenging our assumptions about the city, sensing it differently, beyond the dominant patterns of living together.

Thinking of their world-making and city-making capacity, to potentialise commoning within/against biennials may mean imagining and creating spaces and subjects where things can unfold otherwise. Feminist and queer theorists envision commoning as a transformative world-making process, as creative, disruptive, utopian and even failed performances that challenge heteronormativity (Kern, 2021, p. 56). Thinking of the threshold, we may ask how biennials may offer the possibility to walk the city as a network of passages, similar to how Stavrides (2010) envisions the ‘city of thresholds’. This capacity is about offering the possibility to artists, curators, audiences, to engage with the city as a site for differences, conflicts and to think how the everyday, with its ambiguities, messiness and unfinished state can be the kernel for reimagining the relations between art and the city, for commoning everyday life in the city.

## Chapter 5. Commoning Within and Against the Biennial

Common/s scholars theorised the commoning activities on the occupied squares with a different emphasis. Hardt and Negri (2012) approached the occupied squares as sites of biopolitical production by the multitude against the market, the failures of democracy and the biopolitical control of social relations. In their turn, Federici approached the square occupations as sites for communising reproduction (McKey, 2016; p. 108) and Butler, as a site for social bonds and affects (McKey, 2016, p.107). Stavrides (2016; 2019) questioned the reading of the occupations with production, because the occupiers did not present themselves as a productive force. Rather, as others, he connects the Syntagma occupation to collective creativity as a form of resistance and non-alienating labour, rather than production (Petropoulou, 2014; Papapavlou, 2015; Stavrides, 2016).

However, while art/commoning as collective creativity often takes an oppositional stance towards productive mechanisms and existing art institutions, art/commoning understood with production relations does not happen in a vacuum, but to some relation to art institutions. If art/commoning on the squares may be seen as an unproductive and unremunerated practice of collective creativity (Stavrides, 2016), within the biennial art/commoning enters a space of tensions between activism and production, paid/unpaid labour that biennials inhabit as institutions/events. When artists protested or boycotted biennials in recent years, their acts blurred the lines between what it means to work between the event and the institution, within and against the biennial, but were not viewed as labour struggles necessarily. For example, following the squares' occupations, boycotts and withdrawals in several biennials, the *Biennials and conflict questionnaire* (2016, p. 138) asked 45 artists and curators to provide their views on biennials as sites of various conflicts, including as workplaces, artists' labour struggles and their positioning within broader workers' struggles (Sheikh, 2016). However, many respondents argued that these protest acts focused on defunding and were not about wages or production relations and conditions (Vilensky in Sheikh, 2016).

Considering these tensions and building on the previous chapters, this chapter examines the biennial as a threshold infrastructure, with three key tensions that manifest in the aftermath of the movements: a) the tensions between institution and event b) and c) the tensions that come when collaboration takes both the form of commoning and a mode of production and c)

tensions between public and common space. Building on the key definition of commoning as a threshold practice I draw on from Stavrides (2016) and from writings on art and commons by feminist art theorists Dimitrakaki and Lloyd (2015; 2017) and Kuba Szreder (2017) who connects boycotts to commons, I argue that, art/commoning within biennials accentuates the threshold, troubling both art and commoning and updating the possible meanings that art as commoning and commoning as art may take.

## **5.1 Between Art as ‘Troubled Commons’ and Troubling Art and Commoning**

Connecting to feminist takes on social reproduction, Dimitrakaki and Lloyd (2017) articulate a series of arguments that help us to trace the tensions surrounding production and reproduction in the discussions on art/commoning, through an emphasis on collaboration.<sup>151</sup> Reproduction concerns how artists, curators and producers secure and sustain financial and affective means to work and live through art. In short, the theorists argue that art is a ‘troubled commons’ and that ‘collaboration is key to the illusion that art as commons can be instituted in capitalism (Dimitrakaki and Lloyd, 2017, p. 9).

First, the question is if we can draw lines between collaboration as a mode of production and collaboration as commoning? Commoning intersects with forms of art that require collaboration, participation and aim at social interventions. However, collaboration in common spaces is different from part of production relations and waged labour in the contemporary art system. Moreover, collaboration and sharing are also neoliberal management strategies, which often stimulate artists or curators to compete with each other for scarce resources. This is different from creating a commons, which would require an instituent practice that would ensure that collaboration on the level of production would be expressed also at the level of distribution concerning the social reproduction of participating agents according to their needs (Dimitrakaki and Lloyd, 2017). Second, thinking of capitalism as the economy based on capital relations and art as the social relations that make the art field, Dimitrakaki and Lloyd (2017) acknowledge the need for

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<sup>151</sup> The main points are a synthesis drawn from the publication Dimitrakaki and Lloyd (2015) eds. *Economy: Art, Production and the subject in the 21<sup>st</sup> century* and the paper Dimitrakaki and Lloyd (2017), ‘The Enigma of collaboration: three theses on art, capitalism and subversion’.

commoning as a practice though which we can reproduce ourselves in the art field. In the current blurred lines between production and reproduction, both labour and (unremunerated) participation are required for the production of value in the art economy (Dimitrakaki and Lloyd, 2017). This, especially when thinking that commoning is part of informal economies and what Sholette calls 'dark matter' (Dimitrakaki and Lloyd 2017, p. 60).

The problem is that, if commoning is viewed as a 'gift' (Stavrides, 2016) this 'gift' in the arts is either part of the dark matter or, when it intersects with the formal art economy, it is often kept outside of the formal structures of the market, the final artwork, the spaces and events that present and legitimate it as an artwork (Dimitrakaki, 2016).<sup>152</sup> If art/commoning stays in the realm of the gift economy and as social reproduction, it means it is kept out of the relations of production that make contemporary art. This poses an impasse, as it is a way of saying that art cannot contribute to class struggles, as they manifest in the art field (Dimitrakaki and Lloyd, 2017). Ultimately, art in this case would not be recognised as labour.

With regards the artist-led biennial contestations, Dimitrakaki (Sheikh, 2016) argues that things would be different if audiences would lead protests against biennials. Artist-led biennial contestations remain symbolic, since the 'professionals' that protest are dependent by them and know that, since biennials are not commons, they need someone to fund them. Therefore, they raise questions as to whether they were struggles, by whom and for what reasons (Szreder in Sheikh, 2016).

Szreder (2017, p.1) refers to boycotts and contestations as 'productive withdrawals' and argues that they are mainly initiated by those who identify as art workers, rather than artists as 'agents of artistic circulation' He argues that they are forms of exodus (Virno,2004), similarly to the exodus emerging from artcommoning on the squares and in common spaces. They are not an escape from the institution/instituting, but, a performative attempt to rehearse new institutions of the commons. Rather than investing more time and energy to the pressures for artistic circulation, those who boycott, withdraw their labour from biennials or museums and thus liberate time and social-creative energy to often form other, self-organised initiatives

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<sup>152</sup> For example, video documentary works often hide the material conditions through which they are made and the voluntary work that makes them the remains out of view in credits (Lee, 2012). Dimitrakaki (2002) discusses the video documentary by Francis Alys, *Faith Moving Mountains* (2002).



and new assemblages beyond institutional norms. As such, the artists who withdraw are not idle or disengaged and they do not necessarily destroy production or circulation- as they might even generate new productivities, social relations and artists networks based on values of solidarity and equality.

Although the above argument is valid, however, the biennial contestations so far have shown that artists may reject circulation at specific cases, but this is often a decision they make exactly by already being part of circulation and then they may appear again in another biennial. For example, the collective Chto Delat which boycotted Manifesta 10 and in place organised alternative programmes, participated in biennials following their withdrawal.<sup>153</sup> Besides, as Dimitrakaki argues, not all artists belong to the same class and terms like artworker and artist entrepreneur are problematic, because they can be used by the system to push artists to self-identify with one (artworker implying a left-wing position) or the other (artist entrepreneur implying compliance with neoliberal individualistic values). In essence, both imply fixed positions that suit the system as it is, rather than challenge the status quo (Sheikh, 2016).

For these reasons, perhaps the term ‘stasis’ coming from the squares occupations is more adequate to emphasise boycotts and withdrawals as pauses, exits and disruptions of circulation, since they are not about immobility, but a disruptive act of pausing the flows of capital circulation (Tsavdaroglou, 2018). This is less about imagining audiences protesting against biennials, as suggested by Dimitrakaki (Sheikh, 2016), but about imagining artists aligning with the ‘dark matter’ of biennials, those who work in biennials in supporting roles, protesting the biennial’s labour politics which are often based on exploitation and precarity and take actions towards more equitable relations. This comes with the difficulty of working across the dispersed space of biennialisation – each biennial is a different organisation and to get those working in biennials to find ways to cooperate, self-organise or even unionise, would require a large-scale coordination towards a transnational vision for commoning the biennial.

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<sup>153</sup> For example, they participated in the first Kyiv biennial (2015) and other festivals, like All Our Futures... Festival Kortrijk Congé, Belgium #2015 and Park Fables. Festival Fast Forward, Athens #2018

The biennial, as Chapter 3 showed, is only half an opportunity for most of the creatives it involves. Apparatuses produce and reproduce social relations and entangle subjects in asymmetrical power relations and these are felt daily, through the body and on the work floor. With their cycle of production intensifying every two, three or five years, biennials as workplaces sustain hierarchical divisions between those in temporary and precarious contracts and those working with a relative security in the organisation. In this regard, they often require overworked and underpaid labour based on precarious internship or volunteer contracts – especially for flexible technicians, invigilators or mediators in exhibition spaces.<sup>154</sup> The obvious question is why one should choose to work in such precarious conditions. According to McRobbie (2016, p. 4) young creatives choose precarity because they live on ‘the euphoria of imagined success’ – in the case of biennialisation, a success based on imagined circulations. However, even the distribution of this imaginary success is not equal. While those at the higher ranks will be able to capitalise on their reputational capital, those at the lower ranks will not benefit at equal measure from networking opportunities (Kompatsiaris, 2017).<sup>155</sup>

The process of ‘authorial attribution’ (Szreder, 2021) is crucial for the extractive logic, since it recognises some artists or curators as authors of artworks and projects, while rendering invisible all those cultural producers that contribute to the making of the work (Boltanski, 2014 quoted in Szreder, 2021). Adding to this, I would argue that attribution is also

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<sup>154</sup> Mobility creates visible divisions on the work floor. Drawing on my experience working in biennials, while guest curators or managers and art directors will travel to do studio visits or visit different biennials across the world to stay up to date, assistant curators and producers will most likely ‘stay put’ at the office and provide administrative support to artists’ and curators’ travelling, booking their hotels and coordinating their travel schedule.

<sup>155</sup> Kompatsiaris (2017) shows that many of the volunteers involved in the Athens Biennale hope to raise their opportunities to enter a paid job or to enlarge their networks. While at Liverpool Biennial, I worked with curatorial or production interns who after their short internship were further asked from the biennial to return in other roles, like mediators or assistants. However, in contrast to the programme directors or production managers or those working in development, those working in producing the event of the exhibition are rarely offered a year-round or permanent position as, for budget reasons, their labour is only considered important for the few months leading up to the event and at best, lasting until the de-install. This division can be tangible at specific moments in the production of the biennial. For example, I have witnessed how interns, whose cheap labour is crucial for biennials are excluded from more formal dinners with artists, with the pretext of saving budgets. On the other hand, because informal moments and interactions are plenty during biennial-making, artists, curators and interns or volunteers may seek to interact outside the more formal moments that the biennial organisation plans, breaking in this way the unwritten protocols of who has the right to sit at the same table with the international or star curators and artists.

connected to the decision-making power and the power to delegate that one has within the biennial. While cooperation forms the basis of making artworks, the author is often the one who can delegate the execution of an artwork, in all the material and immaterial ways it involves. As such, the authorial tends to be equated with the conceptual and artistic activity, creating a further division between those who work with ideas and concepts and those who work to materialise them through production.

When we think of art and commoning together, it is not about art as either practice or labour, but rather, of art as both practice and labour in their collective dimension. Any surplus value emerges out of a complex set of relations and interactions, which include working together, including production and participation, collaboration or cooperation. If commoning strives to reconfigure power relations, including resources, and to redistribute them in egalitarian ways, it means thinking of how to distribute any surplus that emerges out of the collective doing that involve different forms of labour in the process of biennial making.

Therefore, to potentialise these relations what is needed is to challenge normative understandings of collaboration in the arts, whether predicated on capitalist systems of antagonism, or from informal systems that through commoning seek survival, reproduction and interdependence, but, often are tangled up in processes that turn art/commoning as a fix to capitalist production, rather than support its potentials for subversion (Dimitrakaki and Lloyd 2017). In this research, these questions and potentials are thought with the tensions between commoning the biennial and the biennialisation of the commons and the role that art/commoning may play in this dynamic.

The way I propose to think of this role may be thought as a process of ‘thresholding’, which points to an embracing of tensions and open passages between art and commoning, between practice and (re)production. The question is neither about ‘pure’ art, nor about ‘pure’ commoning. The question is how to create new combinations and forms of cooperation oriented towards qualitative different relations, that ultimately produce new subjects and relational spaces of political action and art. In this sense, art/commoning may not only be pointing to art as a troubled commons (Dimitrakaki and Lloyd, 2017, p. 9), but also as troubling both the boundaries and normative understandings of what art and what commoning are and could mean. The following sections grapple with these tensions through

examples of post-squares' biennials, which prepare the ground for the limits and potentials that defined the two cases studies in this thesis.

### 5.1.1 Commoning the Event or the Institution? Berlin Biennale 7 (2012) and Documenta 13 (2012)

In the example of BB7, tensions manifested early in the negotiations between the curatorial team of artist Artur Żmijewski, Joanna Warsza and the collective Voina - and the Occupy Berlin activists whom they invited to occupy the central hall of Kunst-Werke (KW).<sup>156</sup> Initially, both activists and KW were sceptical regards the curatorial rationale. KW took this as a risk with regards to its stakeholders (Kompatsiaris, 2015). The activists agreed to participate under condition they would self-organise their assemblies. The curators stated that they would welcome disagreements and that they would not seek to incorporate the activists in 'the logic of the institution' (Loewe, 2015, p. 197). Even though the activists' presence was important for legitimating and giving symbolic value to the exhibition's radical claims, their participation was presented as being outside of the institution. However, this claim failed to acknowledge that the institutional context changes practising activism and how one influences the other. Moreover, the curators preferred to retain a distinction between artists as individuals who receive fees and activists as a collective subject which 'gifts' its time. Paying the activists 'was out of the question' for the curators (Kompatsiaris, 2015, p. 180).

In d13, commoning was present both inside the programme and outside of the venues. Outside the Fridericianum, activists set up the unauthorised (by d13) 'dOccupy' encampment. Activists explicitly stated they did not want to target the institution, but to use d13's international reach to disseminate Occupy. Presenting their political action 'as an artwork' (Loewe, 2015, p. 192), a month later they installed 28 white tents that carried on messages in the spirit of Occupy (greed, profit, pride...). Eventually, curator Carolyn Christov-Bakargiev welcomed this encampment as a social sculpture, a curatorial gesture that legitimated d13 as a hospitable exhibition to the movements (Loewe, 2015). Within d13's programme, the artist

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<sup>156</sup> Kompatsiaris (2017) notes that the curators actively went out on the squares in order to 'recruit' activists to participate in the biennial. At the time, the Occupy Berlin group, connected to the global Occupy movement, had been evicted out of the park where they were active. Only some members initially agreed, others being sceptical due to the biennale's state funding, but ultimately returned to BB7 as it became the main space of their actions. The group launched an open call prior to the opening, calling activists from other movements to participate. The activists took decisions in a general assembly and various working groups were shaped, with different tasks.

initiative And And And, initiated by artists Gabry and Anastas, organised ‘Commoning in Kassel’ a series of gatherings and discursive events that continued their explorations during Occupy.<sup>157</sup> The artists invited individuals and collectives to examine commons as a practice of reproduction for an anti-capitalist life, through gardening, setting up a tea garden and exhibitions that presented flow charts, drawings and objects with political messages. The questions echoed both the necessity for negation and affirmation: how to ‘produce cultures of the common(s)?’ ‘What kinds of refusals and revocations are called for?’<sup>158</sup>

Curatorial efforts to change the hierarchical structures of the biennial may be viewed with what Tyzlik-Carver (2011, p. 1) describes as ‘curating as a practice on the edge’, as they find themselves on the threshold between facilitating and appropriating commons. It is telling that critique addressed to BB7 and d13 pointed out how *both* curators and activists acted with opportunism and tried to capitalise, appropriate and co-opt the movements (Fowkes, 2012; Frascina, 2013). The participation of activists was received as re-enacting or replicating the assemblies and encampments on the squares (Frascina, 2013) or ‘exoticising resistance’ (Kompatsiaris, 2015, p. 171). Fowkes (2012) argued that Occupy in d13 added mostly an ‘aesthetic effect’ and others saw BB7 as a ‘performance of politics’ (Kompatsiaris, 2015, p. 173). While the curators of BB7 renounced aesthetics, reviewers pointed out that the political became secondary (Kompatsiaris, 2017) and at best exposed the ‘radical camouflage’ of biennials (Stallabrass, in Frascina, 2013, p. 24).

In offering a stage for subjects and forms of commoning from the squares, the examples of BB7 and d13 opened up the biennial towards commoning. However, they did not really pose a problem of governance for their host institutions, neither did they challenge the sharing of power. Ultimately, these two examples were more willing to retain distinctions between art and activism, institution and event, rather than negotiate and enter a process of re-ordering of

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<sup>157</sup> And And And is self-defined as an artist initiative that was founded in 2010. During the 100 days of d13 contributions to And and and were made by 16 Beaver Group, Rheim Alkadhi François Bucher, Ayreen Anastas, Pedro Lasch / TTGG, Bik Van Der Pol, Jan van de Pavert, Vladimir Volnovik, Rene Gabri, Lu Cafausu, Oumayma Khaled, Ashley Hunt, Taisha Paggett, Federico Zuckerfeld and Loreto Garin Guzmán, Commoning in Kassel, Jakob Jakobsen and Lamia Joreige. And and and incorporates actions, meetings and art activist networks was self- presented as a ‘coming community’ Fowkes (2012, unpaginated) describe them as a ‘made-to-order artist’s collective’... which ...rehearses the clichés of the protest movement, holding *assambleas* and presenting their programme as a handwritten calendar of notes, but never going beyond vague utopianism let alone addressing the politics of the art event’.

<sup>158</sup> See: And And And, no date (<https://andandand.org/d13.htm>).

positions and identities in Ranciere (2006). In BB7, the assembly was not a unified political body and fervent disagreements rose with regards to decision-making, but, neither the audience nor the institution was contaminated by these processes, to a degree that would create a redistribution of relations, even if temporarily so (Kompatsiaris, 2017). If aesthetic production implies publics, commoning requires active participants (Elias, 2016). Commoning was not an organisational method dispersed across the whole working of the biennial. Nonetheless, there were certain negotiations towards that direction. During BB7, the activists started having assemblies with staff from the institution, activating new possibilities on the threshold between what ‘commoning the event’ and what ‘commoning the institution’ may mean.<sup>159</sup>

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<sup>159</sup> It is interesting to note here that in his introductory essay to d14, Adam Szymczyk (2017, p. 30) refers positively to BB7 and its title *Forget Fear* as a ‘militant, empowering call ‘against neoliberalism. What is also interesting is that the director choses to refer to BB7 as a reference for d14, while he stays silent about the role of AB4 AGORA, which he had acknowledged as the main reference and reason for conceiving d14 as a documenta coming to Athens.

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Fig. 5. Occupy Berlin Biennale. BB7, April – July 2012, Berlin, Germany. Photo: ©Marcin Kaliński. Available at: <https://artmuseum.pl/en/archiwum/archiwum-7-berlin-biennale/2066/109730>. [Accessed: 7<sup>th</sup> July 2022].

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Fig. 6. dOccupy Documenta. d13, June – September, 2012. Kassel. Photo: Sebastian Loewe. Available at: <http://field-journal.com/issue-1/loewe>. [Accessed: 10<sup>th</sup> September 2020].



Fig. 7. AND AND AND, Tea garden at the Ottoneum venue, d13, 2012, Kassel. Photo: © David Gómez Fontanills, used under a Creative Commons AttributionNoncommercial license: <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/3.0/> (CC BY-SA 3.0). Available at: [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:AND\\_AND\\_AND\\_Tea\\_garden\\_Ottoneum\\_3.JPG](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:AND_AND_AND_Tea_garden_Ottoneum_3.JPG). [Accessed: 7th July 2022].



### 5.1.2 Making the City Public or Common? Gezi Park Occupation and 13th Istanbul Biennial (2013)

While the previous examples gestured towards commoning the biennial, the collision between the Gezi park occupation (May 2013) and IB13 (2013) exemplifies how (commoning) the city is claimed both by grassroots practices and the biennial. Against the government's plan to pedestrianise and demolish the Gezi park and Taksim Square, people occupied and activated it as a common space, based on horizontal self-management.

The core enquiry of IB13 - 'the notion of the public domain as a political forum' - was set before the Gezi park protests (Warsza, 2017, p. 93). The biennial's public programme was meant to rethink publicness and public space.<sup>160</sup> However, Gezi sparked actions by artists activists (both participants in IB and not) against the biennial's politics. Artists denounced IB for complicity with the same authorities that were attacking citizens and financed by corporate sponsors such as Garanti Bank and Koç Holding, who lead urban regeneration in Istanbul. The curators cancelled their programme and interventions in public space, presenting some of them indoors and granting for the first time in IB's history, free entrance to all venues.<sup>161</sup> According to curator Fulya Erdemci, this pointed to the persistence of the biennale on publicness, even under the circumstances.

Is this persistence on the public explained by the context? The concept of the public in Turkish (*kamusal*) from denoting 'a space for communion', came to be equated to state and its power in the 20<sup>th</sup> century according to Kortun (2016, p. 135).<sup>162</sup> IB became a significant art infrastructure for addressing urban transformations in Istanbul, enabling art in public space and often facing censorship (Kortun, 2016). However, I would not go as far as von

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<sup>160</sup> The first event was called 'Making the City Public', from which I take the title of this section. The public programme was titled 'Public Alchemy' and would be curated by Andrea Phillips. Christoph Schäfer, activist from Park Fiction in Hamburg held a lecture on the right to the city as part of the programme. The Park Fiction collective had participated in *documenta 11* (2002).

<sup>161</sup> Istanbul biennial has been primarily funded by Koç Holding, a property developer with ties to the military industry.

<sup>162</sup> As we learn from Warsza (2016), Istanbul's population has grown from three to fifteen million in recent years, following the known path from de-industrialisation to the rise of service economy and culture industries. The branding of the city points to Istanbul as a cultural capital (2010) and Erdogan's ambitious Vision 2023 plans, which are meant to coincide with the centenary of the Republic of Turkey in 2023, spanning sectors from the economy, energy, tourism and health care and emphasising growth and development based on economic indicators. Moreover, there are 48 big-scale urban transformation government-led housing projects that build on public land in ways that point to what Harvey (2004) calls accumulation by dispossession.

Borries et al. (2014) suggest, that IB's longer engagement with participation and urban issues prepared the ground for Gezi park, since the latter rests on broader social and neoliberal urbanisation processes. Similarly, I disagree with Green and Gardner (2016) who take a pro-biennial stance with regards to the collision. The authors note that the real events 'highjacked' the IB13 plans to 'activate public space' (Green and Gardner, 2016, p. 261) and that the biennial withdrew because of a 'genuine repression that made art in public spaces dangerous for artists and audience alike' (2016, p. 260).<sup>163</sup> This pro-biennial-bias is problematic, as what lurks is a prioritisation of the biennial as an agent for activating public space and inciting social change, but undermines urban commons struggles against enclosures and does not ask what these collisions may mean in the contested public space of Istanbul.<sup>164</sup>

In contrast, Whybrow (2020) is more attentive to the complexity of the relations between biennials, public and common space, even if the author does not use the commons in his analysis. Whybrow (2020) examines IB13 by focusing on questions of dwelling, inhabiting and co-habiting as key for urban life, and looking at the specificities of Istanbul.<sup>165</sup> Here, there is attention to how art intersects with urban struggles- for example by referring to how the collective Conceptual Art Laboratory interrupted a performance taking place within the biennial, carrying banners with the names of gentrified neighbourhoods and in another,

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<sup>163</sup> This is only one out of two biennials that strictly fall into the post-Occupy frame in their book. The other example is the 10th Gwangju Biennale (2014). With regards to IB13, the authors briefly mention Halil Altindere's video *Wonderland* (2013) which engaged with the displacement of Roma families from the Sulukule historical neighbourhood. They also briefly mention Elmgreen and Dragset's *Istanbul Diaries* (2013) which asked seven locals to write daily about their experience while in the exhibition. They discuss more thoroughly Hito Steyerl's video documentation of a lecture-performance *Is the Museum a Battlefield?* (2013) which traces the links between the killing of the artist's friends Andrea Wolff, during an ambush led by the Turkish army against Kurdish rebels and the Koc family. However, in using the example to support the idea that biennials in this way offer critical encounters from within, the authors understate the work's main question, which enquires the role of artists and museums for social political struggles and their embeddedness in the forces that oppress them. Another aspect which is not discussed is that Steyerl's lecture is not for sale. Institutions can add it to non-profit collections against a donation for Kurdish municipality refugee relief efforts. See: <https://walkerart.org/magazine/hito-steyerl-is-the-museum-a-battlefield> and <https://kow-berlin.com/artists/hito-steyerl/is-the-museum-a-battlefield-2013>.

<sup>164</sup> 2.5 million people took to the streets in Turkey. During the Gezi park occupation 8000 people were injured and eleven people were killed. (Warsza, 2016).

<sup>165</sup> In summarising some of the questions that underpin his approach, the author grapples with questions that have to do with the day-to-day reality of dwellers in Istanbul as a global metropolis, how labour migration shaped the layers of the city and how gentrification and demolitions erase the memories of particular neighbourhoods, all under the state of emergency that the Erdogan government with its conservative pro-Islamic agenda prioritises, leading to displacements, censorship and, during the Gezi occupation, also to deaths.

singing Cavafy's poem 'Waiting for the Barbarians', which echoed the title of IB13 (Mom, Am I a barbarian?). Moreover, the author sees the biennial's withdrawal as a gesture which echoed the broader events - for example the fact that the biennial did not use the AKM building, which became a focal site of contestation during the protests, was because it did not resonate anymore as art venue and the works that were meant to be presented there had to be cancelled.<sup>166</sup>

In the context of Istanbul, as Athanasiou (2016) would put it – public space is worth defending as a public infrastructure, but what Gezi shows is that this defence becomes possible by transforming, even if for a while, public space into common space (Stavrides, 2016). While on previous occasions too IB engaged with the rethinking of public space and while its dependence on the forces that enclose public space was not a secret, the Gezi park occupation catalysed a bigger disruption of the biennial. In this regard, some argued that 'the real art' and the 'biggest biennial' was happening in Gezi park (Geers, 2013 in Kortun, 2016). 'In Gezi art was realised in a way that we artists dream of. That is, art that would dissolve itself into a better world in which everyone performs as an artist, a doer, a thinker, a philosopher. That's what actually happened at Gezi!' as IB13 artist Christoph Schäfer put it (Whybrow, 2020, p. 184).

## 5.2 'Cracking' the Biennial

This chapter discussed art/commoning in relation to positions within/against biennials, viewing them as acts that reject some of the biennial's ambivalent politics and ethics and directing energy into collective efforts. This pressure to biennials to rethink their politics,

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<sup>166</sup> The installation *Intensive Care* by Dutch artists Rietveld Landscape was a light installation that would beam from inside the AKM (Atatürk Cultural Center) building, which the government kept empty for years for its regeneration plans. The AKM had a symbolic significance. The building was inaugurated in 1969 and is inscribed in Turkey's rise of secular politics introduced by political leader Kemal Atatürk, president of Turkey. In 2013, the building was earmarked for demolition by the government, which planned to raise a neo-Baroque building on the site. The intention is aligned to Erdogan's neoconservative politics, which erase the memory of certain urban neighbourhoods in Istanbul, working towards a global, pro-capitalist ideal and homogenising the diversity of the city. Protesters occupied the AKM building and turned it into a cultural centre with banners and posters. Curator Hou Hanru had captured these problematics when he used AKM as a venue for IB 10 (2007), shortly after they closed it down, with the title 'Burn it or not?'. Exhibiting artworks that engaged with urban utopias and the history of the building. (Graf, 2013 in Whybrow, 2020, p. 183).

becomes significant for negotiating biennials as sites of exclusion, inequalities and powers tied to neoliberal policies.

Thinking of art/commoning as a practice on the threshold between practice and labour, between, production and (re)production, the chapter pointed out that art/commoning is not only raising questions about art as a troubled commons (Dimitrakaki and Lloyd, 2017, p. 9), but is also practice that may trouble both the boundaries and normative understandings of what art, biennials and commoning are and could be. What is at stake is to create new combinations and configurations of cooperation, that ultimately produce new subjects and relational spaces of art and commoning.

The chapter suggests that, even if they are not necessarily articulated with intensions to common the biennial, even if they do not permeate the biennial's modes of organisation and governance, the engagements with commoning in the first biennials after the squares' occupations open up new imaginaries for biennial-making. Echoing Holloway (2010) they 'crack' the biennial. Holloway (2010) argues that, in creating cracks and fissures, we can disrupt the economic order in the capitalist system and effect change. Cracks are not pure and do not automatically mean that biennials turn to horizontal spaces; horizontality is a constant struggle within and against verticality (Holloway, 2010, 44, 64).

The first post-squares biennials in this chapter are important to consider because their engagements with commoning, the criticism they received and their perceived 'failures' or 'incomplete efforts' (Kompatsiaris, 2015, p. 182) influenced the starting points of my case studies. Learning from such examples, the curators of my case studies tried to avoid, though not without criticism, BB7's 'staging' of activists and claimed commoning as part of their intention to transform the institutions – each stumbling upon different challenges due to their institutional profiles and positioning in Athens.

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Fig. 8. Omonia Square, 2015. View of the southwest side of the square. Bageion appears on the left side of the square, opposite the Megas Alexandros Hotel. Photo: Themis Andriopoulos. Available at: <https://www.athenssocialatlas.gr/en/article/omonia-square/>. [Accessed: 10<sup>th</sup> September 2019].

## Chapter 6. Commoning the Biennial as Commoning the city? The Case of Athens Biennale 5-6, 'OMONOIA' (2015-2017)

This chapter examines the tensions that the Athens Biennale 5-6, OMONOIA (2015-2017) inhabits, in its effort to common the biennial and to common the city. AB5-6 was conceived as a two-year process that invited members of common spaces and art collectives to co-shape the programme, by 'cohabiting' Bageion, a derelict former hotel and use the area around Omonoia square as a field of research. The ambition was long term: on the one hand to turn the biennale into a cooperative and on the other, to use Bageion as a permanent space for its future activities. However, AB5-6 was interrupted half way. The stepping down of two key members of the artistic team, co-founder Xenia Kalpaktsoglou and programme director, Massimiliano Mollona, caused a rupture in AB5-6's programme and AB as institution/organisation.

To situate AB5-6 premises in the longer history of AB, the chapter begins by approaching the AB as a threshold infrastructure between bottom-up collective practices and top-down regeneration policies, between formal and informal economies. The outline of past editions shows how AB's ambitions for subversive socio-political agenda's and increasing engagement with collective spatial practices have been co-implicated with top-down urban planning and gentrification processes.

The chapter proceeds to examine AB5-6's spatial, curatorial and institutional premises. It shows how AB5-6 is situated between top-down and grassroots city-making processes that appropriate the RttC to promote a neoliberal idea of creativity and entrepreneurialism. Examining the curatorial and institutional premises, the chapter argues that AB5-6's approach to commoning can be summarised with three key processes: a) instituting, b) mediating and c) translating. Accordingly, the challenges that AB5-6 faced were: about mediating between diverse groups and translating commoning from a bottom-up practice to a biennial practice. Drawing on interviews conducted with AB5-6 curators, artists activists and members of art collectives that participated in the Bageion cohabitation, I point out how positions within/against the biennale emerged, that show a scepticism towards AB's intentions to act as a mediator of commoning, but also towards commoning too. The last section examines performative interventions in the area of Omonoia square, arguing that they

invite to think of commoning as a distributive practice that can challenge normative experiences of the city.

Because of the centrality of commoning in the Athens biennale 5-6, OMONOIA, critics have referred to it as a ‘biennial version of the commons’ (Zefkili, 2021). Despite this recognition, literature on AB5-6’s engagement with commoning and the city has been limited to short references or specific projects (Dimitrakaki and Lloyd, 2017; Fotiadi, 2017; Olney, 2020). During the last stage of writing up this chapter, I consulted the publication *Art/Commons* (2021) by Mollona, who dedicates a chapter to his experience as programme director of AB5-6. Offering an extensive account of the intentions, methodologies and challenges that underpinned the endeavour, the author refers to AB5-6 as an ‘institutional threshold’, but does so primarily from a political economy perspective and does not substantiate the spatial aspect (Mollona, 2021, p. 103). Mollona points to the idea of AB5-6 as an ‘institutional threshold’ (2021, p. 103) that by being situated between ‘gift economy and immaterial labour and between the commons and capital’ AB could have made the transition into a commons (Mollona, 2021, p. 114). This chapter offers a broader analysis, by applying the conceptualisations of ‘threshold spatiality’ and ‘threshold institutions’ by Stavrides (2016) to approach AB5-6 in a more comprehensive way, across its curatorial, institutional and spatial articulations.

## 6.1 The Athens Biennale: a Threshold Infrastructure

This chapter argues that AB5-6 builds on AB as a threshold infrastructure, situated between top-down and grassroots city-making processes. AB5-6 builds upon these key aspects in AB's trajectory: a) AB as an infrastructure for the Athenian art scene and its artistic networks b) AB inhabiting an in-between position between top-down urban planning and grassroots collective practices, c) between formal and informal or voluntary economies that it has operated with c) its recent reappraisal as a collective-based biennial model amidst crisis and austerity. This section traces these tensions as they manifest in AB's previous editions, as they inform AB5-6.

AB's founding is viewed as a response to the lack of contemporary art infrastructures and the inefficiency of the state to initiate a biennial (Kompatsiaris, 2017; Oxenius, 2017). From its inception, AB has presented itself as an exhibition that ambitioned to act in subversive ways both in relation to biennials and the city. However, rather than seeing AB as a biennial that toppled policy (Fokidis, 2012), it is more accurate to say that AB emerged in a context of co-implications between cultural strategic aims of the Greek state and wider EU policies, geopolitics and infrastructures. This is also evident in how the AB founders showed from the beginning an awareness of the antagonisms underpinning biennialisation, in which who is first in getting a biennial is important (Poka-Yio, 2014).<sup>167</sup> The Ministry of Culture was discussing the founding of a biennial in Greece. Although initially promising to support AB, it chose to support the founding of the Thessaloniki Biennale (TB) instead (Fokidis, 2012; Poka-Yio, BAK; Kompatsiaris, 2017). Critical for this decision was that the National Museum of Contemporary Art (EMST) in Athens, which has a long history of nomadic life, was still going major reconstruction works.<sup>168</sup> In contrast, Thessaloniki already had the Greek State Museum of Contemporary Art, founded at the occasion of Thessaloniki Cultural Capital

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<sup>167</sup> The founding narrative of AB has fed the persisting account of AB as a case 'hijacking' the biennial model as hegemonic and 'hijacking' or destroying the 'old regime' of policy (Fokidis, 2012). However, the way AB founders moved strategically at the beginning shows how aware they were of wider processes. For example, the founders started progressively announcing the biennale in newsletters, emails and international events, before having secured any funding (Fokidis, 2012; Kompatsiaris, 2017). AB1 was inaugurated with a conference 'Prayer for (Passive?) Resistance' (February 2007) inviting among its speakers Catherine David, co-curator of TB1, which would only open to the public three months later (May 2007).

<sup>168</sup> EMST was established in 2000 at the former FIX brewery. EMST's exhibitions were itinerant, using as venues the music hall Megaron Moussikis and the Athens Odeion, venues which d14 would use in 2017, next to funding the first full opening of FIX, seventeen years after its emergence.



in 1997.<sup>169</sup> These decisions affected TB's emergence as a top down biennial and AB's emergence as a creative entrepreneurial initiative intervening in the infrastructural gaps of contemporary art Athens and profiling itself as a subversive biennial.

AB1 *Destroy Athens*<sup>170</sup> aimed to offer a counter-narrative to biennials as instruments enhancing stereotypical representations of the city as a concrete-built metropolis and the cradle of democracy, particularly in the post-2004 Olympic games climate of national paroxysm and urban development (Oxenius, 2016; Kompatsiaris, 2017, p. 134, 135, 137).<sup>171</sup> However, AB1 was criticised by artists and collectives for the small percentage of Greek artists and, funding received by companies who were linked to the Olympics and partnering up with the itinerant art platform ReMap, which was associated with artwashing gentrification processes in the Gazi and Metaxourgeio neighbourhoods (Alexandri, 2015).<sup>172</sup> AB1's main venue,

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<sup>169</sup> Another reason was, that Thessaloniki, with its Ottoman and byzantine monuments, was less 'burdened' than Athens by its antiquity and fitted the EU regional development funds promoting regionalism, as well as Greece's politics in the Balkans in the 2000s (Karavida, 2014). TB1 was funded with 765, 322 Euros, coming largely (80%) by the EU regional development funds and (20%) by the Hellenic Ministry of Culture. At the time, the complicated bilateral relations between Greece and neighbouring FYROM (Northern Macedonia) were in a positive curve, and art exhibitions in Thessaloniki were promoting it as a cultural metropolis of the Balkans (Karavida, 2014, p. 150). In this context, TB came to be added in a frame of Thessaloniki's envisioned economic and geopolitical role in the Balkans (Karavida, 2014, p. 2, 23).

<sup>170</sup> The phrase comes from poet and artist Yorgos Makris 1944 proclamation, who suggested the destruction of the Parthenon. AB1 was announced with a mini-edition-cum-curatorial-statement with the title 'Suggestions for the Destruction of Athens' and a conference enquiring biennial as sites for reflecting contemporary political praxis. Makris' ideas were also an inspiration for a text in d14's first issue of South as a State of Mind by Marina Fokidis, a decade later.

<sup>171</sup> Greece winning the Euro cup in 2004 and the Eurovision song contest in 2005 fed a general sense of national pride in mainstream media and state-led narratives. The biennale's motto was in sharp contrast to the Greek National Tourism Organisation's campaigns which idealised Greece with the slogan 'Live Your Myth in Greece' (Kompatsiaris, 2017). However, AB1 was criticised for funding by Deutsche Bank or companies linked to the Athens 2004 Olympic games (Oxenius, 2016). AB1's major sponsor was Deutsche Bank and the exhibition was realised under the Aegis of the Hellenic Ministry of Culture and the Municipality of Athens. Moreover, sponsors were Attiko METRO S.A and the Athens International Airport Eleftherios Venizelos. 1995 – 2005 was a period of infrastructural projects realised in direct or indirect relation to the Olympic games, such as the new airport, the metro, the major highway 'Attiki Odos', alongside numerous sport venues, shopping malls and bridges (Dalakoglou, 2014; Kompatsiaris, 2017).

<sup>172</sup> ReMap, a biennial festival, was characterised by similar to biennials contradictions, of simultaneously offering a platform for artists and independent curators, while at the same time being part of urban redevelopment. The exhibitions took place biennially between 2007 and 2013. For a history of the editions of Remap See: <http://www.remapk.com/main/public/uploads/remap5-eng.pdf>.

Technopolis, a former Gas Plant complex of buildings owned by the Athens municipality was also part of a rapid gentrification of the area.<sup>173</sup>

From AB2 and on, relations with art collectives and activism increase, but AB remains at a relative distance from broader urban conflicts. Nonetheless, AB2 introduced the tensions between public and common space that would intensify with and after Syntagma. AB2 was realised just after December 2008, but did not capture the spirit that emerged after December 2008, nor did it sense the ‘Greek crisis’ that would follow (Poka-Yio, 2018). Nonetheless, its public programme (HEAVEN-live) introduced commons for the first time – via a discussion between Stavrides and De Angelis invited by the collective AnArchitektur and included many collectives that at the time were negotiating the meaning of public space, such as Urban Void (1998-2006), Filopappou Group (formed in 2001) and Nomadic Architecture Network (formed in 2005).<sup>174</sup>

AB3 MONODROME (2011) continued the discussions on the commons in relation to the means of production in art, knowledge production, art as social intervention, and alternative management systems during the Public School, which was run by the Athens-based group KERNEL (Kompatsiaris, 2017).<sup>175</sup> AB3 opened after the May/June Syntagma occupation, on 22 October 2011, when more than half a million people were demonstrating against austerity, and closed its door after the government had collapsed. AB3 intended to turn the biennale into a large gathering of artists and citizens (Kompatsiaris, 2017). However AB3 remained detached from the Syntagma occupation and the nearby occupied Embros theatre

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<sup>173</sup> Gentrification in the area was primarily led by the commercial and entertainment industry, and less for residential uses, even though loft-style housing that appeared led to displacing the Roma population of the area (Tzirtzilaki, 2008).

<sup>174</sup> HEAVEN-live was a programme of visual and performative interventions in public spaces curated by choreographer Dimitris Papaioannou and visual artist Zafos Xagoraris. Both have practices that defy strict disciplinary boundaries. Papaioannou had curated the opening ceremony of the 2004 Olympic games, and was known for his work in dance and as comic book illustrator – among them he designed a countercultural magazine and contributed to the first openly gay publications in Greece. Xagoraris was curator of the Greek Pavilion of the 9th Venice Biennale of architecture (2004). he participated at the 27th Sao Paulo Bienal (2006), 1st Thessaloniki Biennale (2007) and later in d14 (2017) and the Venice Biennale (2019). Among the participants we find many collectives: An Architektur, Barking Dogs United, Broadcast Group, Centre for Research Architecture – Goldsmiths College (Celine Condorelli, Angela Melitopoulos, Florian Schneider, Eyal Weizman), Filopappou Group, Kollektivnye Deystviya (Collective Actions), NSK, Palaio Faliro artists group, Superflex, Water Girls Water Boys [Urban Void, Nomadic Architecture Network.

<sup>175</sup> The initiative of Public School was founded in Los Angeles in 2007.

(Kompatsiaris (2017, p. 132, 140).<sup>176</sup> Although some works were connected to the Syntagma occupation, the curatorial framing did not take clear positions towards the movements (Kompatsiaris, 2017).<sup>177</sup> Exceptional in this context was a video installation by KAVECs, the artist duo of Kostis Stafylakis and Vana Kostayola, which took a critical stance to Syntagma.<sup>178</sup>

AB4 presents a critical point in AB's exhibition history, since it deepened the enquiries on commons and collectivity, providing for Massimiliano Mollona potentials and limitations to redress during AB5-6, as well as an influential example for Szymczyk's d14 proposal. Proposing cooperation as an alternative to the state of bankruptcy, AB4 took place in the empty former Athens Stock Exchange, which was provided for free by the National Bank of Greece. AB4 was realised with more than 42 co-curators who worked either voluntarily or with small budgets (Poka-Yio, 2018).<sup>179</sup> Through two open calls, AB4 received 382 proposals (for installations, performances, discussions, screenings, workshops) which would run as a durational performance at the main hall of the venue for over two months

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<sup>176</sup> The refusal of the state TV channel (ERT) - AB3's main communication sponsor - to air AB3's TV spot, stirred critique for state censorship, contributing to AB's image as resistant. The spot (by Giorgos Zois) depicted a balloon with red paint 'exploding' on a policeman and a young man throwing a Molotov in the air next to an occupied neoclassical building. The video included slow motion images, like a woman throwing up on the street, food being distributed to those in need in the streets. The spot can be viewed in the following link: <https://www.furtherfield.org/monodrome-arts-debt-in-times-of-crisis-2/>.

<sup>177</sup> In this context, Spyros Staveris' video-photo documentation of the occupiers was presented opposite an 1823 painting by folk artist Theofilos on the Greek war of independence, creating an association, but without contextualising it curatorially.

<sup>178</sup> The video-installation is titled 'Threnodies: Reflections on the merchant, the geographer and the snake in Antoine de Saint Exupery's "Little Prince"'. Part of the video and a short interview with Stafylakis can be viewed on: [https://kavecs.com/2014/04/30/threnodies\\_sample/](https://kavecs.com/2014/04/30/threnodies_sample/). The video was partly filmed on Syntagma square after the occupation, with a figure re-enacting Joseph Beuys' known 1974 performance I like America and America likes me (1974) where the artist spent eight hours for three days in a gallery sharing space with a coyote. The figure in KAVECs' video is dressed in a similar felt cape and carries a walking stick, walking in the empty square, where at some point, a snake appears. The other figures are the merchant, who sings lyrics drawn on from what the artists saw as nationalistic and neo-patriotic statements made by known Greek composer Mikis Theodorakis; and the figure of the geographer (an intellectual struggling with the writings of Walter Benjamin on "Violence"). The work was thus an early manifestation of a recognisable thread of critique towards the movements in the frame of the biennale, which would continue in AB5-6 and used directly or indirectly as critique towards d14's attraction to radical indigenous practices.

<sup>179</sup> The AB directors and some members of the AB team also contributed to the curating group. The curatorial team was divided in three teams: rock (theory and curating), paper (communication and curating), scissors (production and curation) (Fotiadi, 2014). Work by 61 artists from 28 countries was shown.

(September 29th – December 1 2013).<sup>180</sup> An exhibition was part of AB4 (mainly the two upper floors), but it was this continuous interdisciplinary programme that set the tone, making Poka-Yio proclaim ‘This is not a Biennial! It is not an exhibition’ (Drake, 2013).<sup>181</sup>

With regards to commons, AB4’s enquiries were not just part of a specific programme strand, as in AB2 and AB3, but concerned the whole programme and covered a broad-spectrum on politics, economy, production, participation and collaboration, drawing on an anticapitalist vocabulary. Without exhausting them, main threads were: a) commoning in relation to economy, b) commoning as a practice related to the squares movement and c) commoning as a practice at the intersection of art and activism.<sup>182</sup> Opinions were split as to how connected AB4 was to the socio-political developments of the time and the ‘anonymous’ curatorial collective was seen as a dubious choice amidst the general biennial crisis, which called for accountability (Sherlock, 2013).<sup>183</sup> However, others were positive about their participation, referring to AB4 as ‘a self-organised’ biennale that was receptive to the protests (Charaktinou and Efthymiou, 2013). In the subsequent years, AB4 came to be appreciated as one of the most important exhibitions in the last ten – twenty years in Athens (Konstantinidis, 2019; Zefkili, 2021).

### 6.1.1 The Making of the Resistant Biennale

Another reason that AB4 is important to consider is that it contributed to the appraisal of AB as a resistant model and the attention from different European cultural institutions to Athens

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<sup>180</sup> Open Call was an open invitation on the website of the biennale. Circle invited to realise every Sunday an action, in the frame of a theme, such as city, collaboration or ecology (Fotiadi, 2014). Based in Manchester at the time, myself, together with a colleague, we submitted a proposal, but eventually participated in the biennale as part of the audience.

<sup>181</sup> As Kompatsiaris notes (2017, p. 148) Poka-Yio had make the same proclamation during AB3.

<sup>182</sup> For example, in ‘Creative alternatives to the state of bankruptcy’ critical art theorist Gene Ray with social historian Iain Boal drew on the MNC and discussed commons as an essential category for thinking about space, capitalism and new enclosures. Oliver Ressler’s film ‘Take the square’ included interviews with participants from the squares’ assemblies in Madrid, Syntagma and Occupy. The two-day workshop by Jenny Marketou ‘Uncommon Commons Re (Projected)’ included gatherings of self-organised initiatives in Athens and online conversations with activists - scholars from the US, among whom sociologist Yates McKey and visual culture theorist Nicholas Mirzoeff. The aforementioned artists would be re-invited to AB5-6, creating continuities between the two editions.

<sup>183</sup> Tania Bruguera, who participated in AB4 expressed the opinion that AB4 did not exactly connect to the wider socio-political context in Athens and Greece at the time. During my research, curators with whom I had informal conversations expressed critique about the lack of infrastructure, minimal support and overall chaotic organization; artists-activists from Embros whom I interviewed, saw AB4 appropriating the grassroots assemblies that were widespread after the Syntagma occupation.

as a city of collective art practices amidst the crisis (Fotiadi, 2017). This became obvious when AB received the 7<sup>th</sup> ECF Princess Margriet Award of 25.000 euro by the European Cultural Foundation (2014). AB was praised as a ‘guerrilla organisation’, an alternative economic model to neoliberalism, offering a space for cultural debate, solidarity, grassroots organising and building ‘common ground’ (Zefkili - Watson, 2014; ECF, 2015).<sup>184</sup>

The award was an endorsement of AB by ECF (founded in 1954), an institution which, similarly to documenta, emerged in post-War Europe with the aim to restore and rebuild the European project of democracy.<sup>185</sup> The award gains a particular gravity when considering that it came at a time when the ‘biennial legitimacy crisis’ (Kompatsiaris, 2017) was at its peak. Moreover, it was announced in 2014, a month after d14 announced that it would move to Athens. In his ‘laudatio speech’ at the ECF award ceremony (March 2015), d14’s artistic director, mentioning that AB4 influenced his decision to bring documenta to Athens, praised AB’s founders for their ‘resilience’ and called to act in solidarity with the biennale, a key partner for d14. A certain idealisation lurked in his speech with regards to AB’ spatial politics, forgetting that AB has not operated outside of the urban regeneration narratives in the city, but has been consistently inhabiting them:

Athens Biennale is not an urban regeneration project or a means to raise the city’s attractiveness for prospective investors... It is rather a project devised as an analytical tool, reflecting its immediate socio-political environment, the city, constantly checking on its own status as a critical device – and changing strategies according to the needs of the moment, instead of defining its thematic scope according to the wilful decision of one or another curator (Szymczyk, 2015).

Nonetheless, the ECF award situated AB in discussions between public and common space, and introduced questions that shaped the curatorial rationales of both case studies. During the award, the panel discussion ‘Finding common ground’ was moderated by Mollona, who shortly after became involved in AB5-6. The panel included questions such as how to challenge the notion of the public, place culture in relation to radical politics and rethink institutionalisation.<sup>186</sup> Closing the session, BAK director and ECF board member Maria

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<sup>184</sup> See: <https://culturalfoundation.eu/stories/2015-princess-margriet-award>.

<sup>185</sup> The European Cultural Foundation is an Amsterdam based foundation whose mission is to promote a democratic and inclusive Europe, by connecting the grassroots and the local to European policy, promoting culture as a resource and force for positive social change, according to its mission statement.

<sup>186</sup> See: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uRVofCLyr3w>.

Hlavajova (2015), pointed to the urgency of learning from the work of organisations like AB.<sup>187</sup>

In fact, the role of commons in defending the public institution and its emancipatory potentials under neoliberalism had marked the first encounter between Mollona and Poka-Yio. The two met during a BAK event where scholars and cultural producers reflected on ‘The commons as the survival of the public’ (May 2014).<sup>188</sup> Mollona and Poka-Yio shared the perspective that the precarious conditions of art institutions in Europe’s South are not exactly comparable to the stable state-funding in the North of Europe (Mollona, 2018). In addition, shared interests in postcolonialism and a kin approach to South were the starting point for a conversation which continued with the ECF award to AB4 and evolved into a friendship that slowly led to the invitation to direct AB5-6 (Mollona, 2018).

The starting points therefore of AB5-6 are grounded in a complex field of interactions that mobilise the commons as part of rethinking or strengthening the public art institution, as it is undermined through ongoing neoliberal cuts and demands for more antagonism and impact. Platforms like ECF hybridise the commons, bringing bottom-up commoning closer to notions of civil society, philanthropy and policy-oriented and impact-seeking projects.<sup>189</sup> What may be the impact of such awards for commoning struggles through art and the city?<sup>190</sup> According to Harvey (2014) such recognitions strengthen the potentials to contest the commodification

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<sup>187</sup> As jury member and director of Tate Modern Chris Dercon, put it: ‘From Europe’s most fragile borders, facing unforeseeable futures, Visual Culture Research Center and Athens Biennale courageously show us how culture can be a means of solidarity and common ground that create tangible alternatives to the economic and political conflicts of our time’. (Dercon, 2015, unpaginated). The Kiev based Visual Culture Research Center was the joint laureate of the ECF award. In this frame, the discussion also included references to the Maidan revolution (2013-2014) in Ukraine.

<sup>188</sup> The event was part of the larger BAK project ‘Former West’ (2008-2016). For a description of the project Former West, see: <https://formerwest.org/About>. For the event ‘The commons as the Survival of the public’ see: <https://www.bakonline.org/program-item/other-survivalisms/the-commons-as-the-survival-of-the-public/>.

<sup>189</sup> A look at the supervisory board is indicative. Headed by princess Laurentien, among its members are an adviser of Rockefeller and other foundations.

<https://culturalfoundation.eu/governance#supervisory-board>. See <https://www.culturalfoundation.eu/library/philanthropy-needs-imagination>.

<sup>190</sup> A year before AB4, ECF had awarded the occupied Teatro Valle as an institution of the commons (Mollona, 2015). In this instance, David Harvey (2014), emphasised the importance of common spaces like Valle to generate new meanings for cultural production and the RttC. The occupied Teatro Valle in Rome emerged when a group of artists activists occupied the theatre (2011) to oppose privatisation, gentrification and commodification and soon triggered commoning practices that set it as an important example (also legally acknowledged) - as an ‘institution of the commons’ (Pinto et al, 2014; Mollona, 2015).

and ‘museumification’ of cities.<sup>191</sup> Yet, such recognitions come with risks. In Athens, this kind of awards contribute to the idea that crisis breeds heroic resistance form art (ECF, 2014). Art theorist Eva Fotiadi (2017) notes that this attention puts pressure to continue experimenting, but without necessarily offering structural solutions to the precarious conditions that organisations and activists who explore commoning face, a problem which AB5-6 inherited.

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<sup>191</sup> See his interview: <https://culturalfoundation.eu/stories/interview-with-david-harvey-about-ecf-princess-margriet-award-laureates>.

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Fig. 9. Recreational Data (Ben Vickers) presenting *Possible Currency Zones of the Future...* for The public school at Diplareios School, AB3, 2011, Athens. Available at: <http://kerneloperations.net/the-public-school-in-athens/>. [Accessed: 1<sup>st</sup> June 2019].

The image originally presented here cannot be made freely available via LJMU E-Theses Collection because of 'copyright'.

Fig. 10. KavecS (Vana Kostayola and Kostis Stafylakis). *Threnodies: Reflections on the merchant, the geographer and the snake in Antoine de Saint Exupery's "Little Prince"*, 2011. AB3, 2011. Available at: [https://kavecs.com/2014/04/30/threnodies\\_sample/](https://kavecs.com/2014/04/30/threnodies_sample/). [Accessed: 1<sup>st</sup> June 2019].





Fig. 11. The Beggars' Operas, *New Greece (The Making-Of)*, 2013. Opera Performed in the former Athens Stock Exchange. AB4, 2013, Athens. © Athens Biennale 2005-2021, used under a Creative Commons AttributionNoncommercial license: <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/3.0/> (CC BY-SA 3.0). Available at: <https://passjournal.org/changing-things-so-everything-stays-the-same1/>. [Accessed: 1<sup>st</sup> June 2019].



Fig. 12. Agora Kyklos Collectiv at AB4, 2013, Athens. Photo: Maria Katsaouni. © Athens Biennale 2005-2021, used under a Creative Commons AttributionNoncommercial license: <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/3.0/> (CC BY-SA 3.0). Available at: <https://athensbiennale.org/en/ab4/>. [Accessed: 1<sup>st</sup> June 2019].

## 6.2 Curatorial - Spatial Thresholds: Between the Right to the City and its Appropriation

In the next two years we will be mainly based in Omonoia square, an important urban landmark where migrants, homeless, street vendors, office workers, retailers, professionals and tourists come together every day. Omonoia means unity. But our Omonoia will not be a space of uniformity. It will be a space where differences do exist and are productive, a space that is both individual and common and whose boundaries and thresholds are constantly transgressed. (Mollona, 2015, p. 3).

The previous section introduced AB as a threshold infrastructure, situated between top-down and grassroots city-making processes, between the notions of the public and the commons. This section explores how AB5-6 occupies a threshold position, between the RttC and commoning the city and neoliberal appropriations of these ideas by the Athens municipality. As the above quote suggests, the idea of threshold spatiality (Stavrvides, 2016) referred to Omonoia square and its spatialities and the envisioned curatorial method of working. A major contradiction was, however, that while AB5-6 sought to engage with common spaces that emerged after the Syntagma square occupation, it collaborated with a municipality that had been hostile to the occupation and repressive towards common spaces.

The relation between AB and the municipality is not new, since the biennale had previously received different forms of support and the authorisation to use derelict buildings. However, for the first time in AB's history, the municipality acted as co-organiser of the biennale, offering Bageion, a neoclassical former hotel, built in 1894 and abandoned since 1969, was included in the municipality's plans to regenerate Omonoia economically.<sup>192</sup> Bageion, a former hotel which was in a dilapidated state, as a potential permanent biennial venue in the future. This partnership is crucial for the threshold positioning of AB5-6 between public and commons, making sharper the contradictions that AB5-6 inhabits.<sup>193</sup>

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<sup>192</sup> Bageion was designed by Ernst Ziller (1837-1923), German-born architect who designed two more neo-classicist buildings on the square. Ziller was the architect of many neoclassical, municipal and royal buildings in Athens. In 1872 he was appointed a professor at the Royal School of Arts, now National Technical University of Athens. <https://www.athenssocialatlas.gr/en/article/omonioa-square/>. Bageion has a twin building in the opposite corner of Athinas street, the former Alexander the Great Hotel, built by Ziller in 1889. Both were important landmark pre-war hotels in the area. <https://athensattica.com/things-to-see/architecture/alexander-great-hotel-baggeion/>. The third building by Ziller on the square is café Neon. All were financed by Ioannis Bagas. Bageion had only been partly occupied in recent years, before AB5-6 used it.

<sup>193</sup> The first press release of the collaboration mentioned: 'The aim of this two-year period and the collaboration with the Municipality of Athens is the discovery of a permanent location for the organization's partnerships, from which point the activities of Athens Biennale 2015 - 2017 will take

The title of AB5-6, ‘OMONOIA’ indicated that the area was significant for the biennale and hinted to the intention to be in a porous relation with the city. Omonoia means concord (unity or harmony) in Greek. In this way, the title hinted to the edition’s intention to find ‘common grounds’ between art and commoning practices. From early on, Mollona (2015) presented AB5-6 as an attempt to bring together urban preoccupations and art production.<sup>194</sup> The ‘anthropological method of listening to the city’ and ‘the small actions performed in the everyday’ were important starting points (Mollona, 2018). These intentions echo the significance that the everyday and difference have for the production of new spaces and their emancipating potentials in commoning and RttC (Lefebvre, 1996/1968; Stavrides, 2016).

Omonoia square has been significant for newcomers and migrants in the city and is examined as a space of ‘liminality’ that is inhabited and crossed by differences (Noussia and Lyons, 2009). In this sense, Omonoia can be thought with the RttC as the right of the dweller not to be alienated from the spaces of everyday life and particularly from the centre of the city (Makrygianni and Tsavdaroglou, 2016). However, Omonoia has known many top-down, modernisation and beautification interventions which cause displacements of vulnerable populations (Andriopoulos, 2015).<sup>195</sup> Anthropologist Dimitris Dalakoglou (2013, p. 29) observes that due to changes linked to transport infrastructure and urban expansion, from the 90s on, Omonoia became increasingly associated with ‘marginalised’ activities and social groups.<sup>196</sup> Police patrols and highly coordinated operations have been violently targeting and displacing undocumented migrants, drug addicts and sex workers that inhabit and traverse the square (Dalakoglou, 2013).<sup>197</sup>

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place’. (Athens biennale, press release, June 25, 2015). This was the first press release between the biennale and the municipality, with the involvement of the princess Laurentien of ECF. A second press conference was organised in November 2015, with the mayor, Mollona and AB co-founders Kalpaktsoglou and Poka-Yio, which inaugurated the Synapse 1 programme. See Appendix.

<sup>194</sup> Indicative of this, an excerpt from Harvey’s *Rebel City* (2012) was uploaded on AB5-6’s website before the start of the programme.

<sup>195</sup> The construction of Omonoia square begun in 1846. It first took the name “Palace Square” and then “Otto Square,” after the first king of Greece. The square was renamed Omonoia Square (“Concord Square”) in 1862, after the two rival political factions of the time shook hands, following King Otto’s dethronement. See: <https://www.athenssocialatlas.gr/άρθρο/ομόνοια-concorde/>.

<sup>196</sup> Among the factors Dalakoglou (2013) notes are the increased ownership of private vehicles, the arrival of the metro in the late 1990s, which established Syntagma as central to the new network, as well as the building of new shopping malls.

<sup>197</sup> Such police ‘Operation Sweepers’ which started in the 90s were taking place around the 2004 Olympics and are ongoing. During operation ‘Xenios Zeus’ around 2012, for example, undocumented migrants were arrested and sent to detention centres (Dalakoglou, 2013).

The idea of the biennale and the city as laboratories set the tone during the launch of ‘Synapse 1: Introducing a laboratory for production post-2011’. Mollona spoke about AB5-6 transforming Omonoia square into a ‘social laboratory’; Poka-Yio talked about the biennale as a ‘social CERN’ and ‘a factory for the production of ideas and prototypes’; while mayor Kaminis welcomed the biennale’s intention to ‘transform the city into an international and collective laboratory of ideas ...’ (Press conference, 2015). AB3 and AB4 had also used the idea of the laboratory, an idea which is prominent in curatorial approaches of ‘new institutionalism’, which envision biennials as social spaces and as incubators for collectivity, knowledge-production and social change (Esche, 2013; Kompatsiaris, 2016; Oxenius, 2017). Here, the title pointed emphatically to the Syntagma occupation, which has been analysed as a laboratory for ‘practices of self-organisation, mutual aid and solidarity making’ (Leontidou, 2012 cited in Arampatzi, 2017, p. 6).

It was, however, contradictory to launch such an event under the auspices of a mayor who had opposed Syntagma.<sup>198</sup> During Syntagma, Kaminis urged police to intervene, emphasising that the ‘indignados’ had no right to obstruct access to the square. After Syntagma, the Kaminis administration supported or directly ordered evictions of occupied buildings in Athens.<sup>199</sup> Kaminis’ party named ‘Right to the City’, had a manifesto focused on citizenship, safety and cleanliness of public space, green development and the city as a ‘collective oeuvre’ (Makrygianni and Tsavdaroglou, 2016). However, in seeing migrants as responsible for the centre’s decay, Kaminis endorsed and contributed to state policies that push migrants to the outskirts of the city.<sup>200</sup> In contrast, his agenda prioritised the creative classes as ideal inhabitants of the centre of Athens and emphasised ‘entrepreneurship, city identity and tourism’ (Kaminis, 2010 cited in Makrygianni and Tsavdaroglou, 2016, p. 184).

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<sup>198</sup> At the time of AB5-6, Kaminis’ party was in its second term, having won the elections in May 2014.

<sup>199</sup> The eviction of the anarchist squat of 22 years Villa Amalias or the Agora Kypselis were directly ordered from the municipality, for example.

<sup>200</sup> If difference and social class antagonisms are at the core of the way Lefebvre approaches space production, in Kaminis’ rhetoric, race and class become criteria for exclusion, as not all citizens are equal or recognised as citizens, as Makrygianni and Tsavdaroglou (2016) argue. Kaminis refused to provide accommodation to 300 migrants who went on hunger strike in 2011 demanding to be legalised. Tolerant to the minister of health stigmatising migrant sex workers around Omonoia as HIV transmitters, arresting and imprisoning them for a year, Kaminis agreed afterwards to cooperate with the minister, in order to clear out the centre from drug addicts and other unwanted from the area. Despite this rhetoric and agenda, Kaminis retained a reputation as a progressive mayor who sought to engage with ‘civil society’ and improve the quality of life in the city (Smith, 2016).

This manifested in the main venue that the municipality provided to AB5-6 and the satellite venues AB5-6 engaged with. Bageion is connected to 'Rethink Athens', an urban regeneration plan which was controversially received as a 'gentrification paradox' (Christou, 2014). The Onassis foundation funded 'ReThink Athens' (2009), a study for redesigning the city centre and financed studies for the reconstruction of Bageion. With additional European development funds, the plan was to turn Bageion (and its twin building) into co-working spaces for entrepreneurs (Rigopoulos, 2014). However, the timeframe of these funds was hard to achieve, making ultimately Bageion possible for AB to use for hosting artists and collectives.

Adopting the term cohabitation, AB5-6 seemed to distance itself from the label of a co-working space or an art occupation, like Embros, and emphasised the idea of living and working together at Bageion. However, AB5-6 could be positioned between an art occupation, which, in contrast to the many examples in the city, was authorised by the municipality, and which could potentially function as a future biennial-run space for creatives.<sup>201</sup> Learning from art occupations was indeed a significant thread at AB5-6's discursive programme and the term cohabitation created associations to common spaces where activists, refugees and volunteers live and work together in Athens.<sup>202</sup> Moreover, AB5-6 seemed to inhabit a position between common spaces and creative entrepreneurialism. This was reflected in the choice of using mainly artist-led and creative-entrepreneurial spaces for the revitalisation of the area, as its satellite venues.<sup>203</sup>

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<sup>201</sup> The Kaminis administration had in fact already tested such a possibility (in another building) with the initiative syn-Athina - conceived as a platform for bringing together formal or less formal citizens groups, a device for networking among them and for promoting the city's 'well-being'. This platform had started digitally. For this initiative, the municipality has been In 2014, the City was awarded US\$1.2million through the Bloomberg Philanthropies Mayors Challenge for the development of synAthina as a community-based way of government. (Fotiadi, 2017).

<sup>202</sup> In fact, common spaces that emerged after AB5-6 was announced, also started using the term cohabitation – for example the Housing Squat for Refugees and Immigrants Notara 26 in Exarcheia (occupied in September 2015) and City Plaza (occupied in April 2016). The term cohabitation was already used in the first announcements of AB5-6 in 2015. See: <https://www.e-flux.com/announcements/5290/athens-biennale-2015-2017omonoia/>. These occupations happened therefore in-between Hlavajova's AB5-6 first talk (May 2015) and the second Synapse 1 (November 2015).

<sup>203</sup> Previous editions usually had a main and a secondary venue. In AB5-6, a similar hierarchisation was kept, but there were more satellite venues involved. Next to public and municipal buildings (the National Theatre 'Rex', the Central Market of Athens (Varvakeios Agora)), as well as unoccupied stores (Constantopoulou Megaron) the majority were artist-led spaces, multi-purpose venues or cafe's. Some of these venues were YAH[matter]HYLE run by artist Georgia Sagri and Exile Room, a non-profit social-cultural space focusing on documentary. There was also Bread & Roses or



In outlining the ambivalent position that AB5-6 occupies in relation to its spatial politics, this section offers a crucial layer to understand the tensions that manifested between AB5-6 and the artists collectives it invited to explore commoning together. While emphasising the potentials of commoning to imagine the city as a social and political laboratory, at the same time, AB5-6 partnered up with a municipality that distorted the RttC, promoted creative city urban redevelopment through exclusions and was complicit or directly involved in repressive politics and enclosures of commoning in Athens. The challenge for AB5-6 was palpable from the start: could it potentialise its relation to the city and become a space for commoning from within the ambivalent position of the threshold?



Fig. 13. The winning proposal by OKRA Landscape Architects, Utrecht, The Netherlands, for Omonoia, as part of the Rethink Athens competition held by the Onassis Foundation. Bageion appears on the left side of the square. © OKRA, 2013-2014, used under a Creative Commons AttributionNoncommercial license : <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0/> (CC BY-SA 4.0). Available at: <https://www.envi-met.com/portfolio/rethink-athens/>. [Accessed: 10<sup>th</sup> September 2019].

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Romantso, a former printing plant turned to café, artists' studios, co-working and exhibition spaces) or cafes (Janeiro cafeteria, Bangladesh restaurant, Submarine Snack bar). Some hosted events that which explored Bageion's history. As we read on the AB website, a number of writers frequented the café at the former Bageion, among whom Mitsos Papanikolaou, Napoleon Lapathiotis, Tellos Agras, Minos Zotos, Nick Saravas. For example, readings of poems by Lapathiotis, a poet among the literary circle frequenting Bageion in the 1920's, were presented in the dairy shop Stani Dairy, one of the few left in the area, echoing Bageion's once renown dairy café.

### 6.3 Curatorial - Institutional Thresholds: Instituting, Mediating and Translating Commoning

We have to open up the organisation to the city and to risk the organisation to the city and to risk the organisation itself. To change, to die, to transform. (Mollona, 2018).

At least in my mind, the institution is maturing, or at least is heading towards a transformation which has to do with the fact that it stops being an office for the production of a large exhibition and becomes a space that has specific actions, specific exhibition or theoretical programme and that can host artists, projects ... now if this would still be called a biennale or something else and it would produce the biennale, I can't be sure, but the intention was to see how we could do what Maria Hlavajova calls instituting otherwise (Kalpaktsoglou, 2018).

In analysing the processes through which AB5-6 unfolded, this section argues that the main keywords of AB5-6's approach to commoning can be summarised with three keywords: a) instituting, b) mediating and c) translating, which I unpack in what follows. Concretely, the challenges that AB5-6 faced were: a) finding common grounds with art collectives and socio-political grassroots groups in the city, and acting as mediator between them, b) mediating between the first group and international artists, curators and activists that AB5-6 invited c) mediating between the first and second group and d14, as a prospective partner of AB5-6. What I will be arguing is that the crucial problem in AB5-6 as a threshold infrastructure was mediating between the common spaces and engaging in an exercise of translating commoning from common spaces to the space of the biennale, so as to institute AB5-6 as a commons. These processes exemplify AB5-6 as an edition that inhabited the tensions between commoning the biennial and the biennialisation of the commons.

As the above quotes illustrate, AB-6 was conceived as a process which would explore the potential to transform the institution and open up its relation to the city. The intention to shift the emphasis from exhibition to process included the decision to invite a programme director, rather than a curator (Kalpaktsoglou, 2018). The choice of Mollona, a social anthropologist and film maker whose academic activist research engages with the role of art institutions in late capitalism and studies commoning in different contexts, pointed to the direction of commoning.<sup>204</sup> Although Mollona's involvement in biennials is rather recent, his research on

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<sup>204</sup> Mollona is Senior Lecturer in the department of anthropology at Goldsmith's, University of London and his research combines pedagogy, activism, curating and art. Mollona's main research interests, are summarised on his Goldsmith's page: 'In the current context of global dispossession, austerity, inequality, indebtedness, conspicuous consumption, zero-hour work, extreme

commoning, from studying self-managed Brazilian factories to the occupied Teatro Valle in Rome and links to the context of self-organisation in Italy, shaped AB5-6's intentions and programme.<sup>205</sup>

Central to the idea of AB5-6 as an instituting process was that AB 5-6's programme was not continuous, but punctuated by several intensive ten-day programmes, the Synapses, which were organised at different intervals and included different participants and thematics each time.<sup>206</sup> The Synapses combined a discursive programme which invited artists, theorists and curators and a programme of performances and activities at Bageion, run by the participating collectives. This brought the biennale close to instituting and commoning as a process of 'constant becoming' (Raunig (2007, p. 1; Stavrides, 2016). In fact, the intention to move from exhibition to an instituting process was introduced from early on. Months before Mollona was announced as programme director, Maria Hlavajova (2015) inaugurated AB5-6 with a keynote lecture on 'instituting otherwise' as a question of governance, drawing on Raunig's proposals (2006; 2009). 'How are we together otherwise?' and 'How do we institute the relationships around us?' were posed as urgent questions for art institutions (Hlavajova, 2015; Zefkili, 2016.)

In her second talk in Athens as part of Synapse 1 (November 2015) Hlavajova proposed to view institutions as 'interlocutors between care and power', in order to establish long term learning infrastructures for art and politics. The curator called institutions to use their affective and financial resources in order to enable those vulnerable, in struggle and perceived as 'others', to narrate their stories and make them heard by those who would not hear them otherwise. In this way, Hlavajova advocated the need not to think of the work of

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financialization and privatization of life what kind of institutions should museums, galleries and other cultural institutions be? Where should they look for their public and political constituencies? What kind of practices should they nurture? What forms of sociability, relationality and political imaginaries should they foster? Where shall they draw the boundaries, if any, between their inside and their outside?' <https://www.gold.ac.uk/anthropology/research/staff/mollona-massimiliano/>.

<sup>205</sup> Parallel to AB5-6, Mollona was involved in co-curating a discursive and performative strand for the (September) 2016 Bergen Assembly as a member of the collective 'freethought'. The collective consists of scholars, artists and curators Iris Rogoff, Stefano Harney, Adrian Heathfield, Louis Moreno and Nora Sternfeld. For the Bergen Assembly, see: <http://freethought-collective.net/performative-platforms/the-infrastructure-summit.html>.

<sup>206</sup> Most previous editions and foremost AB3 and AB4 were exploring the biennale as a social space for exchanges. AB5-6 emphasised this even more, because instead of the usual two-months programme, its progressive durational unfolding would take place across two years and there was a periodicity with moments of amplification through the Synapses.



art as the centre of the art institution, but to think of the institution with the relationalities it institutes (Hlavajova, 2015).<sup>207</sup>

Instituting new relationalities with common spaces in the city and mediating between the various groups that AB5-6 engaged with, as stated in the beginning of this section, was at the heart of the effort to transform AB. In taking AB as a space both of capital and of commoning, Mollona's ambition was to use the institution as a mediator between various tensions between art, activism and politics and seek ways to decommodify it (Mollona, 2015, p. 13). As in other biennials discussed in this thesis, in AB5-6 too the changes were mainly tested in the realm of the event – it will be obvious that this chapter makes little reference to the organisational structure of the biennale. Nonetheless, given AB's scale and involvement of the co-founders, the boundaries between the event and the institution are much more porous than, for example d3 or the BB7, which experimented with commoning, but without really affecting structural changes in the institution.

The dual emphasis on commoning and instituting underlined the interviews I conducted. While Mollona emphasised commoning, instituting was highlighted by Kalpaktsoglou. 'Through the programme we would craft the institution as a common' ... 'an institutional commons' or 'let the biennale be used as a commons' (Mollona, 2018). For Kalpaktsoglou (2018) commoning was not the overarching term, since instituting and cohabitation were also important key tools. Neither 'to common' the biennale was a predetermined aim for her. Nonetheless, Kalpaktsoglou (2018) emphasised that commoning was not meant as a theoretical exercise exhausted in curatorial gestures, but something to explore as a 'field of research'.

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<sup>207</sup> The events I refer to here were the first AB5-6 public talk by curator Maria Hlavajova 'Art in the Times of Interregnum' (19 May 2015) and her talk as part of the first summit (Synapse 1, Session II: Rethinking Institutions' (18 November 2015). In the first one Hlavajova referenced political thinker Antonio Gramsci in her title, approaching the present moment as an interregnum, which, according to Gramsci 'consists precisely in the fact that the old is dying and the new cannot be born'. The talk connected to a series of recent talks by Hlavajova (2010, 2014) in biennial fora before and during the biennial legitimacy crisis, where she prompted to rethink biennials with 'instituting otherwise', a method that draws primarily on Raunig (2006; 2009) and which the curator has been exploring since 2000 through BAK.

The intention behind bringing together artists collectives and collectives with a more social – political character, was to address the lack of connection between them (Mollona, 2018).<sup>208</sup> Through conducting research and setting up early meetings (September, 2015) with the collectives, the idea was to involve them as early as possible in the instituting process, before the launch of AB5-6 (Mollona, 2021). How a situated biennale would mediate between common spaces *and* collaborate with d14 was an extra pressure for AB5-6 as a biennale that wanted to practice commoning on the threshold between curating and instituting.<sup>209</sup>

Scepticism towards the mediating role that AB5-6 wanted to play was expressed from early on. Most of the socio-political collectives were present only during the first cycle of events and did not continue further.<sup>210</sup> One early reluctance to be part of AB5-6 is important to note here, because it helps to understand the situated and interrelated complexities’ that shape the relations between AB, d14 and the artists activists networks in the city. It involves the artists activists of Green Park occupation, which had been invited to participate in AB5-6, but withdrew before Synapse 1. Their absence, for those aware of the bottom-up energies in the city, created a significant gap in AB5-6, as Green Park soon became a hub for self-organised art/commoning practices.<sup>211</sup>

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<sup>208</sup> This emerged out of a research process that included a mapping exercise first of social spaces in the city and then of independent or artist-led spaces (Mollona, 2018). The process was led by an ex-student of Mollona and Erasmus fellow, as well as facilitated by activists involved in social movements in the city (Mollona, 2018).

<sup>209</sup> Such pressures were already setting the tone during Hlavajova’s first talk (19 May 2015). The curator, responding to a question from the audience, expressed scepticism on the impact that d14 could have on the local art scene. Her experience of co-curating the 3rd Manifesta in Ljubljana was that itinerant large-scale exhibitions have a negative impact on the local art scenes (Zefkili, 2016).

<sup>210</sup> Some collectives withdrew their participation even before the inaugural event, Synapse 1 (November 2015). For example, activists from the Notara 26 squat had been invited to participate in AB5-6, but did not proceed to participate in AB5-6. The difficulty of AB reaching out to some collectives manifested in AB5-6’s communication material. Invitations to curators and members of organisations mentioned some collectives as ‘to be confirmed’. International press releases omitted the more socio-political collectives, mentioning only artists and artist collectives. See invitation in the appendix. For the international announcements see for example: <https://www.e-flux.com/announcements/5290/athens-biennale-2015-2017omonoia/>. The full list of participants at Synapse 1 was communicated as follows: Dario Azzellini & Oliver Ressler, Αυτόνομη Ακαδημία, Campus Novel, Depression Era, ΙΣΕΤ, Βαλεντίνα Κάργα, Φάνης Καφαντάρης, Ζήσης Κοτιώνης και φοιτητές της Σχολής Αρχιτεκτόνων Μηχανικών από το Πανεπιστήμιο Θεσσαλίας, Playroom, State of Concept, UrbanDig Project, 3 137, Πρωτοβουλία Κατοίκων Μετσ.

<sup>211</sup> Green Park emphasised questions of instituting, performance and the (under)commons. Looking at two further events that Green park organised, neither the institution/instituting nor the biennial was dismissed. The conference ‘Institutions, Politics, Performance’ brought theorists to explore relations between institutions and performance (24-28 September 2015) before the Synapse 1 of AB5-6 (November 2015).

The Green Park activation was initiated by the Mavili Collective, who had activated Embros theatre in 2011. Green Park wanted to build on the learning and failures of the initial reactivation of Embros (which in 2015 was run by other groups) and to practise commoning based on friendship. On 19th June 2015, artists activists decided to occupy the abandoned Green Park café at the Pedion tou Areos, one of the most central parks of Athens, not far from Omonoia.<sup>212</sup> A few days later, the biennale announced that it would inhabit Bageion with the support of the Athens municipality (25 June 2015). Setting the tone at the time were mass social mobilisations towards the pending referendum (5th July 2015), where the country was meant to vote whether they agreed to continue the austerity measures imposed by the creditors.

Operating on the threshold between commoning the biennial and the biennialisation of the commons, between facilitating and appropriating commoning, AB5-6 was received with scepticism, especially by the more politicised groups. The scepticism was understandable, since participating in AB5-6 could be about commoning, but it was also a way to legitimate Bageion as an art occupation supported by the Athens municipality, an administration which had been hostile to Syntagma 2011 and common spaces in the city. At a time when biennialisation was setting the tone in Athens, with two biennials using rhetoric of solidarity and commons, Green Park can be viewed as an attempt to re-emphasise the art occupation from the bottom-up. Green Park opened with a ten-day programme of performances, guided tours, DJ sessions, interventions and ‘spontaneous habitations’ which highlighted the park’s everyday life.<sup>213</sup> This ten-days programme was reminiscent of the Embros reactivation. When a few months later AB5-6 would open with the ten-days programme of Synapse I (and later on, d14 with a ten-days event of ‘Exercises of Freedom’), it was easy to see how Embros and Green Park were important references to learn from or, as critique pointed out, to appropriate from, for both biennials in terms of content and forms.

Despite its ambitions, the tensions continued and AB5-6 was halfway interrupted. Kalpaktsoglou and Mollona simultaneously stepped down in July 2016 (Rea, 2016). Some artists and projects did not continue and the partnership with d14 did not materialise. Despite

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<sup>212</sup> In the park, refugees create makeshift shelters and young refugee boys sell sex to collect money to fund their further journey to Europe. See: <https://www.dw.com/en/child-refugees-in-greece-sell-sex-for-smugglers-fees/a-38535488>.

<sup>213</sup> For Green Park and the rationale of the occupation see: <https://greenparkathens.wordpress.com/programme/programme-strands/>.

the interruption, commoning remained a strand traceable in works and events that did take place after the resignations (between the summer of 2016 and the winter of 2017).<sup>214</sup> However, what set the tone after these resignations, were discursive and performative events, some of which exercised institutional critique towards the initial curatorial agenda for idealising commoning and promoting precarity.<sup>215</sup> These developments make AB5-6 an edition that is rich in within/against the biennial positions, as well as positions for/against commoning, as they manifested during the Synapses' discursive programme and the Bageion cohabitation, both of which can be linked to the threshold spatiality that AB inhabits across its life span.



Fig. 14. International Summit Synapse 1, 18<sup>th</sup> November 2015 at New Rex of the National Theatre of Greece. Session II: Rethinking Institutions. From left to right: Leo Panitch, Maria Hlavajova, Adam Szymczyk, Amalia Zepou (moderator), Hilary Wainwright, Emily Pethick, Latitudes (Max Andrews & Mariana Cánepa Luna). Photo: © Eva Galatsanou, 2015 and © Athens Biennale 2005-2021, used under a Creative Commons AttributionNoncommercial license : <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/3.0/> (CC BY-SA 3.0). Available at: <https://www.lttids.org/longitudes/index.php?categories=summit>. [Accessed: 10<sup>th</sup> September 2019].

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<sup>214</sup> See for example the project *Inhabiting the Bageion: architecture as critique* (2017). The project was by Culture Ireland, funded in collaboration with the Athens Biennale. See: Olney, E. (2020)

<sup>215</sup> Events were organised in September 2016 (partly overlapping with d14's public programme launch), December 2016 and then in April 2017, just before d14's opening in Athens. These latter events were organised by artists or collectives in a similar spirit to the Synapses, but they were not named as Synapses. I discuss some works that took place in this framework in 6.4.2.

## **6.4 Between Learning from Common Spaces and Becoming a Biennial Common Space**

AB5-6 was presented as a process of learning from common spaces, hosting collectives and for practising commoning as a way of transforming the biennale. AB5-6 was envisioned as a space for practising commoning, a way of self-governing the biennale or at least co-shaping with the collectives AB5-6's programme at Bageion. What was to be learned, from whom and how? AB5-6 looked to common spaces and artist collectives for their engagement with collective process of working, performative politics, experimentations with instituting and struggles against privatisation and for culture as resource and democratic participation (Mollona, 2015). Accordingly, the methodology emphasised the biennale as a space for pooling resources, for hosting and practising commoning, transnational exchanges and producing new models, as well as 'a political collective that follows not JUST ONE aim, but facilitates and mediates between diverse aims and needs'. (Mollona, 2015) (See Appendix)

The interlinked aims of learning, hosting and practising commoning were put into practice through the discursive programme of the Synapses, which became the most public moments of the cohabitation of collectives at Bageion. As mentioned, the Synapses combined a discursive programme with guest speakers and a programme of activities at Bageion, organised by the participating collectives. This section examines Synapse 1, highlighting the most relevant for my research aspects, as they emerged during the discursive programme. It then examines the Bageion cohabitation.

### 6.4.1 Synapse 1: Learning from Common Spaces

Discursively, Synapse 1 is important for my scope, because it posed questions on the commons in relation to work and production, as well as the notion of the public, echoing broader discussions that see the commons as a way of strengthening demands to public institutions and state support against precarity. Although the biennale was rarely directly referenced, the summit felt as a self-reflexive environment, where participants were aware of the ambivalences of working within the space of a biennial and of AB as an infrastructural threshold between bottom-up struggles and top-down processes, as well as formal and informal economies.

With its duration and format, Synapse 1 echoed Embros and Green Park's 10-days inaugural events. However, AB5-6 Synapse I combined a) a discursive strand (summit, symposium) that invited mainly guest speakers – activists, theorists, curators, directors of art institutions and b) a programme of actions (performances, exhibitions, workshops) by the collectives participating in Bageion both in and out of the venue. Despite the obvious resemblance to the existing art occupations in the city, some curatorial choices distinguished the launch of AB5-6 from them. Synapse 1 distinguished between a formal launch with a press conference together with the mayor and an international summit (with international guests) at the National Theatre and Bageion, the derelict building which AB5-6 collectives would use. This initial spatial separation between theory and action, formal and informal art contexts seemed to contradict the intention for Synapses to be spaces for interlinking art and activism, theory and discourse (Mollona, 2015). This was counterbalanced during the second day of Synapse 1, where the international guests were invited at Bageion to join about forty-five solidarity spaces, cooperatives and artists collectives, to form working groups, gather in an open assembly, in order to discuss questions raised during the summit and to propose action areas for AB5-6.<sup>216</sup>

Synapse 1 explored three thematics: a) alternative economies, b) rethinking institutions and c) the performative in the political.<sup>217</sup> In this way, Synapse 1 built on what had started with a

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<sup>216</sup> The assembly and the working groups brought together participants of the discursive programme and inhabitants of Bageion, as well as members of the public, in order to reflect on the discussions in the summit (Synapse 1) and as part of the decision-making process. For example, the working group 'Solidarity Networks' invited members of groups that at the time were hosting or doing work related to refugees, like the Refugees Welcome, Solidarity4all. The 'Commons & Urban Welfare' was diverse, as it included members from groups involved in urban gardening, graphic design, autonomous spaces and wireless community projects.

<sup>217</sup> The title of the third strand echoed the title of *Dispossession: the performative in the political* by Judith Butler and Athena Athanasiou (2013), with dispossession describing the condition of those who have lost land, citizenship, property, and a broader belonging to the world. The question of rethinking institutions became even more accentuated during Synapse 2: 'Rethinking institutional Critique – a view from the South' (15-24 April 2016). This included discussions on institutional critique, rethinking biennials and presented of the Bageion inhabitants as 'a new approach to institutionalism'. A third discursive event took place soon after with the support of the Onassis Foundation at the cultural centre Onassis Stegi (27-28 May 2016). 'Art at the borders: spatial politics and post-colonial strategies in the Middle East' examined the notion of the border in art and politics. This was an international event, with talks and screenings on the refugee crisis, the ongoing militarisation in the middle East, as well as the role that artistic practices and art labour can play in proposing counter narratives to national-territorial and post-colonial politics. The event was organised to coincide with the third edition of the Fast Forward Festival organised by Onassis Stegi. See: <https://www.onassis.org/whats-on/fast-forward-festival-3/fff-symposium-art-at-the-borders-spatial-politics-and-post-colonial-strategies-in-the-middle-east>.

conversation between theorists of the commons de Angelis and Stavrides in AB2 (2009), questions on commons and labour at the public programme of AB3 (2011) and engagement with collective practices at AB4 (2013). For example, choreographer and activist Emanuele Braga from Macao new centre for art and culture pointed to the risks cooperative models face, at times when creativity, innovation, cooperation, new technologies, as well as the RttC are appropriated by right wing governance for gentrification or smart city purposes – noting that AB is not exempted from such processes. The question whether commoning becomes cheap labour (Huron, 2017) and a ‘commons fix’ for capital (De Angelis, 2009) was raised during talks about occupations of cultural spaces. Actor activist Sylvia De Fanti and philosophy professor Federica Giardini (2015) involved in Teatro Valle in Rome spoke about artistic work and culture as a primary right which starts from artists’ needs, particularly considering that cuts in public funding for culture in Italy has resulted in many artists living under the poverty line. The speakers stressed that one of the main challenges at Teatro Valle was how to avoid reproducing commoning as a form of volunteering work and one of the ways they addressed this was to introduce a non-division of labour (De Fanti and Giardini, 2015).

The tension between public and common/s was highlighted by Dimitrakaki (2015) who argued that abandoning the discourse of the public in favour of the common does not enable what she called ‘art as commonwealth’ (art based on cooperation). On the other hand, demands for public funding in the arts or demands for artists’ wages perpetuate ideologically the ties of art to the state as a regulator and guarantor of public property. However, art as cooperation in a context of hegemonic property and capitalist production relations, would move away from (occupation as) labour to become (occupation as) something which keeps people busy, but which fails to see that ‘these people also need to make a living’, in other words to reproduce themselves.<sup>218</sup>

This would bring art to seem as if it has nothing to do with production and class struggle, bypassing Walter Benjamin’s question on the essence of political art: ‘how does art stand within relations of production?’. As such, the question is whether art-as-occupation would be

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<sup>218</sup> The theorist hinted to Hito Steyerl (2011), who in her essay ‘Art as occupation: claims for an autonomy of life’, who prompts thinking with these matters with the double sense of occupation as occupying a space and occupation as professional activity or labour.

‘an art of withdrawal rather than an art of political urgency’.<sup>219</sup> Hence, the theorist argued that it is necessary a). to devise practices that claim back the commons from being a remedy to the state, but also acknowledging that the commons does not mean that the state dissolves, b). to look for synergies and not oppositions between public property goods and common goods, and c). to theorise the connections of the commons with class struggle as a specific, daily process across ideological material sites of production (Dimitrakaki, 2015).

The need to connect urban commons to working-class struggles was highlighted by sociologist Dario Azzellini, who prompted to look at commoning the means of production in workplace occupations. Theodoros Karyotis, sociologist and activist from the occupied soap factory VioMe (BIOME) in Thessaloniki raised the significance of alliances between workers, social movements and migrants, pointing out the need for community owned (rather than workers owned) cooperatives and legal frameworks that could enable them to become sustainable post-capitalist efforts. These questions continued at the entrance of Bageion, where Azzellini and filmmaker Oliver Ressler presented the film installation ‘Occupy, Resist, Produce’ (2015) realised in collaboration with workers in three self-managed factories: RiMaflow in Italy, Officine Zero in France and, in collaboration with Karyotis, the VioMe workers in Thessaloniki.<sup>220</sup> The films allow to connect workers’ struggles to take control over the means of production, to continue their fight against enclosures through horizontal self-management processes for decision-making and to find inspiration and solidarity in networks that are both national and international.<sup>221</sup>

If Synapse 1 made something clear was that AB5-6 did not approach the commons as a neutral term. In hosting both positions for and critique towards commoning, AB5-6 welcomed common/s as a contentious discourse. During Synapse 1, speakers referred to occupations not purely as economic processes, but as struggles for creating new affects and social processes that can redefine workplaces and broadly, subjects, spaces and relations

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<sup>219</sup> First, drawing on the idea of ‘the commons fix’ by de Angelis (2013), she pointed out that distinguishing between commons subsumed by capital and commons that are not is difficult, because entanglements between capitalism and commons are often ‘glorified’ in art.

<sup>220</sup> The biennale had organised already a screening of the film in October 2015 in the framework of the Athens International Film Festival (Opening Nights). More information here: <https://www.azzellini.net/en/films/occupy-resist-produce---viome>. All films can be viewed here: <https://art-of-assembly.net/2021/02/09/oliver-ressler-voices-to-reckon-with/>.

<sup>221</sup> Vio.Me workers for example found inspiration in Argentinian factory workers and the Zapatistas. <https://roarmag.org/essays/vio-me-factory-without-bosses/>.



(Azzellini, 2015 and Karyotis, 2015; De Fanti and Giardini, 2015). At the same time, Synapse 1 was a space conscious of the ambivalences that AB5-6 inhabiting, wanting to transform the biennale through commoning, but based on a precarious economy of voluntary and informal labour and entangled in processes of art and commons as ‘fixes’ to the city.<sup>222</sup>



Fig. 15. The Commons and Urban Welfare working group. Photo: © Latitudes, 2015, used under a Creative Commons AttributionNoncommercial license: <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/3.0/> (CC BY-SA 3.0). Available at: <http://ltds.blogspot.com/2015/12/more-from-omonoia-athens-biennale.html>. [Accessed: 10<sup>th</sup> January 2018].

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<sup>222</sup> Another main point of critique was expressed by Stafylakis, along the lines I outlined in 2.3.2. According to Stafylakis the commons idealises and nationalises ideas of community and collectivity, while prioritises the scale of the neighbourhood as a prerequisite for achieving internationalism. According to the speaker, events like the Commonsfest festival in Athens cultivate a certain nostalgia for preserving previous periods or agrarian communities, pointing out thus to the direction of exoticising resistance in the Greek context.



Fig. 16. Assembly at occupied factory Vio.Me. in Thessaloniki, Greece, May 11th, 2014. Photo: © Dawid Krawczyk, 2014, used under a creative Commons AttributionNonCommercial-ShareAlike licence: <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/2.0/> (CC BY-NC-SA 2.0) Available at: <https://www.flickr.com/photos/dawidkrawczyk/14181874173>. [Accessed: 10<sup>th</sup> June 2019].

The image originally presented here cannot be made freely available via LJMU E-Theses Collection because of 'copyright'.

Fig. 17. Dario Azzellini & Oliver Ressler, "Occupy, Resist, Produce – Vio.Me.", HD, 30 min., 2015 (video still). Courtesy artists Dario Azzellini and Oliver Ressler. Available at: [https://athensbiennale.org/newsletter-content/ab5-6/newsletter\\_18092015/newsletter\\_en\\_18092015.html](https://athensbiennale.org/newsletter-content/ab5-6/newsletter_18092015/newsletter_en_18092015.html). [Accessed: 10<sup>th</sup> June 2019].





Fig. 18. The Open Assembly at Bageion on November 19<sup>th</sup> 2015, AB5-6, Athens. Photo: Nysos Vasilopoulos, 2015. © Athens Biennale 2005-2021, used under a Creative Commons AttributionNoncommercial license: <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/3.0/> (CC BY-SA 3.0). <https://www.lttids.org/longitudes/index.php?categories=summit>. [Accessed: 10<sup>th</sup> January 2020].



Fig. 19. The Open Assembly at Bageion on November 19<sup>th</sup> 2015, AB5-6, Athens. Photo: Nysos Vasilopoulos, 2015, © Athens Biennale 2005-2021, used under a Creative Commons, used under a Creative Commons AttributionNoncommercial license: <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/3.0/> (CC BY-SA 3.0). Available at: <http://tohumagazine.com/article/under-construction>. [Accessed: 10<sup>th</sup> January 2020].

#### 6.4.2 The Bageion Cohabitation: A Biennial Common Space?

The cohabitation of artists collectives at the former hotel Bageion grounded the process spatially and created the space for putting commoning to practice. Given the ambivalences discussed in the previous sections, the challenges in Bageion were palpable: could it become a space for commoning from within a venue which emerged out of a partnership with a municipality that distorts the RttC and from a biennale that is ambivalently positioned between top-down and bottom-up urban policies, as well as formal and informal economies? Could Bageion become a space for commoning AB5-6 and commoning the city?

Bageion was a space where the three constitutive elements of the commons were present: space (resource or institution), community and commoning (Stavrvides, 2016).

This section examines whether Bageion featured the qualities of openness, difference and power sharing that characterise ‘threshold institutions’ or ‘institutions of expanding commoning’ (Stavrvides, 2016; 2019) It argues that Bageion was a space where comparisons between different approaches to collaboration, collectivity and commoning were visible, but where a process of translating commoning as a collective ‘working in common’ towards the biennale as a common space was difficult to achieve. To do so, I will first outline some of the participants and main uses of the space and, move to the problems that Bageion raises, drawing on responses by my interviewees.<sup>223</sup>

First, the initial invitations and meetings included four categories: cooperatives (occupied factories, independent publishers, self-managed media), urban commons (which included art collectives, art occupations and refugee squats), hackers (cryptocurrency collectives and urban wireless networks) and the Solidarity4All Network (social and health clinics, solidarity kitchens and schools and anti-fascist groups) (Mollona, 2021). However, after the withdrawals of most solidarity-driven initiatives and more radical political groups, the majority of those who decided to inhabit Bageion came from the art field (Mollona, 2021).<sup>224</sup>

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<sup>223</sup> Participants used Bageion in different ways: the AB5-6 team used the ground floor as office; some recently founded artist-run held workshops (3 123), consulting one-one-one sessions for young artists (State of concept), exhibitions (Depression Era), while other groups used Bageion as a space ‘to meet, talk and exchange’ (Campus Novel, 2018) or a ‘space of residency’ (Sahinis, 2018) from which they set out to explore Omonoia.

<sup>224</sup> Solidarity4all has been a large umbrella platform acting as a main link between SYRIZA and the social movements. At the other end, and among the oldest initiatives invited, was the ‘free social space’ Votanikos Kipos Squat (2009) which emerged after the December 2008 uprising when anti-

Despite the absence of more politicised groups, Bageion became a space that hosted commoning and allowed for comparisons between different practices that connect art and commoning. The participants were a) artists/curators who work collaboratively, b) artists groups or collectives and c) collectives with a more socio-political character. The residents differed in terms of scale, focus of practice, ways of collaborating and positioning themselves in relation to commoning, funding and capitalist structures. Although some of the art collectives engage with the vocabularies of the commons and recognise aspects of commoning in their practices (Urban Dig, Campus Novel) they do not necessarily present their practice as commoning and some stand critically towards the commons (Campus Novel, Letter to the Mayor, 2016).

Bageion could be viewed as a space inspired by, trying to apply the lessons from or appropriating occupations like Embros, Green Park or Teatro Valle, with the authorisation of the municipality. Works and participants at Bageion were connected to art occupations. For example, Georgia Sagri, a member of the Embros theatre assembly and considered among the initiators of Occupy, showed films of past performances at Bageion and hosted events at her nearby space, YΛH[matter]HYLE; some art collectives had shown work at Embros (Depression Era, 2011 and Campus Novel, 2013). Joulia Strauss's Avtonomi Akadimia (AA), a nomadic academy that explores the potentials of radical art-as-education beyond capitalism. During Synapse 2 AA screened the film documentary 'Forget Fear – Story of Occupy Biennale' which focuses on an Occupy action at Pergamon Museum in response to the Berlin Biennale BB7 (2012).<sup>225</sup> During Synapse 2, AA showed the no-currency of the BANK OF NO, 'a collective "rebranding initiative" where art meets the banking crisis', a project

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authoritarian groups occupied a botanical garden complex (built in 2000) abandoned by the local authorities. Among the initial invitees was The Metropolitan Community Clinic at Helliniko (MCCH) which emerged out of the Syntagma experience, does not accept any affiliation to a political party nor monetary donations, but its 60 volunteer doctors and health practitioners had worked with the municipality who gave the building to host the clinic. See:

<https://www.mkiellinikou.org/en/presentation-of-clinic/>. Most of the groups share connections to international solidarity networks and their activism is at the intersection of struggles: for example, Votanikos Kipos has sheltered refugee Syrian families, hosts talks and seminars on the right to housing, participated in antifascist protests or gathered food for a.o. the solidarity kitchen The Other human (O Allos Anthropos). The participants take decisions in open assemblies, they have co-designed the space and have formed working groups that run a.o. a theatre, a library, a cinema, a seed bank and produce goods avoiding commercialisation.

<sup>225</sup> For a video of the BB7 occupy action see: <http://joulia-strauss.net/2012-occupied-berlin-biennale-7/#>. The documentary is by Rafal Swirek. For the actions by Occupy Museums at Berlin Biennale see: <http://www.noahfischer.org/project/ows/38428>.

initiated by an international working group that stems from the 2011 social movements, as well as participants in various artists initiatives (Occupy Museums, Gulf Labor, Free Artists Hungary, and Living Memorial).<sup>226</sup>

The residents organised events that connected to the questions raised by AB5-6. For example, 3137 (founded 2012), a studio and exhibition space run by three young artists who define it as ‘a space of cohabitation’ run workshops on precarious labour and alternative economies.<sup>227</sup> Curator Iliana Fokianaki, initiator of State of concept (founded 2013) which profiles itself as the first non-profit contemporary art institution in Greece, offered consultation sessions for young artists.<sup>228</sup> Other collectives organised participatory sessions and exhibitions in the building. The photographers’ collective Depression Era (founded in 2011) which at the time included more than 20 members, engaged with Omonoia as a space crossed by ‘networks of people, spaces and situations. In Bageion, their exhibition ‘Habitation’ offered a reflection on dwelling and the refugees arriving in the city (Depression Era website).

#### 6.4.3 Translating Commoning: Assembling and Working in Common

The collectives were brought together with the intention to gradually invent new forms of collaboration, not to simply use, occupy or share the same building and produce artworks, events or exhibitions. As such, Bageion was meant to potentialise a collective inventive process towards a cooperative biennial space and the relations that make it. Mollona (2021, p. 97) discusses Bageion with the difficulty ‘for a collective institutional subject to emerge’ and argues that the role of the economy was crucial. Retaining the latter, my emphasis shifts the attention from the collective subject to a process of translating commoning (as practised in common spaces) to a process of ‘commoning the biennial’. My emphasis is on the difficulty in establishing processes of collective creativity, in terms of decision-making and ‘working in

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<sup>226</sup> As we read on the website: By “rebranding” the dead “Laiki” bank, the working group which included its initiator Noah Fischer, as well as Raúl Hott, Nurtane Karagil, Csaba Nemes, Joulia Strauss and “twenty three”, opened a window onto the global financial situation from the specific political and economic conditions experienced on Cyprus.’

<sup>227</sup> The artists of 3 137 are Paki Vlassopoulou, Chrysanthi Koumianaki, and Kosmas Nikolaou and the space is the storefront 3137 Office in Neapoli part of Exarcheia. Their programme at Bageion included a talk on art as good and artists production connected to economic sustainability matters and talks with artists whose practice is connected to this field. For their participation, see: <https://www.3137.gr/en/ophis-office>.

<sup>228</sup> Fokianaki presents State of Concept as ‘the ‘first non-profit contemporary art institution with a permanent location and a yearly program to operate in Greece’. See: <https://stateofconcept.org>.

common', especially on top of the various forms of labour that Bageion required from its residents. According to Stavrides (2016) space commoning connects to social organisation, it expresses social values and meanings and connects to the work, the processes of labour and technology, a 'working in common', that make these relations (Stavrides, 2019, p. 18). The relational power of space comes through the shaping of its form through collective practices – and commoning should be striving to the sharing of power (Stavrides, 2019).

There were two main dispositives put in place by AB5-6 in this regard: an assembly and working groups as tools towards working in common.<sup>229</sup> The AB founders and programme director wanted to experiment with a different model of biennial governance, that would move beyond delegating responsibility to the groups, but sought to co-develop the programme together with the collectives. However, participants expressed scepticism towards the biennale as a platform for mediating between art and activism and, eventually, neither the assembly nor the idea of the working groups were potentialised as collective decision-making devices throughout the cohabitation. The quotes below capture the tensions:

- 5-6 meetings in a circle do not support a vision of becoming a community.  
(Interviewee 1, 2018)
- As artists we don't just produce in an abstract way. We have other work to do too.  
(Interviewee 2, 2018)
- I don't know if commoning actually happened. We did have a space to share.  
(Interviewee 1, 2018)

The assembly laid out openly the hierarchical and material divisions, uncertainty and precarity that underpinned the endeavour. It was especially the resources that AB5-6 was making available that raised criticism (Latitudes, 2015).<sup>230</sup> Next to Bageion as a material, in-

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<sup>229</sup> The assembly and the working groups brought together participants of the discursive programme and inhabitants of Bageion, as well as members of the public, in order to reflect on the discussions in the summit (Synapse 1) and as part of the decision-making process. Working groups were devised around the thematics of: 'Cooperativism', 'Commons & Urban Welfare', 'Alternative Currencies' and 'Solidarity Networks'. For example, the working group 'Solidarity Networks' invited members of groups that at the time were hosting or doing work related to refugees, like the Refugees Welcome, Solidarity4all. The 'Commons & Urban Welfare' was diverse, as it included members from groups involved in urban gardening, graphic design, autonomous spaces and wireless community projects.

<sup>230</sup> Moderator of the discussion, Margarita Tsomou, dramaturg, journalist and activist was sceptical about the model of the biennale being able to offer a platform for activism. In this way, different agents involved in AB5-6 were also performing scepticism from within.

kind support from the municipality, AB5-6 had 50.000 euro from the NEON foundation of art collector Dimitris Daskalopoulos.<sup>231</sup> The idea was to divide this sum among 3 international artists who would visit Athens to research and produce new commissions (each receiving 10.000 euro). Each resident at Bageion would receive 500 euro for the first six months. This distribution was received controversially by the collectives (Mollona, 2018). Members of collectives I interviewed experienced the distinction between international commissions and local participants as alienating, and understood the invitation to collectives as resulting immediately out of a lack of resources (Interviewee 2, 2018). Even if a redistribution of the budget followed, the idea that the process worked towards a non-hierarchical exchange felt unsupported. Eventually, none of the international artists' commissions materialised, after the stepping down of Mollona and Kalpaktsoglou.<sup>232</sup>

The material conditions and the organisational tools that AB5-6 offered clashed with the anticipation that AB5-6 would be a process of community-building. Bageion had several problems which made it unhostable: it is dilapidated, with heating problems, problems with WIFI and lack of basic infrastructures to produce work in-situ (Interviewee 1, 2018; Interviewee 2, 2018). This meant that the venue was scarcely used in between the Synapses, and thus offered less possibilities for shaping a collective process. Not every group could enter a process of commoning, for example, because they were already experiencing internal conflicts or were lacking the time for collaborations (Interviewee 2, 2018).

‘As artists we don’t just produce in an abstract way. We have other work to do too’ as one artist put it (Interviewee 2, 2018). This quote in particular summarises the problem of working in common. In inviting artists and collectives to participate in ways that keep such blurred boundaries required to activate commoning as a form of organisation, but also to operate in precarious conditions that did not secure a ground for a ‘working in common’. It was contradictory that the young artist run space 3 137 (founded 2012) was running discussions on economic sustainability, while AB5-6 was not really securing that the

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<sup>231</sup> Next to the major sponsor of NEON foundation, the Onassis Cultural Centre was a key partner. The biennale organised a two-fold symposium at the Onassis Cultural Centre – Athens (27 May 2016) and at Bageion (28 May 2016). <http://www1.athensbiennale.org/uncategorized/συμπόσιο-η-τέχνη-στα-σύννορα-χωρικές-π/>. More on Fast forward Festival see: <https://www.onassis.org/whats-on/fast-forward-festival-3>.

<sup>232</sup> American artist Theaster Gates came for a talk, Dutch filmmaker Wendelien van Oldenborgh participated in some events, while AB4 artist Hito Steyerl and Suzanne Lacy were invited too (Mollona, 2018).



experiment could move beyond precarity as a condition for creativity and collectivity. Moreover, while inviting the ‘informal economy’ to share space and pool resources, the presence of high-profile curators from abroad, the documenta team and private art collectors during some of Bageion’s events felt like an ‘exoticising gaze’, or at best, a ‘mutual observation’ process, which at moments, also contributed to participants feeling of alienation (Interviewee 3, 2020, Interviewee 4, 2019).

Different artists I interviewed pointed out to the need to have clearer agreements with the biennale. As one put it: ‘There was not a firm promise from the biennale as to what was going to happen. *We* were asked to *make* the conditions’ (Interviewee 1, 2018, - italics mine). Some noted that the experience was not an engagement in a political process in terms of negotiating what the institution itself means or needs (Interviewee 4, 2019).

There seemed to be no direction. Nothing to bring these different groups...a purpose...together, to engage in a political process in the sense of a broader negotiation of what the institution itself means and needs. This why the biennale was stuck in a kind of limbo, like trying to subvert itself but at the same time not doing so’ (Interviewee 4, 2019).

A key tension in the cohabitation as a process of ‘working in common’ can be thought in terms of process and outcome. As an edition which prioritised a processual way of unfolding, AB5-6 comes close to the idea of common space as an always-in the making relation, which cannot be fixed in an end product (Stavrides, 2016). Yet, some anticipated a more defined outcome - for example a publication as an end result to work towards. However, there was also a friction between the open methodology that AB wanted to experiment with and the precarity it is entangled in. According to Poka-Yio: ‘the time investment in order to sustain such open-ended practices is disproportionate to the biennial cycle. When an organisation is producing, it is in a permanent precarity, which does not allow to sustain its programme that easily.’ (Poka-Yio, 2018).

The material conditions and the monetary relations in AB5-6 are different than in art occupations, since resources come from a central organisation and need to be distributed. Artists activists expected from the biennale to play a more active role in sharing the conditions it was offering and questioned how it negotiated hierarchies, inequalities and power relations in the process. Bageion became a space for negotiating the ‘what’, ‘how’ and

‘for whom’ of the exchange between the biennale and the collectives, but exposed the difficulties of implementing commoning as a global practice, artistically, curatorially and institutionally. On the other hand, the cohabitation at Bageion was relatively osmotic and open as a process. Members from different groups participated in workshops by others and there were events that were co-organised, particularly from Synapse 2 and on. Most of the groups who participated invited more artists, acting themselves as hosts and operating with open boundaries. Some continued to collaborate beyond OMONOIA, having initially connected during Bageion.<sup>233</sup> Bageion was therefore more a space of encounters, which contained potentials, but which also laid bare the tensions that underpin relations of art/commoning as collective creativity and art/commoning as production and labour. The kind of osmotic environment that emerged can be best summarised with the words of artist Julia Strauss:

At a certain point, the conflict between the very neo-liberal nature of the so-called contemporary art and the reloveutionary movements affected the assembly. Many will remember how artificial it felt to stage ourselves as activists, while being those activists for real. Some participants who were involved in serious artistic political organising ran out, asking: "What is this?" Yet this moment of dissonance will not make the assembly of those who would otherwise have never come together less precious, rather the opposite. (Strauss, 2018)

What kind of potentialities then could we see in Bageion? Despite the difficulties, Bageion triggered a process of translating commoning from common spaces to how it could be practised by the biennale. One of the most significant contribution in this respect was by the working groups. Each group focused around a different thematic: 'Cooperativism', 'Commons & Urban Welfare', 'Alternative Currencies' and 'Solidarity Networks'. Each produced a list with a wide set of actions and values that could potentialise the relation to the city and to commoning the biennale: for example, the biennale could map the solidarity initiatives in Athens, become a space of care and a cultural commons, build a shared vocabulary and run a YouTube education channel, create an alternative currency and set up independent wi-fi, to support solidarity networks, to map empty buildings in the city and turn Bageion into a space for hosting refugees (Mollona, 2021).<sup>234</sup> Through this translation exercise, AB5-6 opened up imaginaries for the biennial as an infrastructure of and for commoning. Although these

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<sup>233</sup> Between Synapse 1 and Synapse 2 participants changed – they doubled from 14 to 28 – although socio-political groups had withdrawn.

<sup>234</sup> The working groups brought together two to four scholars of the summit and about ten representatives of grassroots initiatives during the second day of Synapse 1.

proposals did not materialise in the framework of AB5-6, they laid the seeds for other initiatives in the future, including d14 and spaces that sprawled after AB5-6, as I discuss in the Epilogue.



Fig. 20. Poka-Yio, Xenia Kalpaktsoglou, and Massimiliano Mollona, at the Open Assembly, 18<sup>th</sup> November 2015, Bageion, AB5-6, Athens. Behind Mollona sits d14's artistic director, Adam Szymczyk. Photo: Nysos Vasilopoulos. © Athens Biennale 2005-2021, used under a Creative Commons, used under a Creative Commons AttributionNoncommercial license: <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/3.0/> (CC BY-SA 3.0). <http://ltds.blogspot.com/2015/12/more-from-omonoia-athens-biennale.html>. [Accessed: 10<sup>th</sup> January 2018].



Fig. 21. Avtonomi Akadimia at AB5-6, April 2016. Panel On Education with Sotirios Bahtsetzis, Vasyi Cherepanyn, Paul B. Preciado, Joulia Strauss. Photo: © Marievi Mastoraki, 2016, used under a Creative Commons AttributionNoncommercial license: <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/3.0/> (CC BY-SA 3.0). Available at: <http://avtonomi-akadimia.net/2016/05/01/test/>. [Accessed: 10<sup>th</sup> September 2019].

## 6.5 Commoning the City?

This section turns attention to a selection of artworks and interventions realised in the framework of AB5-6. Although AB5-6 was received as an ‘artless biennial’ (Tarasoff, 2015), due to its heavily discursive start, a lot of artworks and exhibitions were realised throughout the process. Most of them were ephemeral performance based interventions which echoed both the limited budgets and the explorations of ‘the performative in the political’ (Butler and Athanasiou, 2013) in AB5-6. Besides, this emphasis on performativity and immateriality was not unprecedented in AB’s history, as was the case in AB4 especially.

Drawing on the RttC and the key term of ‘threshold spatiality’ (Stavrvides, 2016) this section asks: If space is relational and performed, what kind of relations were performed on Omonoia square? Engaging with some of the artworks realised in AB5-6, this section argues that artists explored Omonoia as a passage and opened up thresholds: between public and common space, between the biennale and the city. Common spaces conceived as thresholds open up passages that contest the idea of enclaves of homogenous communities and allow for engaging with otherness in the city, with commoning as an always-in-the-making set of relations that shape ‘liminal’ spaces (Stavrvides, 2015, p. 14).

Not all artists or collectives discussed in this section adopt the vocabularies of commoning or the RttC to refer to their practices. Their actions were only ephemeral and, as such, it might be argued that they were not seeking the long-term institutional and organisational transformations that other parts of AB5-6’s programme sought. However, exactly by being ephemeral and performative, many of them seem to have unlocked potentials in relation to AB5-6’s engagement with commoning and the city. What this section suggests is that they potentialised the relation, by forming ephemeral communities and challenging dominant narratives and policies as they have manifested historically on Omonoia square. They engaged with everyday life in ways that were not entirely predetermined, taking shape with spontaneous participations by dwellers. In these ways, they offered continuities to what AB5-6 explored discursively, they acted complimentary to the curatorial / institutional intentions, or challenged AB5-6’s ambivalent situatedness in processes of top down urban policies.

### 6.5.1 (Re)assembling the Biennale

Jenny Marketou's project *HOW Assemblies Matter* (2014-2016) was conceived as an ongoing nomadic and periodic performative assembly, which sought to build discursive and affective infrastructures that cross boundaries between art, academia and activism. The choice of participants reflected this, as *Assemblies* gathered international artists, theorists and curators, as well as collectives, either based in Europe or in Athens.<sup>235</sup> The choice of venues reflected an intention to be dispersed in the city in different moments and took a distance from Bageion, since the project took place after the internal troubles in AB5-6.<sup>236</sup>

The project echoed and also went beyond AB5-6's short-lived general assembly in Bageion. Marketou's *Assemblies*' are curated events by the artist and are not spaces for moulding processes of decision-making and sharing power, as the general AB5-6 assembly was meant to be. The performative dimensions acted in enabling ways with regards to mediating encounters and generating discourses. Thinking with Berlant (2016) *Assemblies* is based on an infrastructuring process that engages with existing spaces, but gestures towards new ways of assembling in them. *Assemblies* may also be viewed with what performance scholar Sharon Jackson (2011) proposes as an 'infrastructural politics of performance'. This rests on the recognition that art practice is part of multiple and interdependent systems, from public/private, individual/institutional, aesthetic/social and comes with the potential to generate transversally its own institutional infrastructures – in this case, from within biennials, biennialisation, academic and art/activist infrastructures.

*Assemblies* generated a discursive and affective space for reflecting on the legacies of assemblies on occupied squares and common spaces and also pollinating them with critique and transnational exchanges. A rich discursive and performative programme emerged, which included talks on the musical dimension of the Syntagma square occupation (Papapavlou), gatherings with artists activists from the first reactivation of Embros, alongside talks on the

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<sup>235</sup> For the participating guests and universities see: <https://assembliesummit.tumblr.com>. For an edited video of the assembly at the NTU, see: <https://vimeo.com/198201238>.

<sup>236</sup> The project took place after the internal ruptures and stepping down of Mollona and Kalpaktoglou. The artist had secured an own budget via a grant from Outset Contemporary, a funding body connected to the art collector Dimitris Daskalopoulos and his NEON Foundation. This allowed her to continue the project unaffected from the withdrawals of AB5-6. *Assemblies, Acts of social urgency and imagination* took place at the National Technical University of Athens (21-22 October 2016) and *The Meeting Room*, an exhibition and gatherings, was organised at a municipality building opposite the central Food market (12-18 December 2016)

emancipatory potentials of space for commoning (Stavrides), the performative potentials of assembling (Athanasίου) or gender-class conflicts (Dimitrakaki).<sup>237</sup> *Assemblies* was also a space where participants expressed critique, noting the exhaustion that comes with being involved in gatherings that ask to tap on their experiences from below (Papadopoulos, 2017). Collective kitchens, like O Allos Anthropos and OptionsFoodLab, a self-organised initiative training refugees in cooking, offered food after some of the assemblies. However, the project was underpinned, as AB5-6 broadly, by a relatively Eurocentric perspective and the absence of voices of newcomers inhabiting the city as subjects with own voices.

The mediating role that AB5-6 wanted to play, was here taken by the artist. Marketou describes the process as ‘a continuous happening’ which rests on performativity and looks itself as a continuous loop ... which operates almost like an algorithm’ (Marketou, 2018). In this way, the project also becomes a space for the artist to reflect her own role as a mediator and multitasker which requires her to act as ‘initiator, host, curator, cultural producer, thinker or entrepreneur’ (Marketou, 2018). Recalling Dimitrakaki and Lloyd’s arguments (2017), Marketou’s project, as the artist stresses too, includes labour (of the artist and the participants) which cannot be fully remunerated, as this labour blends in activism. Negotiating between collective processes and single-authored outcomes is also at play. The artist remains the ‘author’ of some outcomes, for example the video *The Assembly with no Particular Order*, 2016, while publications (*Organising from Below/ HOW Assemblies Matter?* Naked punch, 2017), are collectively-authored.

Two aspects, therefore, make the work exemplary with regard to the tensions that AB5-6 inhabits. First, *Assemblies* was aligned with the curatorial intentions of AB5-6 to be an infrastructure for commoning, but its performative articulation was liberated from the aims for self-governance that the general assembly of AB5-6 during the Synapses seemed unable to activate. Second, *Assemblies*’ seemed to both accept and use the logic of biennial circulation and the dialectics of centralisation and dispersals that echoed Syntagma and its

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<sup>237</sup> The talk on the music dimension of Syntagma was by Maria Papapavlou, Author, Associate Professor. Ethnomusicology and Cultural Anthropology, National and Kapodistrian University of Athens. The artist had secured an own budget via a grant from Outset, the project. For the participating guests and universities see: <https://assembliesummit.tumblr.com>. For an edited video of the assembly at the NTU, see: <https://vimeo.com/198201238>.

aftermath in Athens.<sup>238</sup> Hence, I would argue that the work inhabits the threshold between commoning the biennial and the biennialisation of the commons, between the circulations of biennialisation and the will to reconfigure relationalities and spatial arrangements in the city, in order to generate an expanding network of encounters, collaborations and alliances.

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<sup>238</sup> Some suggest that Syntagma was a centralisation of anti-austerity struggles and dispersal followed the forced eviction of Syntagma (Arampatzi, 2018). Others see the dialectics of centralisation and dispersal characterising the whole period, with mass mobilisations running parallel to smaller-scale neighbourhood assemblies (Capuccini, 2018).

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Fig. 22. Maria Papapavlou, *The musical dimension of the assemblies*. Talk during Jenny Marketou's *HOW Assemblies Matter* (2014-2016). *The Meeting Room*, 16<sup>th</sup> December 2016, AB5-6, Athens. Available at: <https://assembliesummit.tumblr.com/the-meeting-room-programme>. [Accessed: 10<sup>th</sup> June 2019].

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Fig. 23. Vana Kostayola & Petros Christidis, *YoN*, performance during Jenny Marketou's *Assemblies, Acts of social urgency and imagination*. National Technical University of Athens (21-22 October 2016). AB5-6, Athens. Available at: <https://assembliesummit.tumblr.com/post/152151377514/vana-kostayola-petros-christidis-yon#notes>. [Accessed: 10<sup>th</sup> June 2019].



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Fig. 24. Jenny Marketou, *HOW Assemblies Matter* (2014-2016). *The Meeting Room*, December 2016.  
Available at: <https://assembliesummit.tumblr.com/the-meeting-room-programme>.  
[Accessed: 10<sup>th</sup> June 2019].

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Fig. 25. Angela Dimitrakaki and Iliana Fokianaki, *A play on, and off, Alexandra Kollontai and Clara Zetkin* in 2016. Performance at Jenny Marketou's *The Meeting Room*, AB5-6, Athens. Available at: <https://assembliesummit.tumblr.com/the-meeting-room-programme>.  
[Accessed: 10th June 2019].

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Fig. 26. Campus Novel in collaboration with Barbara Marcel, *The Ever-Garden effect*, 2016, AB5-6, Athens. Available at: <http://campusnovel.blogspot.com/p/archiving-topologies.html>. [Accessed: 10<sup>th</sup> January 2020].

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Fig. 27. Campus Novel, *Archiving Topologies*, 2016, AB5-6, Athens. Available at: <http://campusnovel.blogspot.com/p/archiving-topologies.html>. [Accessed: 10<sup>th</sup> January 2020].

### 6.5.2 Performing Thresholds Between Public and Common Space

Creating alternative and ephemeral collective cartographies of the city was a shared research process among various collectives. Shared methodologies in these cases involved walking in the city, with artists acting as dwellers, urban ethnographers or urban anthropologists or tourists. From Bageion to the city and then meeting again in Bageion for workshops or exhibitions, they worked with dispersals, recentralisation's and multiplications, reminiscent of the centralising-dispersal dynamics that Syntagma activated (Stavrides, 2016; Capuccini, 2018). The dense presence of such methodologies during AB56 related to the collectives' practices, but can also be understood with a certain 'anthropological turn' that d14's presence accentuated in Athens.

In working both within Bageion and on Omonoia square, collectives activated spaces that negotiated the connection and separations between the two. AB has always brought art audiences to areas that are underpinned by multiple crossings. However, in the past, these boundaries between AB and the urban environment have been more rigid, since main activities were presented within venues, as in AB3 and AB4 (Kompatsiaris, 2017). In engaging with the dwellers on the square and also bringing them from the square inside Bageion, artists opened up thresholds between the AB audiences and those inhabiting the area. Examples that catalysed this kind of crossings were participatory and performative interventions that brought together people in impromptu ways, creating joyous and festive performances. Artists did not perform on stage, but among and with the dwellers.

Producing knowledge about Omonoia and engaging with the multiple hidden meanings in the area was a shared preoccupation.<sup>239</sup> Storytelling, walks and theatrical interventions were part of Urban Dig's project 'Omonoia' (2016-2017). The group engaged in a 12-month research project on the area, its inhabitants and users. Inspired by the stories told by local shop owners about Omonoia, the group created a series of songs and routes to experience the area and co-developed The Village Omonoia app, which guides users through stories collected from the area. On the streets and in participatory workshops, the group asked dwellers and participants

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<sup>239</sup> Members of Depression Era created the 'Omonoia Index', which assembles texts and images that produce an alternative mapping of spaces, streets and stories from the area across history. For their participation in OMONOIA, see: <https://depressionera.gr/habitation>.

to create handmade maps in response to questions such as ‘What is Omonoia for you?’ and ‘What makes Omonia a square?’ (UrbanDig\_Omonia).

The question was echoed in different works that engaged with the everyday as the locus of meaning-making in the city. For example, for *Archiving Topologies*, Campus Novel (founded 2011) dispersed in the city through fieldtrips, recordings and collective narrating techniques. The group brought together artists residing in Athens and abroad, to explore Athens. Participants engaged in small acts of sharing performed in everyday spaces and researching hidden layers in everyday life. One group attempted to collect ‘happy places’ through chance encounters on the streets (*Strolling Happiness*, in collaboration with Ilaria Biotti). Another group worked together through script exercises, texts and storyboards towards a collective scenario through performative approaches, mixing personal stories by dwellers with locations with historical meaning (*Same Time Tomorrow*, in collaboration with Tatiana Ilichenko and Moritz Metzner). Another collective activity involved researching the National Garden of Athens behind the Greek parliament (formerly the Royal Gardens and palace) and on informal spaces of gardening in the city, from private balconies to occupied urban voids (*The Ever-Garden Effect*, in collaboration with Barbara Marcel).

Campus Novel (2020) speak about the methodologies as ‘dispersion and multiplication of a given centre through the creation of performative events interacting with the local and the international’. By inhabiting spatiality as a process that invites and invents multiple routes that traverse hidden and complex relations between the personal, the collective, the historical or the fictional, these actions interrogate how urban space is produced and how potentialities are to be found in the minor acts of the everyday. In Lefebvre’s spirit, the city is a collective work of art constantly in the making. Moreover, Campus Novel’s methodology seems to echo the decentralising practices of common spaces, as it asks what distributing means in the realm of aesthetic and political action (Rancière, 2006). For example, the squares’ occupations were shaped by a dialectics between decentralising, dispersing and recentralising - through working groups, assemblies and performative art actions (Stavrides, 2016).<sup>240</sup>

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<sup>240</sup> Stavrides (2016) also notes that this helps to understand the differences that shaped the squares. Not everyone came to actively be involved in decision-making. Some people just came to the square to protest or to be part of particular and then dispersed, carrying something of their participation beyond the square.

Not only what makes Omonoia a square, but also who can exercise the RttC, who is excluded and who has the right to use Omonoia was a question that several performative works posed. Different performances invited to think how certain subjectivities and communities are marginalised by dominant groups, how state violence targets migrants, how patriarchy perpetuates the invisibility of women and queer subjectivities in art and public space. For example, a feminist critique on gender stereotypes through dominant social structures, art history and public space set the tone in the performance *Omonoia Erotics*, in the framework of *Gomenes* (April 2016) a project by Eva Gianakopoulou and Rilène Markopoulou. The project unfolded across three days (April 2016), with two Symposia and the final event on the square.<sup>241</sup>

In the framework of *Gomenes*, Maria Bountouka's *Circling the square* was a performative tour around Omonoia (April 2016), which highlighted public performative interventions by Greek female artists in recent years. The tour invited to think how Greek art history and public art are male-centric: monumental sculptures made by men or commemorating male historical figures are plenty across Athens. With subtle humour, ironic or naïve-sounding comments, the guide is critical towards the 'neo-classical' monuments, but also towards the system that decides what is legitimated as public art.<sup>242</sup> During the tour, the artist referred to examples of performance artists who challenge their bodies' boundaries and question the dominant and normalising ways women are often represented in public space.<sup>243</sup> As Bountouka says at the end of her walk, her intention was to show that this kind of works challenge canonical and normative maps of contemporary art in public space, while

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<sup>241</sup> 25 artists and lecturers from Austria, Greece, France, the UK and Germany took part in the project. See: <http://nettingthework.com/GOMENES-I-review-in-detail>. The fact that many of the projects discussed here were iterations meant that AB5-6 was not the only platform through which the work was destined for. In some cases, it also meant that they had funding from different bodies, and not only AB5-6. *Gomenes* was realised with Austrian and Greek artists and theorists. In this way, it had funding by the Federal Chancellery of Austria, the Austrian Embassy, private sponsors (Ktima Stavropoulou and VirtusTech) and in-kind support by the solidarity kitchen O Allos Anthropos.

<sup>242</sup> The tour can be watched here: <https://vimeo.com/171480923>.

<sup>243</sup> Among the examples were Georgia Sagri's performance *Polytechneio*, 1999, where the artist stood wearing bandages instead of underwear inside a glass container opposite the Polytechneio, the National Technical University of Athens. The performance took place during the yearly demonstration which commemorates the student's revolt against the Junta in 1973. Sagri was taken to court for her performance, raising questions about censorship and repression in a democratic state (Antonopoulou, 2017). With the above example, it was also interesting that Bountouka was offering a longer context to situate the artist's work in AB5-6 and d14. At AB5-6 Sagri's video *The New Kind* (2003), shows the artist struggling to move across the pavement while her hands and feet are bound.

simultaneously disrupting the dominant urban order which prioritises the male voice in the city and the making of public space.<sup>244</sup>

*Acts of Engagement* (7 to 17 September 2016) organised by the artist cooperative C.A.S.A. included exhibitions, a discursive programme and performances. Their intervention in AB5-6 resulted from a ten-day collaborative work cycle with the participation of researchers, artists, and curators from 9 countries.<sup>245</sup> The video documenting the acts captures the many bodies present and languages spoken on the square, accompanied by live music played by Roma musicians. In *Free Araf, flames unchained*, artist Eleni Zervou engaged a group of artists with children of refugee families on the square, who drew their wishes and released their drawings as lanterns in the sky during the evening.<sup>246</sup> In his performance, artist Thodoris Trambas engaged in a wrapping of the square with a tape. The artist's actions created an ambivalent space between enclosing and bonding, almost forcing people to make choices where to stand, with whom. Both separating and connecting, new spatial and relational configurations were activated on the square, pointing to interdependencies and vulnerabilities and strengths that may emerge when people of different backgrounds come together as users of the city, even if through the action of one individual and for a limited time.

*Acts of Engagement* invites to think of Lefebvre's RttC as collectively inhabiting the city and in Ranciere's terms, as a redistribution of the sensible, which challenges the notion of citizenship based on membership in a nation-state. Rather than the city being about urban order and normalisation, it emerges out of disorder and joyous feast (Stavrides, 2007, p. 8 in Makrygianni and Tsavdaroglou, 2016). Through these gatherings, artists and refugees,

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<sup>244</sup> Another invited duo in the frame of Gomenes performed critique to art institutions and their entanglements with capitalism and patriarchy. For example, in the frame of Gomenes, artist duo Laura and Lauren who study art and anthropology at Goldsmiths, University of London have created a faux institution, the Department of Sex Work to highlight the exclusion of sex workers' voices and labour rights in art, academic and activist contexts. For an interview with the department of sex work <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MDztoJIn4KI>.

<sup>245</sup> The group collaborated with err\* collective from Master of Arts In the Public Sphere (MAPS), École Cantonal d'Art du Valais (ECAV), Switzerland. Participant artists were: Nikos Stathopoulos, Anna Papathanasiou, Thodoris Trambas, Thomas Diafas, Emilia Bouriti, Vilelmini Andrioti, Javier Gonzalez Pesce, Madeleine Dymond, Andreas Papamichail, Camille Kaiser, Erika Pirl, Alexandros Kyriakatos, Erasmia Tsipra, James Simbouras, Yiannis Antoniou, Camilla Paolino, David Esteban Romero Torres, David Gregory Rees-Thomas, Eleni Zervou, Orestis Karalis, Efthymia Athanasodimitropoulou, Margarita Amorova, Nuno Kassola. For more, see: <http://c-a-s-athens.squarespace.com>.

<sup>246</sup> For the documentation and video see: <https://c-a-s-athens.squarespace.com/material-all/2017/1/13/helen-zervou-free-araf>.

‘documented’ and ‘undocumented’ created a space of osmosis which disrupts the dominant urban order or the formal spatial arrangements that one observes when politicians come to inaugurate yet another revamping of Omonoia.<sup>247</sup> These spatialities contested Kaminis’ rhetoric, where race and class become criteria for exclusion, as not all citizens are equal or recognised as citizens (Makrygianni and Tsavdaroglou, 2016). Through joyous gatherings that involved those that police operations in the area often target as unwanted, the events produced a sociability which is not based on citizenship as a right granted by the state, but on inhabiting space.

In the above examples, performative processes activate sharing through space. They invite questions about the potentials of performativity for shaping ‘relationality as a central condition for new political possibilities’ (Butler and Athanasiou, 2013 in Velicu and Garcia-Lopez, 2018, p. 67). Several approaches to space intersected: creating conditions for gathering, dancing, performing, walking for alternative cartographies, and activating spaces that challenge heteronormative readings of the city. In terms of their engagement with space, they were not simply about space as a resource to be used for creating art projects, but they activated new dimensions of relationality/sociality through transience, multiplicity and diversity.

Whether we approach them as deterritorialising (Stavrvides, 2019) or as displacement (Moten in Lynes, 2018), these interventions disrupted the social norms that set the tone in the everyday life experience of Omonoia square. At the same time, they offered embodied enquiries on the potentials of ‘performing the political’ as per Butler and Athanasiou and the title of one of the Synapse 1’s panels. Drawing on Butler (2015) and Athanasiou (2017) - the ‘we’ is enacted through commoning and produced by performativity. Subjects emerge out of action (Butler, 2015) and commoning shapes fluid identities (Stavrvides, 2015). With this in mind, we may challenge approaches to commoning that see the production of a fully-fledged alternative or communal subjectivity (Velicu and Garcia-Lopez, 2018, p. 61). Athanasiou (2017) sees assemblies as a transitory sharing for political subjectivation and locates their performative potential in sharing vulnerabilities, contingencies and impossibilities, of their

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<sup>247</sup> For example, formal gatherings and speeches set the tone in the latest such revamp by the municipality. The inauguration, amidst the 2020 pandemic and while the government was campaigning for social distancing, was controversially received. A time-lapse of the construction of the fountain can be seen here: <https://www.pappaspost.com/omonias-square-unveiled-athens/>.

efforts for 'being-in-common'. These 'interdependent vulnerabilities' create grounds for negotiating power relations (Butler, 2015 in Velicu and Garcia, 2018). In doing so, they 'disturb notions of an enclosed community' (Butler, 2015) and 'urban enclaves' (Stavrides, 2014; 2016).

If AB5-6's cohabitation experiment did not transform the biennale's governance and economies and remained embedded in gentrification and urban redevelopment processes, these performative practices created spaces of collective agency and spatial arrangements that enabled new encounters and imaginaries for art and urban everyday life. They enacted versions of the city which connected to social urban-based struggles and allowed for porous relations with the square's everyday life. Seen through them, despite the ambivalences that underpinned it, AB5-6 emerges as an edition which activated what for Lefebvre (1996/1968) was an important aspect, that is to have multiple readings of the city and, in Rancière's (2006) spirit, create new distributions of the sensible in the city.



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Fig. 28. Thodoris Trambas, *Syn+*, 2016, Performance at Omonoia square, AB5-6 Athens.  
Available at:  
<https://uploads.knightlab.com/storymapjs/a399dd5676437f62040477406bfcc83c/tothefuturepublic/index.html?wmode=opaque>. [Accessed: 10<sup>th</sup> January, 2020].

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Fig. 29. Thodoris Trambas, *Syn+*, 2016, Performance at Omonoia square, AB5-6 Athens.  
Available at:  
<https://uploads.knightlab.com/storymapjs/a399dd5676437f62040477406bfcc83c/tothefuturepublic/index.html?wmode=opaque>. [Accessed: 10<sup>th</sup> January, 2020].



Fig. 30. Maria Bountouka, *Circling the square*, 2016, Omonoia square. In the framework of the event *Gomenes*, AB5-6, Athens. Photo: Alexandros Kaklamanos. © Eva Giannakopoulou and Rilène Markopoulou, used under a Creative Commons AttributionNoncommercial license: <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0/> (CC BY-SA 4.0). Available at: <http://nettingthework.com/CIRCLING-THE-SQUARE>. [Accessed: 1st June 2021].

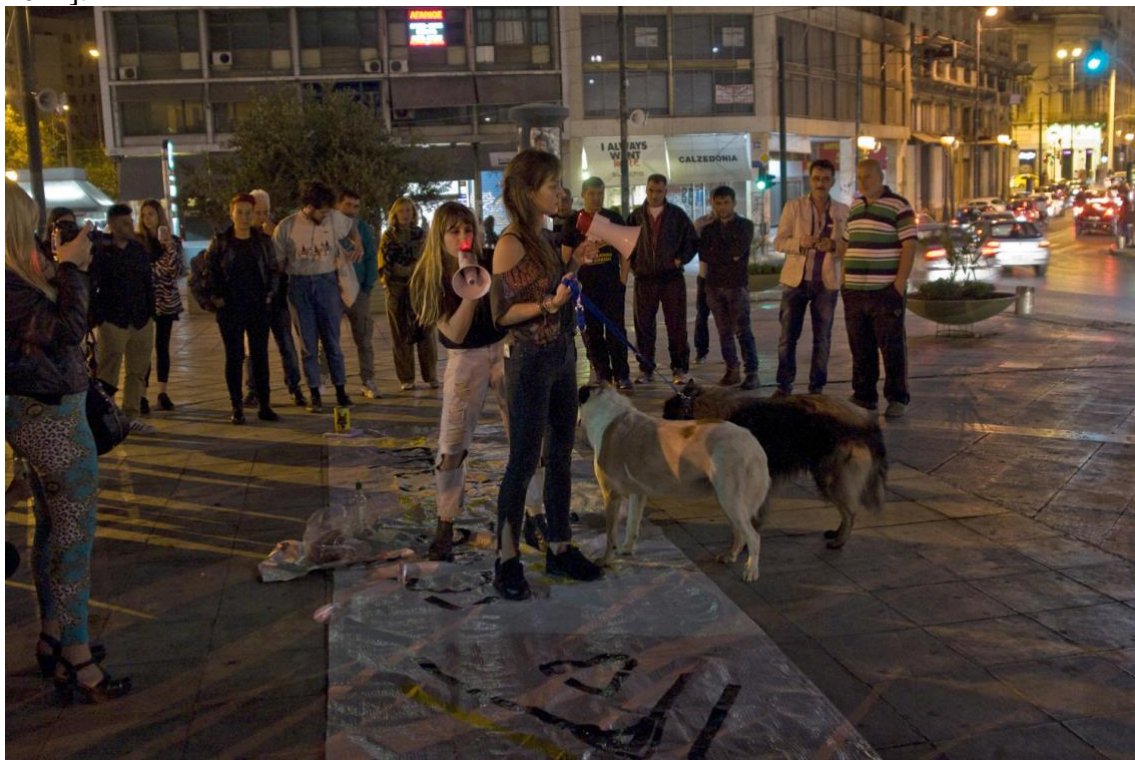


Fig. 31. Eva Giannakopoulou and Maria Nikiforaki, *Omonoia Erotics*, 2016, Omonoia square. In the framework of the event *Gomenes*, AB5-6, Athens. Photo: Alexandros Kaklamanos and Nikos Stathopoulos. © Eva Giannakopoulou and Rilène Markopoulou, used under a Creative Commons AttributionNoncommercial license: <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0/> (CC BY-SA 4.0). Available at: <http://nettingthework.com/GOMENES-1/GOMENES-I-Athens-GR-Participants-Performances>. [Accessed: 1<sup>st</sup> June 2021]. [Accessed: 1<sup>st</sup> June 2021].

## 6.6 Learning from AB5-6: Translating Commoning

With the idea of the threshold running across the chapter, I approached the curatorial/spatial/institutional premises of AB5-6 as a problem of instituting commoning connected to AB5-6's ambition to have a mediating role between AB, grassroots collectives, international artists and d14. These ambitions were met from early on with scepticism and withdrawals. A key contradiction in AB5-6 was that it gestured towards the city as a collective work of art, along the lines of Lefebvre's (1996/1968) RttC, but it partnered up with a mayor that has appropriated the RttC to promote creative city rhetoric and has been hostile to common spaces. The Bageion cohabitation was underpinned by tensions between process/outcome, production/reproduction and collective creativity. Hierarchical divisions among the participants, unequal budget distribution, different forms of labour demanded by the biennale and critique from artists towards the experiment hindered the potentialisation of a collective decision-making process towards commoning the biennial. In contrast, performative interventions that explored Omonoia square generated dynamic porous interactions and different spatialities with regards to urban life. In this way, they opened imaginaries that envision other relationalities of urban life.

The intention to learn from common spaces already indicates a simultaneous distance and a proximity to how art/commoning is practised in biennials. Biennials are not commons, but the quest to learn from common spaces is already a quest to common the biennial – that is, reorganising its economy, institutional boundaries and relation to the city – even if some of these elements remain on the level of 'a desire to' change. Through the example of AB5-6, what I argue is that biennials accentuate the problem of translation. 'The commons is always organised in translation' (Roggero, 2010, p. 368 in Stavrides, 2016, p. 43. Translation creates common grounds between people of different political, cultural or religious background. Rather than relying on pre-existing languages and forms of communication, what is at stake is 'to invent new forms of translating 'experiences' or intellectual adventures' (Ranciere, 2009, p. 11 in Stavrides, 2016, p. 43). If biennials have a role to play as infrastructures for commoning, this means asking how they can act as infrastructures for translating commoning, before asking perhaps how they can be common spaces. The act of translating the empirical insights and theories on commoning is an exercise that is about the inventiveness of commoning to open new worlds always in-the making. These acts of

translation can create new languages, habits and codes that potentialise relations between art/commoning, biennials and the city.

AB5-6 rehearsed an exercise of translation, by asking activists from common spaces to suggest possible actions in the process of an envisioned transitioning from the biennial mode towards a common space. The exercise of translating art/commoning as collective creativity, sharing and collaboration and as labour is a crucial problem that both commoners and biennial makers would need to be attentive to. Despite its contradictions, the commoning-based approach of AB5-6 potentialised processes of translation at the overlaps between commoning the biennial and commoning the city.

What can be learned from AB5-6? This question is pertinent, because I argue that d14's 'learning from Athens' is premised to a degree on learning from AB. First, commoning in AB5-6 was understood as a socio-spatial practice to learn from and to be explored discursively. Second, to common the biennial was about engaging with collective practices in the city through processes of self-management and collective decision-making. While this proved the most difficult aspect in the process, the main question is how the biennial can become the means to practise commoning. From a relational point of view, this points to a practice that seeks to mediate and institute new relationalities. From an organisational point of view, it concerns a practice which tries to think together with artists/collectives how to create the conditions for co-shaping and co-deciding a process of mutual engagement. The approach moves from curating the biennial to establishing a ground where curatorial and institutional premises and ambitions overlap. In this framework, the question that occupied the core of AB5-6 was how to politicise and collectivise the biennial, how to transform its production and economies and its relation with the city. Can the biennial be a space for exploring the potentialities for collectively shaping both the biennial and the city?

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Fig. 63. Documenta 14, last public message with a design by Mevis & van Deursen. Message on Twitter and critical comments by a user. Twitter, 18<sup>th</sup> September, 2017. Available at: [https://twitter.com/documenta\\_\\_14/status/909736217000005632/photo/1](https://twitter.com/documenta__14/status/909736217000005632/photo/1). [Accessed 1<sup>st</sup> June 2021]

## Chapter 7. Learning from Athens as Learning from Common Spaces?

### The Case of documenta 14, 'Learning from Athens' (2017)

As in AB5-6, rethinking the institution was presented as being at the core of the curatorial approach of documenta14 'Learning from Athens'. d14 articulated from the start that the move to Athens was significant for this rethinking. The approach pointed to a willingness to operate on the threshold between curating and instituting documenta, questioning established and instituted modes of documenta and proposing a new one, triggered by moving the exhibition to Athens. Initially d14 had no thematic premise, but what was important was the structural move to Athens (Szymczyk, 2017b). The working title 'Learning from Athens' acted declaratively, pointing to the intention to learn from and act in solidarity to Athens (Tzirtzilakis, 2017). The progressive unfolding of d14 in the space of two years through a series of events and the use of the commons in d14's curatorial logos pointed to a possible sharing process of the exhibition - a process of 'instituting in the commons' (Szymczyk, 2017, p. 41).

This chapter traces how d14 engaged with the commons, identifying different positions that emerged in the curatorial and institutional decisions:

- Commoning as a curatorial approach of learning from solidarity cultures and sharing the exhibition with the context of Athens
- Commoning as artistic method of learning from and engaging with common spaces in Athens
- The commons in defence of the public art institution
- The commons as institutional critique to the existing documenta institution
- The commons as a horizon for documenta, invoked performatively in the curatorial logos
- The commons as collective (particularly indigenous) struggles against capitalist enclosures

The chapter proposes a reading of d14's overall curatorial – institutional position with what Athanasiou (2016) calls a performative politics within/against the institution.<sup>248</sup> As I

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<sup>248</sup> Athanasiou (2015) had expressed her propositions during AB5-6 Synapse 1 'The performative in the political' and during the Green Park conference on 'Institutions, Politics, Performance', events

introduced in chapter 1, Athanasiou (2016) suggests that working from within and against the institution one can address its normalising power. One of the most emphatic ways the curators used the commons emerged in relation to this position of within/against: defending broadly the public art institution and expressing institutional critique towards the institution of documenta.

As in AB5-6, I examine d14 with the double prism of commoning the biennial/commoning the city to ask if and in what ways it may have potentialised processes of sharing and new relationalities with the city and what kind of contradictions underpin its curatorial premise to learn from Athens. d14's move and use of commons in its curatorial logos raises the question how a powerful institution/event shares its material and symbolic power and the agency it has to shape contemporary art and large-scale exhibitions, with Athens, a city marked in recent years by crisis and commons. Taking the city as a locus of neoliberal crisis and resistance, d14 was split between Kassel and Athens, stirring fervent debates about its intentions in Athens. Critics argued that the move was an othering gesture that took the city both at the core of systemic socio-political problems of Europe and distant enough from Europe - a devalued other whose radical art activist practices can offer lessons (Tramboulis and Tzirtzilakis, 2018, p. 5). While presented as a decolonising gesture, d14 received criticism for reproducing neo-colonial attitudes and exoticising the politicised art scene in Athens (Fokianaki, Varoufakis, 2017).

In examining how d14 mobilises the commons and situating this engagement in the complexities that the exhibition encountered in Athens, this chapter addresses a gap in literature that responded to d14's presence in Athens. Despite the wealth of reviews and texts about d14, research so far has not engaged at length with commoning as a significant prism for d14's move to Athens and curatorial – institutional premise. Neither the critique it received nor its relation to AB have been examined through the lens of commoning.

What I will be arguing is that d14's curatorial/institutional stance is underpinned by missed potentialities and reluctances to be a porous to the solidarity cultures on the ground in Athens and only selectively articulated its institutional politics and horizons with the lens of the

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where d14's artistic director and other d14 agents participated. In this regard, it can be argued that this position is influenced by discussions on rethinking art institutions and the choice that the d14 team made to work in Athens.

common/s. I argue that decisive for d14's decisions, shifting positions towards commoning and reluctances towards engaging with Athens and its commons spaces were the broken ties with AB (summer 2016) and the critical reception it received, as d14 progressively unfolded from the opening of the public programmes and on (September 2016).

The chapter argues that between the initial curatorial intents to 'learn from Athens' and d14's final performative claims that declared the exhibition as a commons, d14 was reluctant to potentialise its relation to Athens and commoning. d14's curatorial/institutional logos only selectively articulated its institutional politics with the lens of common/s, acknowledging it as significant for documenta's future and in support of the public art institution. The public programme hosted artists activists, but this remained a discursive interaction, while d14's publications did not connect commons struggles to Athens. Works in public space opened up the exhibition to the city, but d14 seemed disinvested from presenting them in ways that revealed their complex relations to Athens' solidarity and commoning practices.

## **7.1 Curatorial - Institutional Thresholds: Instituting in the Commons?**

The previous chapter examined AB5-6 and the contradictions that underpinned the biennale, in its quest to engage with commoning. This chapter examines documenta 14 (d14) and its intention to 'learn from Athens'. I contend that this intention, at least initially, overlapped with an intention to learn from commoning, particularly Athens's solidarity spaces and self-organised art occupations (Tsomou, 2015). (Szymczyk, 2015a and 2015b). However, the unmaterialised partnership with AB5-6, a prospective partner of d14 and a biennale which had commoning at its heart, as well the critical reception, which run in parallel to d14's progressive unfolding, co-shaped the shifting positions and reluctances in terms of how d14 articulated its relation to Athens, its art scene and common spaces.

This section establishes the significance of both Athens and the commons for the curatorial premise of d14. Subsequently, it argues that one of the main gaps in d14's approach was that it was conceived as a gesture of sharing and wanted to be situated in the context of Athens, but which failed to elaborate on this as a gesture of commoning. Concretely, the section juxtaposes curatorial statements and curatorial decisions, revealing discrepancies between them and highlighting the problem of representation as key in understanding these discrepancies.



Rethinking the institution was connected to Athens and commons through the notion of solidarity. Next to learning from the solidarity spaces in Athens, solidarity was posited as a guiding principle for d14's political position and the curatorial decision to move to Athens. Moreover, Szymczyk had called to act in solidarity with Athens and AB at the ECF award (see Chapter 6.1.1). During AB5-6's panel 'Rethinking institutions' (Synapse 1, November 18 2015) Szymczyk presented his approach by drawing on Foucault's understanding of apparatus (dispositive) as a formation whose major function is to respond to an urgent need (Szymczyk, 2015c).<sup>249</sup> His proposal (dating from 2013) to move d14 to Athens was informed by urgencies related to migration and the political disappointments following SYRIZA's election, challenges that he took both as European as much as Greek.<sup>250</sup> The reasons were also connected to the debt crisis and the tensed relations it signified between Germany and Greece since 2009, becoming even more tensed during the refugee crisis and Greece's potential exit from the Eurozone, in 2015.<sup>251</sup>

Hospitality was a keyword in the curatorial urge to 'unlearn' the privileges that came with operating from within the powerful institution of documenta (Szymczyk, 2015a).<sup>252</sup> For documenta to become relevant as a critical agent, the position of the host (in Kassel) had to be partly abandoned for that of guest in Athens, according to the curator. This desire to rethink documenta's relation to Kassel builds on previous documenta editions, which literature approaches as deterritorialising or decentralising efforts that incorporated forms of

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<sup>249</sup> Connecting solidarity to the Polish context, Szymczyk spoke about *Solidarność*, the Independent Self-governing Labour Union of Solidarity in Gdansk a movement that, learning from previous movements and failures, was significant for the first free elections in Poland.

<sup>250</sup> The Synapse 1 was at least the second instance where Szymczyk participated. An early symposium was organised by AB in December 2004, bringing together directors of several cultural institutions in Greece. See: <https://athensbiennale.org/cgi-bin/biennial-list/mail.cgi/archive/ab%34newsletter/20141129003722/>.

<sup>251</sup> When the German minister of foreign affairs visited Athens and spoke about d14 as a potential bridge between the two countries, d14 issued a statement to say that the bridge d14 was interested in building was 'a political one, over which the refugees who need to find a safe home in Europe might be able to walk' (d14 News, 2015). See: <https://www.documenta14.de/en/news/1610/documenta-14-is-not-an-ambassador-of-any-one-nation-or-interest-group>.

<sup>252</sup> From early on the concept of hospitality was adopted to emphasise that the stake was to negotiate the role of (documenta in Kassel as) host with that of (documenta in Athens) as guest (press release, Oct 2014; Szymczyk, 2017, p. 240). In interviews, the director spoke about the move out of Kassel could be read as a 'dispossession' (DW 2017). As Szymczyk noted in later interviews, the 'enterprise' of documenta was a good starting point to consider the contemporary condition of neoliberal capitalism' and for devising ways to 'circumvent the spectacular regime that the marketization of contemporary art brings' (Szymczyk, 2018).

institutional critique (Green and Gardner, 2016). However, d14's ambition was to move this logic further, as the below quote from the director's essay in d14's main publication, *The Reader* (2017) shows.

I would argue that, rather than only being a tool of German cultural policy and an event expected to have a significant impact on Kassel and the region, documenta must be considered an autonomous, commonly owned, transnational and inclusive self-organised artistic undertaking - one that is carried out by a multitude and not limited to any location in particular" (Szymczyk, 2017, p. 40, 41).

In his essay, the director argues that documenta does not exist, but as a 'potentiality' - a self-organised parliament of bodies (a title given to d14's public programme) that embodies the multitude, a collective social subject able to continue reassembling and institute beyond the event of d14 (Szymczyk, 2017, 41).<sup>253</sup> The essay takes a concise – even though brief- position towards the significance of 'instituting in the commons': Szymczyk correlates the latter to performative or practical acts of coming together, like rituals or celebrations, acts of radical subjectivation that contest sovereign forms of power, precarious labour and antagonisms (Szymczyk, 2017, p. 41). Envisioned as a continuous mobile assembly of the multitude, the idea of the future 'iterability' (as per the title of the essay) of documenta points to the task of the multitude for instituting the common (Hardt and Negri, 2009).

The common/s are also evoked as practices connected to emergent communities which move beyond identity bonds through processes of political subjectivation (de Angelis, 2016; Stavrides, 2016). Echoing the crisis in the Greek context, the director proposes to rethink documenta through an active reclaiming of ownership by a 'coming community' that reimagines every d14 participant as 'owner of an unlimited number of unissued shares in the exhibition' beyond commodified relations and antagonism (Szymczyk, 2017, p. 41).<sup>254</sup>

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<sup>253</sup> The text does not always name its theoretical sources. The idea of potentiality points to Agamben and, even though many ideas point to different theorisations linked to the common/s, there are no direct references in the essay.

<sup>254</sup> The full passage reads as follows: 'This act of becoming owners rather than consumers, renters, producers of documenta 14 – and of or entire lives – can be performed in many different ways in Athens and Kassel, and elsewhere, through symbolic and practical gestures, interventions, celebrations, and rituals. For as long as we do not institute, realise, and employ the possibility of claiming our place in the commons through an act of radical subjectivation, we will not be able to move away from the apparatuses of sovereign power that we were born into and that continue to shape and destroy our lives, keeping us within ever precarious labour conditions and subjugating us to debilitating political schemes that keep people isolated from each other or pitted against each other'. (Szymczyk, 2017, p. 41, 42). 'In referring to 'unissued shares', the vocabulary also alludes to the debt

However, if the director points to a potential future itinerant model as an ongoing process of instituting in the commons for documenta, he gives us no insights into how this idea played out in Athens. Was and in what ways d14 instituted in the commons? Taking commoning as a curatorial methodology that could be potentialised with d14's move to Athens invites to think of a porous exhibition to art/commoning practices in Athens and an intention to share with the Athens art scene the power documenta has to shape contemporary art and write the history of exhibitions.

Putting aside the curatorial – institutional horizon that Szymczyk points to, the problem of representation is one that defines d14's relation to Athens and commoning. First, because of its move to Athens, d14 pushes critics, researchers or visitors, to look for artists, subjects and artworks with some relation to Athens or Greece. Neither the search for the local, nor the national entirely disappear. Although aware that d14 could not represent the complexities of the Athenian art scene, nonetheless critics anticipated from d14 a sense of 'responsibility with regards to who it chose to speak about or amplify and how it represented Athens' (Zefkili, 2016; Baciak, 2017).<sup>255</sup> If instituting new relationalities was important for AB5-6, a situated biennale, this question was even more crucial for d14, as a documenta that chose this particular city to make its statements.

Accordingly, any effort to examine how it 'learns from Athens' and how it 'learns from commoning', calls to think how it engages with commoning *in* Athens and to grapple with questions of inclusion and exclusion. In other words, this view proposes to think of commoning as a curatorial methodology of sharing the exhibition with the context where it chose to act. This narrow focus on commoning in Athens raises, however, questions. d14 was not strictly *about* Athens and the commons was not necessarily the overarching concept that marked its political positions. For instance, by focusing on d14's relation to commoning *in* Athens, what might be undermined is d14's enquiries into commoning related to other

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mechanisms imposed to Athens, which d14 thematised also in *The Reader*. By claiming ownership, the hope is to challenge documenta's usual privileged Western audiences, not something that d14 necessarily achieved, but which is 'yet to be fully realised' according to the director (Szymczyk, 2017, p. 41).

<sup>255</sup> d14 engaged with theorists and critics in its publications and public programme and commissioned a few Athens based artists. In total, there were 16 artists with some relation to Athens out of 146 living artists. There were many artists architects and composers included in the list of

geopolitical contexts, racial injustices or indigenous struggles, which were part of its enquiries.

For my scope, a narrower examination of how d14 engaged not with the commons in general, but specifically with commoning *in* Athens is significant, given the centrality of Athens for d14. Just listing which understandings of commons d14 mobilised - for example, the idea of the common good in relation to the public institution or the commons as collective indigenous struggles against capitalism - does little to tell us how these thematics emerge out of the specific interrelation with the context of Athens, a city where commons are a contested terrain, its political meanings debated across art, political activism and urban life.

Similarly, interrogating d14's stance towards commoning includes, but cannot be exhausted in how many Greek artists, curators or Athens based collectives were included in d14. However, this cannot tell us much about the qualities of the collaboration.<sup>256</sup> What is, however, remarkable, was that d14 did not invite many collectives in general, a paradoxical choice for an exhibition that sought to investigate forms of being together. Despite the small number - six collectives (and seven artists duos) in d14's artist list, the few invitations to international collectives nonetheless resonated with some of d14's most accentuated enquiries into violence, indigeneity or racialized injustices.<sup>257</sup> Hence, I argue that it is necessary to address how d14 mobilises the common/, who it excludes and includes by situating these choices in the complexities that defined its presence in Athens.

A crucial decision to consider, for contextualising the exclusions that are visible in d14's artist list and programme is the break between d14 and AB. d14 did not invite Athens-based curators to be part of the curatorial team, a decision which received criticism (Zefkili, 2017;

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<sup>256</sup> Athens is also represented through artists whose work does not strictly relate to commons, like Panos Haralambous or Eva Stefani.

<sup>257</sup> Among them were, the anonymous Syrian collective Abounaddara, whose work aims to show the diverse aspects of the Syrian revolution; iQhiya, a Johannesburg-based feminist black collective whose performances explore radical feminist resistance movements; the indigenous north American collective Postcommodity, the Sami Artist group, and the artist trio of Israel Galván, Niño de Elche, and Pedro G. Romero who d14 commissioned to work with Roma artists, and lastly, Forensic Architecture, who were added later, in Kassel. In short, the inclusions of the few collectives in d14 were aligned to d14's quest to renew Eurocentric canons in the framework of documenta's histories, rather than show a connection to Athens.

Mollona, 2021).<sup>258</sup> Here, there was an anticipation that AB could be part of the curatorial team, since it was presented as a key partner for d14 in Athens. The fact that the AB co-founders were not invited in d14's curatorial team caused the break between d14 and AB (Mollona, 2021). Although this break was never publicly announced, it set the tone in informal discussions during d14's opening and has been since addressed only briefly in reviews (Rikou and Yalouri, 2017; Zefkili, 2017). The break meant that the connection to Athens' collective art practices and commoning on the ground was more difficult to achieve for d14 without the mediating role that AB5-6 could have played. The unmaterialised collaboration with AB, a key infrastructure within the Athenian art scene, constituted a gap for d14 as an exhibition that engaged with commons as collective struggles in its magazine and public programme and was envisioned as an exhibition to be instituted in the commons (Szymczyk, 2017). Even if only speculatively, there was a missed potentiality, that of instituting commoning as a form of collaboration between two very asymmetrical biennials in terms of resources, influence and different positions in relation to Athens.

#### 7.1.1 Exercises of Freedom: Assembling documenta 14 After Athens Biennale 5-6

A second crucial moment that shaped the problem of representation and influenced d14's engagement with commoning in Athens was '34 Exercises of Freedom' (September 14-24, 2016) which launched d14's public programme, The Parliament of Bodies (PoB).<sup>259</sup> The 'Exercises' were curated by philosopher, queer and trans activist Paul B. Preciado, Head of d14's public programmes. The venue, The Municipality Arts Centre at Parko Eleftherias, a former headquarters of military police during the Junta (1967-1974) inspired the programme (eleftheria is freedom in Greek) which drew on Foucault's (1984, 1994) notion of freedom as positive resistance and emphasised anti-dictatorial struggles (Minj, 2019).<sup>260</sup>

The intention was to bring together 'contemporary languages of resistance' and trigger alliances between the radical left, indigenous struggles and trans feminist queer practices. In

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<sup>258</sup> The most important roles in d14 team where Athens-based curators were involved were Marina Fokidis Head of Office in Athens and Katerina Tselou as Assistant to the director.

<sup>259</sup> A ceremonial opening with indigenous activist Linnea Dick launched the events. For a more at length discussion of the events see: Fokianaki, 2016: <https://www.frieze.com/article/missing-bodies>. Zefkili, 2017, 2017a and b. <http://thirdtext.org/exercises-freedom-documenta14> and <https://ocula.com/magazine/features/documenta-14-a-reflection-before-the-opening/>.

<sup>260</sup> Among the intentions was to problematise the transition from dictatorial regimes to neoliberalism in the 1970s, connecting for example Greece to Argentina and Brazil.

this spirit, the ‘Exercises’ launched with Toni Negri and Niillas Somby, Sami activist, both imprisoned as terrorists in the early 1970s. The last events included activists from AMOQA (Athens Museum of Queer Arts), and Turkish Kurdish queer activists with links to Athens, Berlin, Istanbul and Rojava.

With these invitations, the PoB gestured towards a queering and decolonising of the commons, expanding the multitude through the inclusion of postcolonial, indigenous and queer transfeminist activism. If the PoB was envisioned as a multitude in the curatorial rationale (Szymczyk, 2017), then the PoB pointed to an anti-identitarian politics that was at once personal, spatial, political, global: it referred to the crisis of representative democracy; it echoed Preciado’s transitioning as a transgender man and saw refugees and trans people as political subjects that expose the crisis of nation states, calling for a political ‘transition’ (Preciado, 2017).<sup>261</sup>

Most critics located the problem in the ways the ‘Exercises’ engaged *with* movements and artistic activism (Kleftogianni, 2016; Rafferty, 2017; Stafylakis, 2017; Zefkili, 2017). For example, Stafylakis criticised the pro-commons and queerwashing stance, noting that d14 amplified the already existing popularity of the commons, which contribute to a ‘superficial representation of the city as a global paradigm of alternative lifestyles and radicalised communities (Perlson, 2018). Along these lines, the theorist criticised the participation of Adesportes Skyles, a self-organised female theatre collective, whose performances in antiracist festivals or Embros theatre offer socio-political commentaries on the ‘Greek crisis’, as indicative of how d14 prioritised leftist collectives that nationalised crisis/resistance, while marginalising the more complex versions of queer practices (Stafylakis, 2017).<sup>262</sup>

In contrast, Stavrides (2017) located a lack of engagement with the solidarity movements, pointing out that the programme risked equating freedom or radicality as an individual choice, missing the point of asking what is really at stake in collective practices for social

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<sup>261</sup> d14’s bilocation too was framed in terms of ‘Kassel transitioning into Athens. Athens mutating into Kassel’ (Preciado, 2017, e-flux).

<sup>262</sup> The performance of Adesportes Skyles can be viewed here:

<https://www.documenta14.de/en/calendar/1010/-26-the-waltz-of-the-dirty-streets>.

emancipation. To learn from Athens would necessitate to look how its inhabitants act in solidarity in recent urban, social and workers' movements.<sup>263</sup>

The 'Exercises' press release mentioned that the PoB wished to take a distance from the 'fiction' of democracy that the squares' movement was associated with (d14, News, August, 2016). Yet, Negri (2017) referred to the 2011 Syntagma occupation as the 'new Athenian experience of freedom, a new idea of democracy' (2017, p. 557) and critics saw in the durational performance of Georgia Sagri, *Attempt. Come* (2016), which launched the event, and Andreas Angelidakis' *Demos* (2016), a modular installation that could be reconfigured for gatherings, as reminiscent of idealising Athens as the cradle of democracy (Fyta, 2017; Zefkili, 2017).

The multifold critique to the 'Exercises' had multiple repercussions. The Society that would explore queer artistic expressions, in collaboration with activists from AMOQA, did not form, while the PoB's gatherings would take place inside the venue from then on. Tensions concerning how d14 represented the Athens' art scene became public (Zefkili, 2021). For example, during the roundtable 'The Politics of curating' organised by *Learning from documenta* (January 2017), an initiative that wanted to act as an observatory to d14, Stafylakis and Preciado engaged in a fervent disagreement and d14 agents refused to share how they had worked in Athens, speaking about an obsession of representation, inclusion and exclusion from the side of the Athens art scene (Zefkili, 2021).<sup>264</sup>

### 7.1.2 The Commons in Defence of the Public Art Institution

The prioritisation of partnerships with public institutions marked d14's presence in Athens and provided one of the most prominent frameworks where the idea of the common/s was explicitly used in the curatorial logos.<sup>265</sup> The decision to only work with public art

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<sup>263</sup> Writing just before the exhibitions opened and after his own talk at the PoB, this critique was published at a time when the PoB seemed to be taking the exploration of commoning on board, through The Cooperativist society and the Apatride Society- as I discuss in the next section.

<sup>264</sup> See: <https://learningfromdocumenta.org/round-table-the-politics-of-curating/>.

<sup>265</sup> Out of 40 venues - four as main exhibition venues - d14 partnered up with mainly state-funded (16) or municipal (two) museums and buildings, alongside Universities (two) and archaeological sites. The main museums d14 used for its venues were the National Museum of Contemporary Art (EMST), the Athens Conservatoire (Odeion), the Benaki Museum and the Athens School of Fine-Arts. These hosted exhibitions whose thematics corresponded to the buildings' function, as for example music in Odeion or pedagogical experimental and communal projects in ASFA. For the full list see: <https://www.documenta14.de/en/news/15450/documenta-14-introduces-institutional-partners-in->

institutions was meant to point to the exhibition as a ‘public service’ that rejects the art market, (Preciado, 2019, p. 228-229). The decision resonated at the backdrop of the austerity-led, privatisation programmes and underfunding of public museums in recent years, especially in Greece (See Chapter 2). However, it is more precise to say that d14 rejected Athenian galleries and private Greek foundations (like Niarchos or Onassis) as partners, but it did keep international private foundations and donors, who contributed to some of the reparative gestures d14 undertook – gestures which were either welcomed as necessary or criticised as philanthropy or charity (Weiner, 2017).<sup>266</sup>

Moreover, any reading of the insistence of d14 on the notion of the public should consider the moment where this was done. The d14 team announced its institutional partnerships rather late (March 2017), after it had broken ties with AB and after it had received critique when launching its public programme.<sup>267</sup> The break with AB can explain d14’s reluctances to emphasise common/s and partly explain why d14 chose to emphatically name all of its manifestations as ‘public’- an insistence which was criticised for enclosing the gesture of sharing in a select number of formal partners (Zefkili, 2017).<sup>268</sup>

The question ‘How are art and its institutions made public and part of the common good?’ framed the most highlighted partnership with the National Museum of Contemporary Art (EMST). This partnership was presented as part of the non-hierarchical conversations and

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athens-and-venues-of-the-exhibition. With this choice, the team avoided the, typical for biennials, use of disused or repurposed post-industrial buildings. EMST was formerly the factory of the FIX brewery and ASFA the old textile factory of Sikiaridis family, but have been long used as venues for contemporary art.

<sup>266</sup> For example, d14 donated 100.000 Euro to restore the Yannis Tsarouchis Foundation with the help of private foundations and art patrons. Perhaps coming from the director’s previous connection to Kunsthalle Basel, for this renovation patrons were Christine Binswanger, senior partner at Herzog and de Meuron, Peter Handschin and Martin Hatebur, art collectors and presidents of the Basel Kunstverein, alongside Nicoletta Fiorucci, of the Fiorucci Art Trust. The architectural study was donated by Stamos Fafalios of CF COMPANY, Athens (Szymczyk and Latimer, 2017). For the sum see: <https://artsceneathens.com/2017/04/01/documenta-14-from-lilac-sheep-and-frog-rivets-to-the-resistance/>. Another gesture was helping restore the EMS Synthi 100, a rare analogue synthesizer that KSYME-CMRC, an Athens music research centre, purchased in the early 1970s. See: <https://www.documenta14.de/en/venues/868/athens-conservatoire-odeion->.

<sup>267</sup> See <https://www.documenta14.de/en/news/15450/documenta-14-introduces-institutional-partners-in-athens-and-venues-of-the-exhibition>. For EMST: <https://www.documenta14.de/en/news/13738/documenta-14-and-the-national-museum-of-contemporary-art-athens-emst-announce-their-collaboration-in-athens-and-kassel>.

<sup>268</sup> In this context, what d14 oversaw was that some of the avant-garde Greek artists it included in its exhibitions had been indeed neglected by public institutions (Tzirtzilakis and Tramboulis, 2018).



mutual hospitality that d14 sought to institute between Kassel and Athens.<sup>269</sup> With its funds, d14 enabled, for the first time in the museum's history, the full operational use of the building in Athens. On the other hand, it brought and presented the EMST collection in the Fridericianum, in Kassel.<sup>270</sup> However, despite the operational complexity, symbolic value and logistic challenges, it was questionable whether d14 could catalyse structural changes or address the neoliberal undermining of a museum with such a troubled history, since its founding in 2000. Tellingly, after d14, EMST went back to a limbo between government-defined processes of management and relying for its survival on the exact major private foundations that d14 had the possibility to reject.<sup>271</sup>

Defending the public art institution as a common good became emphasised in the context of institutional critique which was performed from d14 towards documenta the institution. Here, d14's use of the common in relation to the notion of the public was used to strengthen the idea that documenta should be defended as a public art institution, or rather, as an institution that operates on the threshold between public and common. However, d14 seemed to have instrumentalised the notion of the common in the conflict with the board of documenta

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<sup>269</sup> An idea of usefulness lurked too, in the way the partnership was framed, which can be connected to discussions about enhancing the social or civic function of 'user-generated' museums. For these discussions relevant are examples like mima museum in the UK, Arte Útil and the L' Internationale network are setting the tone. See e.g. <https://civilsocietyfutures.org/building-a-user-generated-museum-a-conversation-with-alistair-hudson/>.

<sup>270</sup> Presenting the EMST collection in Kassel was a symbolic gesture of decentering, which Szymczyk saw as very central to his project -so much that the director was rumoured to have threatened documenta's supervisory board with his resignation. The exhibition was titled "antidoron" (counter gift), a term chosen to allude to sharing and offering, including the Greek Orthodox communion. According to then EMST director Koskina this was deemed more appropriate than the initial title 'antidaneion' (mutual loan), to avoid associations with the financial debt and WWII reparations - points of friction in German - Greek relations (Ammirati, 2017). It is interesting that the association with loan was avoided, because d14 actively appropriated the language of finance; one of its conceptual threads was debt as neo-colonial mechanism, including the recent German-Greek relations and among the performances that opened d14's EMST exhibitions was the controversially received *Payment of Greek Debt to Germany with Olives and Art*, 2017, a performance by Marta Minujin and a lookalike of Angela Merkel. The performance can be viewed here:

<https://www.documenta14.de/en/calendar/16514/payment-of-greek-debt-to-germany-with-olives-and-art>. Later on, the PoB hosted in the Fridericianum members of the Working Group Distomo, who have been demanding for reparations for a massacre that the Nazi's 1944 in the homonymous village See: <https://www.documenta14.de/en/calendar/22532/working-group-distomo>.

<sup>271</sup> EMST received a 3.000.000 million Euro donation by the Stavros Niarchos Foundation in 2018, to complete works in the building, transport collection and for equipment. See EMST, 2018, <https://www.emst.gr/en/shortnews-en/temporary-suspension-of-emst-exhibition-program> (accessed March 25, 2020). For the discussion on the appointment of a new director see: <https://www.artforum.com/news/cultural-figures-decry-greek-ministry-of-culture-s-handling-of-museum-director-search-78886>.

gGmbH, the legal body governing the institution of documenta, which criticised the team of d14 for a large budget deficit. By the time the exhibitions opened (April 2017) the critique from one part to another was highly mediatised.<sup>272</sup>

The commons as institutional critique set the tone here. The d14 curators pointed to documenta as a commons across different exhibition devices and moments. For example, in all d14 publications, a short text in the ‘Exergue’ – not coincidentally the page before the list of shareholders and sponsors – stresses that the function of the documenta gGmbH is to be an institution useful for the common or public good, one serving the idea of a community (Latimer and Szymczyk, 2017, p.675). At the closing event in Kassel, artists and d14 team members held protest boards in front of the Fridericianum, which declared that ‘documenta is not owned by anyone’. d14’s final online message emphatically declared d14 as a commons, thanking everyone involved in the exhibition.<sup>273</sup>

The performative position of within/against the institution according to Athanasiou (2016) is about performing the institution in a counter-institutional way, which means resisting that which restrains the institution from becoming, even despite its will, a site of dissent itself, or which enables the ‘infrastructural condition(s) for politics’ (Butler cited in Athanasiou, 2016, p. 684). This position was dispersed across d14’s politics, however, it is doubtful that d14 moved beyond critique to generate conditions for infrastructuring commoning. The overwhelming presence of public (state-led) art institutions, the absence of AB and expressions of collective art in d14’s exhibitions, made that the commons were mainly mobilised as a rhetoric in defence of public art institutions, rather than a curatorial methodology for sharing with Athens. The various declarations could be viewed as ‘speech acts’, performative utterances that (Austin, 2955) prefigured documenta as a commons, as alluded by Szymczyk (2017) in his essay. Coming at this point in time, however, when the conflict with documenta’s board was overwhelmingly present in the news, the commons

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<sup>272</sup> As Szymczyk noted in later interviews, the ‘enterprise’ of documenta was a good starting point to consider the contemporary condition of neoliberal capitalism’ and for devising ways to ‘circumvent the spectacular regime that the marketization of contemporary art brings’ (Szymczyk, 2018).

<sup>273</sup> The deficit became the main topic of discussion on art media and artists and curators were petitioning against the exhibition’s instrumentalisation by Kassel, defending d14 as an exhibition that attempted to enhance documenta’s emancipatory and decolonising potentials through Athens. See: <https://conversations.e-flux.com/t/a-statement-by-the-artists-of-documenta-14/7031>. See also the audience – participating in one of d14’s artworks discussing the deficit: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UrOMrTy1ZgI&t=73s>.

came in defence of a multimillion event, which was underpinned by shortcomings in terms of potentialising a relation of sharing with Athens.

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Fig. 32. d14, the page of the exergue in the *documenta 14: Daybook* (2017).

### 7.1.3 Missed Potentialities: Athens and Commons in documenta 14's Publications

d14 shows a reluctance to address the problem of representation as integral to its intention to learn from Athens and to institute in the commons. Its publications seal the exhibition in support of this argument. d14's publications reveal very little about d14 as a learning process and keep another striking separation: they speak about common/s without Athens and about Athens without common/s. The reason for looking at how the publications engage with Athens and commons is not only to point out a discursive gap as a missed potentiality. The publications of each documenta have the power not only to write the history of documenta, but also the histories of large-scale exhibitions, given documenta's significance. Moreover, they are important sources for researchers in exhibition studies and art professionals, as they solidify each documenta's curatorial and political position. In the case of d14, the publications could have acted as a tool for commoning the art institution and become tools for sharing d14's agency to write together with Athens the political position of d14. However, a reluctance set the tone here too.

The particularity in d14 is that it unfolded progressively. Therefore, there was a possibility to communicate what, how and from whom d14 learned from Athens in the 2-3 years that the exhibition was in the making before the opening (April 2017). The potential for sharing the learning process was particularly linked to *South as a State of mind*, which was issued at intervals between 2015-2017. An existing magazine run by Athens-based curator Marina Fokidis, that d14 used as 'host', the magazine shaped a parallel discursive and visual space while d14 was in the making and parallel to the public programme.<sup>274</sup> However, in *South*, Athens is consistently kept outside of the counterhegemonic struggles that the magazine engages with. Across the magazine, there are only a few direct references to commoning, such as contributions by art theorist Gene Ray (2016, 2017) who discusses Standing Rock and indigenous communities' struggles for commons of water, land and air. Approaching commoning as a political struggle for sharing which necessitates working through divisions,

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<sup>274</sup> The magazine includes interviews or conversations among artists that served as introductory to their work, and presented through visuals and textual essays, poems, interviews, letters, some of the leitmotifs that would reappear in the exhibition spaces, such as protests, ruins, masks and scores. As the editors write, the whole is meant as a topography of elective affinities' (Latimer and Szymczyk, *South*, 4); *South* is invoked 'as inspiration for resisting the North Atlantic's devouring of space, resources, alternative histories and epistemologies [43] [...] for antagonising the neo-colonial sweep,' and can thus be generally considered as "a model for change." [44].

the author reflects how indigenous communities practice ‘buen vivir - ‘good living’ based on care and responsibility and asks whether this can be applied in urban contexts.<sup>275</sup>

The most prominent representations of Athens in d14’s publications are two: a) Athens as a city constructed by and serving Western hegemonic narratives and b) a city in crisis, emblematic for collapsed Eurocentric democratic ideals.<sup>276</sup> The director refers to Athens as a city where economic neo-colonial and neoliberal violence is felt daily, a city at the crossroads of cultures and movements, a good vantage point for opening up processes of unlearning and ‘spaces of possibility’ (Szymczyk, 2017, p. 32). What is emphasised are the difficulties of organising d14 from within documenta and splitting the budget equally between Athens and Kassel. The bilocating is mainly described as a generator of mutual fears: Kassel feared of losing documenta and Athens feared that another mega-event like the Athens Olympic games of 2004 would leave no sustainable impact in the city (Szymczyk, 2017, p. 21).

Even though to a degree true, the above statements sound reductive, considering the many questions that d14’s presence raised for artists and critics in Athens.<sup>277</sup> Similarly, there is no

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<sup>275</sup> See Gene Ray, “Writing the Ecocide-Genocide Knot: Indigenous Knowledge and Critical Theory in the Endgame,” *South as a State of Mind* #8 [documenta 14 #3] (Fall/Winter 2016). And: Gene Ray, *Resisting Extinction: Standing Rock, Eco-Genocide, and Survival*, *South as a State of mind* 9 [documenta 14 #4] (Winter/Spring 2017).

[https://www.documenta14.de/en/south/25218\\_resisting\\_extinction\\_standing\\_rock\\_eco\\_genocide\\_and\\_survival](https://www.documenta14.de/en/south/25218_resisting_extinction_standing_rock_eco_genocide_and_survival). Of course, the magazine is contextualised as being published ‘from Athens’ with the Editors’ letters, which include brief references to events that relate Athens to an ongoing economic and humanitarian crisis globally (Latimer and Szymczyk, *South*, issue 1, 2016).

<sup>276</sup> These representations set the tone in the two most Athens-related texts in *The Reader* (2017), which examine hegemonic neoliberal narratives of the crisis. Yannis Hamilakis’ ‘Some Debts can never be repaid: the archaeopolitics of the crisis’ offers a sharp analysis on how iconic statues, monuments and ruins were implicated in stereotypical discourses of the Greek crisis and were instrumentalised by Greek governments to serve nationalist populist agenda’s. His essay refers to the archaeological excavations in Macedonia, which Greek governments used in the dispute with neighbouring country, North Macedonia. Maria Boletsi’s essay ‘From the subject of the crisis to the subject in crisis: middle voice on Greek walls’ points out that the author of the wall message is not known and we can’t know who causes the torment, due to the verb’s middle voice. In addition, by showing how ‘Vasanizomai’ became recontextualised in literature texts, theatre plays, TV and internet, the author offers a wide range of references to cultural production in Greece, being the only text that includes references to contemporary cultural production in Athens, in *The Reader* (2017).

<sup>277</sup> Indicative are also the images in *The Reader*, Folio 5, titled ‘When, and where, do German- Greek relations begin?’ which include mainly depictions (by German Austrian artists architects Gurlitt, Shinkel, von Klenze) of the Parthenon and the Acropolis and a marble fragment of ears brought from Greece in Hesse, pointing to the idealised grand tour of European youths and mercenaries. In his accompanying text d14 curator Dieter Roelstraete refers to Winckelman’s *History of Ancient art* (1764) to trace briefly the construction of classical Greece as the ‘ever-present horizon’ (2017, p. 469)

connection to Athens' solidarity cultures in the commons thread that can be recognised with some effort in *The Reader* (2017) - from the director's reference to the significance of 'instituting in the commons' (Szymczyk, 2017, p. 41), the commons of social reproduction through women's cooperatives (Federici, 2017), to a brief reference to the squares movement as decisive for the building of the common (Negri, 2017, p. 557).<sup>278</sup> The only author in *The Reader* (2017) that takes us to the streets of Athens and refers to contemporary cultural production is Maria Boletsi, who engages with 'Vasanizomai', a writing-on-the-wall verb which appeared during the crisis and loosely translates as 'I am tormented'. Boletsi (2017) explores the possibility of the middle voice as a critical tool of the dispossessed (p. 439) to address neoliberal narratives that transfer political responsibility from the state to individuals (p. 442).

The above choices sketch d14 unwilling to ground its counter-hegemonic ambitions in the context of Athens and its solidarity cultures. Surely, several authors contribute to *South, The Reader* and many authors who work in Athens write the artists' entries in the *Daybook* (2017). However, d14 chooses not to include voices by cultural institutions it worked with, silences the critique it received and how it worked in Athens – let alone does not mention the role of AB for attracting it to Athens. Without undermining the wealth of content, ultimately, the publications do not move beyond the syndrome of 'humiliation-pride', in which Athens is either a) an idealised construction of / for Western civilization or b) it is finger pointed for its recent economic crisis – a critique that had already been raised from the first days of d14's public programme in September 2016 (Stavrides, 2017).

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for art history; continuing to the key role that Bavarian prince Otto I had for imposing this ideal and shaping Athens' urban and architectural identity, up to the appeal of the Parthenon to Nazi aesthetics.<sup>278</sup> Some of these connections may be lost, as the content is dispersed across publications. For example, a copy of the *Code Noir* (1685) reproduced in *The Reader*, which legitimised the economic and racial violence of slavery in the French colonies was displayed in the Neu Galerie in Kassel; the reproduction of the Zapatista (EZLN) Women's Revolutionary Law links to Federici's text in *The Reader* and by Subcommandante Marcos in *South*, as well as references to *Zapatismo* in the public programme. The same goes for *The Reader*, where there is no introduction or authorial voice to guide through its content, calling nonetheless for an active reading which make the publication as a 'performative double' of the exhibitions (Nichols Goodeve, 2017). On that note, it is perhaps the website of d14 that offers the most successful space to weave threads that become disparate across d14's programmes.



Fig. 33. Andreas Angelidakis, *DEMOS*, 2016. d14, Athens Municipality Arts Center Parko Eleftherias. Photo: Sevie Tsampalla.



Fig. 34. Opening of the public programmes of d14, 14<sup>th</sup> September 2016, at Athens Municipality Arts Center Parko Eleftherias. Andreas Angelidakis, Antonio Negri, Paul B. Preciado. Photo: © Stathis Mamalakis, 2016, used under a Creative Commons AttributionNoncommercial license: <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0/> (CC BY-SA 4.0). Available at: <https://ocula.com/magazine/features/documenta-14-a-reflection-before-the-opening/>. [Accessed: 1<sup>st</sup> June 2021].

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Fig. 35. Georgia Sagri, *Attempt. Come*, 2016. Performance during the opening of the public programme of d14, 19<sup>th</sup> September 2016, at Parko Eleftherias, Athens. Photo: Stathis Mamalakis, 2016, © Georgia Sagri. Available at: <https://georgiasagri.com/works/attempt-come/>. [Accessed: 1<sup>st</sup> June 2019].



Fig. 36. Georgia Sagri, *Dynamis (Askese – on Empathy)*, workshop, d14 Athens, 2017. Photo: Sevie Tsampalla.





Fig. 37. Torture and Freedom Tour of Athens, opening of the public programme of d14, 16<sup>th</sup> September 2016 at Parko Eleftherias, Athens. Photo: © Stathis Mamalakis, 2016, used under a Creative Commons AttributionNoncommercial license: <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0/> (CC BY-SA 4.0). Available at: <https://www.documenta14.de/en/calendar/976/-11-torture-and-freedom-tour-of-athens>. [Accessed: 1<sup>st</sup> June 2021].



Fig. 38. Adesptes Skyles, *The Waltz of the Dirty Streets*, 2016. Performance at the opening of the public programme of d14, 23<sup>rd</sup> September 2016, at Parko Eleftherias, Athens. Photo: © Stathis Mamalakis, 2016, used under a Creative Commons AttributionNoncommercial license: <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0/> (CC BY-SA 4.0). Available at: <https://www.documenta14.de/en/calendar/1010/-26-the-waltz-of-the-dirty-streets>. [Accessed 1<sup>st</sup> June 2021].

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Fig. 39. The writing on the wall Vasanizomai on one of the facades of Theatre Embros. Available at: <https://www.greekschannel.com/gr/theatro-empros-o-politismos-ston-gypso/>. [Accessed: 1<sup>st</sup> June 2021].

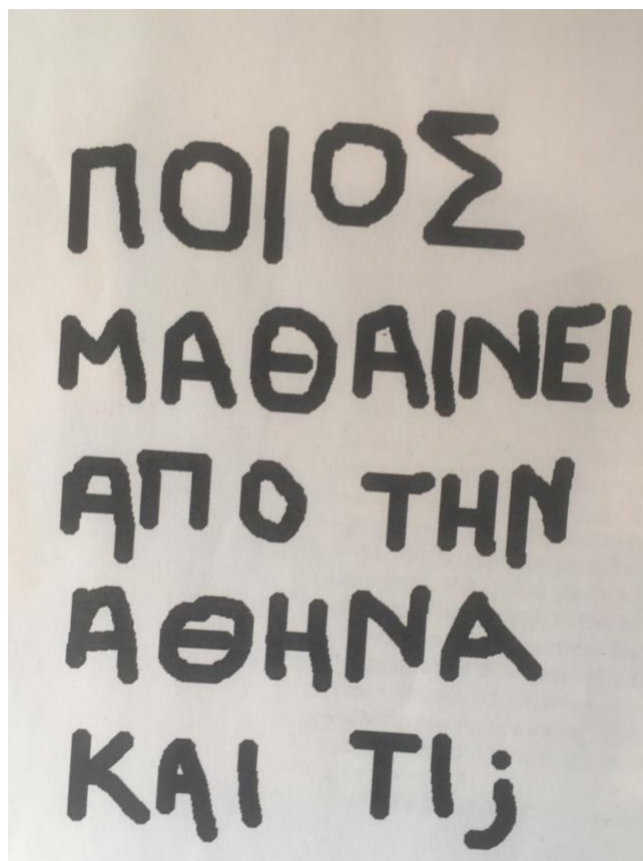


Fig. 40. Who is learning from Athens and what? Text from a flyer in the streets of Athens in reference to d14. Photo: Sevie Tsampalla.

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Fig. 41. Diagram of the Societies of the Parliament of Bodies, d14's public programme. Courtesy d14. Available at: <https://www.documenta14.de/en/public-programs>. [Accessed: 10<sup>th</sup> September 2019].

## 7.2 The Parliament of Bodies: A Threshold Between documenta 14 and Athens

Headed by Paul B. Preciado, d14's public programme, the Parliament of Bodies (PoB), was organised as a series of events by six Open Form Societies which were co-organised with artists, members of d14 and groups. The name 'Parliament of Bodies' was a reference to the 2015 OXI referendum protests in Athens, when, as per the curatorial statements, the 'parliament was in ruins' and the 'summer of migration' brought undocumented and unrecognised bodies to the streets against austerity and xenophobia (PoB, 2017). This section engages with the PoB, arguing that it was also d14's most porous device in relation to the city and to common spaces. Due to its processual unfolding, the PoB was d14's main device for creating anticipations and shaping d14's radical vocabulary, next to *South as a State of mind*, d14's magazine (launched fall/winter 2015).<sup>279</sup> Because the PoB unfolded publicly and progressively, it was the only space from within d14 where interactions and frictions between d14 and Athens were shared with d14's publics.<sup>280</sup> Participants from common spaces were invited to contribute to discussions that explored questions in the direction of commoning the art institution and commoning the city. However, the PoB also outlined the limits of d14's porosity in terms of its relation to the city, by insisting on the performative position within/against documenta.

Although neither commons became the overarching prism, similarly to the AB5-6 discursive programme, the PoB reflected back on d14's curatorial premise to rethink documenta. The emphasis on togetherness through otherness and the more porous relation to the city from within d14 allows to approach it, like Bageion, with the features of porosity and comparability in threshold institutions (Stavrides, 2016). The PoB invited to challenge the

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<sup>279</sup> To be fair, since autumn 2016, d14's education programme (aneducation) was also running 'House of Commons' sessions with art students, that engaged with commoning as art practice. However, these were less open to the public. <https://www.documenta14.de/en/public-education/25192/elective-affinities>.

<sup>280</sup> d14's public programme was more public, durational, relational and embedded in the city's socio-political context than its predecessors. For example, it was more openly public compared to d13, which had organised closed conference and seminar events mainly for artists, professionals and students in its outpost locations Cairo, Alexandria and Banff. It engaged with more than 300 artists and thinkers in both cities, far more compared to dX's '100 Days – 100 Guests' public programme. Opening seven months prior to the exhibition's opening, its duration was also much lengthier than D11's five Platforms, which had only amounted to a total of about 50 public days of events in various locations (ref). Compared to previous iterations, it was more embedded, taking place first in Athens and then in Kassel and being activated longer in the former than the latter.

heteronormative vision of political subjectivation, performing a space that gestured towards a political / institutional process of becoming or ‘transitioning’ (Preciado, 2017). The emphasis on performativity and difference echoed d14’s overall position of performing the institution within/against to create conditions of possibility for ‘un/common space’ (Athanasίου, 2016).<sup>281</sup>

The Societies were conceptualised as spaces for cultural activism, inspired by ‘micropolitical self-organization, collaborative practices, radical pedagogy and artistic experimentations’ (PoB, unpaginated).<sup>282</sup> In contrast to AB5-6, the Societies were not collaborations with existing collectives in the city. The majority were co-coordinated with a) artists who had already been invited to participate in d14 (Georgia Sagri and Angelo Plessas); b) members of d14 in some waged capacity (d14 education curator Arnisa Zeqo ‘The Society of Friends of Ulisses Carrion’); or c) by groups that were formed specifically on the occasion of d14 (‘The Artists Cooperative’, and ‘The Apatride Society’).<sup>283</sup> Already its launch - the ‘Exercises’ seemed to echo the opening events of Embros, Green Park and AB5-6’s Synapses.<sup>284</sup> Besides, members of some societies had been involved in AB5-6, such as dramaturg and activist Margarita Tsomou who had coordinated AB5-6’s General Assembly.

The PoB was a space for assembling in a city where assemblies have been abundant, both in common spaces and in AB5-6. Some of my interviewees saw the PoB as emulating already

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<sup>281</sup> Questions that accompanied the programme: What does it mean to be public? How does a body become public? What are the political conditions of representation? Can an exhibition be thought of as a Parliament of Bodies? <https://www.facebook.com/documenta14/photos/the-parliament-of-bodiesthe-34-exercises-of-freedom-inaugurated-documenta-14s-pu/736480136518753>.

<sup>282</sup> The Societies were named after the abolitionist societies formed against slavery in 18th century England and France. (The Parliament of bodies, 2017).

<sup>283</sup> The Noospheric Society was dedicated to alternative technologies of consciousness; the Apatride Society for the Political Others explored anticolonial discourses and practices, global migration, and the transformation of the nation-state; the Society of Friends of Sotiria Bellou was dedicated to the proliferation of queer and transfeminist politics; the Society for the End of Necropolitics looked for ways to counter the technologies of death of capitalist colonial history; the Society of Friends of Ulises Carrión took the tactics of the eponymous Mexican artist as a starting point to examine cultural strategies and practices of noninstitutionalised art; and the Cooperativist Society (coordinated with Emanuele Braga and Enric Duran), working on circular economy and “communing.”

<sup>284</sup> The ‘Exercises’ took place in September 2016, six months before d14 formally announced its institutional partners in the city (March 2017) and seven before the exhibitions opened in Athens (April 2017). To situate them in relation to AB5-6, the events launched just a couple of months after the two biennials more or less parted ways. The ‘Exercises’ run parallel to AB5-6’s ‘September events’, (projects I discussed in the last section of the AB5-6 chapter), which were organised after the two Synapses and after the internal stepping down of Mollona and Kalpaktsoglou.

tested modes of gathering in Embros and the Athens biennale (AL, ET). For some critics, the PoB felt like a 'déjà vu' of AB4 AGORA (Zefkili, 2017b). Compared to AB5-6's General Assembly heated discussions, most of the PoB sessions I attended did not include collective decision-making processes, despite disagreements being discussed openly. Each Society held gatherings which included talks, lecture-performances or screenings which ended with discussions or Q&As. Inviting prominent figures from academia to give lectures, the PoB did not exactly shy away from the idea of expertise and retained the distinction between viewer and artist/curator/theorist, even though the spatial organisation of these gatherings mostly allowed for proximity of bodies in space, conviviality and networking opportunities during the breaks.

In 'The 'Apatride society for the Political Others' only specific gatherings connected to commons, but because this became the most active Society, its engagement with commons was also more visible. This Society also became the most porous with regards to the city's existing art occupations, solidarity economy and cooperative initiatives, situating them in broader postcolonial and decolonial enquiries. The early event 'Indigenous Knowledge 2: Fleeing and Occupying' (7<sup>th</sup> December 2016) brought together members of City Plaza Bahar Askavzadeh, a writer from Afghanistan and researcher-activist Olga Lafazani, with cultural researcher Brigitta Kuster, who spoke about the (under)commons in relation to migration, technologies of border control and resistance.<sup>285</sup> The speakers raised questions on the power relations that need to be negotiated at City Plaza, which at the time was occupied for seven months, hosting about 400 refugees. Lafazani (2017) stressed City Plaza from a gender perspective and as a political project, where the question of how to politicise practices of cooking and cleaning in the occupation is an everyday challenge.

Learning from common spaces as part of rethinking institutions set the tone in the session 'Social Economies: Deinstitutionalizing Alternatives, Global Capitalism, and Local Knowledge (8<sup>th</sup> February 2017) which brought together discourse and practices on commoning. Stavros Stavrides elaborated on the idea of common space as a threshold space from which we can learn. Green park member performance theorist Gigi Argyropoulou talked about the potentials emerging for art and art institutions through commoning and

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<sup>285</sup> See: <https://www.documenta14.de/en/calendar/4757/indigenous-knowledge-2-fleeing-and-occupying>.

commoning through art, spatial practice and de-institutionalization. Commoning was highlighted not only as resisting practice, but as generative and affirmative practice that creates new relations.<sup>286</sup>

The ‘Cooperativist Society’ was a kind of continuation of AB5-6’s preliminary explorations of commons and solidarity economy, which put into practice and revealed the limits of commoning from within d14.<sup>287</sup> Run by The Artist Cooperative Athens (ACA) a group that was formed on the occasion of d14 and organised workshops with existing cooperatives from Athens and abroad, on cryptocurrency, mutual credit and tools for developing cooperation.<sup>288</sup> During d14 it was one of the few Societies that went nomadic and assembled in different spaces across the city.<sup>289</sup> However, as this was a custom-made and late addition to the programme<sup>290</sup>, critics commented that the PoB was not really interested in engaging with existing initiatives in the city (Fokianaki, 2016).<sup>291</sup> Practising commoning from within the

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<sup>286</sup> The event also brought together Deborah Carlos-Valencia, DIWATA–Philippine Women’s Network in Greece which has started a microcredit cooperative and Lina Mourgi, a member of the Dock for Social Solidarity Economy (SSE) <https://www.documenta14.de/en/calendar/9683/social-economies-deinstitutionalizing-alternatives-global-capitalism-and-local-knowledge>.

<sup>287</sup> The group was formed by artists with individual practices exploring commoning. Some of its members had participated in AB5-6. The Society was co-coordinated or at least worked with founding member of the Catalan Integral Cooperative and Faircoop Enric Duran and Emanuele Braga co-founder of Macao, an independent center for art, culture and research in Milan, one of the speakers at AB5-6’s panel on ‘Alternative economies’. More precise, Braga was invited by Documenta14 for a focus research on alternative economy in a series of meetings titled “The Conclave”, that continued in the Cooperativist Society. This information I retrieve from his CV:

<https://studenti.accademiadibrera.milano.it/sites/default/files/BRAGA.pdf>. Although Duran and Braga are named co-coordinators of the Society, I was not able to find more information as to how they were involved, on d14’s website. Braga presented a talk in Kassel (28 April): Emanuele Braga, Beyond work and private property, the Macao experience as an Institution of the Commons. The group and would have presence after the PoB at the Athens Commons festival <https://www.facebook.com/events/119259895417298/>.

<sup>288</sup> For example, the first event invited members from The Athens Integral Cooperative (AIC) The Trading Floor Game, created by Valeureux collective (Sybille Saint Girons and Matthew Slater), is a simple group game simulating an elementary “market. Presentation and workshop with a member of Go Pacifia, a young collective in the process of building time-based mutual credit networks in Argentina Open Collaborative Platform (OCP).

<sup>289</sup> The gatherings were held (11 February) at Parko Eleftherias; (March 17–18) at Athens School of Fine Arts, Giorgio De Chirico Amphitheater, 256 Pireos Street, Athens; May 16). FairSpot [Themistokleous 42, Exarcheia, Athens] ASFA and Ύλη[matter]HYLE. Another society which organised meeting outside of the main venue was The Noospheric Society.

<sup>290</sup> The Society had its first gathering on 11 February 2017. See:

<https://www.facebook.com/documenta14/photos/pcb.776091952557571/776091215890978/>

<sup>291</sup> Fokianaki refers to PAT. For other cooperatives see: <https://blog.p2pfoundation.net/history-cooperative-practices-greece/2017/06/06>. In June 2017 there were more than 3000 agriculture cooperatives, 14 co-operative banks and 48 womens’ co-operatives listed in Greece. In addition, one

discursive programme of d14, proved difficult. Artist Maria Juliana Byck (2021) describes the tensions of negotiating power relations, visibility and the risks of being co-opted by d14, while engaging in horizontal and consensus-based decision-making processes. Although, as she puts it, the Society was premised on the idea of ‘using German money to create an alternative economy for Greece’, ultimately a budget cut created a conflict and the Society ended its collaboration with d14 in May 2017.<sup>292</sup>

Positions of within/against d14 were adopted by the two co-coordinators of PoB Societies I interviewed. For Nelli Kambouri, a scholar who researches gender, migration and labour struggles and co-ordinated the Apatride Society, the Apatride Society ‘was not documenta’ and this distance between the Society and the institution was enabling, giving the coordinators a sense of ‘autonomy’.<sup>293</sup> Moreover, positioning herself outside of the art field – meant that she was less affected by the critique that the art scene expressed towards the PoB and the Apatride Society (Kambouri, 2018). The coordinators successfully negotiated for themselves payments per event, rather than with a fee for their whole involvement, as d14 had initially proposed. That d14 could offer artists and speakers fees and cover travel expenses was a welcoming change in a context where remuneration for participating in discursive events or symposia for academics is not a given, according to Kambouri (2018).

In contrast, Sagri’s position was different, since she was both invited as an artist to produce new work and to act as co-coordinator of the Society for the end of Necropolitics. Sagri had the possibility to develop the Society as part of her commissioned artwork for d14, but eventually the series of lectures and discussions she co-developed were more in parallel to it. Although the Society grew out of common interests, the intensity of preparations for d14 made more engaging conversations scarce along the way.<sup>294</sup> Moreover, for Sagri,

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can find 23 electrician, 33 plumber and 41 pharmacist co-operatives all around the country. In June 2017 the ‘Festival for Solidarity & Cooperative Economy’ in Athens was already in its 5<sup>th</sup> edition.

<sup>292</sup> <http://field-journal.com/issue-18/cartographies/co-opting-the-coop-cooperativist-society-documenta-public-programs-parko-eletherias-fairspot>.

<sup>293</sup> Kambouri is a researcher at the Center for Gender Studies in the Department of Social Policy of Panteion University in Athens, who had been involved in a feminist collective active at Embros. See: <https://sofiabempeza.org/ekeines-apautes>.

<sup>294</sup> Sagri’s involvement in PoB communicated with her own practice on a more discursive level, exploring topics that were at the core of PoB, like non-identitarian relations and struggles against the rise of nationalism and fascism in Europe, in a series of seminars with e.g. philosophers Eric Alliez, Maurizio Lazzarato and Franco “Bifo” Berardi. Her involvement is thus different from Angelo Plessas, whose Noospheric Society was based on his practice in a more immediate way, as the gatherings he coordinated overlapped with or fed into his commissioned work for d14.



participating in d14 came with a cost in terms of how she was perceived as one of the few Greek d14 artists and how she positions herself in the radical political art field.<sup>295</sup>

Emphasising that she did not make any new friends through d14, Sagri shared her criticism in a letter published at e-flux in response to several artists coming in defence of d14 (as part of the budget deficit conflict with the documenta board) noting that participating in d14 was not a process of sharing, neither enabled immediate material gains or new friendships.

While refuting the commons as an overarching concept for its political ambitions, the PoB retained its significance through the Societies, which acted as thresholds between d14 and the city's common spaces. Hosting activists from spaces like City Plaza and Green Park, complemented their absence in AB5-6. However, the PoB was also d14's limit in terms of distributing agency, negotiating and sharing power, as the Cooperative Society shows. Moreover, the emphasis on the institution and the reluctance to assemble in other spaces in the city, ultimately defined the PoB as a space for hosting, rather than taking the position of the guest in Athens, that d14 often declared.<sup>296</sup> Characteristically, in one of the sessions I attended (December 2017), a member of the audience asked the curator if they considered gatherings in common spaces in the city. Preciado's answer was that it was not the intention to transform the exhibition into a space of activism, but to transform the institution, by critically contesting it from inside.<sup>297</sup> That d14's coming to Athens was meant to be viewed as an act of institutional critique was obvious from early curatorial statements. documenta needed to be 'radically redefined' and Athens was crucial for this (Svarrer, 2016). As Preciado noted: 'Absolutely. We need Athens to deconstruct documenta, this is what we need completely. Every single aspect of this institution.' (Svarrer, 2016). However, in emphasising this position of within/against documenta, this reasoning ultimately risked implying that Athens was instrumentalised in the framework of the curatorial premise to rethink (to common?) the institution, while commoning the city was only secondary.

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<sup>295</sup> For the letter, see: <https://conversations.e-flux.com/t/a-statement-by-the-artists-of-documenta-14/7031/2>.

<sup>296</sup> This was also in contrast to the visits by many theorists, like Judith Butler (May 2016), Angela Davis (Dec 2017), and David Harvey (March 2017) who had visited City Plaza, holding short discussions from within the space and expressing their solidarity.

<sup>297</sup> The session can be viewed here: <https://www.documenta14.de/en/calendar/5106/encountering-gesture-as-event-or-the-conceptual-body>.

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Fig. 42. The Apatride Society of the Political Others: Social Economies: Deinstitutionalising Alternatives, Global Capitalism, and Local Knowledge with Gigi Argyropoulou, Deborah Carlos-Valencia, Lina Mourgi, and Stavros Stavrides. Available at: <https://www.documenta14.de/en/calendar/9683/social-economies-deinstitutionalizing-alternatives-global-capitalism-and-local-knowledge>. [Accessed: 1<sup>st</sup> June 2021].

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Fig. 43. The Cooperativist Society's first meeting. Available at: <https://www.facebook.com/coop.society/photos/1249039808525552>. [Accessed: 1<sup>st</sup> June 2021].

### 7.3 Commoning (the Exhibition with) the City?

This section turns attentions to some of d14's works in outdoors locations, spread across the city. Out of the 47 venues and locations that d14 engaged with in Athens, works in public space were a minority. This underlined a relative insularity of d14 as a large-scale city-wide exhibition that was articulated mainly through partnerships with formal art institutions. However, works in outdoors locations, particularly public squares, were the most porous works of d14, since they could be experienced not only by art professionals and audiences in the (often ticketed) exhibition venues, but also from dwellers.

According to art historian and cultural critic T.J. Demos (2017) both in Athens and Kassel there was a lack of an in-depth engaging to the specificities of the political, economic and social conditions shaping the collective and radical practices in Athens. The critique resonates when thinking that even the Athens School of Fine Arts (ASFA), the venue which had a high concentration of works that explored collective practices and radical pedagogies, only showed a handful of commissioned works with some relation to Athens.<sup>298</sup> It also resonates when thinking of some of d14's highlighted spectacular outdoors works, like Marta Minujin's *Parthenon of books* (2017) in Kassel or Rebecca Belmore's *Biinjiya'ing Onji (From inside)* (2017) – a large marble tent installed on Filopappou Hill that overlooks the Acropolis.<sup>299</sup> The gap that Demos' (2017) locates in d14 resonates, however, the theorist concentrates mostly on works included in the exhibition spaces, leaving out of his scope d14 works in outdoors locations and expanding on what 're-commoning space and institutions' may mean.

What I argue in this section is that, first, works that connected with the socio-political specificities in Athens were not absent in d14's programme. In fact, the works discussed in this section are all new commissions, which means that they were specifically conceived for

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<sup>298</sup> These were two new commissions, the film by Bouchra Khalili, *The Tempest Society* (2017) and the multi-media installation by Angelo Plessas, *Experimental Education Protocol* (2017), next to works by architect Dimitris Pikionis and painter Yannis Tsarouchis, two important figures for Greek art in the 1930s.

<sup>299</sup> The former was an updated version of a 1983 installation – a replica of the Parthenon made to host books that were banned during the dictatorship in Argentina. The latter referenced the artist's First Nation heritage as a wigwam dwelling and refugee makeshift shelters. However, both works divided critics, raising comments for spectacularising and commodifying Athens due to their scale, material and costs, rather than for the issues of free speech and on refugee and indigenous displacement that they raised, respectively (Yalouri, 2021).

Athens and were presented in public squares. Most of the works I discuss can be connected to Athens, crisis and common spaces, and some engaged with commoning as artistic methodology. I examine the kind of spatialities they produced and the kind of relations and tensions they negotiated. Most of the works I discuss enabled different forms of encounters, as well as processes of sharing, collaboration and participation. Second, what I argue is that d14 insisted on the notion of the public and showed a reluctance to contextualise these works, connect them to their sites or connect them to commoning practices and the common spaces that inspired the artists. This section therefore examines public works and how d14 presented them, tracing how they learn from common spaces and how they engage with Athens.

### 7.3.1 Asymmetries and Distributions



Fig. 44. Ibrahim Mahama, *Check Point Prosfygika. 1934–2034. 2016–2017, 2017*. Performance with charcoal sacks on Syntagma Square, d14, Athens. Photo: Sevie Tsampalla.

Ibrahim Mahama, *Check Point Prosfygika. 1934–2034. 2016–2017*, 2017. Syntagma Square, Athens.

Ibrahim Mahama's *Check Point Prosfygika. 1934–2034. 2016–2017*. (2017) involved a large number of participants who were involved in sowing together jute sacks, to make a large carpet which was installed on Syntagma square. The work spatialises cooperation, labour, production and economy relations, steady elements in Mahama's practice. In covering a public square, the work slightly deviates from his usual swathing of public buildings, such as museums, theatres or ministries in jute sacks.<sup>300</sup> Mahama's works, according to d14 curator Bonaventure Soh Bejeng Ndikung (2017, p. 28), call to investigate the possibility of disrupting and subverting the politics of spaces and their meanings. Second, the artist sought inspiration in the self-governing practices of the residents of the Prosfygika housing complex on Alexandras road. Therefore, to examine the meanings that the work offered means looking into the relation to the Syntagma square and the Prosfygika complex and to ask how d14 presents these relations in its communication.

The work's emphasis on labour connects to Syntagma square as a key site for labour-related strikes and demonstrations. The Greek parliament, the ministry of finances and the ministry of employment are in the area, and demonstrations take place here both traditionally and during the austerity years. The sewing of materials is 'also a form of protest by occupying the space temporarily' as the artist suggests. However, d14 does not contextualise the relation between the work and the square from this perspective.<sup>301</sup> The information about the Syntagma square is rather generic, referring to Syntagma as having been occupied by political movements across times, 'demonstrating for human rights and speaking up about living conditions' (p. 39). The short text refers to its original name as 'Palace Square' and how it was renamed in 1843 after a military uprising put pressure on Greece's first King, Otto, to form a constitution (in Greek, Syntagma means constitution).

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<sup>300</sup> Before the official opening of the exhibition, the artist had invited groups to take part in performances, to engage in sewing, un-sewing and re-sewing the jute-sacks. Three public sewing events took place before the final session on April 7 2017, when the exhibition opened. In Kassel, Mahama was commissioned to cover the Torwache, a building which was part of an interrupted urban plan to connect a royal residence to Kassel's medieval centre (<https://www.documenta14.de/en/venues/21736/torwache>).

<sup>301</sup> I am referring to the *Daybook* (2017) and the *Booklet* (2017).

Mahama participated in Prosfygika, observing the residents' commoning practices in organisation and work, using this as a starting point for his work (Spyrou, 2017). This housing complex of eight blocks, reminiscent of the Bauhaus style, was built in 1935 to house refugees fleeing the war in Asia Minor.<sup>302</sup> The refugees appropriated the open space in between the buildings and turned it into a common space by organising activities for play, everyday reproductive work, feast and social exchanges (Stavrides, 2016).<sup>303</sup> In recent years the building hosts a mix of residents from the original owners, refugees, artists and squatters, who engage in self-management processes, organising assemblies and collective kitchens (Stavrides, 2016). As other common spaces, this too has faced eviction and demolition threats, electricity/water cuts by the government and also difficulties of practicing commoning as an open practice between the different inhabitants - newcomers, owners, renters and activists (Assembly of Occupied Prosfygika, 2012; Stavrides, 2016).<sup>304</sup>

However, d14's official material does not make any connection between Prosfygika and Mahama's work. The reference to Prosfygika is under another artist's entry (Araeen) in the *Booklet* that guides the visitors. Actually, the text only highlights that Prosfygika was built by the Athens mayor (1934-1936) Konstantinos Kotzias. In this sense, a long and complex history goes unmentioned (and reduced to one public figure) and we learn nothing about how the artist entered a process of 'learning from Athens'. It is also telling that d14 does not mention another particular moment in the history of Prosfygika, which raises associations with Mahama's work. As other common spaces in the city, which are earmarked for regeneration, Prosfygika has suffered from state neglect. The buildings were dilapidated around the 2004 Olympics. Back then, the government decided to cover them with giant images of ancient Greece or by related to the Olympic images. Whether Mahama saw his work mirrored in this top-down wrapping of the buildings is possible, but is not traceable in the communication of the work.

In terms of its content and form, the work offers only implicit and abstract connections to the commoning practices of Prosfygika, through the thread of migration and in spatialising cooperation. The artist calls 'collaborators' the many people needed to bring the work into

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<sup>302</sup> The 1922 'Asia minor disaster' was part of the Greco-Turkish war 1919-1922 in the aftermath of World War 1. Encouraged by the English, French and Russian forces, the Greek army sought to liberate cities with Greek population in Turkey's Aegean coast.

<sup>303</sup> Stavrides (2016) gives a long account of the history and current practices in the Prosfygika.

<sup>304</sup> See: <https://czarnateoria.noblogs.org/files/2017/02/Brochure-Prosfygika.pdf>

being, by stitching the jute sacks together (Ndikung, 2017, p. 28). At a first instance, these collaborators are migrants from rural-urban areas and work together in big industrial spaces in a ‘convivial atmosphere’ (Ndikung, 2017, p. 28) notes. The visible or less visible traces of labour on the sacks create a new cartography of cities and local relations among an ‘international working class’ according to Ndikung (2017, p. 28). Made in South-east Asia, jute sacks are widely used all over the world. In Ghana, they are used to transport cocoa beans, rice, charcoal and other commodities, while they are also used as currency. In fact, Mahama gets the sacks from traders and in exchange, provides them with new ones, creating in this way work that is based on an exchange between the formal and informal economy (Jeffries, 2019).

On Syntagma square, the collaborators were volunteers, interns, members of the chorus and the audience. Various forms and layers of labour make the work’s coming into being visible. The manual labour of the sewers, the affective labour of the d14 chorus members and the voluntary work of the audience are all part of the artwork. On Syntagma, this labour is publicly performed, rather than concealed from view. Marxist art historian Danielle Child (2019) notes that in participatory works that include some form of delegation, often the labour that is made visible is not of the artists but of the non-artists and their work (anyone with basic sewing skills can participate in Mahama’s work). This kind of labour was invisible in modernist art, but remains a classed relationship in examples of works that require many hands beyond the artist to materialise (Child, 2019).

The work raises questions about the entanglements of material/immaterial labour in the space of globalisation. In my view, the work, as performed on Syntagma square, exposes a moment in the process of transforming the jutes into an artwork, exposing (some of) the different forms of labour within a large-scale exhibition, rather than it gestures towards subverting them. My interpretation is coloured by my own work experience in biennials, but it also thinks of the sewers with Sholette’s ‘dark matter’, since they remain unnamed and are the usual volunteers, interns and temporarily contracted biennial staff.<sup>305</sup> The work remains more attached to the notions that the artist already negotiates in this series of works and which concern labour, trade, manufacturing, circulation of goods, commodities and people in

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<sup>305</sup> On this aspect, it differs from other artists who employ similar methods, such as Thomas Hirschorn, who for example names those who labour with him on the projects he initiates (Childs, 2019, p. 173).

capitalist and neo-colonial flows. Without taking away the value of such problematics, given that Mahama's installations have appeared in several biennials, it is easier to think of the cooperatively produced value captured through biennial circulation, rather than to imagine how the sowers on Syntagma engage in commoning, beyond a basic form of cooperation required to weave together the carpet.



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Fig. 45. The Prosfygika complex. Available at: <https://www.athina984.gr/en/2019/05/24/ekdothike-i-oikodomiki-adeia-gia-ta-prosfygika-tis-l-alexandras/>. [Accessed: 1st June 2021].

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Fig. 46. Social kitchen O Allos Anthropos at the Prosfygika Housing complex in Athens. Available at: <http://oallosanthropos.blogspot.com/2013/02/11-02-2013.html>. [Accessed: 1<sup>st</sup> June 2021].



Fig. 47. Rasheed Araeen, *Shamiyaana–Food for Thought: Thought for Change*, 2017. Tents with geometric patchwork, cooking and eating, Kotzia Square. d14, Athens. Photo: Sevie Tsampalla.

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Fig. 48. Rasheed Araeen, *Shamiyaana–Food for Thought: Thought for Change*, 2017. Tents with geometric patchwork, cooking and eating, Kotzia Square. d14, Athens. Photo: Amra Ali. Available at: <https://www.artnowpakistan.com/wp-content/uploads/2019/04/39.pdf>. [Accessed: 1<sup>st</sup> June 2021].

Rasheed Araeen, *Shamiyaana – Food for Thought: Thought for change* (2017), Kotzia square, Athens.

Rasheed Araeen's *Shamiyaana – Food for Thought: Thought for change* (2017) was built on Kotzia square, which is directly opposite the Athens's City Hall and next to the central Municipal Athens Market, known as Varvakeios. The work gestures towards migration, food sharing and hospitality. *Shamiyaana* connects to Araeen's upbringing in Pakistan, as well as with the artist's preoccupations for equitable distribution of resources (Ali, 2019).<sup>306</sup> It is inspired by shamiana, the traditional Pakistani colourful wedding tent used for the gathering of families and guests when celebrating weddings or other significant events. Food is usually cooked outdoors under the structures, while intergenerational exchanges and family bonds are shaped in an atmosphere of informality (Ali, 2019). In Athens, the structure was set up as an open-air restaurant which served free meals to passers-by with a free ticket. Up to 120 people a day could be served, for the duration of d14's presence in Athens (Ali, 2019). The Mediterranean inspired meals were cooked in the tent by a social enterprise called Organization Earth, which sourced food from the Varvakeios Agora.

To contextualise the work in Athens, my reading invites to think of the solidarity kitchens and food-based activities that take place on Kotzia square. In recent years Kotzia square has hosted pop up ticketed food festivals offering tasters from gastronomic restaurants at lower prices. On the other hand, one of the most known solidarity kitchen initiatives, O Allos Anthropos (the other human) an initiative by Konstantinos Polychronopoulos who has turned into a collective endeavour, has been distributing free meals nearby Varvakeios Agora on a weekly basis. Donated food from restaurants and market vendors is cooked and shared by volunteers with those in need, reaching up to 2.000 meals a day. As we read on Allos Anthropos' website, the choice of not only collecting or distributing food, but also cooking and eating together between the volunteers and those on the receiving end aims at fighting the

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<sup>306</sup> The work brings the artist's long engagement with questions of collective action, food production and sharing in Athens. Born in Karachi in 1935, founding editor of *Third Text*, a journal for critical writing and decolonising and a member of the British Black Panthers in the 70s, Araeen has addressed systemic underrepresentation of Black and Asian artists and decolonising in the UK. Discussing this work, Araeen remembers how he cooked and shared food with Artists for democracy (AFD) in London, a group whose practice was oriented to class, anti-racist and anti-imperialist struggles (Judah, 2020). Ali (2019) also reads it with Araeen's relation to his own family for which he had designed a house, as taking care of them after his father's death. Ali sees this as out of the frame of art, literally on the street. That he creates a bridge between the private and public, the local and the global.

shame of receiving a free meal for those in need and going beyond charity.<sup>307</sup> Verinis and Williams (2018) discuss how the spatial boundaries in social kitchens in the city are often fluid, lacking strict demarcations. The boundaries between those making and receiving are also fluid, since some of those receiving food often become volunteers in the kitchen too.

Curiously, the d14 *Booklet* only refers to the square as ‘seemingly deserted’ due to the decline of commercial activities (p. 27), something which seems to forget not only the solidarity initiatives, but also the commercial life that surrounds the square.<sup>308</sup> Street vendors are often found behind the archaeological site, in the vicinity of which the d14 ticket booth for Araeen’s work was placed. At least one café and one multistore were still there at the time of my visit during d14’s opening, while the square is crossed by many people, including families with kids who like disturbing the pigeons on the square. In describing the area in this way, d14 does more to reproduce a dominant crisis narrative and the artist’s-, artwork’s and d14’s role as one ‘revitalising its activities’ and offering a ‘fix’ through its hospitality gesture.

*Shamiyaana* differed from food festivals that are critiqued for commodifying space and by asking people to pay to enter a private-public space offering gastronomic food tasting as a privilege (Parham, 2015). It was also not a common space, since there was a clear division between those cooking and those enjoying a meal, who had to first secure a ticket from the d14 team. It was obvious that *Shamiyaana*’s spatial boundaries were clearer than the fluid ones that social kitchens tend to have in the city (Verinis and Williams, 2018). As Gkougkousis (2021) discusses, the d14 team in charge of the ticketing was informally ‘screening’ visitors, often excluding those in need and instead, prioritising d14’s audiences and encouraging them to jump the queue to secure a table and experience the work. Moreover, the social enterprise Organization Earth responsible for cooking the meals is funded by the Kokkalis Foundation, an initiative by one of the wealthiest families in Greece.<sup>309</sup> Organization Earth, unsurprisingly, takes a capitalist friendly, environmental and

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<sup>307</sup> See: <http://oallosanthropos.blogspot.com/p/social-kitchen-other-human.html>.

<sup>308</sup> Kotzia square is described in d14’s booklet through historical public buildings (the (not mentioned as demolished) Municipal Theatre, National Bank and post office).

<sup>309</sup> The foundation has sought to raise the philanthropic profile of this business family, whose wealth has been accumulated from telecommunications, lottery and the ownership of a football team, while not spared from scandals and money laundering by giving fellowships for Balkan students to study in Harvard or donating to hospitals. Petros Kokkalis, who is founder of the Foundation, is currently MP in the European parliament with the coalition of the Radical Left. His father, Socrates Kokkalis had founded Intracom Holdings in the 1970s, the biggest telecommunications and security systems

‘sustainable’ green economy as its motto, which includes the way it sees newcomers – seeking to turn them ‘from passive recipients to productive members of a sustainable society’.<sup>310</sup> The ambivalence is well known: is this a redistribution of wealth through art or is this a kind of artwashing? Either way, these connections place private capital, philanthropy and charity at the core of large-scale exhibitions.

In Athens, *Shamiyaana* created encounters with strangers and an atmosphere of a communal space of sharing was present, as those entering were sat together on the same table to eat next to each other. However, this experience could differ from visitor to visitor. An artist friend who had visited the work shared a table with homeless people in the area, while other friends mentioned that they were mostly surrounded by d14 international visitors. Sitting under the *Shamiyaana* structure during d14’s opening days with my then 5-year old daughter, we shared the table with two Greek women in their 80s who had emigrated from Canada decades ago. Our discussions revolved around the traditional white bean soup served on that day (fasolada) and our common experiences of migration through the lens of food. Sharing that I was living in the UK, the women were kin to highlight the importance of retaining ones’ ‘Greekness’ while abroad – through speaking the language, cooking Greek food and supporting Greek owned businesses.

In pointing out the above relations, my intention is not so much to show that the distance between a solidarity bottom-up initiative and an artwork based on food sharing is big, because of the funding and the obvious difference that *Shamiyanna* remains attached to a large-scale exhibition. In connecting Araeen’s work to the context of Athens, my intention is to point out to the more complex relations that go unmentioned in d14’s communication. Although sharing and encounters were at the core of the work, in light of the above, arguing

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company. He was also a chairman of Intralo, which is the world's second largest company for distribution of lottery systems, in which he owns a quarter of shares. He is also the owner and president of Greece's most successful soccer team – Olympiacos CFP. His estimated wealth in 2015 was 197 million (<https://www.businessinsider.com/the-wealthiest-greeks-2010-5?r=US&IR=T#socratis-kokkalis-4>). Petros Kokkalis is Vice-President of the Kokkalis foundation, founded in 1998 and which has its base in Harvard University. <http://www.balkananalysis.com/blog/2006/01/24/the-rich-list-2005-top-ten-wealthiest-dynasties-in-greece-and-turkey/>.

<sup>310</sup> See: <https://www.kokkalisfoundation.gr/single-post/2017/11/08/earth-refugee>. In contrast, for example, the moto’s of autonomous social solidarity kitchen like *El Chef*, which begun in 2007 to enact solidarity with migrants and operates till present day, uses the slogan ‘we cook collectively, we serve solidarity’ (Verinis and Williams, 2018, p. 103).

that the work's intentions were to form a space for genuine exchange, far from offering a spectacle or charity, as per d14 curator Fokidis (Ali, 2019) undermines and decontextualises the work.

Rather, my argument is that situating *Shamiyaana* in the contested terrain of food production and distribution prompts to ask how artworks negotiate a space within/against capitalist structures. Commoning intersecting with food politics and sharing are not exclusively grassroots bottom-up initiatives. They are practices claimed by different initiatives which may overlap but also can be distinguished from the values they share. Citizen-led initiatives redistribute surplus fruits and veg from local markets to local charities, social dining platforms offer international visitors to the city a meal at locals.<sup>311</sup> In Athens, both the church and the Athens municipality distribute free meals in the vicinity of Kotzia. The neo-Nazi Golden Dawn party during the crisis years was known for its food distributions – which were however only available to those who could prove their Greek nationality.

In the aftermath of d14, Araeen continues *Shamiyaana* as a permanent restaurant in London's Stoke Newington neighbourhood. Presented as a communal space, the space hosts Araeen's work, educational art activities and is rented for evenings during art events like Frieze. Working from within the art world connections to engage in an act of re-distribution and transfer resources, the profits go among other to developing projects or organic collective farms in reclaimed Sahara land (Shamiyaana.com). Rather than an emphasis on a 'genuine' exchange (Ali, 2019), these negotiations may be a more productive starting point to consider both the potentials and the limits of commoning.

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<sup>311</sup> For different food sharing initiatives, soup or solidarity kitchens in Athens see: <https://sharecity.ie/research/sharecity100-database/>. In 2021, 11 organisations that engage in food sharing food created a coordinating structure, in order to strengthen the solidarity work. See: <https://www.facebook.com/elchef.gr/>.

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Fig. 49. Social kitchen O Allos Anthropos cooking in front of the Ministry of finance, in support of the fired cleaners of the Ministry. Photo: EUROKINISSI/TATIANA ΜΠΟΛΑΡΗ. [https://www.efsyn.gr/ellada/koinonia/254909\\_o-allos-anthropos-opoios-einai-stin-exoysia-pataei-pano-sto-filotimo-gia-na](https://www.efsyn.gr/ellada/koinonia/254909_o-allos-anthropos-opoios-einai-stin-exoysia-pataei-pano-sto-filotimo-gia-na).

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Fig. 50. Rasheed Araeen, *Shamiyaana – Food for Thought: Thought for change*, 2017, d14, Athens. The kitchen, operated by Organization Earth. Photo: Haupt & Binder. Available at: <https://universes.art/en/documenta/2017/documenta-14-athens/06-kotzia-square>. [Accessed: 1<sup>st</sup> June 2021].

### 7.3.2 Performative Occupations Within/Against Biennialisation

#### Sanja Iveković, *Monument to Revolution, 2017: Avdi Square, Athens*

Sanja Iveković's *Monument to Revolution* reimagined the *Monument to the November Revolution* (1926) commissioned to Mies van der Rohe by the German Communist party, in Berlin, and destroyed by the Nazis in 1935. The original monument was meant to commemorate Rosa Luxemburg and Karl Liebknecht, both murdered by the military fascist unit Freikorps. Iveković' work reconstructs the foundations of the monument. While van der Rohe's monument was a brick wall, hers is a low brick stage in front of a red wall.

A Croatian artist whose work was shaped in Socialist Yugoslavia, Iveković renegotiates socialist monumentality and the politics of remembrance in public space. The proposal for a version of the work predated d14 (Majaca, 2015, Visible, 2015), but the location choice in Athens showed a clear intention to create a conversation between the work and the area's history. d14's communication in this case shows care in contextualising the work in the area's working-class history. The work was built at Avdi (former Douroutis square) in front of the Municipal Gallery, a former silk-factory, after which the area is named (Metaxourgeio) and which has shaped its working-class character. Metaxourgeio is an area of ongoing gentrification which many migrant communities call home and where contemporary art galleries alternate with cafes and brothels. Women's labour struggles, a key aspect in the artist's work was therefore paired to the area's character and the associations the factory raised, as at different times of its life, women were the majority of its workforce (Bozoni, 2017). The material used to build the stage involved recycled bricks from Omonoia and Monastiraki squares and Lipasmata of Drapetsona in Piraeus, a former factory turned into park.<sup>312</sup> In reusing material from a repurposed industrial-turned recreational space, the work invites to think of multiple sites coming together in what is approached as a 'spatialising operation', which revisits an existing proposal in a given location (Pejic, 2015).

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<sup>312</sup> The Athens work is part of a series of similar proposals. The previous proposal for the Danish city of Aalborg envisioned a participatory, long term process-based approach for its construction. Even so, its construction was never an end in itself, but was conceived with the aim to stimulate debates about the absence of women revolutionaries in public space, antifascist struggles and the invisibility of women's' labour across history.



Conceptually, the work can be situated in the artist's broader engagement with the vision of 'coalitional feminism' of Rosa Luxembour (Documenta 14, unpaginated).<sup>313</sup> The artist often acts as organiser/curator, using the term cooperator for herself and those she works with (COOPERATIONS, 2018).<sup>314</sup> In Athens, Iveković invited artists, theorists and curators to curate part of the work's programme. Art theorists Angela Dimitrakaki and Antonia Majaca, who collaborated with the artist previously, realised *Art of the Possible: Towards an Antifascist Feminist Front*, an oral intervention heard from the installation, which aimed to potentialise new forms of international feminist antifascist action (Majaca, 2017).<sup>315</sup> Inspired by Luxembour's definition of political practice as the 'art of the possible' in everyday life struggles, 30 women from various feminist political backgrounds were recorded in their native language or the language in their country of residence, but speaking 'in common' as the curators note (Art of the possible, 2017, unpaginated) Among them, there were many feminist groups active in Greece.<sup>316</sup>

The work enquired the possibility for a 'feminist instituting as an instituting for the common/s' (Dimitrakaki, 2016, p. 4). Dimitrakaki (2016, 2016b) argues that to move feminist institutional critique, 'instituting in the common/s' needs to elaborate the common as a political principle in relation to feminist demands and to explore how it can undermine antagonisms (2016, p. 4). Equally important is not to close the discussion within the feminist emphasis on reproduction and care, as this undermines the many forms of labour through which women make and sustain the art world. Rather, she calls to study the 'feminisation' of labour in contemporary art in connection to Sholette's (2010) 'dark matter'.

In inviting others to occupy and performatively activate the *Monument*, Iveković's work was one of the few within d14 that activated a connection between d14 and the city's art activist

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<sup>313</sup> See: <https://www.documenta14.de/en/calendar/16469/art-of-the-possible>.

<sup>314</sup> For example, as founder of the NGO Electra in Zagreb, the artist, organised in 2000 an event called Co-operation: The international Forum for Feminist Theory and Art Practice to which artists, theorists from Eastern, Western Europe and the US came together (COOPERATIONS, Press Release, 2018). Following d14, the exhibition COOPERATIONS was presented in Ljubljana, curated by Bojana Pejic, who was among her cooperators in this earlier event.

<sup>315</sup> See Memorial For(u)ms – Histories of Possibility, a two-day conference curated by Majaca.

<sup>316</sup> The oral document can be heard on d14's website:

<https://www.documenta14.de/en/calendar/16469/art-of-the-possible>. The contributors are all mentioned on the page. Among them we find the Athens feminist collective To Mov / The purple and The Organisation of United African Women (Migrant Women Association, Greece). For more: <https://tomov.gr/en/2017/04/04/art-of-the-possible/>.

networks. The last event *Women's Work in Revolt Feminisation of labour in art and neoliberal economy* (30<sup>th</sup> June-1<sup>st</sup> -July 2017) invited individuals and members of collectives working in Athens to discuss gender, class and labour, at the Athens School of Fine Arts.<sup>317</sup> Another one-day event, *In Spite of Everything: Stubborn Returns and Urban Afterlives* was conceptualised by Gigi Argyropoulou, member of the Mavili Collective who occupied Embros and Green Park. Argyropoulou invited members of collectives, activists and theorists from Athens and beyond, for walks, performances, presentations and screenings. The event thus echoed Green Park, as well as some of AB5-6's panels and performative interventions.

Therefore, what made this work porous was that Iveković invited individuals whose research or practice engages with Athens to co-curate part of the artwork – outside of the fixed curatorial team of d14 - and act as the artist's cooperators, as co-hosts and mediators between the artist, d14 and the city. However, one can also argue that these events were only a few days and admittedly late during d14's presence in the city.

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<sup>317</sup> The last event included members from two groups: the Athens Subsumption group and PAT Temporary Academy Athens, which engage in an educational and para-institutional practice. For the Subsumption group: <http://www.subsumption.space/blog/>. For PAT: <https://temporaryacademy.org>.

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Fig. 51. Sanja Iveković, *Monument to Revolution*, 2017, Avdi square. d14, Athens. Available at: <https://rokantyszowski.org/en/angela-dimitrakaki-antonia-majaca-sanja-ivekovic-art-of-the-possible-towards-an-antifascist-feminist-front/>. [Accessed: 1st June 2021].

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Fig. 52. *In Spite of Everything: Stubborn Returns and Urban Afterlives*, organised by Gigi Argyropoulou. Avdi square. d14, Athens. Photo: Yannis Priftis. <https://www.documenta14.de/en/calendar/17054/in-spite-of-everything>. [Accessed: 1<sup>st</sup> June 2021].

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Fig. 53. *In Spite of Everything: Stubborn Returns and Urban Afterlives*, organised by Gigi Argyropoulou. Avdi square. d14, Athens. Photo: Yannis Priftis.  
<https://www.documenta14.de/en/calendar/17054/in-spite-of-everything>.  
[Accessed: 1<sup>st</sup> June 2021].

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Fig. 54. *In Spite of Everything: Stubborn Returns and Urban Afterlives*, organised by Gigi Argyropoulou. Avdi square. d14, Athens. Photo Yannis Priftis.  
<https://www.documenta14.de/en/calendar/17054/in-spite-of-everything>. [Accessed 1<sup>st</sup> June 2021].

C.A.S.A. (Contemporary Art Showcase Athens), *The Performative Fest of The Commons* (2017), Avdi Square, Athens

Iveković's work is characteristic both of the potentials and the limits of the way d14 worked in Athens in relation to common spaces: members of collectives were hosted either by d14 agents or artists, facilitating contextualisation, but were rarely highlighted as the main agents conceiving interventions in the frame of d14. Perhaps this is why a performative occupation by an Athens based collective of Iveković's monument still resonated, even after d14 had closed its doors. C.A.S.A. (Contemporary Art Showcase Athens), a cooperative I discussed as part of AB5-6, occupied the stage for one evening, a week after d14's official closing in Athens (23 July 2017). *The Performative Fest of The Commons* involved artists, the self-organised group of Refugee Minors from Afghanistan from Malakasa Camp and female refugees in Petrou Ralli prison, as well as a contribution by the solidarity Kitchen O Allos Anthropos.<sup>318</sup>

Contrary to other collectives that sabotaged d14 while it was running, this performative action could be taken as part of the Iveković's work – if it wasn't for the timing. For example, among the most visible performative occupations was *Rockumenta* by the group Lgbtqi+ Refugees in Greece, who stole a monolith that they were meant to carry walking in Athens as part of Roger Bernat, *The Place of the Thing* (2017), a walking that would continue to other Balkan cities until Kassel. They then published a ransom note and video on social media, in which they criticised the fetishization of refugees by d14, and drew attention to the precarious conditions queer migrants in Athens and beyond.<sup>319</sup> Krista Lynes (2016) excellently analyses their action with Butler's performative politics, as a performative displacement that strategically appropriated urban space and digital platforms – to which I add biennialisation- that interrupted d14's more narrowly defined public sphere, forging a new space and another kind of walking too, as well as an ephemeral collectivity that pointed to the RttC, even without using this vocabulary.

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<sup>318</sup> The event incorporated critique to d14. See the performance of Kostas Voulgaris and Kostas Skylos, who set up a theatrical satire that draws on the Emperor's new Clothes, asking anyone on the square to participate. One can notice that, by that time, the red wall of the monument had been sprayed painted with a large graffiti. See: [https://www.google.com/url?sa=i&url=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.youtube.com%2Fwatch%3Fv%3DbSbKDrfADuU&psig=AOvVaw0YFqV70rEeLd5jF773b0EE&ust=1630497133794000&source=images&cd=vfe&ved=0CAwQjhxqFwoTCJDF6qiZ2\\_ICFQAAAAAdAAAAABAJ](https://www.google.com/url?sa=i&url=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.youtube.com%2Fwatch%3Fv%3DbSbKDrfADuU&psig=AOvVaw0YFqV70rEeLd5jF773b0EE&ust=1630497133794000&source=images&cd=vfe&ved=0CAwQjhxqFwoTCJDF6qiZ2_ICFQAAAAAdAAAAABAJ).

<sup>319</sup> See: [https://artreview.com/news/news\\_8\\_june\\_2017\\_refugee\\_group\\_steal\\_documenta\\_sculpture/](https://artreview.com/news/news_8_june_2017_refugee_group_steal_documenta_sculpture/).

Was it then still meaningful to organise a performative occupation after d14 had departed from the city? Interpreting the action and the possible meanings it seems to negotiate, I would think so. This timing problematises the within/against position with regards to d14, since d14 was no longer operative. In this way, the event claimed visibility, but without really disturbing any biennial. The collective asked no permission by the municipality, negotiating therefore the boundaries of public space as something for which one needs authorisation. Without avoiding a kind of idealisation of the commons through emphasising terms like coexistence, co-creation and celebration, yet, this event opting for cooperation with self-organised spaces, refugees and engaging with dwellers, pointed to the fact that struggles for the commons and the right to the city in Athens' urban space are ongoing and continue beyond the circulations of biennialisation.

C.A.S.A.'s actions offer many entry points to consider how the art scene in Athens intersected with d14 and negotiated d14's boundaries, but also AB5-6's boundaries. Organising with other spaces in Athens and Kassel, C.A.S.A. collectivised the opportunities that d14's move to Athens generated. In this way, the artists seized opportunities to present work by Athens based artists – some of which participated in d14 as mediators or collaborators, facilitating the work of d14's official artists. For example, in June 2017, the cooperative held a discussion with Creg Sholette at Embros theatre with Iliana Fokianaki (8 June 2017) which criticised biennials' urban politics. A few days before d14's closed its doors in Kassel, the cooperative presented works at KMMN, a project by students from the Kunsthochschule Kassel initiated to enhance exchanges during d14. The exhibition 'To The Future Public' (5 September 2017) involved Athens based artists and collaborations with Avtonomi Akadimia, Embros, Nosotros Social Centre, the Migrants Social Center - The House of Refugees, Tsamadou 13, as well as SynAthina, a group initiated in 2015 for international exchanges, particularly with Germany. Many of the works presented had emerged out of *Acts of Engagement* during AB5-6.

Ultimately, the above sketch out the many positions that artist activists within and against biennialisation. Exercising institutional critique within biennials may run in parallel to disruptive acts of pausing the flows of capital circulation that biennialisation presents, as in the case of *Rockumenta*. Accepting to take part in a biennial or seizing the opportunities of biennialisation for creating new possibilities for networking, cooperating and commoning, as in the case of C.A.S.A. What these examples show is that the relations between biennials and

artist activists from common spaces are more than a simple antithesis, but a complex field of actions, interactions and negotiations that perform within/against and beyond positions that challenge and reimagine the encounters between art, commoning, biennials and the city.

### 7.3.2 Learning from Common Spaces

This section started by referring to the critique addressed to d14 for not engaging with the specificities of the political, economic and social conditions shaping the collective and radical practices in Athens (Demos, 2017). As I showed in this section, this engagement *was* present in some of the commissioned works in Athens, but d14 showed a reluctance in contextualising the works. Most of the works *do* invite us to think of them with commoning in the city and ask questions about the relation to their sites, everyday life, struggles through commoning and commoning through space. I do not take these works as exemplary of commoning. Rather, as examples that allow to pose questions with regards to the kind of space they activated in relation to the city and the socio-political context of its solidarity, art and commoning practices in the city. I think of them therefore *with* the city and *with* commoning.

Before concluding, I want to refer to two works that show that d14's most concrete gestures of learning from Athens' common spaces were most visible in commissioning works that enabled artists to conduct extensive research stays in Athens and collaborate with a number of individuals and organisations. Both a process of learning and a process of commoning were at play in the following examples.

*For Crossings* (2017) Angela Melitopoulos engaged with commoning practices in refugee camps, working with a team of theorists, archaeologists, activists and refugees. Although the work was a video installation which was mainly presented in Kassel and in exhibition venue, it brings a significant perspective for the artistic methodology employed. Central to the artist's methodology were forms of cooperation and practices of self-governance emerging within and against the infrastructures of violence that war and state mechanisms impose. Workshops were organised in the Moria refugee camp of Lesbos, which was initially built with a capacity of 3.000 and in 2020 still held 20.000 refugees fleeing war and poverty, before being destroyed by fire in September 2020. Another workshop took place with Kurdish refugees who practice self-governance in the 60-year-old Lavrion refugee camp, one

of the oldest in the outskirts of Athens; and a third, with activists in the North Greek village of Skouries, who have been fighting in decade-long anti-mining struggles against a Canadian-owned extractivist company and the false promises of recent governments. Demos (2017) praised the work for calling the viewer to take a position with regards to the complex entanglements of capitalist accumulation based on extraction of resources, as well as for locating in migration the promise of new emancipatory potentials beyond European nationalisms. A look at the webpage for Melitopoulos' on d14's website reveals these many entry points, as her work is shown and discussed both in Athens and Kassel in exhibition spaces, radio and TV.<sup>320</sup>

*Victoria Square Project* by artist Rick Lowe in collaboration with Maria Papadimitriou is one of the exceptional cases among the exhibition's public artworks, in the sense that it remains active in the city beyond d14's presence in Athens. *Victoria Square Project* is hosted in a building located near Victoria Square, which often becomes the refuge for migrants and refugees evicted out of solidarity spaces or state-led camps – most recently, during the pandemic in June 2020. Functioning as a space for workshops and events, *Victoria Square Project* is a hub for migrant communities in the neighbourhood, who either set up own activities or participate in projects by artists from diverse backgrounds and practices. As per my last visit and interviews in June 2019, the space is not run as a commons, but operates between artistic entrepreneurship and self-organisation, since a small team coordinates the activities and maintains the building. While the space does not per se take a political stance akin to enquiring commoning's radical potentials, it is a space that, due to being open to newcomers and open to change in its organisation (Kalyvis, 2018) keeps the potentiality of commoning and community open. Given that many squats set between solidarians and asylum-seekers in the city have been systematically police raided and evicted in recent years both by left-wing and right-wing governments, the presence and open potentials of this space cannot be underestimated, amidst the ongoing enclosures of common spaces in Athens.

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<sup>320</sup> The work was screened in a single event at the Greek Film Archive (Tainiothiki) in Athens, while shown as an immersive video installation in Kassel. Broadcasting her earlier video-essay *Passing Drama* (1999) at the National TV channel, as part of the series *Keimena*, d14 through beyond the exhibition space and made connections with the artist's longer engagement with her family history, of refugees from Asia Minor (1923) who fled to Greece and then became forced workers in Hitler's Germany in WWII. work was in direct dialogue with the PoB's enquiries into practices related to migration both as control and resistance. <https://www.documenta14.de/en/artists/1935/angela-melitopoulos>.



In summarising how d14's works engaged with common/s and commoning, I identify various ways, traceable not only in one, but across the works:

- Common space as inspiration (Mahama, Araeen, Iveković, Melitopoulos, Lowe)
- Learning from common spaces (Mahama, Araeen, Iveković, Melitopoulos, Lowe)
- Commoning as artistic methodology (Araeen, Iveković, Melitopoulos, Lowe)
- Commoning as a gesture towards redistributing resources (Mahama, Araeen)
- Common space as a partner in realising the work (Iveković, Melitopoulos, Lowe)
- Commoning as critique to biennialisation of the commons (C.A.S.A., Lgbtqi+ Refugees)

According to Demos (2017), commoning could have been a possible answer to the lack of a more in-depth engagement with Athens and one of the main contradictions that underpinned d14 as an exhibition that wanted to speak about the crisis, but risked commodifying the crisis:

If this situation regarding the contemporary enclosure of radical artistic experience in capitalist consumer society is all-too-familiar, then it is one we must continue to come to terms with and to challenge, in part by inventing new forms of public exhibition, re-commoning space and institutions, and reversing ongoing privatisations (Demos, 2017).

In discussing how d14 presented these works through its devices, what I show is that commoning was not translated in an overall exhibition practice that sought to highlight how these works engaged with Athens and common spaces. The d14 texts that accompany the works (*Booklet, Daybook, 2017*) tend to emphasise more formal architectural aspects, public buildings and public figures from the history of the sites, reinforcing d14's overall insistence on the notion of the public, but undermining aspects of everyday life or connections to socio-political processes.<sup>321</sup> Obviously, the works remain bound to the idea of public space -we still use the term public to engage with this kind of works in biennials, even if they are realised in the interdependencies between public/private, aesthetic/social and individual/institutional in which biennials as infrastructures are part of. With this in mind, I argue that d14 showed a

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<sup>321</sup> In the free booklet that included all d14 sites in Athens, the city is divided in clusters, a standard practice in city-wide exhibition maps. Highlighted are the sites or the relation of the work to a site. While some works (Iveković) are better contextualised than others (Mahama, p. 39), there is a general lack of a more contemporary context about these specific sites in the booklet. The Daybook mostly includes information about the artist's practice, written often by a theorist, curator or artist who responds to the artist's work often in a more personal tone.

reluctance to engage in a process of sharing the city through its devices. Ultimately, this is a reluctance to translate the intention of 'learning from Athens' to a practice of commoning both the exhibition and the city.

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Fig. 55. The Ubuntu Drum and dance group performing during *The Performative Fest of The Commons* organised by C.A.S.A., Avdi square, Athens, 23 July, 2017. Available at: <http://www.contemporaryartshowcaseathens.com/newsroom/2017/10/19/ubuntu>. [Accessed: 1<sup>st</sup> June 2021].

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Fig. 56. Exhibition with the self-organised group of Refugee Minors from Afghanistan from Malakasa Camp during *The Performative Fest of The Commons* organised by C.A.S.A., Avdi square, Athens, 23 July, 2017. Available at: <http://www.contemporaryartshowcaseathens.com/newsroom/2017/10/15/outdoor-exhibition-of-photography-and-drawing-works-from-self-organised-group-of-refugee-minors-from-afghanistan-from-malakasa-camp>. [Accessed: 1<sup>st</sup> June 2021].

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Fig. 57. C.A.S.A, *Trojan Horse*. Drawing published to accompany the call for the exhibition To the Future Public (5 September 2017), Kassel. Available at: <https://conversations.e-flux.com/t/open-letter-to-the-viewers-participants-and-cultural-workers-of-documenta-14/6393>. [Accessed: 1<sup>st</sup> September 2018].

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Fig. 58. #Rockumenta. Photo: courtesy of LGBTQI+ Refugees in Greece. Available at: <https://adanewmedia.org/2018/11/issue14-lynes/>. [Accessed: 1<sup>st</sup> September 2019].

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Fig. 59. LGBTQI+ Refugees, “Between a Rock and a Hard Place”. Photo courtesy of LGBTQI+ Refugees in Greece. Available at: <https://adanewmedia.org/2018/11/issue14-lynes/>. [Accessed: 1<sup>st</sup> September 2019].



Fig. 60. Rick Lowe and Maria Papadimitriou, lead artists, *Victoria Square Project*, 2017. Social sculpture, Elpidos 13, Victoria Square, Athens. Photo from the project Fun Palaces in Athens, in collaboration with synAthina. Sunday, 6<sup>th</sup> October 2019. Photo: Alexandra Masmanidi. Available at: [https://www.facebook.com/VictoriaSquareProject/photos/fun-palaces-in-athenssunday-october-6-2019photo-credits-alexandra-masmanidi/781244155677699/?paipv=0&eav=AfbTdfYqaPyotjnPqcJR0CqRMxQz47DzMdLMXDoN-qaORAy2NCj1telAjHon9YwNwGQ&\\_rdr](https://www.facebook.com/VictoriaSquareProject/photos/fun-palaces-in-athenssunday-october-6-2019photo-credits-alexandra-masmanidi/781244155677699/?paipv=0&eav=AfbTdfYqaPyotjnPqcJR0CqRMxQz47DzMdLMXDoN-qaORAy2NCj1telAjHon9YwNwGQ&_rdr). [Accessed: 1<sup>st</sup> September 2020]. [Accessed: 1<sup>st</sup> September 2020].

## 7.4 Learning from documenta 14: Translating Commoning

The chapter examined d14's engagement with Athens and commons, taking as a starting point that d14's 'learning from Athens', overlapped with an intention to 'learn from commoning' as a practice that shapes the city's art occupations, solidarity driven practices and the Athens biennale (Szymczyk, 2015a and 2015b). A main argument is that the unmaterialised partnership with AB5-6 (around the summer of 2016) and the critique d14 receives in Athens from its first public events (September 2016) are constituent to it and co-shape d14's positions and reluctances towards commoning the city.

Breaking ties with AB5-6, an edition which had placed an emphasis on commoning and collectivity, broke a significant bridge between d14 and Athens' collective art practices. If d14 created divisions among theorists and cultural practitioners in Athens, these were also expressed with positions for and against commoning. Although some critics called d14 for a more in-depth engagement with commoning and Athens' socio-historic and political specificities (Demos, 2017; Stavrides, 2017) others precisely criticised its engagement with commoning as essentialising, nationalising or exoticising resistance (Documenta, 2017; Stafylakis, 2017). In this latter strand, critique pointed out that d14 bypassed Athens' radical queer activist practices, despite the public programme's orientation towards a 'queering of the commons'. d14 was not responsive to this critique, excluding from its artist list queer artists from Athens, but also broadly Athens collectives, exclusions which contradicted its enquiries on the politics of togetherness.

In contrast, the public programme invited activists and theorists engaging with common spaces. Several conversations raised debates on the potentials of commoning in relation to migration, solidarity economy, art and institutions during the Apatride Society; the Cooperativist Society explored commoning with circular economy. It is here where we can trace how d14 potentially learns from AB. d14 extended to a degree AB5-6's preoccupations on commoning and alternative economies and institutions. Where d14 mainly differed was that, despite the majority of speakers being international, it also hosted migrants, activists and artists from occupations in the discursive programme, while AB5-6 had mainly invited international artists and theorists to its international summits. These invitations, together with a few exceptional works it commissioned, were also d14's only concrete engagement with collective practices and commons struggles in Athens.

Thinking with AB5-6 and the exercise of translating commoning as crucial for potentialising commoning, d14's contradictory position can be summarised with the problem of translating its intentions to common, but in the specific context of Athens: although d14 recognised the commons as significant, in its communication and publications there is no effort to engage with solidarity and art commoning practices in Athens. d14 was reluctant to situate works in public space in the broader socio-political context and in relation to Athens' solidarity practices. In its publications, d14 seems more kin to speak about crisis and Athens' role in shaping Eurocentric and Western hegemonic narratives. Ultimately, this ends up silencing the contemporary city. In prioritising partnerships with public institutions in Athens d14 enclosed sharing in the more formal institutions of Athens and supported of the notion of the public, rather than negotiated its boundaries in the context of Athens. d14 only at the very last public message and amidst a conflict with the documenta board of directors, emphatically posed d14 as a commons. However, commoning cannot be exhausted in institutional critique or contestation of sovereign power, but is about the willingness to attend to struggles to politicise institutions, contesting their exploitative, extractivist, and colonising dimensions. A performative politics of the institution is about enabling the infrastructural conditions for sites of dissent and forms of instituting in common, to flourish (Butler, 2015, cited in Athanasiou, 2016, p. 684). With the above in mind, d14's final message of 'documenta as a commons' points to a horizon, denoting both the potentials and the limits that underpinned d14's relation to the city's art/commoning practices.



## Conclusion

This thesis extends the timeframe of recent biennial literature beyond the legitimacy crisis (Kompatsiaris, 2017). The research is premised on the argument that the effects of the squares occupations for art and biennials are still ongoing. ‘We are continuing to live in the historical moment of 2011’ wrote sociologist Oliver Marchart (2019, p. 11). My primary research question in this thesis was ‘How to substantiate the relation between biennials and commoning?’ Each chapter enquired this relation, bringing biennial literature in conversation with common/s literature, tracing gaps and ending with a discussion on the potentialities that emerge for research and practice. I analysed two case studies that shared intentions to learn from common spaces in Athens. The case studies, d14 and AB5-6 provide us with insights about commoning as a key concept and practice for approaching the contradictions that biennials inhabit and how they employ commoning in the process of exhibition-making. This chapter outlines key insights gained, highlighting the contributions this research makes. After briefly outlining what followed my case studies, it points to possible ways forward for future research at the intersection of biennials and commoning.

## **Contributions to Knowledge**

My point of departure is that commoning is a crucial lens through which biennials are challenged and that biennials are crucial sites for negotiating the tensions and contradictions that traverse relations between art, commoning and the city. For this reason, this thesis proposed to examine the biennial as a threshold infrastructure, examining it through its main facets: biennialisation (Chapter 3), as a city-wide exhibition with an accentuated relation to public space (Chapter 4) and through the questions it raises regarding commoning as collective creative practice and productive activity or labour, due to its engagement with activist practices (Chapter 5).

This research project is innovative because it is the first study to examine the relations between art/commoning and the city with a focus on biennials. I show that commoning is not simply a trope, a curatorial methodology or a ‘visual style’ as Green and Gardner (2016, p. 259) think of Occupy. Moreover, building on, but also moving beyond Kompatsiaris (2017), I argue that commoning is not only connected to a crisis moments in biennials, but it is a lens

through which we can understand the structural tensions biennials inhabit. Therefore, moving a step further from the existing literature, this study suggests that commoning is not only a challenge that emerges in the aftermath of the movements, but that it is an analytical lens that can help us think of the multiple tensions that biennials inhabit between the capitalist production and its resistance, as well as to rethink them and their relation to the city.

In order to address the research questions, I enriched literature by examining biennials with the analytical framework of common/s, drawing in particular on spatial approaches to commoning. Chapter 1 theorised the possible meanings that commoning the city and commoning art institutions may take. Lefebvre's (1968/1996) idea of the RttC, together with the definition of politics by Rancière (2006) set the foundation for enquiring the political potentials of common space, as defined by Stavrides (2016) as a threshold space, which negotiates boundaries of public space, identity and community. Seeking to transform the city as a collective work of art (Lefebvre, 1968/1996), to common the city means to strive for qualitative socio-spatial relations that are based on difference and unpredictability, and are collectively shaped as part of the everyday right by the dwellers to inhabit and occupy public space (Stavrides, 2010; Harvey, 2012). To common the city is a right to create the city collectively and reimagine the social relations that make it, through sharing and cooperation and through collective actions of dissent that may open up new and subversive potentials for aesthetic and political meanings in urban space.

The chapter suggests that the question of potentialising commoning with regards to the art institution becomes closely linked to questions of instituting and infrastructuring and vice versa, to potentialise instituting and infrastructuring is to think of them with commoning art and art institutions. I took as a starting point three key features from Stavrides (2016) and his proposal for threshold - or 'institutions of expanding commoning', that of openness, difference and the sharing of power and juxtaposed them with theoretical proposals that think of the relations between art, art institutions and movements (Raunig (2007; 2013; Athanasiou, 2016; Berlant, 2016). In bringing them together, the chapter shows that both common spaces and art institutions require to grapple with the question of sharing power and work towards reconfiguring power relations, while remaining open to difference and open in form.

Chapter 2 grounds the theoretical enquiries of chapter 1 in Athens, examining the catalytic role of the Syntagma square occupation for the proliferation of grassroots collective creativity in the city. The chapter examined how common spaces in Athens counter austerity politics, give shape to new forms of social organisation and reconfigure the relation with public art and public space (Arampatzi, 2014; Stavrides, 2016). The chapter showed that in this context commoning the city and commoning the art institution converge, not only as artists activists practise forms of commoning, but also as top-down authorities and art institutions, including biennials, claim commons.

Literature on collective art practices in Athens could benefit by being situated in broader post-movements discussions (Fotiadi, 2017). Chapter 2 contributes to this direction, by bringing Syntagma and post-Syntagma accounts in conversation with accounts of Occupy. This juxtaposition revealed that Syntagma accounts emphasise collective creativity, while Occupy the negotiation with art institutions. This chapter showed that art/commoning in Athens meets sharp critiques by artists for idealising the relation between resistance and austerity. At the same time, Athens' examples (like Embros and City Plaza) help dispel the idea that commoning is about idealised communities, showing the everyday negotiation of power as a key challenge. Moreover, in situating AB in this context, the chapter expands on previous literature focusing on AB (Kompatsiaris, 2017; Oxenius, 2017) showing how AB's ambitions for subversive socio-political agenda's and engagement with collective spatial practices in the city were intertwined with top-down urban planning and gentrification processes, but also, that AB played a significant role in shaping the attention to Athens as a place of collective creativity amidst austerity, from cultural institutions in Europe, culminating in the move of d14 to Athens.

In addressing the relation between biennials and city-space, the research contributes to what several scholars see as a need in biennial literature: to ground biennials in their urban contexts. I argued that this problem needs to be addressed if we are to think about substantiating the biennial's relation to commoning and the city. To this end, chapters 3 and 4 pointed out at how biennialisation and biennial literature tends to undermine the relation to city and the 'situated complexities' (Kompatsiaris, 2017, p. 9) they face.

Chapter 3 rearticulates the main arguments of biennialisation, by sketching out dialectical tensions and implications of biennial politics and their connecting to common/s. Biennials

may be symptoms of globalisation and its systemic asymmetries, but have also articulated critiques to neoliberalism, and opened up counter-hegemonic potentials through politicised discourses, art and curatorial practices (Rogoff, 2009; Kompatsiaris, 2020). At the same time biennials are hostile to common/s, because biennialisation accentuates how they can be sites that capture the collectively and socially produced common, by concentrating symbolic and economic capital and power in a few star curators and artists. Biennialisation enriches and spreads the common/s as discourse and art practice in the art field. But these circulations also carry the risk of conflating the common/s, turning it into a trendy or banal trope of harmonious togetherness, at the risk of normalising and neutralising their political potentials (Berlant, 2016).

Chapter 4 discussed biennials with common/public tensions. Biennials are not entirely public institutions, but they rely on public institutions and funding and need public space. Biennials are not commons, but they come with potentials for infrastructuring and instituting commoning with each edition, due to the partnerships they generate and depend upon. The contribution the research makes for these discussions is that it proposes to conceptualise biennials as threshold infrastructures. The biennial's threshold spatiality reveals itself in the ways biennials inhabit and negotiate tensions between use and exchange value, between public space and participatory art projects, between the experiential and the everyday. Can a form of commoning emerge through these partnerships, which potentially negotiate the biennial's boundaries and redistribute the resources that biennials have, which are economic, affective, immaterial and symbolic? While a biennial common space sounds problematic, given its periodicity, it can also be thought as a pace paired with the processes of centralising and dispersing that characterise commoning on the squares and in assemblies (Stavrides, 2016). The chapter argued that bringing together various agents in the city for the event and then dispersing, biennials may be able to play a crucial role towards collectively creating the city as a work of art, as long as they invest in the quality of relations that commoning strives for.

Chapter 5 reviewed how post-squares biennial literature examines the gestations of the movements and the biennial crisis, pointing out that the lack of theorisations with commoning is a significant gap, all the more because biennials acted as thresholds that denote a passage of commoning from the square to the art institution. The chapter highlights the tensions between art/commoning as collective creativity and art/commoning understood with

production relations. I argue that biennials that invite artists activists accentuated the division between institution and event; any intention to common the biennial stays within the realm of the biennial as event, rather than as institution. Moreover, the city did not become the focal point of action neither for curators who invite artists activists from Occupy nor artists' boycotts' – with a few exceptions, such as in the collision between the IB13 and the Gezi park occupation. Ultimately, art/commoning within biennials troubles both art and commoning and updates the blurriness in their already blurred boundaries.

Chapter 6 examined AB 5-6 and its quest to learn from common spaces and become a space for practising art/commoning. Pointing out positions within/against the biennale, I highlight how the ambition to mediate between grassroots collectives, international artists and d14 were met from early on with scepticism and withdrawals. In discussing AB4, I outlined how AB5-6 was premised on the recognition of AB4 as a successful resistant Southern biennale by European institutions. Through the example of Green Park, I outlined the 'situated complexities' that biennials face at a time when art occupations have the power to negotiate their visibility on their own terms, at a time when negotiating between 'commoning the biennial' and 'the biennialisation of the commons' sets the tone in Athens and beyond. Pointing to the city as a collective work of art, while, partnering up with a mayor that has appropriated the RttC shaped AB5-6's contradictory urban politics. I then looked at the threshold ambivalences at the Bageion cohabitation. Despite the experiment meeting various problems, AB5-6 rehearsed an exercise of translation, by asking activists from common spaces to suggest possible actions in the process of an envisioned transitioning from the biennial mode towards a common space. The exercise of translating art/commoning as collective creativity, sharing and collaboration and as labour is a crucial problem that opens up ways of thinking and doing for commoners and biennial makers. The last section argued that performative interventions in the area of Omonoia square, invited to think of commoning as a distributive practice that can challenge normative experiences of the city.

Chapter 7 examined documenta 14 (d14) and its intention to 'learn from Athens'. I contend that this intention, at least initially, overlapped with an intention to 'learn from commoning', as it is practiced in common spaces and the Athens biennale (Szymczyk, 2015a and 2015b). However, the unmaterialised partnership with AB5-6 and the critical reception, which run in parallel to d14's progressive unfolding, co-shaped the shifting positions and reluctances in terms of how d14 articulated its relation to Athens, its art scene and common spaces.

The chapter argued that, although d14 recognised the commons as significant, its communication and publications showed little effort to engage with solidarity and art commoning practices in Athens. d14 was reluctant to situate works in public space in the broader socio-political context and in relation to Athens' solidarity practices. In its publications, d14 seems more kin to speak about crisis and Athens' role in shaping Eurocentric and Western hegemonic narratives. As I maintained, d14's engagement with common/s was largely contained in a discursive sphere and commoning in specific works. It did not permeate its institutional politics, as d14 partnered up mostly with public institutions and did not engage with artist-led and grassroots cultures.

The unmaterialised partnership between AB5-6 and d14 was an unpotentialised exercise of translating commoning. If there was a failure in changing the institution, as some of their agents proclaimed, it was a failure in engaging in a process of translating commoning on an inter-exhibition and inter-institutional level in the context where d14 was taking place. This points to the shortcomings of large-scale recurrent international exhibitions in the post-Occupy condition, to disrupt, taking this to mean not only a reflection on the asymmetries, centers and edges of globalization and the struggles it generates, but to an effort for a being-in-common that would expose them to the contingencies and (im)possibilities towards the co-shaping of common worlds (Berlant, 2016). Translating continuously how this can be done in each case may be a key preoccupation for those investing time in art/commoning. Perhaps through these processes can large-scale exhibitions like documenta establish grounds not only to stretch institutional boundaries (Szymczyk, 2017), but for connecting to 'counterpower infrastructures' that push contemporary art practice beyond institutional critique towards institutional liberation (Not an Alternative, 2016).

## **Horizons**

In this research, I explored biennialisation only to the degree that it helped to point out how it shapes subjects, spaces and asymmetrical power relations that present a challenge to commoning as a practice for redistributing power. Although biennialisation-as-circulation allows us to grapple with power asymmetries, it is rarely backed up with quantitative data that would allow to substantiate the arguments. In his extensive research on the extractive logic and the possibility to institute in the commons in artistic circulation, Szreder (2021)

provides a valuable tool, but this rests on qualitative methods. Circulation never stops, but, if commoning is about distributing and sharing power, a possible way forward to complement current research is to develop quantitative methods that dissect the mechanisms of biennial circulation and can visualise how and by whom capital is accumulated.<sup>322</sup>

Recent biennial research has been enriched with the historical survey of Green and Gardner (2016) which explores counter-hegemonic potentials in the space of biennialisation. Biennial literature can benefit from a similar longer history of the relations between art and the broad spectrum of socially engaged and site-specific practices they have hosted in relation to commoning. This would contribute to a longer history of the relations between biennials and commoning.

Feminist and decolonial perspectives on the city and on commoning are not as accentuated as I would have liked in this research. I believe that literature can benefit from a feminist take on the biennial and its relation to the city, since these perspectives are absent. Considering the feminisation of labour in the arts in general (Dimitrakaki, 2016) it would be interesting to have more female voices that work within biennials in different roles and can share their embodied experience. Another possible way forward would be to combine research on the role of women (employed or in temporary roles and contracts) in biennials and develop methods to engage with how feminist and decolonial politics are implicated in commoning and the city within/against biennials.

My methodological positioning as someone with some relation but also distant from Athens facilitated many interactions with artists and curators from my case studies, but I did not have the kind of ethnographic engagement as recent scholars did with AB3 and AB4 (respectively, Kompatsiaris, 2017; Oxenius, 2017).<sup>323</sup> Similarly, although auto-ethnography resonated with me, I found it difficult to write the whole thesis from a more empirical perspective and to

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<sup>322</sup> I have referred elsewhere in the thesis to examples that move towards this direction, such as the Global Biennial Survey 2018 by Kolb and Patel (2018) who map the geographical distribution of biennials and their disciplinary focus. Wu Chin-Tao conducted research on the asymmetrical representation of artists coming out of Western and North European art centers, while Oxenius in his PhD (2017) maps what he calls a 'global territorial assemblage' using methods of cultural mapping and a longitudinal analysis of press coverage is an interesting methodological approach that reveals the complexities of biennials.

<sup>323</sup> Although early on in my research I was asked whether I wanted to be involved in the production of one of my case studies, practically this did not seem possible to me at the time.

voice myself as someone who has embodied experience of working within biennials in diverse roles, ranging from a volunteer to a curator. I think of this as a possible next possible step in reworking this thesis, in order to share it with a broader public in the future.

Considering the call for more ethnographic approaches on biennials (Kompatsiaris, 2017) and inspired by ‘militant ethnography’ research that examines relations between commoning and Athens (Arampatzi, 2014; Capuccini, 2018), I suggest that biennial literature can benefit more precisely from activist and militant practice-based research. What this points to is taking a critical position, which may open up possibilities for exploring the new possibilities that emerge for art, the city and the biennial, in their interrelations. In critical art theory and museology, Bernadette Lynch speaks about taking the ‘critical friend’ role to address how museums work with communities. What I suggest draws on militant ethnography as ‘a politically engaged and collaborative form of participant observation carried from within rather than outside grassroots movements (Juris, 2007, p. 164 in Arampatzi, 2014, p. 100. A gain of militant ethnography is that researchers become ‘active practitioners’ and can catalyse new ways for studying that emerge in-between academia and activism, (Routledge 1996b in Arampatzi, 2014).

It is such examples, among numerous other that explore the commons, that co-shape the new questions that will need to be addressed in the future. The way I suggest therefore to think of future paths for research is a combination from practice and militant ethnography, which can enrich biennial research is that it shifts from writing about to writing *within/against* biennials and navigating collectively the tensions between commoning the biennial and the biennialisation of the commons.

Some of these questions should guide in my view any future research on biennials that aims not only to delineate the asymmetrical relations that they are involved in, but also to challenge them and create new and more just forms of working and practicing together. If commoning as practice and activist research methodology seeks to expand theoretically informed analyses, through collective practice and critical engagement with resisting others. If commoning is about collective visions of the city and of society, perhaps we should dare to ask how we may research and write exhibition histories in more collective ways – not necessarily in the form of anthologies, but as a question of commoning research process and knowledge production. Here, we may think of how Moten and Harney (2013) propose in the



*Undercommons* a mode of study based on Blackness, as a way of refusing the neoliberal logic of competing against each other and putting energy into co-shaping something together, challenging and democratising the idea of learning (Halberstam, 2013, p. 11). The challenge for future research then could be to move from within/against to a beyond that values study as a mode of thinking and experiencing together embedded within what Harney aptly calls the '*with and for*', a togetherness that, through difference, seeks to make new worlds possible (Halberstam, 2013, p.5, 10)

## Epilogue

The findings of this research picture a moment in the on-going relations between biennials and commoning. As such, they provide a contribution to current academic debate, but cannot be but open conclusions. The aftermaths of my case studies and several examples that explore the possibility for commoning the art institution are already indicating possible ways forward for research. From the moment an exhibition like Documenta, with its power for shaping art discourses and practices, closes its doors declaring itself as a commons, has the power to trigger an avalanche of similar explorations all over the world. The reverberations become obvious in documenta 15 (2022) which picks up the gaps of d14 and is much more emphatically presented as a commons based documenta.

Although AB5-6 was a rupture in the life course of AB, it nonetheless bred spaces that explore art/commoning. Soon after stepping down from AB5-6, Xenia Kalpaktsoglou went to co-found with Mollona, Stavros Stavrides and architect Peggy Zali, The laboratory for the Urban Commons in Athens (LuC) (June 2017).<sup>324</sup> Out of LuC sprung Neo Cosmos, a collective where LuC members are involved. Characteristic of the new hybrid forms between public/commons, Neo Cosmos defines itself as an in-between space ‘Between a Cultural Centre and a public space’ which seeks to explore tools for sharing across research and production how ‘to inhabit together the commons.’<sup>325</sup>

Mollona went to co-found the Institute for Radical imagination (November 2017) a network of artists, academics and activists, which researches art, commoning and political prefiguration from a post-capitalist perspective. The experience of AB5-6 was catalytic for this initiative and its manifestos on a universal income for the arts, as well as Mollona’s (2021) book. These initiatives echo what Mollona mentioned in our interview, that through the AB5-6 experience ‘he became even more convinced that there is a possibility for an institution to be actually progressive and revolutionary’ (Mollona, 2018).

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<sup>324</sup> The first events in the frame of the Laboratory for the Urban commons took place in November 2016. See: <https://luc-athens.org/collectiveluc/>.

<sup>325</sup> See:

[https://www.neocosmos.gr/?fbclid=IwAR2T9nEo7wrgul5D7YIMEfwHRQj6F8Q4etJBMYsxPo\\_QMIOWJ4PlionLQR0](https://www.neocosmos.gr/?fbclid=IwAR2T9nEo7wrgul5D7YIMEfwHRQj6F8Q4etJBMYsxPo_QMIOWJ4PlionLQR0).

Following AB5-6 d14, another laboratory has also sprung out to some relation to AB, The ViZ laboratory for Visual Culture, an initiative a.o. of Poka-Yio and under the directorship of Kostis Stafylakis. ViZ is a lab that works with both private and public partnerships and funding from Onassis Foundation, who also became a key funder of AB after AB5-6. After AB5-6, AB, under the directorship of the remaining co-founder, Poka-Yio, who was also elected professor at the Athens School of Fine Arts, took directions that built on the criticisms, failures and frictions with d14. Despite their differences, subsequent biennales enquired about the possibilities for other ways of thinking and doing together. AB6 ANTI (2017) suggested to think of opposition and resistance at a time when they are already normalised and canonised and proposed anti-humanism as a way of thinking differently of the world. AB7 Eclipse (2021) proposed to adopt a 'Black Lens' and highlighted artists from the African diaspora and other non-Western contexts, asking how to 'coexist in the world differently'.<sup>326</sup> AB seems to have been able to capitalise on its raised international profile in the last years, securing funding both from private foundations and the Hellenic Ministry of Culture.

Thinking of circulation, the tensions of commoning the biennial/the biennialisation of the commons continue. The afterlives of d14's Parliament of Bodies is an example that illustrates how The PoB re-emerged after d14 at Warsaw's MoMA and the biennial Bergen Assembly 2019. According to Preciado, this further circulation was premised on failure: 'having failed to transform documenta's economy and institution, the PoB mutates into an apartheid institution-in-becoming and without constitution that parasites other institutions to provoke critical metamorphosis and repolitization' (Artemuseum, 2018). We may see the PoB as relational device that bears the potential to queer and disrupt the institutions and be a transnational infrastructure for commoning, but it is also a device based on extracting value produced from the many previous participants and the few individuals who will continue to circulate and amass reputational capital.

It is unlikely that the tensions between commoning/biennialisation will move to the background. The COVID-19 pandemic put a pause on biennial circulation and, subsequently, shrunk the biennials' ecological footprint through halting global travelling. However, even if

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<sup>326</sup> For AB6, see: <https://anti.athensbiennale.org/en.html>. For AB7, see: <https://eclipse.athensbiennale.org/en/eclipse>.

as some moved in front of screens, participating in online panels as speakers or audiences and anything in between, the power relations and the inequalities did not halt. Sustaining visibility by being present online was more difficult for women and those with caring responsibilities, who had to combine work and research from home, while busy with the daily work of reproduction. Yet, as Niemojewski (2021) argues in his monography *Biennials: the exhibitions we love to hate*, the pandemic opens up the possibility to speculate on the biennial's future, but, most importantly, on the responsibility we have as biennial-makers, to reassess them and address the inequalities they amplify.

During a workshop organised at LJMU in 2018, with d14's project manager Christoph Platz, I asked him whether we could imagine documenta curated by a collective. A few months later, it was announced that documenta 15 would be curated by the Indonesian collective ruangrupa who would use the concept *lumbung* (rice field / communal rice-barn) to point to commoning as a central practice for their artistic and curatorial approach. Inviting collectives to share problematics from their own contexts and connected to broader networks, d15 picks up the gaps that d14 left and the criticisms it attracted with regards to its engagement with Athens. While d14 only at the end emphatically declared 'documenta as a commons', d15 already emphatically starts with this declaration.<sup>327</sup> Not coincidentally, after the commotion that d14's move to Athens stirred, one of d15's conceptual lines turns attention to the city: 'From and For Kassel' considers documenta as a pool of resources, located in the city but operating on a global scale through a contemporary art ecosystem. Yet, despite its emphasis on collectivity and self-organisation, already the first reviews of d15 speak about the impossibility of forgetting the kind of powers that these events implicate and the double-edge movement of integrating 'Other' voices in the canonised circuits of global art (Charlesworth, 2022).

By now, there are also well-known examples beyond biennials that show that a persistent engagement with commoning can be possible from within an art institution. More recently (2021), Kortun talks about the idea of the threshold as a metaphor towards a new institution, based on a fluid relation of mutual trust with its constituents and through their critique may help the art institution to improve. 'Otherwise, institutions are just shopping, doing good, and

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<sup>327</sup> In fact, the question of documenta as a commons was debated at the Salzburg Academy in 2021, which brought together agents of both d14 and d15. See: <https://documenta-fifteen.de/en/mediathek/ruangrupa-at-salzburg-summer-academy/>.

being timely: commoning in the Summer, queering in the Fall, and decolonising in the Winter.’ (Kortun, 2021, unpaginated). Casco Art Institute: Working for the Commons in Utrecht and the Brussels-based art school École de recherche graphique implement a feminist commoning approach across their organisations, which seems to move beyond a fragmented and occasional engagement with common/s. Such spaces become important for hybridising and producing new meanings for art/commoning, working through new ambivalences, paradoxes and hybridities.

Biennials *are* behind these new forms of commoning/instituting/infrastructuring, since they are testing grounds. There is no reason to idealise biennials as generators of the new nor to demonise them as failures, but to seek how these experiments may co-shape new meanings of art/commoning and move towards more egalitarian relations in the arts. Learning from the intentions, realised programmes, interruptions and self-proclaimed failures, we should study biennials because they offer not only limitations but also the potentialities that emerge for art/commoning.

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## Appendix

### **Appendix 1. Glossary**

#### **Art/commoning**

By using the verbal form, my emphasis is on the activity of commoning. In the broader sense, I use the term art/commoning to refer to discourses and practices in art and curating that chose to be in proximity to the values that underpin common spaces. Art/commoning may refer to a whole range of art practices that enable cooperation, self-management and collective creativity, processes which bring the negotiation and sharing of power at the core of common spaces. Because negotiating with the definitions and meanings of public space is a defining feature of common spaces, I take this negotiation between public and common space as crucial for art/commoning. Negotiating and reconfiguring the boundaries between practice and production is also a key aspect of art/commoning in this research, especially when situated in biennial contexts. Art/commoning is a term that builds on that of art/commons proposed by Massimiliano Mollona (2021), whose approach brings anthropology and political economy together and emphasizes art/commons as a practice for anti-capitalist and post-colonial critique.

#### **Biennial (or Biennale)**

The term biennale (Italian) or biennial (in English) refers to large-scale periodic exhibitions that, strictly speaking, occur every two years. However, the term is commonly used for events of different periodicity, such as triennials (which occur every three years) and documenta (which occurs every five years – hence the term quinquennial).

In this thesis, biennials are spatially dispersed exhibitions which place display in a broader discursive environment and are thought with the capacity to generate art infrastructures in the city.

As such the spatial, discursive and infrastructural agency are thought as key aspects of biennials. As city-wide exhibitions biennials have a more pronounced relation to public space and publicness (compared to art fairs or museum exhibitions, which tend to be ticketed and take place in indoors venues) not only because they take place outdoors, but also because they are often city-initiated or rely on public authorities, an aspect which is decisive for their use of public space. The discursive components may include talks, workshops, publications and other educational activities that engage with social and political issues and typify what several curators and scholars call the ‘discursive biennial’. The infrastructural agency of biennials, although less developed in biennial literature, refers to biennials as able to enhance infrastructures for contemporary art, especially in contexts considered peripheral or with less developed contemporary art institutions (Filipovic, 2010; Niemojewski, 2010, p. 95; Smith, 2016). In this thesis, biennials are discussed as infrastructural thresholds; because they can both enable and enclose art/commoning.

\*See also biennials as infrastructural thresholds

#### **Biennale (or Biennial)**

In this thesis I use the English term biennial to refer broadly to periodic exhibitions, including documenta, and retain the term biennale for the Athens biennale, to correspond to the organisation’s name. The Italian term biennale, when adopted by a new such event, raises a more direct association to the history of biennials through the Venice Biennale, the first such event to have been organised in 1893. Despite its different periodicity, documenta (1955) is commonly included in the histories of biennials, as its development shares with biennials selection processes, discursive frameworks and professional networks (Niemojewski, 2010; O’Neil, 2012, Green and Gardner, 2016; Kompatsiaris, 2017).

### **Biennialisation**

In the first instance, biennialisation refers to the global proliferation of biennials since the 1990's, a global spread which makes biennials significant for shaping the knowledge, codes and norms of contemporary art (Ferguson and Hoegsberg, 2010; Marchart, 2008; 2014; 2019). Biennialisation is, however a contested term. While some see the global diffusion of biennials as offering opportunities for visibility to underrepresented art contexts and artists, others argue that biennialisation reproduces existing power relations and produces new asymmetries (Chin-Tao Wu, 2007; Filipovic, 2014; Bethwaite and Kangas, 2018).

In this research, biennialisation denotes a circulatory logic tied to neoliberal globalisation, which not only shapes how art is discussed, produced and presented, but mostly, a process through which cities, artists and curators accumulate various forms of economic, symbolic, cultural or discursive capital (Gielen, 2009; Green and Gardner, 2016; Kompatsiaris, 2017; Szreder, 2017).

### **Biennialisation of the Commons**

In cultivating antagonism, shaping power asymmetries and accumulation, biennialisation creates the conditions for limiting, capturing and enclosing the potentials of art/commoning, commoning the biennial and the city. If commoning shapes subjects, spaces and relations that seek to decommodify capitalist social relations in the city, biennials are embedded in processes that typify neoliberal governance and the commodification of cities. Considered as city-branding tools, biennials promote tourism, narratives of creative cities, which often rely on gentrification (Niemojewski, 2010; Sheikh, 2010; Kompatsiaris, 2017; Oxenius, 2017). This is why I argue that the stakes of 'commoning the city' and 'commoning the biennial' need to take shape 'within and against the biennial', meaning, within the biennial's realm, but against the features that make biennials an ally and facilitator of the capitalist production of art and the city.

### **Biennialise/ Biennialising**

This verbal form points to how biennialisation shapes subjects ideologically (Sheikh, 2014). Participating and circulating in biennials, artists and curators are biennialised, meaning that they are shaped and perceived as successful international and highly networked professionals.

### **Common (the)**

In the singular, the common refers to a political principle for instituting a cooperative society beyond neoliberal capitalism (Hardt and Negri, 2009; Harvey, 2012; Dardot and Laval, 2015; Bianchi, 2018). In this research, the common is drawn from the theory of Hardt and Negri (2009) and refers to the socially or collectively produced value by the multitude, the subject that has replaced the traditional working class, in globalisation.

### **Common (to)**

To common something (in this thesis the art institution, the biennial, the city) means to engage in processes of negotiating, sharing and redistributing power and strive for new configurations based on cooperation, horizontality and equality.

### **Commoning**

Commoning refers to the activities or social practices of cooperation, self-management and collective creativity by a group of people (the commoners) which establish a relation between them and a resource or a space, as well as shape the relations between them. Guided by the values of solidarity and equality, commoning practices strive for horizontality and challenge the dominance of capitalist relations. In common spaces, this often includes rejecting monetary exchanges, assembling to take decisions together and maintaining spaces through rotating systems for tasks. Crucial for defining commoning (and common space) in this research is the context of Athens and examples of art occupations, self-managed parks, neighbourhood assemblies, squats and refugee solidarity spaces, which emerge in Athens after the Syntagma square occupation in 2011.

### **Commoning Art Institutions / Institution of Commoning**

In the aftermath of the squares' movement different theoretical propositions attempt to rethink art institutions. In this research, the idea of rethinking the art institution through commoning takes as a starting point three key features proposed by Stavrides (2016): openness, difference and the quest to address normalisation and reconfigure power relations (Raunig, 2009; 2013; Moten and Harney 2013; Athanasiou, 2016; Berlant, 2016).

### **Commoning the Biennial**

Commoning the biennial in this thesis is about shaping biennials by engaging with commoning as collective decision-making processes that are based on the values of horizontality and equality. What is at stake is a different biennial, one that distributes power, engages with the city from the bottom-up and challenges hierarchical relations.

### **Commoning the City**

Commoning the city refers to practices of commoning that shape the city from the bottom-up, involving people in collective decision-making processes, driven by values of solidarity, horizontality and equality. What is at stake in such initiatives is to create a different kind of city, more just and beyond dominant capitalist relations, where people participate in the decisions that shape their everyday life, rather than being fully dependent by bottom-up decision-making processes.

### **Commons**

In the plural, the commons refer to spaces emerging through social practices and collective struggles which may institute the common (Bianchi, 2018). Most definitions of commons involve three constituent elements: a) a community b) resources, goods or services c) managed through commoning practices that refer to the social relations and sharing processes that make the commons.

### **Common/s**

Written in this way, common/s on the one hand points to differences between theorising the common as a principle and a mode of production (Hardt and Negri, 2009) and the commons as practices, struggles or spaces (Federici, 2016; Stavrides, 2016; De Angelis, ), but also points both to convergences across different theorisations. I borrow the term common/s from feminist commons scholar Silvia Federici (2016) and art theorist Angela Dimitrakaki (2016) and use it throughout the thesis whenever I refer to arguments that are shared by different theorists, even if some adopt the singular and others the plural term.

### **Common Space**

Common spaces are spaces that emerge out of commoning activity, when groups of people organise from the bottom-up, reclaim (urban) space and strive to shape their social relations based on the principles of solidarity, horizontality and equality. Common spaces are defined as distinct both from public and private spaces, because they do not depend on a prevailing authority or ownership, but because they are shaped by cooperation, collective decision-making and negotiations of the power relations inherent in social processes (Argyropoulou, 2015; Stavrides, 2016). Negotiating with the definitions and meanings of public space is a defining feature of common spaces. In this thesis, examples of common spaces include art occupations, self-managed parks, neighbourhood assemblies, squats and refugee solidarity spaces, but also art collectives and the effort to common the biennial or common the city within/against the biennial.

### **Emancipatory**

Although commoning is not per se anti- or post-capitalist practice, in this thesis it mainly refers to an emancipatory practice, which is driven by the need to challenge the dominance of capitalism, in defining public space, social relations and relations in biennials.

### **Enclosure**

Enclosures are a capitalist strategy to enclose spaces that are shaped by social relations that threaten our dependence on capitalism and hence, capitalism's reproduction, argues political economist

Massimo De Angelis (2007; Hodkinson, 2012, p. 507). Urban geographer Stuart Hodkinson (2012) provides a useful summary, defining the ‘new urban enclosures’ with: a) privatisation, as a legal process which determines who has the right or not to access or use a space (e.g. through physical barriers, but also through surveillance mechanisms); b) dispossession, a process which denies those excluded the possibility to engage in activities linked to what has been enclosed, as well as the knowledge acquired through commons, and c) capitalist subjectification, a process which aims to subject life in the capitalist logic of accumulation, the profit-making logic of the market, either through waged labour, through consumption, entrepreneurship or property ownership (Hodkinson, 2012).

### **Infrastructure**

The understanding of infrastructure in this thesis draws on Lauren Berlant (2016) who sees infrastructures as an organisational model consisting of patterns, habits and norms of use. Infrastructures organise movement or the ‘patterning of social forms’ (Berlant, 2016, p. 393). The idea that commoning is an infrastructure for troubling times points both to the times of crisis and a performative agency in commoning as a collective struggle to change established normative patterns of social life, repair what is broken, and define the terms of transition towards new forms of collective living (Berlant, 2016).

### **Infrastructuring**

using the term infrastructuring is meant to point to the agency biennials have to generate new art and, potentially, commoning infrastructures in the city. Similar to commoning, this term points to processual and relational, material, as well as immaterial and affective aspects implied in conceiving biennials as infrastructures.

### **Instituent practice**

The term refers to practices that denote a shift from institution to open-ended, ongoing practices that can resist closure and normalisation and address configurations of power in art institutions.

### **Instituting**

The term instituting points to a thinking which shifts attention from the institution as a hierarchical and rigid space to the institution as a process, or a ‘constant becoming’, drawing on Gerald Raunig (2007, p. 1). The concept does not negate institution, but proposes to occupy existing institutions and from within them invent new instituent practices (Raunig and Ray, 2009, p.12)

### **Potentiality**

For philosopher Giorgio Agamben (1993) potentiality is about realising ‘that things did not have to and do not have to be the way they are’ (Balskus, 2010, p. 178). In this thesis I draw the concept of potentiality from Stavrides (2019) who thinks of commoning as a practice that may potentialise (social relations in) space. At the same time, potentiality cannot be reduced to existing reality and as such, it is not something that should only be understood through what it actualises, but as something that lays the seeds for a new imaginary to emerge (Kompatsiaris, 2011; Stavrides, 2016).

### **Prefiguration**

The term refers to activities, daily practices and strategies of activists to build in the present alternative futures for a social organization and social relations that are based on horizontality and equality, beyond the dominant paradigms in capitalism, challenging the entanglements of representative democracy, neoliberalism, globalisation or colonialism. In essence, prefiguration is about avoiding reproducing the social structures that activists criticise and, in contrast, adopting means for a struggle that are not distinct from the kind of society they envision.

### **Prefigurative (Commoning as Prefigurative Practice)**

When thinking of commoning as a prefigurative practice, it is a way of thinking of it as an activist practice that, through cooperation and self-management, as well as collective creativity, seeks to bring



about another world, one guided by principles of solidarity, horizontality and equality, by planting the seeds of the society of the future in the present.

### **Right to the City (RttC)**

Based on various interpretations of Henri Lefebvre's writings, The Right to the City is the right to shape the city as an oeuvre, a collective work of art. This is a collective right that involves participation. For some, the RttC calls inhabitants to produce space as use-value, which has to do with symbolic gains and aspirations for living well (Harvey, 2003). In this thesis, the RttC is combined with commoning. Thought together, they refer to a collective right and practice to common the city, making the city the site for exercising politics and collective urban imagination (Harvey, 2012; Arampatzi, 2014; Argypoulou, 2015; Stavrides, 2016).

### **Space**

In this thesis space is understood as a social construct, following the theories of Lefebvre (1996). Space is relational, not simply something which contains subjects and social relations, but which actively shapes them. Inherent in this process is that space is produced by different social groups, classes, experts, the grassroots, who are often in an antagonistic or conflicting relation with each other. Space is the dominant form through which capitalism is produced, consumed and reproduced. While capitalism tends towards abstract or homogenous space which conceals the contradictions and conflicts of social life, struggles over urban space make differences and conflicts over ownership, use, meanings and values of urban space tangible (Lefebvre, 1977, p. 344).

### **Space Commoning or Spatial Commoning**

The term is introduced by Stavrides (2016), to point to the practice of commoning that engages with space; it is the more active equivalent of common space. Space commoning may be linked to with the three-fold understanding of space by Lefebvre and in particular 'lived space'. Lived space is the combination of perceived (how everyday produces space) and conceived space (representations of space). Lived space is shaped by symbolisms and images, and involves not only how we experience everyday life in the city, but also how we can appropriate spaces against state and capitalism and create new spatial imaginaries. Commoning is a practice that emerges out of the experience of existing spaces and is underpinned by an effort to create other possible spaces, beyond capitalist domination in the city.

### **Stake**

When someone has a stake in something, it matters to them, for example because they have a share, are invested or involved in it and because its success or failure will affect them. The stakes involved in an action are the things that can be gained or lost.

In this thesis the term stake refers to the importance of commoning for the emergence and lifespan of common spaces. What is at stake in commoning the city and commoning the biennial is to give shape to transform them, to shape new kinds of relations in them. What commoning is viewed as an emancipatory and prefigurative practice, it is not simply the means to an end (for example, occupying a building or a desolate plot), but also what is at stake. That is, what is at stake in such actions is to organise together from the bottom-up and create a different social space, by cooperating with each other in horizontal ways, negotiating the power relations and inequalities that are shaped by class, gender, culture etc. In the example of City Plaza, what was at stake was not per se to occupy an abandoned former hotel, but to turn it into a common space run through commoning, in solidarity with and the cooperation of refugees. In doing so, they offered a different kind of politics for hosting refugees than the state and a social organization prefiguring a society of equals.

### **Threshold**

In the literal sense, the term threshold refers to the plank, stone, or piece of timber that lies under a door. By extension, it also points to a door or gate, encompassing both the sense of end or boundary, but also the point of entering or beginning. A threshold is therefore an ambivalent or undecided position, but can also refer to the point at which something begins to be created or is visible.

### **Threshold spatiality**

The term refers to the spatial qualities of the threshold. Thresholds make us think of entry and exit points, crossings and passages, porosity and openness, but they also point to a state of limbo and ambivalence (Stavrides, 2016, p. 57, Volont, 2021, p. 4). Through the notion of threshold spatiality, commoning is defined with this kind of qualitative features as a practice that negotiates boundaries of public space, of community and identity, of capitalist and non-capitalist social relations (Stavrides, 2016).

### **Common spaces as thresholds**

In conceiving common spaces as threshold spaces, Stavrides (2016) examines how they occupy an ambivalent position that is neither outside of capitalism, nor entirely absorbed by capitalism and may gain emancipatory potentials. Common spaces as thresholds are spaces of encounters and crossings, connecting and comparing at the same time. Conceived as thresholds, common spaces involve subjects, rules of use and relations that are or should strive to be always open and in the making. For example, by inviting newcomers and new rules to be made constantly, as well as encouraging encounters, common spaces may become transformative and open up new city imaginaries.

### **Biennials as threshold infrastructures**

Applying the idea of infrastructure in biennials points to their capacity to generate multifaceted art infrastructures, which involve relational, material, as well as immaterial and affective dimensions. Thought as infrastructures, biennials organise movement and circulation in the art world, shape the norms and patterns of what is to be considered as art. In proposing biennials as threshold infrastructures this thesis suggests that biennials inhabit thresholds between facilitating and capturing or enclosing commoning. It points to biennials inhabiting tensions between accumulating power and distributing power through biennialisation. It points to the negotiations that shape biennials as spatial exhibitions, as they act between dominant urban policies and grassroots urban creative practices, between public and common space. It points to the questions biennials raise and tensions they inhabit between collective practice and labour, when they host commoning practices in their realm. From within this threshold position, this thesis enquires how may biennials be potentialised as infrastructures for commoning, both transforming biennials and their relations to the city.

### **Urban commoning**

Urban commoning is theorised as a set of spatial practices that create space not only as a good to be shared, but also as a medium that shapes the subjects, the practices, relations or institutions of sharing. Urban commoning is thought as a practice that fights enclosures, negotiates tensions with public space and the boundaries of identity and community, sharing power and open up new social imaginaries in the city.

## Appendix 2. Timelines

Key events and relations between the curatorial figures, before the opening of the exhibitions and up until the rupture between AB and d14.

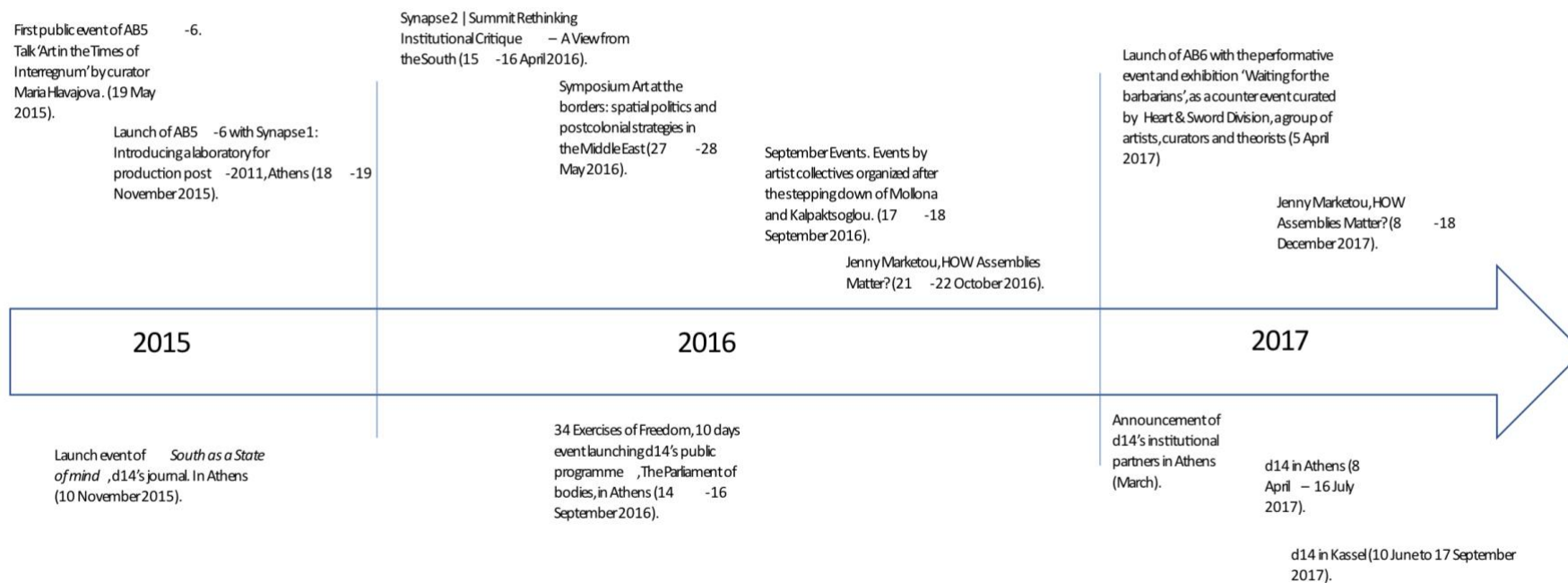
### Athens Biennale



### Documenta

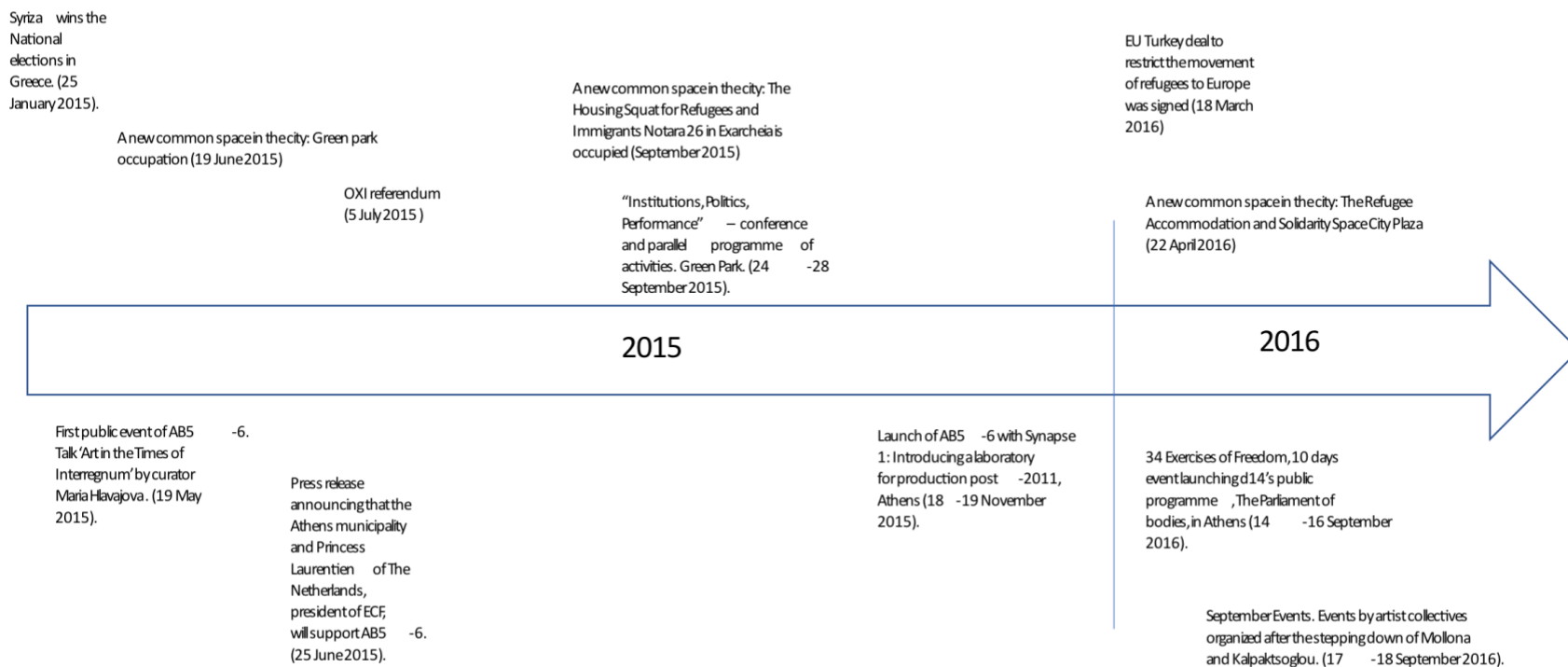
Key events between the opening and the closing of the exhibitions, showing the processual way of working of the two case studies.

## Athens Biennale



## Documenta

# Athens Biennale 5 -6, documenta 14 and common spaces in Athens in relation to key political events



### Appendix 3. Comparative Table

<b>Commoning and Common Spaces</b>	<b>Biennials and Biennialisation</b>
Horizontality	Hierarchy
Collective decision-making	Decision-making power according to role and position in a hierarchical structure -
Negotiating and sharing power	Accumulating power via circulation in biennialisation
Unproductive collective practice	Productive relations
Unremunerated, voluntary work Gift	(Should be) remunerated Should not be a gift, because this denies the fact that working and commoning in biennials is work
Collective work or social doing	Labour and practice, individual and teamwork, but often the artist remains the author. Artist as delegator or driver of exploitation
Collaboration, cooperation towards non-capitalist relations	Collaboration within a capitalist context of antagonistic productive relations and collaborative practices
Rotating of tasks	Tasks according to role
Negotiating boundaries of community and identity	Biennialising: making the figure of the international, mobile and networked artist and curator
Shaping subjects, spaces and relations that seek to decommodify capitalist social relations in the city	Embedded in processes that typify neoliberal governance and the commodification of cities. City-branding tools that promote tourism and narratives of creative cities
Negotiating boundaries of public space, ad hoc interventions	Within the boundaries of public space, authorised, accepting ownership, safety regulations for artworks in public space
Illegality, reclaiming and occupying space	Authorised use of public space
Anti-capitalist or post-capitalist values	Biennialisation depends on neoliberal capitalism and its values
A practice against and beyond enclosures that take the form of gentrification	Partnering up with those who have the power to enclose common spaces and lead gentrification

## **Appendix 4. Conference Presentations and Attendance of Conferences (Selection)**

### **Conference Presentations**

3-4th October 2017. 'Commoning documenta 14?' In: Contemporary Research Intensive. Research Pavilion, Venice, Italy.

5th December 2017. 'Some Takes on Curatorial roles in Collaborative and Participatory practice'. University of Creative Arts, Farnham, UK

22-23rd June 2017. 'Assembling Bodies: Commoning the Biennial?' In: Art Institutions & Performance Art. International workshop for PhD candidates and Public Symposium. Justus Liebig University, Giessen, Germany

3<sup>rd</sup>-4<sup>th</sup> October 2017. *Contemporary Research Intensive*, Research Pavilion, Venice, Italy. Organised by The Contemporary Condition/Aarhus University & Exhibition Research Lab/Liverpool John Moores University, in partnership with Venice Faculty for Arts and Design/University of Architecture IUAV, Uniarts Helsinki and the Research Pavilion, in the context of the 57th Venice Biennale.

31st May – 3rd June 2018. 'Commoning (in) documenta 14 (2017) and Athens Biennale 5 to 6 (2015-2017)? Periodic Exhibitions of Contemporary Art Amidst the Local/Global Narratives of Commons'. In: Urban Struggles in Mediterranean Cities: The Right to the City and the Common Space, School of Architecture, National Technical University of Athens, Athens, Greece

26th October 2018. Oral presentation – contribution to discussion session (In Response to Möntmann, N. (2017) "Plunging into the World: On the Potential of Periodic Exhibitions to Reconfigure the Contemporary Moment"), MA Curating Aarhus University, Exhibition Research Lab, LJMU, Liverpool, UK

8<sup>th</sup> March 2019. 'Commoning the Biennial or the Biennialisation of Commoning? Recurrent contemporary exhibitions and politics in the post-Occupy condition', International Women's Day PGR Research Café, LJMU, Liverpool, UK

## **Attendance of Conferences (selection)**

11<sup>th</sup>-15<sup>th</sup> September 2017. *Making Public Domain*, Summer School by UAntwerpen – ARIA, Antwerp, Belgium

5<sup>th</sup> March 2018, Christoph Platz, *The Role of Documenta in the Post-War Period*, Tate Liverpool, UK

9<sup>th</sup> May 2018. *How to Biennale! An Exchange of Ideas at Tate Modern*, by the Winchester School of Art at Tate Modern, London, UK

3<sup>rd</sup> June 2018. *ROAMING ASSEMBLY #22 ~ EURASIAN STEPS* by the Dutch Art Institute at State of Concept, Athens

9<sup>th</sup> June 2018. Launch day workshops of *Casco Art Institute: Working for the Commons*, Utrecht

23<sup>rd</sup> May 2019. *With For About: Art and Democracy*, Heart of Glass, St Helen's, UK

24<sup>th</sup> May 2019, *Protests Past and Present: Resistance and Persistence. Towards Equality*, LJMU, Liverpool, UK



## Appendix 5. Publication

Tsampalla, S. (2020) 'Commoning and Learning from Athens, documenta 14, 2017', In Made, R. and Christensen, S. (eds.) *Passepartout - New Infrastructures, Performative Infrastructures in the Art Field*, issue 40, Aarhus University

[https://www.google.com/url?sa=i&rct=j&q=&esrc=s&source=web&cd=&cad=rja&uact=8&ved=0CAMQw7AJahcKEwjQmtH2jYz5AhUAAAAAHQAAAAAQAg&url=https%3A%2F%2Ftidsskrift.dk%2Fpassepartout%2Farticle%2Fdownload%2F123384%2F170422%2F258979&psig=AOvVaw3QxOvpt\\_Wa1Tytm9IqLN4q&ust=1658565974632447](https://www.google.com/url?sa=i&rct=j&q=&esrc=s&source=web&cd=&cad=rja&uact=8&ved=0CAMQw7AJahcKEwjQmtH2jYz5AhUAAAAAHQAAAAAQAg&url=https%3A%2F%2Ftidsskrift.dk%2Fpassepartout%2Farticle%2Fdownload%2F123384%2F170422%2F258979&psig=AOvVaw3QxOvpt_Wa1Tytm9IqLN4q&ust=1658565974632447)

Tsampalla, S. and Kølbæk Iversen, A. (2018) *On Bodies and Rhythms*. In: Cox, G. and Lund, J. (eds.), *Contemporary Research Intensive*. (The Contemporary Condition series 10). Berlin: Sternberg Press

## **Appendix 6. Core Questions to Interviewees During the Semi-Structured Interviews**

Can you introduce your practice?

How was the invitation addressed to participate in the case study?

How familiar were you with the Athens Biennale? Did you participate in previous editions?

How familiar were you with documenta? Did you participate in previous editions?

What were the intentions and main ideas behind your project?

What kind of methodologies did you employ during your participation?

Does commoning play a role in your approach?

How would you position your collective / your practice in relation to commoning?

What would you say about the collaboration with the biennale and its curators?

What would you say about the collaboration with documenta and its curators?

How were the relations with the other collectives that were part of AB5-6 in Bageion?

How were the relations with the other collectives that were part of The Parliament of bodies?

How would you describe the material conditions made available by the institution?

What kind of relations and spaces do you think emerged from this experience?

How do you see commons and commoning in the context of your collaboration with AB5-6?

How do you see commons and commoning in the context of your collaboration with documenta 14?

## Appendix 7. List of Interviewees

Name	Occupation	Other art-, common space or biennial	Relation to Athens Biennale and AB5-6	Relation to documenta 14
Massimiliano Mollona	anthropologist		Programme director	
Xenia Kalpaktsoglou	Curator		Co-founder of Athens Biennale Co-director of AB5-6	Participant in event 'Women's Work in Revolt Feminisation of labour in art and neoliberal economy' (30th June-1st -July 2017) in the framework of Sanja Iveković, <i>Monument to Revolution</i> , 2017
Poka Yio	Artist curator		Co-founder of Athens Biennale Co-director of AB5-6	
Nelli Kambouri	Academic, researcher, activist	Participant at Embros		Parliament of bodies coordinator of the Apatride Society of the political others
James Simbouras	Artist		Member of the artist cooperative C.A.S.A. (Contemporary Art Showcase Athens) Participant with C.A.S.A. at Bageion cohabitation	Co-organiser of 'The performative fest of the Commons', a performative occupation of Sanja Ivekovic' public artwork <i>Monument to Revolution</i> , 2017
Maria Papadimitriou	Artist	Initiator of the artist-run space Souzy Tros		Artist collaborator of Rick Lowe at Victoria Square Project

George Kalyvis	Project manager			Project manager at Victoria Square Project
Rick Lowe	Artist			Artist initiator of Victoria Square Project in Athens
Julia Strauss	Artist	Initiator of Avtonomi Akadimia, participant at Occupy Berlin Biennale 7, participant at AB2, HEAVEN	Participant with Avtonomi Akadimia at Bageion cohabitation	Organiser of ‘The School of everything’ symposium (6th-7th July 2017) at the Parliament of Bodies
Georgia Sagri	Artist	Founder of YΛH[matter]HYLE Founding organiser at Occupy Wall Street	Provided partner venue for AB5-6: YΛH[matter]HYLE, video shown in AB5-6, participant at AB1 Destroy Athens	commissioned artist for documenta 14, co-coordinator of the Society for the end of necropolitics at the Parliament of Bodies
Jenny Marketou	Artist		Participating artist in AB3 and participating artist in AB5-6	Participant at ‘The School of everything symposium’ coordinated by Avtonomi Akadimia at Parliament of Bodies
Robin Vanbesien	Artist		Artist who showed his film assembly for an Oresteia (2016) at AB5-6, a film which includes interviews with activists from Syntagma square occupation, common spaces and filmed at Green Park	

Giannis Delagrammatikas	Member of artist run group	Member of artist group Campus Novel Participating artist group at Embros	Campus Novel Participating artist group at Bageion cohabitation	
Yannis Sinioglou	Artist, architect, member of artist run group	Member of artist group Campus Novel Participating artist group at Embros	Campus Novel Participating artist group at Bageion cohabitation Participating artist group at Bageion cohabitation	
Ino Varvariti	Artist, member of artist run group	Member of artist group Campus Novel Participating artist group at Embros	Campus Novel Participating artist group at Bageion cohabitation	
George Sahinis	Artist, member of artist collective		Founder of Urban Dig Participating artist group at Bageion cohabitation	
Angela Svoronou	Artist, member of artist collective		Artist member of Depression Era Participating artist group at Bageion cohabitation	
Eleni Tzirtzilaki	Artist architect activist, member of collective	Participant at Embros	Founder of Collective Nomadiki Arhitektoniki Participating artist and artist collective in AB4, AGORA	
Anna Laskari	Artist	Participant at Embros	Participant at the Apatride Society of the political other (film Piraeus port as entry point of global capitalism)	

Emma Fry	Curator and producer	Criticality curator at criticality producer at FIERCE AND URGENT CONVERSATIONS: The First International Triennial of Social and Collaborative Arts Practice, in St Helens, Merseyside (2021)		
Nataša Petrešin-Bachelez	Curator	Curator at U3   7th Triennial of Contemporary Art in Slovenia   Resilience in Ljubljana (2013)		
Mariana Zikou	Curator	Co-curator at the Biennale of Western Balkans (BoWB), Ioannina (2018)		
Elpida Rikou	Artist, anthropologist		Co-initiator of Learning from documenta 14 and of TWIXTlab (2014-)	

## Appendix 8. Press Release Athens Biennale 2015-2017 OMONOIA.

ATHENS BIENNALE



### Press Release

Athens, June 25, 2015

- The Municipality of Athens, co-organising partner of the Athens Biennale
- Athens Biennale, 2015 - 2017: "OMONOIA"
- Bageion: The historic building in Omonoia Square hosts the

Athens Biennale with large-scale installations

#### 1. The Municipality of Athens, co-organising partner of the Athens Biennale

Today during an event held at the City Hall, the Mayor of Athens, Mr. Yorgos Kaminis, officially announced the partnership of the Municipality of Athens and the Athens Biennial Foundation in co-organising the Athens Biennale. The Athens Biennale will generate cultural production for the Municipality and its citizens; and will continue to initiate an open dialogue on visual arts and culture at large, incorporating practices, actions and discussions around the social issues of the present time.

H.R.H. Princess Laurentien of the Netherlands attended the event as President of the European Cultural Foundation, which recently awarded the Athens Biennale with the ECF Princess Margriet Award for Culture 2015 for its contribution to European culture and the creation of an open, democratic Europe.

#### 2. Athens Biennale, 2015 -2017: "OMONOIA"

The next edition of Athens Biennale will be symbolically entitled "OMONOIA" (Concord). It will launch its activities in October 2015 and in contrast to the typical model of a Biennale, will run through 2017.

The Athens Biennale, constantly intuitive towards the institution of biennales, revises its identity by extending its duration to two years. Bridging the past to the present and the future, the fifth edition of the Biennale (2015) merges with the sixth (2017). The Athens Biennale 2015 - 2017, a daring and experimental endeavor launches its activities in June 2015 and peaks in June 2017 with the opening of documenta 14.

In view of the critical historical juncture, the Athens Biennale 2015 – 2017 focuses on burning issues such as the emergence of alternative economies, the performative in the political and the establishment of institutions that redefine the systems structures and its pre-existing models, while highlighting the current views of contemporary art.



The Athens Biennale 2015 - 2017 builds on the successful fourth edition of (AGORA) 2013 forming a curatorial team consisting of social philosophers, political thinkers, art theorists, curators and artists. The Athens Biennale 2015 - 2017 arises as a reaction to the current political and social conditions and a need to activate the public through art and contemporary theoretical viewpoints.

The Athens Biennale's 2015 - 2017 : "OMONOIA" launches a two-year period of activities that will run from June 2015 through the summer of 2017, in various venues across the Athens center, and, more specifically, at Omonoia square. The aim of this two-year period and the collaboration with the Municipality of Athens is the discovery of a permanent location for the organization's partnerships, from which point the activities of Athens Biennale 2015 - 2017 will take place. The creation of a cultural centre in a period of crisis and cultural reconstruction led the Athens Biennale 2015 - 2017 to Omonoia square and the selection of the former hotel Bageion as the symbolic starting point for the unfolding of the artistic program.

The four-storey listed building of the former hotel Bageion, an excellent example of the Athenian urban architecture, dates back to the late of the 19th century. Ernst Ziller built the hotel between 1890-1894 after the donation of Ioannis Bagas, The Bageion located in Omonoia square, the oldest square in Athens, which until 1930 was the center of secular life and commercial point of the city. In the basement of the hotel was housed a traditional cafe with habitués from all social strata of life, who found there freedom from the conservatism of the time. In the early 1920s the Bageion becomes a spiritual refuge for the young writers of the time (Mitsos Papanikolaou, Napoleon



Lapathiotis, Tellos Agras, Minos Zotos, Nick Saravas) and becomes one of the most important places where the new generation of the Greek Literature was formed later.

3. Bageion: the historic building in Omonoia square hosts the Athens Biennale with large-scale installations

The opening of the Athens Biennale 2015 -2017 begins with the installation of two large-scale works at the hotel Bageion. In the former ballroom the work *Rhinoceros*, 1997 ,by Nikos Kessanlis is displayed and in the facade of the building the sign *Άντερ Κονστράξιον* (ie. Under Construction), 2015, by the Underconstruction Group.

The *Rhinoceros* was first reconstructed almost twenty years after its last presentation. The work of historical artist Nikos Kessanlis (1930-2004) is in dialogue with the under construction site of Bageion and the connotations that it carries on the current socio-political condition. It is part of a series of visual creations which Kessanlis experimenting with the structure of the image, by freeing it in the space and overthrowing the painterly qualities and origins. At the *Rhinoceros* is displayed the iconic engraving by Albrecht Dürer - the representation of a rhinoceros that the engraver had not actually ever seen. This

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radical gesture of Kessanlis suggests a revision of the traditional means of artistic creation but also refers to the ability of art to conjure up and gives new meaning of its contemporary reality. On another level, the *Rhinoceros* is talking with Omonoia through the counterpoint to the *Tail*, 2003, the large-scale installation of Kessanlis in the underground station beneath the square. The chaotic pace of the station contrasts with the icy melancholy of Bageion, but Kessanlis works at both treaties and beyond.

In the façade of the building the Underconstruction Group (Alexandros Laios, Maro Fasouli, Dimitris Foutris) suspends the wooden sign *Άντερ Κονστράξιον* (ie. Under Construction). Underconstruction Group was formed in September 2008 having as principal axis of research the notion of rebuilding the structures that frame the institutions inside which the Group acts. The team's Construction

projects are created and located among conversion, reconstruction of concepts and solidified systems of thought and behavior.

This sentence condenses the under construction current social condition and literally under construction operation of the former hotel as a symbol- monument and the attempt of the Athens Biennale enliven and reactivate the space by creating a core of actions and reactions.

Opening hours:

Thursday – Friday: 16:00 – 19:00 Saturday: 12:00 – 16:00

Bageion Hotel, 18 Omonoia Square

Exhibition Duration:

26 June – 31 July 2015

1 September – 1 October 2015. The exhibition will remain closed during August.

For further information, please contact Magda Terzidou, tel. 210.5232.222 and email: [communication@athensbiennale.org](mailto:communication@athensbiennale.org)

For further photographic material, please visit:

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## **Appendix 9. Opening Speech of Athens Biennale Omonoia Rex National Theatre.**

Athens, November 2015

I thank the National theatre for hosting us in this beautiful venue, and the municipality for their support and Poka Yio and Xenia for having involved me in this wonderful journey.

It is probably not obvious to you why an anthropologist should direct an art biennale. Some of you will know anthropology as the discipline that was born under the British Empire to better understand the cultures of the colonies so that they could be ruled better. But anthropology's early founders were Jewish emigres, artist belonging to the French surrealist movement or oxford-based socialists with a subversive soul. Their anthropology cast a critical glance on mainstream society through the eyes of other cultures. After the devastation of the first world conflict and the economic crisis that followed, anthropologists looked at the south as a space where the political and economic foundations of Europe could be re-imagined. In 1922 Marcel Mauss wrote the famous book on the gift in which he argued that reciprocity, cooperation and sharing (commons) are much more productive and sustainable forms of living than the ideologies of competition, individualism and privatization of life that sustained western societies. As anthropologist, I have been researching on in issues of poverty, inequality, labour and uneven economic development my whole life. In the 1990s I moved to the UK when a bright and young labour MP Tony Blair was gathering huge popularity around his proposal of a new left for Europe. I did my fieldwork in Sheffield, North of England where I lived in a poor working-class neighborhoods and worked in two steel factories. In my research I was trying to understand how the working-class survived the disastrous economic austerity imposed by Thatcher government, which had privatized and destroyed the mining and steel industries and turned the city into a gigantic shopping mall. An economic model that Blair himself, I soon discovered, totally endorsed. In 2008 I moved to Brazil at a time when in the midst of global economic recession, the country was experiencing an unprecedented economic growth under the charismatic leadership of president Lula da Silva an ex-metalworker and leader of the anti-dictatorship movement. During my fieldwork I lived in favelas, worked in factories, cooperatives and with homeless and migrants organizations. Researching on a grassroot level I tried to understand whether Brazil's new economic wealth was reaching the millions of families that lived in extreme poverty. Today I find myself in Greece, at Europe's crossroad, between south and north; east and west and at another important historical juncture, when from the ruins of an enduring and disruptive economic crisis new political forces and experiments are rising.

Anthropology has taught me that history is made by small actions performed in the everyday by different sections of civil society. Informed by anthropology this biennale will invite the public to take part with us in this historical moment of change. This public will come from different sections of society and include those who are located at the very margins of history – unemployed, informal workers, migrants and all those who have been pushed into a state of precariousness especially after 2008 who judging by the statistics are a growing army and includes the middle classes. We will ask them to join the biennale in their own terms, neither as sociological categories nor as romanticized political subjects. Avoiding analytical abstractions that dehumanise We will let civil society speak for itself.

Here is where art comes into play. Let me give you a few examples of how artists' run spaces and cultural organizations are rethinking urban politics in Europe:

They are committed to collective, process-based and open-ended ways of working.

They are aware of the performative dimension of politics and the play of emotions, desires and affects in material life.

They experiment with new institutional forms that cut across the state and the market, self-determination and institutionalization, autonomy and the collective.

They struggle against the privatization of the state and provide free welfare, food and education using culture as both a common resource and as space of democratic participation.

Athens biennale has always been one of these subversive and experimental art institutions. I want to thank Poka and Xenia for their inspiring example. Agora, the name of AB's last edition was set in the empty building of the former Athens stock exchange. Agora captured the sense of urgency and effervescence of that moment of capitalism in crisis and of popular rebellion against austerity that coalesced in Syntagma square in May 2011. It did so through a subversive format, which shifted authorship from the artist and the curator to the public itself and set up discursive, performative, grassroot and research-based dialogues between art professionals and people from different disciplines. Agora was a call for the public to come together and collaborate in a moment of economic crisis.

But times have changed, we now live in a state of permanent crisis, there is no inside or outside to capitalism, and even social democratic states are rapidly shrinking so that the new public is dispersed across different communities of interests, different institutions and economies.

Today we have with us some of these urban groups from the art sector and outside it that emerged from the anti-austerity movement and practice some forms of cooperativism, commons, self-organization, performative politics and participatory democracy. From that historical moment of reaction, critique and hope in May 2011 these groups now face the challenge to survive in the longer term and be sustainable. We all here, as art institutions, citizens or workers face the same challenge. In the next two days we will discuss how the alternative economies, performative politics and institutional experiments of these groups can become sustainable models for life after the crisis and after capitalism as we know it. We will involve in this reflection scholars and intellectuals who have been engaged actively in these experiments – as activists rather than simply studying them. All together in the next two days we will set the key issues and themes to bring forward in our programme in the next two years in the spirit of co-determination.

By bringing together this edition and the next edition, AB will run continuously over the next two years. This signals our commitment to go beyond the short-term temporality of art events and build lasting relationships and cultural infrastructures both material and immaterial. In the next two years we will continue to host top international scholars and intellectuals and commission Greek and international artists who are willing to stay in Athens for sometime, connect with our network and reflect with us on the themes and practices are important for us. We are committed to an open methodology revolving around the idea of the laboratory intended as:

A way of pooling initiatives, ideas and resources

A space for hosting and display projects, workshops and events of different solidarity

initiatives

A base out of which autonomous projects, artwork, meetings, research interventions and collaborations may develop

A centre of transnational exchanges of initiatives outside and inside Greece.

A centre of national and transnational academic research

A site of production of models, prototypes and policies.

A political collective that follows not JUST ONE aim, but facilitates and mediates between diverse aims and needs.

Our main stage will be the city of Athens. Cities are magical entities, seductive, menacing, marked by beauty and excess contagious, stereotypical and mythical. No city is ever one. There is the city of hawkers and the city of finance, the city of tourists and the city of homeless, dilapidated historical centres and middle class ghettos each of them with different degrees of publicness. Cities speak to us in different voices, smells and physical gestures, much of which, as writer Italo Calvino remarked, are invisible to us. We will ask the city of Athens to illuminate us, in the spirit of Walter Benjamin, but also to make us rebels (a reference to David Harvey) and experiment with new forms of sociability and existence.

In the next two years we will be mainly based in Omonia Square an important urban landmark where migrants, homeless, street vendors, office workers, retailers, professionals and tourists come together everyday. Omonia means unity. But our Omonia will not be a space of uniformity. It will be a space where differences do exist and are productive, a space that is both individual and common and whose boundaries and thresholds are constantly transgressed.

Let me tell you. I am aware that it will not be easy. We will fail and fall, come together, part way and start again like in a dance rehearsal. Because each of us is a different body. But if we are committed to this collective movement in the next two years we will discover together new ways of thinking and acting and enter a new space where art, life and politics come together. And along the way we will have fun!

Available at: [https://www.gold.ac.uk/media/documents-by-section/departments/anthropology/Opening-Speech-of-Athens-Biennale-Omonia-\(PDF-download\).pdf](https://www.gold.ac.uk/media/documents-by-section/departments/anthropology/Opening-Speech-of-Athens-Biennale-Omonia-(PDF-download).pdf). [Accessed: 14<sup>th</sup> September 2021].

## Appendix 10. The programme of Synapse 1 at Athens Biennale 5-6.

### Friday 15/04

11:00 -17:00 19:00  
20:00

### Saturday 16/04

10:00 – 18:30 10:00 – 21:00 21:00

### Sunday 17/04

11:00 – 22:00 11:00 – 16:00

12:00 – 15:00 12:30 – 15:30

13:00 – 15:00

15:00 – 19:00 16:00 – 17:30 16:00 – 17:30 17:30 – 18:00 18:00 – 19:00 18:00 – 19:30

### Monday 18/04

14:00 – 22:00 15:00 – 19:00

16:00 – 17:30

Summit day 1  
Opening of Bageion  
*CIVIL<sup>2</sup>*, theatre play by Stella Christodouloupoulou

Summit day 2  
*Synapse 2* Working Hours *OMONOIA* After-party

*Synapse 2* Working Hours  
Avtonomi Akadimia  
*On Education* by Sotirios Bahtsetzis, Vasyl Cherapanyn, Paul B. Preciado and Joulia Strauss, talk  
*Meeting Large European Networks* by European Alternatives (Daphne Büllsbach) and *Krytyka Polityczna* (Jakub Dymek and Igor Stok szewski)  
Assembly  
UrbanDig & Ideas Factory  
*What is Omonoia?*, open physical workshop  
Playroom  
*Imagine Xouth I*, workshop for children aged 6-12 years old and their parents  
Kuba Szreder  
*Diverse Economy of Contemporary Art*,  
a cognitive mapping session  
Playroom  
*Wanderers*, open workshop  
Perpetuum Mobile  
*AR - Artists at Risk*, presentation  
*ANAPARASTASI*  
Performance by Geopoetics group  
Perpetuum Mobile  
*Risk*, screening  
Razavipour Neda  
*Unstable Equilibrium*, talk  
*ANAPARASTASI*  
Performance by Geopoetics group

Synapse 2 Working Hours Playroom  
*Wanderers*, open workshop ANAPARASTASI  
Performance by Geopoetics group

16:00 – 20:00 17:00 – 18:30 17:00 – 20:00 18:00 – 19:30 18:00 – 20:00 19:30 – 20:30 20:30 – 21:45

## Tuesday 19/04

14:00 – 22:00 15:00 – 19:00

16:00 – 17:00 17:00 – 18:30

18:00 – 19:30 18:00 – 20:00 18:00 – 22:00

Panos Sklavenitis in collaboration with Playroom

*Locus Exoticus Daysign Workshop*

Avtonomi Akadimia  
*Border Security in the Robotic Age* talk by Daniel Mützel  
Greek artists initiatives  
*Acts of Involvement*, open discussion  
ANAPARASTASI  
Performance by Geopoetics group  
Residents of Mets Initiative in collaboration with Transition Group Solar air heater workshop  
Campus Novel  
*Strolling Happiness*, presentation by Ilaria Biotti  
*Civil War, A Foreign Country*  
Theatre play by Aris Laskos, Kitty Paitazoglou,  
Eleanna Stravodimou

Synapse 2 Working Hours Playroom  
*Wanderers*, open workshop Katayoun Karami

*The Other Side*, talk  
Avtonomi Akadimia  
*Forget Fear – Story of Occupy Biennale*, world premiere  
of the Im documentary by Rafal Swirek  
ANAPARASTASI  
Performance by Geopoetics group  
Residents of Mets Initiative in collaboration with Transition Group Solar air heater workshop  
Netting the Work  
*Gomenes I*, a performance art event on Gender and Stereotypes

## Wednesday 20/04

14:00 – 22:00 15:00 – 19:00

16:00 – 17:30 16:00 – 19:00 17:00 – 18:00 17:30 – 19:30 18:00 – 19:00

Synapse 2 Working Hours Playroom  
*Wanderers*, open workshop ANAPARASTASI  
Performance by Geopoetics group UrbanDig

Office Hours  
C.A.S.A.  
*LOCATION ALLOCATION*, presentation by Fatma Ergkiouner Residents of Mets Initiative in collaboration with  
Transition Group Solar air heater workshop  
Avtonomi Akadimia in collaboration with C.A.S.A.  
*4Dsound: points on the curve*, talk by Alyssa Moxley



18:00 – 19:30 19:00 – 20:30

19:00 – 19:30 19:30 -21:00

#### **Thursday 21/04**

14:00 – 22:00 15:00 – 19:00

16:00 – 19:00 18:00 – 20:00 18:00 – 21:00 18:30 – 20:00

20:00 – 22:00

#### **Friday 22/04**

14:00 – 22:00 15:00 – 19:00

16:00 – 19:00 18:00 – 20:00 18:30 – 20:00 20:00 – 22:00

#### **Saturday 23/04**

12:00 – 22:00 12:00 – 15:00

#### *ANAPARASTASI*

Performance by Geopoetics group

Avtonomi Akadimia

*Acoustic weapons: from the walls of Jericho to the GitMo playlist*, talk by Sebastian Schäfer

Katerina Stasinopoulos

*OMONOIA 14/12/05*, screening

Residents of Mets Initiative

*Ιλισ-sos the River the Bridge the Cave and the Temple*, presentation

Synapse 2 Working Hours Playroom

*Wanderers*, open workshop UrbanDig

Of ce Hours

Residents of Mets Initiative in collaboration with Transition Group Solar air heater workshop

Lo & Behold

*Regarding Authority*, project

Avtonomi Akadimia

Introduction of Krytyka Polityczna Centre

*Brand New World / Nowy wspomniały świat*, screening,

a documentary by Maria Smarz – Koczanowicz presented by Marta Madej

*Khaima* (2011) by Athanasios Karanikolas, screening

Synapse 2 Working Hours Playroom

*Wanderers*, open workshop Fanis Kafantaris

*Speleo~ / Σπήλαιο~*, workshop

Residents of Mets Initiative in collaboration with Transition Group Solar air heater workshop

Avtonomi Akadimia

*Forget Institutional Critique*, talk by Raimar Stange

*Raw Material* (2011) by Christos Karakepelis,

screening in the presence of the director

Synapse 2 Working Hours Fanis Kafantaris

*Speleo~ / Σπήλαιο~*, workshop

12:00 – 21:00

Campus Novel

*Same Time Tomorrow*

Screening by Tatiana Ilichenko and Moritz Metzner Lo & Behold  
*Regarding Authority*, project  
Playroom

*Imagine Xouth II*, workshop for teachers, parents and anyone else Playroom  
*Wanderers*, open workshop  
C.A.S.A.

Performance by Thomas Diafas  
Residents of Mets Initiative in collaboration with Transition Group Solar air heater workshop  
Avtonomi Akadimia  
*Incorporeal materialities: Politics of the body, gender, language and rhythm*, talk by Ioulia Mermigka  
C.A.S.A.  
Performance by Filippos Vasileiou  
C.A.S.A  
Performance by Antigoni Tsagkaropoulou  
C.A.S.A  
Performance by Kostas Voulgaris  
*Plague*  
Theatre play by Grigoris Liakopoulos

*Synapse 2 Working Hours* Fanis Kafantaris  
*Speleo~ / Σπήλαιο~*, workshop Campus Novel

*Same Time Tomorrow*

Screening by Tatiana Ilichenko and Moritz Metzner Lo & Behold  
*Regarding Authority*, project  
Panos Sklavenitis in collaboration with Playroom Locus Exoticus Daysign Workshop

Residents of Mets Initiative in collaboration with Transition Group Solar air heater workshop  
Playroom  
*Wanderers*, open workshop

*Katzelmacher* (1969) by Rainer Werner Fassbinder, screening Avtonomi Akadimia  
*Final Fantasy. 21 translations of purpose in Japanese. Hermeneutics of myth, manga and RPG*

talk by Hiroshi McDonald Mori  
*Boy eating the bird's food* (2012) by Ektoras Lygizos, screening

12:00 – 21:00 13:00 – 16:00 15:00 – 19:00 15:30 – 19:00 18:00 – 20:00 19:00 – 20:30

19:00 -20:00 20:00 – 20:30 20:30 – 21:00 20:30 – 21:30

**Sunday 24/04**

12:00 – 21:30 12:00 – 15:00

12:00 – 21:00

12:00 – 21:00

13:00 – 16:00

15:00 – 17:00

15:00 – 19:00

18:30 – 20:00 19:00 – 20:30

20:00 – 22:00

**Avtonomi Akadimia**



Available at: <https://athensbiennale.org/cgi-bin/biennial-list/mail.cgi/archive/ab4newsletter/20151116220433/>. [Accessed: 12<sup>th</sup> September 2021].

## **Appendix 11. Artists Against Evictions. Open Letter to the Viewers, Participants and Cultural Workers of Documenta 14.**

Open Letter to the Viewers, Participants and Cultural Workers of Documenta 14

Open Forum

artistsagainst #1 April 10, 2017, 4:21pm

Documenta 14 Viewers, Participants and Cultural Workers,

We call for your attention, in this immediate moment of “Learning from Athens”. We are the people who inhabit this city and we are talking to you as our guests.

Your jostling bodies crowd the streets of Athens, your mouths are speaking of our hardship, your feet are pounding the pavements. But this is not enough. Now is a time for carving out a space for all, not a time of culturally archiving crisis. Now is a time of action not blind consumption. We ask you to redirect your limbs into the shadows and the black outs, away from the feast the Mayor of Athens has staged for you.

You say you want to learn from Athens, well first open your eyes to the city and listen to the streets.

One of you laments the discourse of illegitimate bodies. At the same time, by staying silent, he is assisting the eradication of spaces for the thousands of bodies who inhabit this city in autonomous units. These squatted houses are under constant threat; daily we are told we will be evicted through violent means. Not only jeopardizing our basic human needs, but our support networks, spaces of autonomy and unified cultural practices. In these buildings, artists and activists coexist together with thousands of refugees, who have come here from war-torn countries to seek new lives with dignity and freedom.

The silence of Documenta is not acceptable and only goes further to accommodate Mayor Kaminis, the State, the Church and the NGOs who stand against us and force thousands into segregated concentration camps, prepped and ready for the very bodies your director says he’s trying to protect. This violent act is dividing the legitimate bodies from the illegitimate ones by state force and Documenta has so far been silent.

The precursor events of Documenta 14, entitled “The parliament of bodies” spoke of the voices of resistance, transgender voices, the voices of the minority. Well, we are those voices, we are genderless, we are migrants, we are modern pariahs, we are the dissidents of the regime and we are here. We walk with you, we tread the parallel streets, but you don’t see us – you have your eyes trained on the blue dotted lines of your Google map. You have been programmed and directed not to see us, to just miss us, reverse and avoid us – our culture has been censored from you. We ask you to recalibrate your devices, we ask you to get lost, to hack your automation, and rewire your cultural viewpoint.

In the run up to all those budget airlines hitting the tarmac, we have confronted some serious battles.

Only three weeks ago, at dawn on the 13<sup>th</sup> March 2017 the state evicted the social space Villa Zografou. They simultaneously raided Alkiviadou refugee squat and arrested 120 refugees only to release them out into the cold, homeless and without their belongings in the streets at midnight. This is not an isolated incident of oppression. Last summer in Thessaloniki, people faced the violent eviction and bulldozing of refugee homes. In Lesbos, the No Borders kitchen camp was destroyed, amongst others. Immediately after these barbaric evictions and abuses, mayor Kaminis stated that the occupation of municipality owned buildings by migrants is “degrading the city.” The same mayor stood before you on April 6th, presiding with pomp over the Documenta press conference.

The Greek government today threatens to destroy anyone who seeks grassroots solidarity, self-organization and to build spaces for new beginnings. Over 2000 refugees share these spaces with artists and others, and form communities.

This aggressive cleansing will not stop, and we are under threat of losing all autonomous houses by the summer of 2017. These houses are our culture, our homes, and our structures. The mayor of Athens calls them ghettos but what is one man’s ghetto is thousands of people’s home, and site of social expression and interaction.

WE ARE ASKING YOU TO FIRST SEEK ATHENS AND THEN LEARN FROM US. BY PARTICIPATING BLINDLY YOU ARE SUPPORTING THE GOLDEN GHETTOISATION OF OUR NEIGHBOURHOODS, THE EVICTION OF OUR COMMUNITIES, AND THE SYSTEMS OF PATRIARCHY THAT STAND ON OUR FINGERS AS WE TRY TO BUILD OUR OWN, SELF-SUSTAINABLE ARCHITECTURES.

CONSIDER YOUR PARTICIPATION AND ROLE IN EVENTS THAT IMPLICITLY LEND COVER AND LEGITIMACY TO THE MAYOR AND STATE’S ACTIONS.

YOU ARE CONDONING THE WAR ON GRASSROOTS INITIATIVES FOR ALL IF YOU IGNORE OUR CALL.

WE CALL FOR YOUR SUPPORT AND SOLIDARITY TO:

CLOSE THE CAMPS, NOT THE SQUATS  
SOLIDARITY TO ALL SQUATS  
AGAINST THE AGREEMENT OF EU-TURKEY SHAME  
OPEN THE BORDERS

8<sup>th</sup> April 2017, Artists against evictions

Available at: <https://conversations.e-flux.com/t/open-letter-to-the-viewers-participants-and-cultural-workers-of-documenta-14/6393>. [Accessed: 12<sup>th</sup> September 2021].

## Appendix 12. First Press Release Documenta 14 – Learning From Athens, 7<sup>th</sup> October 2014

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Team documenta 14, copyright Nils Klinger, 2014

On October 6, 2014, a symposium titled “documenta 14, Kassel: Learning from Athens” was held at Kunsthochschule (Academy of Fine Arts) in Kassel, Germany, at the invitation of the academy. Organized by the team of documenta 14, and led by Artistic Director Adam Szymczyk, the symposium presented key members of the next documenta organization, as well as discussed essential ideas and thematic concerns of the exhibition project as a whole, scheduled to take place in 2017.

The city of Kassel has been the host of documenta since its inception in 1955. Likewise, over the past thirteen editions, documenta has served as host to many artists and cultural practitioners from around the globe. But, ultimately, this position of host—with all the privileges involved—appears to be no longer tenable and begs to be questioned, if only temporarily. To this end, Szymczyk introduced documenta 14’s planned twofold structure: In 2017, documenta 14 will establish a second site—Athens—bringing Kassel and the Greek capital onto equal footing as the two locations of the exhibition. Thus documenta’s undisputed position as host will be abandoned for another role, that of guest, in Athens.

Szymczyk noted that the main lines of thinking behind this move are manifold. They have to do with the current social and political situation both in Europe and globally, which motivates artistic action. Further, they indicate the need to embody in documenta 14 the palpable tension between the North and the South as it is reflected, articulated, and interpreted in contemporary cultural production. The challenge involves avoiding the traps of binary logic, while resonating with changing realities. To that end, instead of the singular spectacle, with its clearly designated location and temporal order, typical for great international exhibitions,

documenta 14 will comprise two iterations set in dynamic balance in space and time. The distance between Kassel and Athens will fundamentally alter the visitors' experience of documenta 14. A feeling of loss and longing brought about by geographic and mental displacement created by two distant iterations of the exhibition might change the visitors' perception of the show, working against the idea of rootedness and countering the widespread, normative assumption that such an exhibition must sustain the unity of action, place, and time. Challenging this state of things, documenta 14 will attempt to encompass a multitude of voices in, between, and beyond the two cities where it is situated, reaching beyond the European context from the vantage point of the Mediterranean metropolis, where Europe, Africa, the Middle East, and Asia face each other. The diverse and diverging locations and socioeconomic circumstances of Kassel and Athens will come to bear on the very process of creation of the exhibitions, while inspiring and determining its individual works of art. For documenta 14, the participating artists will be invited to think and produce within the dynamic between these two cities.

The working schedule envisages documenta 14 to open in Athens in April 2017; it will then be inaugurated two months later in Kassel, on June 10. This will ensure that there will be a month of overlap, with two parts of the exhibition running in parallel. Moreover, though each iteration of the exhibition will be developed as an autonomous project, they will inform each other's content while not repeating the form, with several distinctive venues in Athens, as in Kassel. Documenta 14 intends to learn from the city of Athens and its citizens, instead of parachuting a prepackaged event from Kassel into one or several picturesque venues. Rather than being merely a sum of two destinations, documenta 14 will unfold in a three-year-long process of learning and producing knowledge, while also engaging in the process of instituting spaces for public life in both locations. In this process, both cities' communities will become involved, contributing to the project. Already, over the course of 2013 and 2014, several instructive meetings have taken place in Athens with a number of the city's cultural producers who represented the diversity and contradictions of the Greek context today, beginning an ongoing discussion of collaboration with certain institutions there. In parallel, similar discussions have been led in Kassel.

Greece in 2014 is not an isolated case; it is emblematic of the fast-changing global situation, and it embodies the economic, political, social, and cultural dilemmas that Europe must face today—much as Kassel in 1955 embodied the need to deal with the trauma of destruction brought about by the Nazi regime and simultaneously served as a strategic location at the onset of the Cold War. If Athens exemplifies the current issues that extend beyond the proverbial notion of the “Greek Crisis,” these problems—which are as much European and global as they are Greek—remain unresolved. Yet they present us with an opportunity to open up a space of imagination, thinking, and action, instead of following the disempowering neoliberal setup that offers itself as (non)action implied in the (non)choice of austerity. While the specific timing and choice of locale of Kassel in 1955 were precisely the factors that allowed documenta to develop into a now half-century-old venture, those sociopolitical parameters that made documenta urgent are no longer in play. This sense of urgency, then, must be found elsewhere.

Szymczyk and his team concluded by noting that documenta 14—in its temporary displacement and doubling of perspectives—would enable those artistic strategies that reach toward the reality of a contemporary world, one understood as a place for a multitude made up of individuals, and not as a territory defined by hegemonic relationships that make it a



place of suffering and misery for many. It is this world that will be addressed in the exhibition, the world larger than Germany or Greece.

#### **APPENDIX**

documenta 14 is organized by Artistic Director **Adam Szymczyk** together with a team whose first members have now been announced:

**Pierre Bal-Blanc**, Curator; **Marina Fokidis**, Head of Artistic Office Athens; **Hendrik Folkerts**, Curator; **Henriette Gallus**, Head of Communications; **Annie-Claire Geisinger**, Coordinator Communications Office Athens; **Quinn Latimer**, Editor of Publications; **Andrea Linnenkohl**, Assistant to the Artistic Director; **Hila Peleg**, Curator; **Christoph Platz**, Head of Exhibition Department; **Dieter Roelstraete**, Curator; **Fivos Sakalis**, Press Officer/Greek Media; **Katrin Sauerländer**, Head of Publications; **Monika Szewczyk**, Curator; **Katerina Tselou**, Assistant to the Artistic Director.

The visual identity of documenta 14 will be changing over time and in response to the development of the project, in the process involving the design offices of **Julia Born & Laurenz Brunner**, Berlin; **Mevis & Van Deursen**, Amsterdam; **Vier5**, Paris & Kassel; and **Ludovic Balland Typography Cabinet**, Basel.

Available at: <https://newsletter.documenta.de/t/j-12C9729D2BF513CC>. [Accessed: 12<sup>th</sup> September 2021].

**Appendix 13. Last Press Release Documenta 14 – documenta 14, April 8–September 17, 2017, in Athens, Kassel, and beyond, has reached more people than ever before – 17 September 2017**

The image originally presented here cannot be made freely available via LJMU E-Theses Collection because of 'copyright'.

Banu Cennetoğlu, *BEINGSAFEISSCARY*, 2017, various materials, Friedrichsplatz, Kassel, documenta 14, photo: Roman März

*documenta 14 is not owned by anyone in particular. It is shared among its visitors and artists, readers and writers, as well as all those whose work made it happen.*

On Sunday, September 17, 2017, after 163 days of concerts, screenings, readings, performances, discussions, and the presentation of works by over 160 international artists, documenta 14's thirty-five exhibition venues in Kassel opened their doors to the public for the last time.

**Well over one million visitors saw the exhibition in both cities during its runtime of 163 days, which makes documenta 14 the most frequented contemporary art exhibition of all times.**

**During the one hundred days of documenta 14 in Kassel we welcomed 891,500 people who visited the exhibition venues,** the events, and works in public space. Sixty-five percent of the visitors came from Germany and the remainder visited from seventy-six countries around the world. Of these, 32,800 were school children, over 14,500 were seasonal ticket holders, 14,500 were professional visitors, and 11,150 were media representatives. 19,750 visited documenta 14's diverse events which formed part of the Public Programs as well as other performances in Kassel.

**In Athens, documenta 14 was visited over 339,000 times,** in forty-seven exhibition venues, making documenta 14 the most visited multi-venue contemporary art exhibition in Greece's history. Almost half of the visitors were Greek; twenty-five percent came from Germany; and the remainder visited from over fifty countries around the world.

In Athens, documenta 14 has been visited by over 2,200 media representatives. 5,750 professional visitors traveled to Athens during documenta 14's preview days and the exhibition period and 2,500 school children visited documenta 14 in Athens.

**700.000 listeners tuned in to documenta 14's radio program Every Time A Ear di Soun** online. The program, a collaboration between documenta 14 and Deutschlandfunk

Kultur, has been on air during the entire period of the exhibition. Nine radio stations in Greece, Cameroon, Colombia, Lebanon, Brazil, Indonesia, the United States, and Germany constituted a worldwide art exhibition on air.

The program punctuated each station's usual programming in their local language with art pieces for radio commissioned by documenta 14, archival material, and broadcast selections from documenta 14's Public Programs for four hours daily. Every Time A Ear di Soun has also been accompanied by live acts addressing issues related to the phenomenology of the sonorous, the sonic as medium for historical narration, Frantz Fanon's concept of radio as medium of resistance, Rudolf Arnheim's concept of the imagery of the ear, and more.

**119,000 visitors took a walk with a member of the Chorus.** Paths, routes, and parcours crossed and intertwined, as visitors considered the pathways taken by peripatetic thinkers as a point of departure for a reflection on the act of walking. Joining a member of the documenta 14 Chorus, visitors created their own lines of inquiry, questioning and entering into dialogue as they unraveled and unfolded documenta 14 together. aneducation has been an open-ended enquiry into modes of questioning, discussing, and thinking art for each and every visitor of documenta 14.

aneducation built projects with schools, universities, art colleges, and communities relating specifically to documenta 14 artist projects. The program of aneducation was to reach a wide and diverse audience that is open to thinking about the social role of art and artists in today's society. aneducation was shaped by three main questions: "What shifts?" "What drifts?" "What remains?" while investigating the relationship between art, education, and the aesthetics of human togetherness through the collective activation of the body—shifting from day to night. What does it mean to come together? How and where do we come together? And what can we do when we come together?

**The Parliament of Bodies**, the Public Programs of documenta 14, emerged from the experience of the so-called long summer of migration in Europe, which revealed the simultaneous failure not only of modern representative democratic institutions but also of ethical practices of hospitality. The Parliament was in ruins. The real Parliament was on the streets, constituted by unrepresented and undocumented bodies resisting austerity measures and xenophobic policies.

Throughout an entire year, from September 2016 in Athens moving to Kassel in April 2017 and ending there in September 2017, the Parliament of Bodies and its Societies were active as a dissonant and at the same time synchronous practice of polyphony and multiplicity. More than 300 artists, activists, thinkers, and writers took part in the events. 112,203 viewers followed the documenta 14 Public Programs via live stream.

Nomadic and performative, working as a stateless heterotopia by means of multiplication and displacement, the Parliament of Bodies acted within the spaces of the exhibition as well as within spaces of both cities (theaters, associations, studios, squares . . .) that are experimenting with new forms of sovereignty beyond the norm.

Out of the many Open Form Societies that were active in Athens and Kassel, we would like to acknowledge the work of the Society of Friends of Halit Yozgat and Pavlos Fyssas dedicated to create networks of solidarity between antifascists and anti-racists movements in Greece and Germany.

**Coinciding with the closing of the exhibition in Kassel, the fourth and final guest issue of *South as a State of Mind***, has been released online, focused on a working theme of violence and offering. In visual and textual essays, as well as poetry, fiction, and letters, languages of violence and transformation are being explored by some of the most compelling writers, thinkers, and artists of the past and present day. *South as a State of Mind* is a magazine founded by Marina Fokidis in Athens in 2012. From early 2015, the magazine temporarily became the documenta 14 journal, publishing four

special issues edited by Quinn Latimer, documenta 14's Editor-in-Chief of publications, and Adam Szymczyk, documenta 14's Artistic Director. All issues can be read online.

An interest in language and reading and address—its uses and abuses and affects, as public rhetoric or private literary production—has led the documenta 14 publications program forward. The documenta 14 publications explore language itself; they do not simply employ it in the service of aesthetic, political, and discursive regimes. The disparate forms that language takes—as letters, stories, parables, essays, diaries, speech acts, legal documents, propaganda, poetry, and hybrid literary other—and the ways in which these forms structure our being in and reading of the world, have all found their way into the documenta 14 publications. These include the documenta 14 journal *South as a State of Mind*; *The documenta 14 Reader*, a critical anthology exploring issues of economy, language, and the coloniality of power; and the *documenta 14: Daybook*, devoted to the commissioned artists in the documenta 14 project. Each of these publications articulates larger art-historical and political concerns while focusing on the daily activities and practices of artists and writers and the forms of resistance to be found therein.

Available at: <https://www.documenta14.de/en/news/25596/closing>. [Accessed: 12<sup>th</sup> September 2021].

## **Appendix 14. Examples of Common Spaces**

This section aims to visualise examples of common spaces and activities that the practice of commoning may encompass. They refer in particular to chapters 1 and 2 in this thesis, which focus on commoning and common spaces in Athens. They act complementary to the glossary, the timeline and material related to common spaces in the Appendix. The images and the texts aim to provide brief descriptions of the activities of commoning involved in each example and help contextualise the case studies in relation to Athens and common spaces. Occupy and Gezi Park occupation images are included, because the examples are referenced in the main body of the thesis. The texts accompanying the images attempt to highlight the following keywords and aspects:

- Art/commoning
- Assembling
- Occupying public space
- Occupation
- Working in common
- Performing public space
- Enclosures

### **From Common Space to Entrepreneurial Creative Hub: The Example of Agora Kypselis (Municipal Market of Kypseli) in Athens (2006-)**

The occupation of Agora Kypselis (2006) is an early example (preceding the December 2008 and crisis) of a common space in Athens. The example is indicative of how art/commoning practices play a significant role against enclosures.

Agora Kypselis, a historically significant building (1935) was closed for decades and in 2003 the municipality (owner of the building) made plans to demolish it, in order to erect a shopping centre. Twenty-one associations decided to occupy and self-manage the market, organising cultural events. The occupation put pressure on the Ministry of Culture to declare the building a monument, due to its architectural significance and halt its demolition.

The municipality started looking for a new manager in 2016. After receiving 17 proposals, the management was given to Impact Hub, a non-profit organisation, which is part of a global network promoting social entrepreneurial models such as start-ups, co-working spaces and creative cities. The more recent transformation to a creative hub is indicative of the appropriation of common spaces by the municipality, something which also played a role in the agreement between the municipality and the Athens Biennale, for the latter to use Bageion as a potential creative hub for its future activities.

Some of the images depict exhibitions and events organised by the collective Reconstruction Community, with non-hierarchical decision-making processes, in which the author was a member.



Agora Kypselis (2006) The building before the occupation. The text on the door reads ‘ The market should be open to the citizen and to culture’. Photo: Archive Reconstruction Community. © Reconstruction Community, used under a Creative Commons AttributionNoncommercial license: <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/3.0/> (CC BY-SA 3.0).



Reconstruction Community exhibition at Agora Kypselis (2006). Photo: Anna Tsouloufi-Lagiou. © Anna Tsouloufi-Lagiou, used under a Creative Commons AttributionNoncommercial license: <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/3.0/> (CC BY-SA 3.0).



Reconstruction Community event at Agora Kypselis (2006). Photo: Archive Reconstruction Community. © Reconstruction Community, used under a Creative Commons AttributionNoncommercial license: <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/3.0/> (CC BY-SA 3.0).

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Agora Kypselis (2018). Available at: <https://news.gtp.gr/2018/10/04/art-music-sharing-bring-athens-kypseli-public-market-back-to-life/>. [Accessed: 10<sup>th</sup> September 2019].



### **Art/Commoning After December 2008: The example of the Lyriki Occupation, Athens (2009)**

The Lyriki (National Opera House) occupation is an example of art/commoning taking shape after the December 2008 urban riots in Athens. Through collective participatory creative processes, such as self-organised workshops, an open assembly and performative events reclaiming public space, the Lyriki occupation contributed to the post 2008 rise of collective art practices in Athens' public space. Two months after December 2008, the dancers of the Lyriki occupied the building (February 2009). Renaming it 'Insurgent People's Opera', the dancers protested against police violence and the enclosure of public spaces, reclaiming culture as collective creativity against the exclusion of 'difference' in the arts, showing solidarity to workers' struggles and with those arrested during the December 2008 riots.

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Performative painting action in front of the building during the occupation of National Opera House (Lyriki) (8<sup>th</sup> February 2009). Photo Elena Akyla. Available at: <https://elenakyla.wordpress.com>. [Accessed: 10<sup>th</sup> September 2019].

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Graffiti from the Insurgent People's Opera, National Opera House (Lyriki) by dancers, February 2009. Available at: <https://libcom.org/article/national-opera-house-occupied-athens-and-turned-counterinformation-and-resistance-base>. [Accessed: 10<sup>th</sup> January 2020].

## **Commoning as Collective Working: The Example of Navarinou park, Athens (2012 - )**

In the example of the Navarinou Park in Athens, residents from the area occupied this abandoned parking lot, which was left in limbo between its public/private owners (the Technical Chamber of Greece (TCG)). People occupied the lot, redesigned it as a park and continue to self-manage it. Practising commoning through their collective labour, horizontal participation through assemblies, working groups, and organising actions that encompass community food-producing, a children's playground and a place for cultural events.

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Navarinou Park. Available at: <https://artsmetric.com/navarinou-park/>.  
[Accessed:10<sup>th</sup> November 2019].

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Commoning as collective working. Working together to transform the abandoned parking lot into the self-organised Navarinou Park. Available at <https://www.firefund.net/parkonavarinou>. [Accessed:10<sup>th</sup> November 2019].

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Working together in redesigning the self-organised Navarinou Park. Available at <https://www.firefund.net/parkonavarinou>. [Accessed:10<sup>th</sup> November 2019].

## **Visualising the Spatiality of the Syntagma Square Occupation as Common Space, Athens (2011)**

The Syntagma square occupation, as Occupy and other examples from the squares movement, was characterised by the occupation of public space. The encampment was crucial for spatialising practices of commoning, while the porous boundaries between the several parts of the encampment shaped Syntagma as a threshold common space (Stavrides (2016, p. 166). Although protest actions took different forms, crucial for analysing the Syntagma square occupation as a common space were a) the assembly as the main space and time for coming together, speaking in public and for horizontal decision-making processes, b) working groups in the encampments (for example collectively organised solidarity kitchen, garbage collection, a first-aid station, a web radio) and c) theatre or circular group traditional dances, which performatively protested against police violence, as well as improvised music happenings, which sometimes resolved tensions between protesters (Kaika and Karaliotas, 2014; Leontidou, 2014; Papapavlou, 2015; Stavrides, 2016).

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Sit-in protest during the Syntagma square occupation. 29<sup>th</sup> June 2011. Photo: endiaferon. Available at: <https://publicintelligence.net/greece-syntagma-square-protest-photos-june-2011/>. [Accessed: 10<sup>th</sup> November 2019].

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The encampment during the Syntagma square occupation. 13<sup>th</sup> June 2011. Photo: linmtheu. Available at: <https://publicintelligence.net/greece-syntagma-square-protest-photos-june-2011/>. [Accessed: 10<sup>th</sup> November 2019].

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The encampment during the Syntagma square occupation. 13<sup>th</sup> June 2011. Photo: linmtheu. Available at: <https://publicintelligence.net/greece-syntagma-square-protest-photos-june-2011/>. [Accessed: 10<sup>th</sup> November 2019].

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Assembling at the Syntagma square occupation, 2011. Photo: interoccupy.net-cc. Available at: <http://cadtm.org/Change-Greece-Change-Europe,11105>. [Accessed: 10<sup>th</sup> November 2019].

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Assembling at the Syntagma square occupation, 30<sup>th</sup> June 2011. Photo: Ggia. Available at: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Anti-austerity\\_movement\\_in\\_Greece](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Anti-austerity_movement_in_Greece). [Accessed: 10<sup>th</sup> November 2019].

### **Occupy Wall Street, New York (2011)**

One of the first and most characteristic images of Occupy, the image of a ballerina dancing on top of the Charging Bull sculpture by the Adbusters poster that incited the occupation. The sculpture 'Charging Bull' had been placed in 1989 without authorisation by a wealthy Italian artist named Arturo di Modica. Although it was soon removed, it was placed back, as presumably Wall Street workers loved it. The sculpture came to symbolise private profit that characterises the area of Wall Street. Hence, the Adbusters poster with the image of a ballerina on the bull and the protesters at the background, indirectly announced that a performative occupation was about to take over public space *and* public art that stood in the area (McKey, 2016). As in Syntagma, the General Assembly was a key space shaped by commoning, an experience of collective decision making, participatory or direct democracy.

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Poster, Adbusters, July 2011. Available at: <https://designobserver.com/feature/the-poster-that-launched-a-movement-or-not/32588>. [Accessed: 10<sup>th</sup> November 2019].



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Assembling at Zuccotti Park, September 2011. Photo: Yates McKey. Available at: <https://www.e-flux.com/journal/72/60504/occupy-and-the-end-of-socially-engaged-art/>. [Accessed: 10<sup>th</sup> November 2019].

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Occupy protesters in Oakland holding signs referring to the "We are the 99%" message of Occupy. Available at: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/We\\_are\\_the\\_99%25](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/We_are_the_99%25). [Accessed: 10<sup>th</sup> November 2019].

## **Between Art/Commoning and Enclosures: The Free Self-Managed Theatre Embros, Athens (2011-)**

The reactivation of Embros theatre was initiated a few months after the Syntagma square occupation was cleared out by the police in the summer of 2011. Residents of the Psirri area, together with the ‘Mavili Collective’, a group of performance artists and theorists, occupied Embros on 11<sup>th</sup> November 2011. As other examples, this was also a disused building, left empty by The Ministry of Culture for 5 years. The group first organised a 12-day programme of talks, discussions and performances open to the public. The programme influenced examples which followed, such as Green Park in 2015 (which also involved members of the Mavili collective), as well as AB5-6 and d14, which both launched with a ten-twelve days public programme.

The threat of enclosure has been constant in the life span of Embros, both coming from outside and inside. While the reactivation started as an ephemeral dissident act, the groups continued to collectively manage the space, but with many internal conflicts and withdrawals. A year after the reactivation, with a new government bringing a renewed agenda of privatisations of public property and national assets, the occupiers faced the threat of eviction and arrest. One of the latest acts of enclosure was in May 2021, when the city sent workers to seal the theatre and evicted the artists from the building, causing another wave of solidarity protest actions around the theatre and internationally.



Il Camino commune, Action by Nomadiki Arhitektoniki/Eleni Tzirtzilaki inside and in front of the theatre, during the reactivation of Embros theatre (November 2011). Photo: Eleni Tzirtzilaki. . © Eleni Tzirtzilaki, used under a Creative Commons AttributionNoncommercial license: <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0/> (CC BY-SA 4.0). Available at: <https://nomadikiarhitektoniki.net/perpatontas/il-camino-commune-tragoudi/#more-61>. [Accessed: 10<sup>th</sup> January 2020].



Il Camino commune, Action by Nomadiki Arhitektoniki/Eleni Tzirtzilaki inside and in front of the theatre, during the reactivation of Embros theatre (November 2011). Photo: Eleni Tzirtzilaki. © Eleni Tzirtzilaki, used under a Creative Commons AttributionNoncommercial license: <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0/> (CC BY-SA 4.0). Available at: <https://nomadikiarhitektoniki.net/perpatontas/il-camino-commune-tragoudi/#more-61>. [Accessed: 10<sup>th</sup> January 2020].

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Artists protesting the sealing of Embros theatre in May 2021.  
Photo available at: <https://en.squat.net/2021/05/>. [Accessed 15<sup>th</sup> June 2022].

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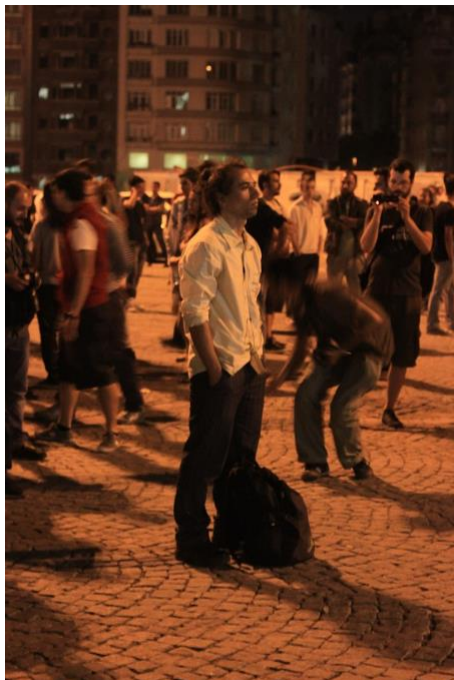
An act of enclosure: workers sent from the public authorities sealing Embros theatre. 21<sup>st</sup> May, 2021. Photo: Tzina Sotiropoulou. Available at: [https://www.facebook.com/search/photos/?q=microgeographies&sde=AbrD\\_dSce9Y75ee31OLweAlwCCulWbt9F\\_42IbbtLDwVOJ1fIvo8nLFekWalwsfCKIxXIOSGETfWoHdyurXhj6yxqot9sgD7uR6x77IcIsBZPoBg5zknE2KDIto7nsvmZUk](https://www.facebook.com/search/photos/?q=microgeographies&sde=AbrD_dSce9Y75ee31OLweAlwCCulWbt9F_42IbbtLDwVOJ1fIvo8nLFekWalwsfCKIxXIOSGETfWoHdyurXhj6yxqot9sgD7uR6x77IcIsBZPoBg5zknE2KDIto7nsvmZUk). [Accessed 15<sup>th</sup> June 2022].

## The Gezi Park Occupation, Istanbul (2013)

The standing reading protest at the time of the Gezi Park occupation, which contested the urban development plans for the park, saw hundreds of people following the performative act of Erdem Gündüz of standing and reading books, manifesting in public and taking up space in the city.

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Performance artist Erdem Gündüz standing without moving for eight hours on June 17, staring at the flag of modern Turkey's founder Mustafa Kemal Atatürk at the Atatürk Culture Center (AKM). Istanbul, 2013. Available at: <https://www.hurriyetdailynews.com/standing-man-inspires-a-new-type-of-civil-disobedience-in-turkey--48999>. [Accessed: 1<sup>st</sup> September 2019].



Standing Man protest acts in Taksim Square during the Gezi Park occupation, 2013. Photo: ©John Lubbock, used under a Creative Commons AttributionNoncommercial license: <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/3.0/> (CC BY-SA 3.0). Available at: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Erdem\\_Gündüz](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Erdem_Gündüz). [Accessed: 1<sup>st</sup> September 2019].

Similar to the Syntagma square occupation, the Gezi Park occupation also had no clear limits between the encampments and other parts of the park. This lack of well-defined borders facilitated the creation of exchanges, passages, and in-between spaces between the occupiers and those crossing or using the park.

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The Gezi park occupation. May 2013. Available at: <https://www.publicspace.org/works/-/project/h312-occupy-gezi>. [Accessed: 7<sup>th</sup> July 2022].

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Fighting against acts of enclosure: A bulldozer was hijacked by supporters of the Beşiktaş football club and used it to chase away police forces who tried to evict the Gezi park occupation. May 2013. Available at: <https://www.publicspace.org/works/-/project/h312-occupy-gezi>. [Accessed: 7<sup>th</sup> July 2022].

## **A Common Space Amidst the Biennialisation of the Commons: Green Park (2015)**

On 19th June 2015, artist activists decided to occupy the abandoned Green Park café at the Pedion tou Areos, one of the most central parks of Athens, not far from Omonoia square. In the park, refugees create makeshift shelters and young refugee boys sell sex to collect money to fund their further journey to Europe. The Green Park occupation was initiated by artists activists from the Mavili Collective, who had occupied Embros theatre in 2011. By 2015, Embros was run by other groups and Green Park wanted to build on the learning and failures of the initial reactivation of Embros and to practise commoning based on friendship. Setting the tone at the time were mass social mobilisations towards the pending referendum (5th July 2015), where the country was meant to vote whether they agreed to continue the austerity measures imposed by the creditors.

Green Park opened with a ten-day programme of performances, guided tours, DJ sessions, interventions and ‘spontaneous habitations’ which highlighted the park’s everyday life.<sup>328</sup> This ten-days programme was reminiscent of the Embros reactivation. When a few months later AB5-6 would open with the ten-days programme of Synapse (and later on, d14 with a ten-days event of ‘Exercises of Freedom’), it was easy to see how Embros and Green Park were important references for both biennials in terms of content and forms. In fact, the Athens Biennale had announced that it would inhabit Bageion with the support of the Athens municipality (25 June 2015) a few days after Green Park was occupied. The artist activists of Green Park had been invited to participate in AB5-6, but withdrew before Synapse 1. Their absence created a significant gap in AB5-6, as Green Park soon became a hub for self-organised art/commoning practices.

At a time when biennialisation was setting the tone in Athens, with d14 and AB5-6 using rhetorics of solidarity and commons, Green Park can be viewed as an attempt to re-emphasise the art occupation from the bottom-up. However, looking at the artists and guest speakers who participated in the launch, one can see that many of them participated in both Green Park and AB5-6. Green park activists would also participate in d14’s public programme as speakers, as some artists from AB5-6 would do too.<sup>329</sup> As art theorist Fotiadi (2017) writes,

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<sup>328</sup> For Green Park and the rationale of the occupation see: <https://greenparkathens.wordpress.com/programme/programme-strands/>.

<sup>329</sup> Not only the format, but also the questions in terms of a collective cohabitation allowed for parallels and, moreover, some of the same artists participated in Green Park and in AB5-6. Among

artists move through these flexible, interdisciplinary, horizontal alliances while maintaining parallel individual careers, competing and depending on the same funding by private foundations and making use of the biennale as a significant infrastructure for contemporary art in the city - and in this instance, of d14.

The early withdrawal of Green Park members both performed institutional critique to the biennials in the city, claimed visibility but also intersected with the biennial format. Green Park emphasised questions of instituting, performance and the (under)commons. Looking at two further events that Green Park organised, neither the institution/instituting nor the biennial was dismissed. The conference 'Institutions, Politics, Performance' brought theorists to explore relations between institutions and performance (24-28 September 2015) before the Synapse 1 of AB5-6 (November 2015). Green Park artists initiated the *Performance biennial*, which started in Athens and took participants to a mini residency on the island of Cythera (June 2016). In this way, it is more accurate to say that Green Park attempted to engage with the logic of biennialisation from a bottom-up way. At this particular instance, when two biennials were envisioned to take place in overlapping times and with overlapping stakes, this seemed to respond both to the need for differentiation as a grassroots initiative, which could choose to legitimate or not a biennial, and chose how to inhabit the tension between commoning the biennial and the biennialisation of the commons.<sup>330</sup>

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them were Joulia Strauss, Sofia Dona, Fanis Kafantaris. AB5-6 collectives (Depression Era and Campus Novel) had shown work at the Embros theatre occupation (2011 and 2013, respectively).

<sup>330</sup> The conference brought together several speakers who engage with these matters: Athena Athanasiou, Denise Ferreira Da Silva, Stefano Harney, Alexandros Kioupiolis, Bojana Kunst, Isabel Lorey, Alan Read, Gerald Raunig, Vassilis Tsianos.

For the performance biennial see: <https://www.facebook.com/events/277253532626795/>.  
<https://www.facebook.com/events/229059120916562/>.



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The exterior of Green Park. Available at: <https://greenparkathens.wordpress.com/#jp-carousel-249>. [Accessed: 10<sup>th</sup> June 2019].

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Members of Green Park cleaning the space together. Available at: <https://greenparkathens.wordpress.com/#jp-carousel-249>. [Accessed: 10<sup>th</sup> June 2019].

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Green Park (G.Argyropoulou, K.Tzimoulis, V.Noulas), DIY Performance Biennial 'NO FUTURE', 2017. Available at: <https://www.visibleproject.org/blog/project/diy-performance-biennial-no-future-athens-and-cythera-greece/>. [Accessed 12<sup>th</sup> September 2019].

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Green Park (G.Argyropoulou, K.Tzimoulis, V.Noulas), DIY Performance Biennial 'NO FUTURE', 2017. Available at: <https://www.visibleproject.org/blog/project/diy-performance-biennial-no-future-athens-and-cythera-greece/>. [Accessed 12<sup>th</sup> September 2019].

### **A Common Space for Difference, Living and Working Together: The Refugee Accommodation and Solidarity Space City Plaza, Athens (2016-2019)**

City Plaza, a disused hotel near Victoria Square, which had been closed for seven years, was occupied on 22<sup>nd</sup> April 2016 by the Economic and Political Refugee Solidarity Initiative, in order to offer housing to refugees arriving to Athens and as a space to fight racism and the border politics of EU and Greece. The decision to squat the building was taken a month after the EU-Turkey deal to restrict the movement of refugees to Europe was signed, on 18<sup>th</sup> March 2016. City Plaza brought together activists, refugees from different cultural, class and religious background and volunteers from all over the world. At that time, there were thousands of refugees arriving in Greece or held in camps.

In bringing together people from different backgrounds, City Plaza was a common space where negotiating difference, including class divisions, values and norms that are shaped by different cultural and social backgrounds shaped the cohabitation. In fact, although there were no criteria as to who was entitled to be accommodated (contrary to state led processes), there was an effort to keep a balance in gender, nationalities and religious backgrounds. Devising decision-making processes like assemblies and working in common for daily tasks, like cleaning and cooking, was essential to the process of commoning. With regards to collective working in City Plaza, activists and inhabitants did not assign specific roles according to skills or experience, but followed a system of rotation. In this way, many of the inhabitants would do a variety of the tasks that are needed to maintain a common space. The importance of such a system for commoning is that any newcomer can step in and take over a task and by doing so, feel welcome and part of a community-in-the making and a social space beyond a rigid or fixed distribution of roles. (Lafazani, 2017)

City Plaza became an important common space example in the period following the EU-Turkey deal. The hotel could host about 400 people at a time and in total hosted about 2500 refugees in the 36 months it operated. Members of City Plaza Bahar Askavzadeh, a writer from Afghanistan and researcher-activist Olga Lafazani spoke during the event 'Indigenous Knowledge 2: Fleeing and Occupying' (7 December 2016).

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The Refugee Accommodation and Solidarity Space City Plaza reception. Photo: Olga Lafazani. Available at: <https://antipodeonline.org/2017/11/13/intervention-city-plaza/>. [Accessed: 1<sup>st</sup> September 2019].

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The whiteboards where the various activities organised at City Plaza are listed. Photo: Mara Scampoli. Available at: <https://www.meltingpot.org/en/2017/10/we-struggle-together-we-live-together-2/>. [Accessed: 1<sup>st</sup> September 2019].

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Refugees and volunteers serve a dinner which they have also helped to cook at City Plaza. Available at: <https://www.thenewhumanitarian.org/feature/2016/05/06/welcome-city-plaza-greece-s-refugee-hotel>. [Accessed: 1<sup>st</sup> September 2019].

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Children's activity at City Plaza. Available at: <https://en.squat.net/2016/05/29/greece-city-plaza-hotel-athens/>. [Accessed: 1<sup>st</sup> September 2019].

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Refugees and volunteers dance together. Available at: <https://en.squat.net/2016/05/29/greece-city-plaza-hotel-athens/>. [Accessed: 1<sup>st</sup> September 2019].

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City Plaza. Party held on the roof of the hotel on the night of St. Lawrence. Photo: Mattia Alunni Cardinali. Available at: <https://www.meltingpot.org/en/2017/10/we-struggle-together-we-live-together-2/>. [Accessed: 1<sup>st</sup> September 2019].

## Appendix 15. Vote of the People's Assembly of Syntagma Square

# VOTE OF THE PEOPLE'S ASSEMBLY OF SYNTAGMA SQUARE

Athens, May 27 2011

For a long time decisions have been made for us, without consulting us.

We are workers, unemployed, retirees, youth, who have come to Syntagma Square to fight and give a struggle for our lives and our future.

We are here because we know that the solutions to our problems can only be provided by us.

We call all residents of Athens, workers, unemployed and youth, to come to Syntagma Square, and all of society to fill the public squares and to take their lives into their own hands.

In these public squares we will shape our claims and our demands together.

We call on all workers who are going on strike in the coming days to show up and stay at Syntagma Square.

We will not leave the squares until those who compelled us to come here leave the country: the governments, the Troika (EU, ECB and IMF), banks, the IMF Memoranda, and everyone who exploits us.

We send them the message that the debt is not ours.

**DIRECT DEMOCRACY NOW!**

**EQUALITY - JUSTICE - DIGNITY!**

**The only struggle that is lost is the one that is never fought!**

Available at:

[https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Vote\\_of\\_the\\_People%27s\\_Assembly\\_of\\_Syntagma\\_Square.svg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Vote_of_the_People%27s_Assembly_of_Syntagma_Square.svg). [Accessed: 1<sup>st</sup> September 2019].



## **Appendix 16. Letter to the Whitney Museum of American Art by Arts & Labor**

Dear Whitney Museum of American Art,

We are Arts & Labor, a working group founded in conjunction with the New York General Assembly for #occupywallstreet. We are artists and interns, writers and educators, art handlers and designers, administrators, curators, assistants, and students dedicated to exposing and rectifying economic inequalities and exploitative working conditions in our fields through direct action and educational initiatives. We are writing to call for an end to the Whitney Biennial in 2014.

Biennials were born in the nineteenth century, in an era when many nations were young and wished to showcase their greatest cultural products and achievements. The Whitney annuals grew out of this, championed by the patron and sculptor Gertrude Vanderbilt Whitney, in a period when American art had little critical or financial support.

Much has changed since the founding of the Whitney Studio in 1914 and the advent of the current biennial format in 1973. The absorption of contemporary art into museums, the rise of a speculative art market, and the need for artists to obtain advanced degrees to participate in the current system have changed how art is produced and exhibited.

We object to the biennial in its current form because it upholds a system that benefits collectors, trustees, and corporations at the expense of art workers. The biennial perpetuates the myth that art functions like other professional careers and that selection and participation in the exhibition, for which artists themselves are not compensated, will secure a sustainable vocation. This fallacy encourages many young artists to incur debt from which they will never be free and supports a culture industry and financial and cultural institutions that profit from their labors and financial servitude.

The Whitney Museum, with its system of wealthy trustees and ties to the real estate industry perpetuates a model in which culture enhances the city and benefits the 1% of our society while driving others into financial distress. This is embodied both in the biennial's sponsorship – represented most egregiously in its sponsorship by Sotheby's, which has locked out its unionized art handlers – and the museum's imminent move to the Meat Packing District, a neighborhood where artists once lived and worked which is now a gentrified tourist destination that serves the interests of the real estate industry.

We therefore call upon the Whitney in its centennial year to end the biennial and to support the interests of art workers over the capital interests of its trustees and corporate sponsors. As the Declaration of the Occupation of New York City states, "We come to you at a time when corporations, which place profit over people, self-interest over justice, and oppression over equality, run our governments." Art institutions have come to mirror that ethos. We therefore call upon the Whitney to terminate its collusion with this system of injustice and use its resources to imagine sustainable models of creativity and culture that are accessible not just to Americans but to people around the globe.

Sincerely, Arts & Labor

Available at: [http://artsandlabor.org/wp-content/uploads/2011/12/End-the-Whitney-Biennial\\_24\\_feb\\_2012.pdf](http://artsandlabor.org/wp-content/uploads/2011/12/End-the-Whitney-Biennial_24_feb_2012.pdf). Accessed: 1<sup>st</sup> September 2019].

## **Appendix 17. Green Park Manifesto.**

Today on the 19th of June, 2015 we are occupying Green Park cafe in the Pedion tou Areos, one the two central parks of Athens. Almost 4 years after the occupation of the Embros theatre in 2011 we are activating with our own means a space deserted and left empty for years by the Greek state and propose a 10 day program of cultural and political intervention in the here and now of Athens. This activation refuses a particular temporal horizon and understands itself outside of the logics of ownership. The occupation is not defined by a particular ideology or interest but rather comes about as a result of the encounters born out the experiments and struggles of the last few years. Thus, we look to, rebuild modes of collectivity and solidarity and reclaim friendship for its political importance. We propose friendship as a model for organizational formations and autonomous instituting that exceeds neo-liberal calls to order.

Made up of fluid and flexible methods that refuse the enclosures of formal political representation this action attempts to collectively explore forms of critical artistic, political and theoretical production and their relationship to the public and dominant social narratives. It seeks to rethink the need for and nature of participation. It seeks to remain imperfect and incomplete. It seeks to recuperate lightness, humor, self-depreciation and joyous critique as the foundations of an open process.

The activation of the abandoned public building in Green Park, Athens desires politics and joy to emerge in a shared fight for, and from within, marginalised, forgotten and unexpected places. Deploying friendship as a political relationship in a struggle against cultural and artistic monopolies, “creative cities” and their production lines of co-optation, through this ephemeral collective experiment we aim to co-imagine with fellow city dwellers, the here and now of Green Park and our city.

Available at:

<https://greenparkathens.wordpress.com/manifesto/>. [Accessed: 1<sup>st</sup> September 2019].