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Commoning the Art Institution: How does commoning as knowledge and as practice contribute to the formation of institutional identity?

A thesis presented

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ABSTRACT

As the threat of ecological, financial and social crises grows, the demand for alternative frameworks that provide knowledge and strategy outside of neoliberal influence is proving of increasing importance. Over the past decade, a feasible, alternative framework has been recognized in *the commons*. As a result, scholars argue commons thinking and practice has become integrated as a guiding principle within art institutions, first as a method of organization, subsequently as a mode of critical encounter towards contemporary societal frictions and finally, as an overarching form of identity.

Traditionally, the commons have been understood as the shared use and management of resources by and for a community, according to a set of democratically defined rules and typically in relation to material goods such as land, water and food. More recently however, the commons has come to also be understood in relation to spaces that can facilitate the mutual exchange between aesthetics and politics as a method of raising awareness of the social ecologies of the individual, the collective and the institution.

Although there has been considerable scholarly attention paid towards material commons, there is a notable dearth of research surrounding immaterial aspects of the commons such as knowledge, language art and culture. Arguably, even less has been produced in reference to the commons in practice, with the majority of work focusing on hypothetical frameworks or guidelines. Therefore, what is required is a body of research that not only explores how art institutions are producing radical frameworks as an answer to societal frictions, but one that also unpicks and untangles those who are already doing so. Therefore, this thesis seeks to explore how commoning in the arts uses commons thinking and practice to contribute to the formation of institutional identity as part to larger institutional movements.

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1. INTRODUCTION

In *Capitalist Realism*, Mark Fisher laments how the current capitalist system is seen by many, including those who identify its tragic shortcomings, as the only viable option.¹ Imagination, in his view, is failing us, and without a vision that projects new ways of relating to ourselves, each another, and our wider society, we are unequipped against the rise of *enclosures*² which *do* have a clear vision of what could come tomorrow.³ This being said, over the past decade, a feasible, alternative framework to oppose the mass privatization of resources has been recognized in *the commons*. As a result, scholars such as Pascal Gielen argue commons thinking and practice has become increasingly integrated as a guiding principle within the art institution, as a method of organization, a way to critically encounter contemporary societal frictions and as part of the formation of a larger, institutional identity.⁴

1.1 The Commons

Traditionally, the commons has been understood as the shared use and management of resources by and for a community.⁵ Commons are maintained according to a set of democratically defined rules and typically in relation to material goods such as land, water and food.⁶ Intrinsic to the existence of a commons is a sharing of governance, a sense of communal belonging, co-production and collaboration among community members or *commoners*, and a deepened sense of societal responsibility.⁷ Community activist Karl Linn believes that when sufficiently sustained, “commons offer spaces of experimentation and encounter that can be personalized to meet the needs of their individual community.”⁸ In this respect, commoning can be recognized as a guiding principle of organisation, a strategy for assemblage and the embodiment of coordinates for maintaining community relations.

¹ Fisher, Mark. *Capitalist Realism: Is There No Alternative?*. (Winchester, England: Zero Books, 2009.)

² In the context of this research enclosure include, but are not limited to, the overdevelopment of ecosystems to the point of destruction, the diminishing of sharing systems through excessive patents and copyright laws, the privatization and marketization of material and immaterial resources as a result of hyper-capitalist and neoliberal ideologies and the subsequent, immanent social, financial and ecological.

³ Fisher, Mark. *Capitalist Realism: Is There No Alternative?*. (Winchester, England: Zero Books, 2009.)

⁴ Dockx, Nico, and Pascal Gielen. *Commonism: A New Aesthetics of the Real*. (Amsterdam, The Netherlands: Valiz 2018.) p.6

⁵ Hodby, Alexandra Jane, *Learning After 'New Institutionalism': Democracy and Tate Modern Public Programme* Phd diss., Goldsmiths, (2006) pp.1-335 p.207

⁶ Bollier, David, and Silke Helfrich. *Patterns of Commoning. Commons Strategy Group and Off the Common Press*, (Amherst, USA: Levellers Press 2015.) p.13

⁷ *ibid*

⁸ Karl Lin Commons and Community in Gmelch, George, and Petra Kuppinger. *Urban Life: Readings in the Anthropology of the City, Sixth Edition*. (Long Grove, USA: Waveland Press, 2018.) p.9

Historically speaking, the commons is by no means a new conception. With an etymology dating back to the British feudal living of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, the direct link between commons, land and ownership has continued ever since.⁹ This being said, the 1960s saw a particular resurgence of use of the commons framework in a bid to oppose the advancing neoliberalization of governments that was being experienced during this period.¹⁰ From 1960 onwards discussions surrounding the commons become mainly associated with economics and governance, especially in scholarly discourse, following the publication of Garrett Hardin's influential essay "The Tragedy of the Commons."¹¹ Hardin's publication mourned the overuse of natural resources and the subsequent accelerated enclosure of common pool resources. Partly as a response to Hardin's pessimistic approach, economist Elinor Ostrom issued a series of a works examining the ways in which commons were seen to be flourishing around different parts of the world.¹² In her publications she attempted to forge feasible frameworks and guides for successfully, and sustainably, reproducing these examples of successful commoning. Ostrom's work gained both scholarly and popular attention after she was awarded the Nobel Prize in Economics in 2009, sparking another wave of interest in the economic and societal relevance of the commons. Such a resurgence was especially apparent during this period due to coinciding with the repercussions of the European financial crash.

More recently, the commons has come to also be understood in relation to spaces which facilitate the mutual exchange between aesthetics and politics and as a method of raising awareness of social ecologies of the individual, the collective and the institution.¹³ Therefore, despite established scholarly attention on material commons, the frequent referencing of *knowledge commons*, *digital commons*, *network commons* and *creative commons* is becoming visible, suggesting a considerable shift in contemporary understandings of the

⁹ Bruyne, Paul D., and Pascal Gielen. *Community Art: The Politics of Trespassing*. (Amsterdam, The Netherlands Valiz, 2011.) p.4

¹⁰ *ibid*

¹¹ Surhone, Lambert M., Miriam T. Timpledon, and Susan F. Marseken. *Tragedy of the Commons: Garrett Hardin, The Commons, Diner's Dilemma, Enlightened Self-Interest, Population Control, Inverse Commons, Common Heritage of Mankind*. (London, England: Betascript Publishing, 2010.)

¹² Hess, Charlotte, and Elinor Ostrom. *Understanding Knowledge as a Commons: From Theory to Practice*. (Cambridge, England: Mit Press, 2011.)

¹³ Braidotti, Rosi, and Maria Hlavajova. *Posthuman Glossary*. (London, England: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2018.) p.83

concept. This is supported by Michael Hardt and Anthony Negri, influential theorists on the relationship between commons, ideologies and governance, who argue that the “common” is now not only limited to natural resources, but also contributes to the production of language, knowledge, codes, information, emotion and affect, proving immaterial commons to be an essential a resource in the resistance against neoliberal agendas.¹⁴ With this in mind, although the majority of work discussing the commons focuses on physical resources, this thesis intends to look less at the material connotations and more on the cultural impact of the commons. By considering commons as a composite term that encompasses the political, economic, social and cultural, this thesis will center around a definition that includes creative environments such as the art institution, alongside social constructs such as art, culture, knowledge and language. From here we can begin to articulate how common spaces of experimentation and encounter are implemented as a way of providing ecologies of care through collaborative and cooperative means, so as to transform knowledge production, methods of organization and, as a result, institutional identities.

1.2 Arts Institutions and The Commons

This inclusion of immaterial resources is perhaps where the connection between commons and art becomes especially prevalent. Whilst the rhetoric of “the commons” has been present in the arts since the early twentieth century, English scholar Amy Elias emphasizes that after the 1990s, “artists, curators and cultural theorists asserted an urgency for creating revised social models based on commons logic in order to facilitate the production of new models of community and sociality.”¹⁵ Such an articulation could suggest that the common’s ability to reflect upon, and react to, current societal systems whilst simultaneously addressing frictions and inequalities, is perhaps one of the key motivations for why artists and institutions are choosing to engage with its associated thinking and practices.

Curator and Director of *The Luminary*, James McNally argues that the “imported and internalized narratives of corporate structures inform every level of our organizations.”¹⁶ He

¹⁴ Hardt, Michael, and Antonio Negri. *COMMONWEALTH* (Cambridge, England: Harvard University Press, 2009.) p.x

¹⁵ Elias, A, Art and the Commons *ASAP/Journal*, Vol:1, No:1, (January 2016) pp.3-15, p.4

¹⁶ McNally, James, *Temporary Art Review* "The Work of the Institution in an Age of Professionalization." *Temporary Art Review*. Last modified March 25, 2016. <http://temporaryartreview.com/the-work-of-the-institution-in-an-age-of-professionalization/>. Accessed June 19, 2019

contends that that although the logic and influence of capitalism has infiltrated since the 1970s, the last decade has witnessed a full transition to what he terms, “the professionalization of the institution.”¹⁷ In short, institutions are becoming increasingly profit and market-driven, and, as a result, are altering from spaces of critical exchange and encounter to act as part of corporate, capitalist systems of operation. From this view, the framework of the commons can also be understood as a method for formulating revised social models of alternative governance that challenge capitalist-fueled professionalization and embedded hierarchical systems within the art institution. In line with Elias’ work, the commons today can be identified as an essential framework to aid institutions in rethinking traditional, top-down hierarchical approaches through processes of knowledge production, organizational strategy and institutional practice.

With this in mind, this thesis will center around two mid-level art organizations that have embraced commoning as part of their discourse and practice. *Casco Art Institute Working for the Commons (Casco)* in Utrecht, The Netherlands and *Primary* in Nottingham, the U.K. are both similar-sized institutions, located in the cultural, political and financial climate of Northern Europe with related artistic backgrounds and programming styles. Such crossovers between the two organizations highlight them as pertinent cases to be placed beside one another so as to encourage a rich and complex analysis in reference to how commoning assists in the formation of institutional identity.

Furthermore, part of the motivation for this selection is due to the contrasting approaches each institution takes towards the commons. For example, *Primary* does not directly refer to itself as a commons-based institution, yet its relationship with commoning practice is evident through extensive commons-based artist residencies and a programme based upon skill-sharing and common knowledge exchange. Conversely, *Casco* chooses to directly address the framework of the commons as a leading imperative for everything produced in its space. This includes its exhibitions, study sessions, educational programmes, public programmes, publications, internships, residencies, annual assemblies and more. The two case studies are

¹⁷ McNally, James, *Temporary Art Review* "The Work of the Institution in an Age of Professionalization." *Temporary Art Review*. Last modified March 25, 2016. <http://temporaryartreview.com/the-work-of-the-institution-in-an-age-of-professionalization/>. Accessed June 19, 2019

therefore compelling for this research as their identities, discourses and practices differ substantially despite adopting corresponding frameworks.

This said, there are of course limitations presented with such as approach, particularly as both organizations are set in a Northern-European context meaning there is less diversity or difference to offer within their institutional cultures. Another constraint is the aspect of longevity. The process of *commoning* takes a significant amount of time to be thought through, developed and implemented, something that cannot be easily documented or described in two case studies alone or within the scope of this thesis. Therefore, instead of choosing to focus on the process of *commoning* itself, this research intends to study the *outcomes* of adopting active, commoning practices within the institutional structure, to understand the subsequent effects on an institutional identity. Furthermore, by choosing just two case studies it could be argued that the breadth of this research is somewhat limited. This being said, the case studies will not act in opposition or comparison with one another, instead they will form part of a dialogue to explore the nuances and complexities of adopting such a complicated and intricate framework. Therefore, *Casco* and *Primary* will not be used to prove or disprove a certain criterion but instead form part of an ongoing dialogue and debate surrounding art and the commons.

Such complexities surrounding this framework are summarized by activist and scholar David Bollier who notes, “commoning involves so much idiosyncratic creativity, improvisation, situational choice, and dynamic evolution that it can only be understood as *aliveness*.”¹⁸ Therefore, the commons or commoning in the context of this research should not be viewed as a static framework or set of fixed criterion, but instead as a malleable concept that can be adapted to fit each institution individually. This is important to note as the predominant approach both *Casco* and *Primary* take in reproducing commons is through *commoning practices*, proving the distinction between commons as a static framework and commoning as active, participatory practice especially valid for this research.

1.3 Methodology: Approaching Commons Institutions

¹⁸ Bollier, David, and Silke Helfrich. *Patterns of Commoning. Commons Strategy Group and Off the Common Press*, (Amherst, USA: Levellers Press 2015.) p.29

This thesis will be organized around a conceptual framework that places three concepts at its core. The first, and perhaps most fundamental concept is *institutional identity*. By integrating the commons as a guiding principle, and commoning practices as a method for translating theory into practice, this thesis seeks to understand how commoning carries the potential to transform an institution's identity. Through the lens of *institutional identity*, we can consider what is placed on an institution's agenda through the adoption commons logic, and how this is subsequently viewed and interacted with by its wider public. This being said, instead of using *institutional identity* as an isolated lens, it will serve to provide a contextual basis to understand where commoning fits within larger debates surrounding institutional identities and critiques.

The second concept is *knowledge*, understood here as the production, dissemination and exchange of information and understanding within the environment of the institution. By applying knowledge as a conceptual lens to the formation of information, ideas and voice, this thesis seeks to locate how multitudes of knowledge that sit outside of dominant Eurocentric, patriarchal and colonial thinking can explore new ways for information to be produced and exchanged within an institutional environment.

The final concept is *strategy*, employed to explore the breakdown of boundaries between theory and practice and public and private. This will culminate with a focus on curatorial strategy and the aims and objectives of the institution in relation to its audience and wider publics. Using strategy as a lens will provide clear articulation surrounding the uniting of commons knowledge with tangible commoning practice, in an attempt to explore their translation from static concept to active practice. Therefore, the conceptual lenses of *knowledge* and *strategy* will frequently be referenced in relation to one another to show how the relationship between the two can impact the institution as a whole.

Together, the three concepts will provide a layered analysis both through being applied to theory and to the aforementioned case studies so as to reflect how art institutions are adopting commoning as a way of constructing knowledge, a method of organization and curation and as a form of institutional critique. In conjunction with one another, the lenses of *institutional identity*, *knowledge*, and *strategy* will develop a rich and nuanced analysis that

highlights the idiosyncratic nature of commons-based institutions. I approach this method with inspiration from Mieke Bal's *Travelling Concepts*, which considers concepts as "performative", and not as "established univocal terms, but as dynamic in themselves."¹⁹ The commons is a slippery term with an abstract nature that is often complicated to define. For that reason, the adoption of a conceptual framework offers the dynamism that Mieke Bal describes, which will provide the grounding required to undertake this research.

In order to enrich my analysis, I will employ three further methods of investigation. The first, discourse analysis, will play a prominent role in the analysis of each case study. The analysis will pay particular attention to vision and mission declarations, curatorial statements, programme descriptions and institution manifestos. This will be surveyed whilst recognizing that most are public documents and therefore have a particular agenda and audience they are seeking to address. I also acknowledge that a certain level of expertise or specialism is required in order to fully articulate what has been written in the texts, so I intend to also take into consideration how wider audiences may receive the information. Alongside this, the research will also feature semi-structured interviews with the head curator of each institution. This combination of methods will offer a substantial means of investigation towards a complex social phenomenon in order to offer broader and richer insights into how the commons infiltrate into each layer of an institution and its resulting impacts.

In terms of thesis structure, *The Institutional Question* will establish current conceptions of institutional identity by utilizing past institutional theory and critique, predominantly *New Institutionalism*, so as to understand movements that have attempted to radically transform institutions in the past. This will act as a foundation not only for articulating the nuances surrounding the paradox that is commoning the institution, but also how commoning fits into larger debates surrounding the organization of institutions. This chapter will also pay close attention to how the use of commoning practices can shape an institutions agenda, inner workings, ecosystems and structures, and, as a result, their identity.

¹⁹ Bal, Mieke, and Sherry Marx-MacDonald. *Travelling Concepts in the Humanities: A Rough Guide*. (Toronto, Canada: University of Toronto Press, 2002.) p.11

Thinking the Commons will then look to examine how commons knowledge is applied to formulate a theoretical foundation within an organization. This will pay particular attention to how institutions *use* the commons within an art setting and provide a link between forms of knowledge, patterns of knowledge and spaces of knowledge. This chapter will also seek to understand ways in which knowledge can be reproduced and disseminated through horizontal exchange whilst encouraging a multitude of voices that help shape collective identity formations.

From here I will finally move on to investigate commoning practices in *Practicing the Commons*, with a focus on how theory can be bridged with practice, especially via the means of organizational structure, institutional practice and curatorial strategy. This will be achieved by first looking at broader strategic models, with the aim of then situating them within specific institutional practices to identify the overlapping connections between them.

The conceptual lens of each chapter will be further developed in relation to key theories related to the commons devised by art professionals, scholars and artists alike. A combination of concept and theory will then be applied to the case studies as a way of actively bridging the gap between theory and practice. By definition these theories are not exhaustive but instead articulate the essential components in relation to commons identities, commons knowledges and commoning practices to strengthen the analytical base of each lens.

As the threat of ecological, financial and social crises grows, the demand for alternative frameworks that provide thinking and practice outside of neoliberal influences is proving to be of increasing importance. Hardt and Negri support the fervent resistance against the privatization of cultural products such as information, ideas and art as, for them and as for this research, open access to the natural and cultural common, is “a prerequisite from a free and egalitarian society.”²⁰ Although there has been considerable scholarly attention towards material commons, there is a notable dearth of research surrounding the immaterial aspects of the commons concept, and even less so in reference to the commons in actual practice, with the majority of works focusing on hypothetical frameworks or guidelines. Therefore,

²⁰ Bruyne, Paul D., and Pascal Gielen. *Community Art: The Politics of Trespassing*. (Amsterdam, The Netherlands: Valiz 2011.) p.4

what is required is research that not only explores the ways art institutions can produce radical frameworks in response to societal frictions but also a work that studies those who are already doing so, so as to articulate and explore how commoning in the arts uses associated thinking and practice to contribute to the formation of institutional identity.

1.4 Case Study One: Casco Art Institute Working for the Commons

As an institution, *Casco* are as well known for their pursuit towards art and democracy as they are for their exhibitions and programming. Established in 1990 by two artists and an art historian, the developments of the non-profit organization for contemporary art have been gradual and continual.²¹ Known from 2003 to 2017 as *Casco Office for Design and Theory*, the arts center specialized in cross-disciplinary and collaborative approaches towards artistic production and dissemination.²² Yet after two focal exhibitions, *Grand Domestic Revolution* (2009-2013) and *Composing the Commons* (2013-2016), the Utrecht-based space announced a significant reorientation of their program around a new modus operandi. In 2017 *Casco* was officially renamed *Casco Art Institute: Working for the Commons*, beginning a shift in both the organizational structure and its associated language and practice.²³

Now, two years into a transition period that aims to be fully developed by 2020, the revised modus operandi of the institution encompasses “imagining a post-capitalist society that cultivates and presents art practices based on study lines of the commons and *for* the commons, alongside communities in the field of art, education and activism.”²⁴ Although *Casco’s* subsequent programmes and exhibitions do not use commoning as an isolated approach, instead choosing to look at subjects such as *post-humanism*, *feminism*, and *queerness*, the thinking of the commons undoubtedly informs all of *Casco’s* on-site artistic production.

Casco’s significant transition of knowledge, strategy and identity based upon the concept of and *for* the commons proves *Casco* a pertinent case to study in order to “test” the collected theory of each chapter through their real-life commoning processes. Therefore, by applying

²¹ Choi, Binna. *Cluster: Dialectionary*. (Amsterdam, Holland: Sternberg Press, 2014.) p.50

²² *ibid*

²³ McNally, James, *Temporary Art Review*, "Working for the Commons: A Conversation with Binna Choi of Casco Art Institute." *Temporary Art Review*. Last modified December 1, 2017: <http://temporaryartreview.com/working-for-the-commons-a-conversation-with-binna-choi-of-casco-art-institute/>. Accessed 19 June, 2019

²⁴ Billboard Outside Casco Accessed April 11, 2019

the developed lenses of *knowledge*, *strategy* and *institutional identity* to *Casco* it is possible to explore how the adoption of commons thinking and commoning practices are first of all adapted from conception into action, and, secondly, impact the way *Casco* is recognized both internally and externally as an institution.

1.5 Case Study Two: Primary working *with* the Commons

Similarly, to *Casco*, *Primary*, a Nottingham-based art institution, was established by an artist collective, this time in 2012. *Primary's* founding collective proposed a vision that directly engaged with the neighborhood so as to seek creative solutions for rising social frictions in the local area.²⁵ This objective was coupled with the aim to establish an organization that placed artistic research and production at its core.²⁶ It is significant to note that *Primary* is based in Lenton, a diverse area in Nottingham that is comprised predominantly of student accommodation and social housing. As an organization, *Primary* provides work spaces to over forty artists with a broad range of critically engaged visual arts practices and backgrounds, alongside hosting an independent gallery, the Small Food Bakery, and Primary Gardens.²⁷ The building also offers studio spaces to supports resident artists with the intention to encourage them to experiment and develop their practices both on and off site.

This being said, it is *Primary's* public programme developed by Director Niki Russell and Engagement Curator Rebecca Beinart that the institution has become nationally and internationally renowned for. The range of programmes intend to explore new ways for local and international audiences to engage with contemporary art by encompassing artist commissioned work both within and outside of the building in the form of residencies, exhibitions, talks and workshops. Notably, although *Primary* does not directly identify itself as a *commons institution*, both Rebecca and Niki affirm that commoning is at the core *Primary's* programming as a direct “thread of thinking.”²⁸ This affirms *Primary* as an opportune case to study, not just in relation to the concepts of *knowledge* and *strategy*, but

²⁵ *We Are Primary* | A Unique Creative Facility for Artists, the Public and Local and International Communities. Accessed June 21, 2019. <http://www.weareprimary.org/>.

²⁶ *ibid*

²⁷ *ibid*

²⁸ *We Are Primary* | A Unique Creative Facility for Artists, the Public and Local and International Communities. Accessed June 21, 2019. <http://www.weareprimary.org/>.

also to be placed next to *Casco* to understand how working *with* the concept of the commons can impact institutional identity differently to working *for* the commons.

2. THE INSTITUTIONAL QUESTION

Commons offer revised models of thinking, practicing and instituting, which, in turn, support engagement between art institutions and their wider communities.²⁹ What is more, the commons hold the potential to form micro-worlds that challenge current public/private, inside/outside dichotomies, issues which currently sit high on institutional agendas.³⁰ Yet a clear criticism of instituting the commons is that it constructs a paradox when considering the role of the *institution* with the framework of the *commons*. With this in mind, how can an institution's hierarchical structures be turned horizontal without neglecting integral aspects such as organisation and territorialization? How can a relationship between the commons and the institution be sustained when at face value the two represent such polar entities? In order to enquire into how commons knowledge and commons practice act together to shape and progress institutional identities, we must first explore the ways in which we currently *institute* and how a commons framework fits within these broader institutional questions.

2.1 Institutional Identity

Identity plays an integral role within any art institution. It is through the formulation and sustenance of an institutional identity that a given organization relates to its users and publics, produces exhibitions and, ultimately, exists as a space and a place. Institutional identity therefore not only situates an organization's positionality but also acts as a guiding imperative for all of the multiple components that combine together to make up the institutional whole. From this view, the concept of *institutional identity*, both in its internal construction through systems and structures of operation, and in its external relationships with publics, partners and funders, provides the very core to this research. Therefore, by placing the commons and the institution on the same level we can begin to unravel how commoning fits within larger visions of new, and radical forms of instituting.

Such a conceptual analysis not only seeks to observe how commons offer alternative forms of organization, but also suggests how, by existing as spaces that reproduce commons

²⁹ Bollier, David, and Silke Helfrich. *Patterns of Commoning. Commons Strategy Group and Off the Common Press*, (Amherst, USA: Levellers Press 2015.) p.29

³⁰ Gielen, Pascal. *Institutional Attitudes: Instituting Art in a Flat World*. (Amsterdam, The Netherlands: Valiz,2013.) p.175

through thinking and practice, art institutions can lead the way for progressive, radical, and ultimately *new* ways of understanding and relating to wider society.

In order to gain an initial grounding of the commons within the institution, it is first essential to decipher how we understand the *institution* itself. Curator Simon Sheikh regards art institutions as, “the in-between, the mediator, interlocutor, translator and meeting place between art production and the conception of ‘public’”.³¹ To adopt this as a working definition is to acknowledge the capability of a given organization in shaping our collective understandings. This is typically achieved through the uniting of publics and by providing tools and spaces for knowledge and practice to be mediated, nurtured and translated. The identification of the institution as *mediator* and as *in-between* also relates to the sentiment of *instituting*, considered by philosopher and theorist Gerald Raunig. To Raunig, “instituting” entails placing an emphasis on re-organization, re-invention and reterritorialization.³² He states that “instituting means occupying existing institutions and inventing new instituent practices to be implemented within them.”³³ In this sense, instituting can be perceived as transforming the institution from a static and stagnant space of hierarchy and rigidity, to an active and fluid environment that is perhaps better understood as a *reactive* space. To mediate is to move between situations, to intervene and resolve, suggesting a certain *aliveness* that combines Simon Sheikh’s interpretation of the institution with the active role of instituting.³⁴ From this perspective, instituting offers parallels with how commons are designed to be continuously produced and reproduced in response to changing spaces, situations and pressures.

2.2 New New Institutionalism

The notion of exploring institutional identity has been a prevalent form of critique since the 1960s and 1970s. This being said, institutional critique began to gain both popular and professional momentum during the 1980s and 1990s as the work made by artists became

³¹ Sheikh, Simon 2006. Public Spheres and the Functions of Progressive Art Institutions. In: Vanessa Muller and Nikolaus Schafhausen, eds. *Under Construction – Perspectives on Institutional Practice*. (Köln, Germany: Verlag der Buchhandlung Walther König 2010) pp. 192-194 p.192

³² Raunig Gerald and Ray Gene eds., *Art and Contemporary Critical Practice: Reinventing Institutional Critique*, MayFlyBooks/eipcp, (London, England: MayFly Books 2009.) p. 3

³³ Raunig Gerald and Ray Gene eds., *Art and Contemporary Critical Practice: Reinventing Institutional Critique*, (London, England: MayFly Books 2009.) p. 12

³⁴ Stevenson, Angus. *Oxford Dictionary of English*. (New York: Oxford University Press, USA, 2018.) p.224

critical of the commercial sponsorship, colonial collections, and gendered institutional selection shown in the circuit of galleries and museums.³⁵ Such accumulations of critical reflection over this period arguably led to the birth of the radical movement, *New Institutionalism* in the 1990s and early 2000s.

New Institutionalism was conceived by art critic Jonas Ekeberg with the intention of reforming curatorial, artistic, educational and administrative practices so as to reorganize the structures of medium-sized contemporary art organizations.³⁶ Today, Van Abbemuseum Director Charles Esche recognizes New Institutionalism as a curatorial intention to produce “an active space” that is “part community center, part laboratory and part academy”.³⁷ Jonas Ekeberg himself referred to the movement as “the difference between an open-ended aesthetic criticality and a more specific, anti-capitalist activism.”³⁸ New Institutionalism essentially pushed for the museum to adopt a hybrid form that encompassed frameworks and practices usually considered outside of traditional museum structures. The movement reflected part of a larger societal quest to produce spaces of intrigue and encounter rather than of mere presentation, in order to challenge hierarchical and ego-driven roles whilst placing emphasis on participation and collective learning. Yet in reality the developments of New Institutionalism gained the reputation of undermining institutions and were often regarded as a rigid set of practices that threatened the power of the certain key institutional figures which its original intention had been to provide nuance to.³⁹

Although it is difficult to discern if institutions wholly adopted New Institutionalism as a guiding framework, examples such as *Institution 2* at the *Museum of Contemporary Art Kiasma*, Helsinki, in 2003, which produced a programme focusing on the practice of ten European art institutions, “that manifest a flexible and progressive approach to a critical engagement with art and the exchange with the public,” would suggest that the movement had at least some level of influence.⁴⁰ This is seen through the conscious decision to

³⁵ Sheikh, Simon. Notes on Institutional Critique. *Transform*, IDEA 28, Bucharest, (2007) pp.10-11 p.10

³⁶ Kolb Lucie and Flückiger Gabriel, *New Institutionalism Revisited* in *ONCURATING* Issue 21 January, (New) Institutional(ism) (2014) pp.1-15 p.11

³⁷ *ibid*

³⁸ *ibid*

³⁹ *ibid* p.5

⁴⁰ *ibid* p.14

programme around the topic of the institution itself so as to incite criticality and reflexivity, suggesting the *Museum of Contemporary Art Kiasma* integrated the key principles of New Institutionalism's thinking and practice.

An understanding of the New Institutionalism movement provides important context when discussing current institutional identities, as parallels between its associated thinking and practice have been drawn with the commons framework. Curator Alexandra Hodby suggests that the key principles of the commons align with the equity and open organizational structures which were discussed as part of New Institutionalism.⁴¹ Moreover, commons thinking gives attention to the politics of culture and publicness that were evident yet arguably under-discussed in New Institutionalism. On top of this, both frameworks place a clear emphasis on the concept of community. Although, this being said, New Institutionalism appeared more concerned with a theoretical basis for providing ideal models of community, whereas the commons focus more on *actual* communities. However, overall, the overlapping central themes surrounding the call for progressive institutions can be clearly discerned between the two frameworks. By introducing the thinking of the commons, the arts institution holds the potential to build and learn from the discrepancies presented with New Institutionalism, and bring to the forefront the discussions surrounding openness, horizontality, community and transparency that New Institutionalism could not quite reach. With this said, what such crossovers undoubtedly highlight, is that the commons-based institution is not a standalone phenomenon, but one that is supported by a long and rich history of institutional critique that came before it. Therefore, *commoning* must be considered with a mindfulness towards larger and longer questions surrounding institutional identity.

2.3 Institutions of the Commons

Whilst acknowledging the significance of previous institutional critique in the shaping of institutional identity, it is also important to keep in mind current conversations surrounding the *future* of the museum. Curator James McNally's biggest criticism towards institutional critique is that it spends too long focusing on discursive elements and critique, with very little

⁴¹ Hodby, Alexandra Jane, *Learning After 'New Institutionalism': Democracy and Tate Modern Public Programme*" Phd diss., Goldsmiths, (2006) pp.1-335, p.207

evidence of subsequent action.⁴² This is where the institution of the commons can perhaps provide an alternative by being considered a *living strategy* due to its requirement of constant, reactive renewal.⁴³ Such a view indicates *temporality* as a vital element of instituting the commons. This is further supported by sociologist Pascal Gielen who argues that rather than being-in-common, commons based institutions are continuously “*becoming-in-common*.”⁴⁴ This not only reiterates the absence of a determined framework or model, but also further emphasizes the need for organizations to be flexible, adaptable, reactive and porous, to live simultaneously in the present and in the future.

Alongside aspects of temporality, instituting as commons assume a certain institutional identity, one that deals with the sentiments of transparency, horizontality, alternative thinking and exchange.⁴⁵ To give this abstract notion grounding and explore the paradoxical nuances between the institution and the commons, Gerald Raunig has established a formula for *commoning the institution*. In Raunig’s view, a commons-based institution will not produce traditional academic canons and will instead focus on ethico-aesthetic experiments and longer term projects involving wider mental, environmental and social ecologies. The commons-based institution will also aim to “decolonize” and include a knowledge exchange beyond times and geographies, questioning rigid time management in an attempt to “re-territorialize time.” Finally, the commons-based institution admits no money is necessarily clean money and instead attempts to locate funding sources that include ethico-political criteria and acknowledge that models of participation and activation of the audience should be considered an imperative part of the institution process.⁴⁶

Gerald Raunig’s guiding principles act as clear ethical boundaries for what constitutes a commons space whilst still providing room for organizations to build upon so as to add their own institutional idiosyncrasies. Although still somewhat abstract in nature, these principles

⁴² McNally, James, *Temporary Art Review*, "New Constitutions: Institutions After Capitalism." *Temporary Art Review*. Last modified September 5, 2017. <http://temporaryartreview.com/new-constitutions-institutions-after-capitalism/>. Accessed June 20, 2019

⁴³ Bollier, David, and Silke Helfrich. *Patterns of Commoning. Commons Strategy Group and Off the Common Press*, (Amherst, USA: Levellers Press 2015.) p.5

⁴⁴ Gielen, Pascal. *Institutional Attitudes: Instituting Art in a Flat World*. (Amsterdam, The Netherlands: Valiz, 2013.) p.173

⁴⁵ Hess, Charlotte, and Elinor Ostrom. *Understanding Knowledge as a Commons: From Theory to Practice*. (Cambridge, England: Mit Press, 2011.) p.36

⁴⁶ *Art and Contemporary Critical Practice: Reinventing Institutional Critique*. Eds. G. Raunig, and G. Ray. (London, England: MayFly Books.2012.) p.87

seek to stress the importance of the democratization of knowledge and the adoption of certain practices in the facilitation of this process. This highlights that despite institutional practice and design influencing the overall identity of a given space, an organization cannot simply change its institutional identity without adopting knowledges and practices that follow the same ethico-aesthetic pursuits. It is not just by name that the commons-based institution transpires, rather, every aspect of its identity is altered in the process. By working with already existing structures, commons institutions do not abandon their notion of autonomy altogether, but use it in ways that fit their personal environments and communities to build and secure spaces of experimentation and encounter. This articulation assists in considering the nuances that give room for an art organization to remain as an institution, but one that applies reflexivity and criticality in ways that supposes it to incorporate the openness and transparency of the commons.

Spaces of commoning are designed principally for commoners to use to help produce, collaborate and create new realities and collective identities. Ultimately, the commons provide a space and a place for knowledge to be translated into practice that can facilitate in the democratization for and protection against enclosures. As Jesus Carrillo, the former director of public programmes at the *Museo Reina Sofia*, an institution that has included commoning practices as part of its strategy, argues “the democratization of our cultural institutions is the only vaccine against this state of affairs.”⁴⁷ As much as institutional identity can be borne from organizational structure and static framework, it mostly depends on how knowledge and strategy inform one another within the space of the institution as to how it is subsequently recognized. Therefore, this thesis will proceed to investigate how commoning as knowledge and as practice facilitates in formulating an identity that reframes the role of the institution especially when situated within larger debates and dialogues surrounding the role of the institution in an age of rising societal frictions.

⁴⁷ *Art and Contemporary Critical Practice: Reinventing Institutional Critique*. Eds. G. Raunig, and G. Ray. (London, England: MayFly Books.2012.) p.88

3. THINKING THE COMMONS

Commons do not simply exist, they are continuously produced through cycles of conception, reproduction, and reflection.⁴⁸ Although each and every commons has its own distinctive identity influenced by a locality, history, culture and social practice of its own, one aspect that remains constant is the need for a distinguishable body of knowledge to work with and operate through. Such a knowledge base helps to devise infrastructure that supports commoning networks and successfully translates theory into practice. Sociologist and art historian Pelin Tan contends, “socially engaged artistic research methods and practices provide a collective experience of the trans-local production of knowledge and of instant alliances that lead to the creation of common spaces for uncommon knowledge.”⁴⁹ Tan’s argument implies *knowledge* to be an integral component to any space of commoning, signifying that commons thinking carries a responsibility to examine *who* and *what* is represented through its mediations of knowledge production and dissemination. To aid in such an endeavor, this chapter seeks to explore how common/*uncommon* knowledge can first of all be constructed, and subsequently, disseminated, in a sustainable, intersectional and accessible manner, all whilst continuing to offer feasible alternatives to the policies and logics of neoliberalism. How we use commons thinking to acquire *uncommon* knowledge and what we opt to share within the walls of the institution are pertinent matters to consider when exploring how art institutions reflect upon commoning and integrate its associated thinking as part of their identity formations.

3.1 *Knowledge* as a conceptual lens

Such an exploration will be conducted through the conceptual lens of *knowledge*. Used here as a tool to aid in understanding how commons carry the potential to emancipate the institution, enable the learner and provide spaces for encounter, criticality and resistance.⁵⁰ Contrary to traditional interpretations, this chapter seeks to recognize knowledge not just in reference to hard facts or cycles of academic iteration, but also in relation to forms of *social knowledge*, *emotional knowledge*, *tacit knowledge* and *cognitive knowledge*, developed

⁴⁸ Stavrides, Stravros. *Common Space: The City as Commons*. (London, England: Zed Books, 2016.) p.44

⁴⁹ Baldauf, Anette. *Spaces of Commoning: Artistic Research and the Utopia of the Everyday*. (Vienna: Sternberg Press, 2017.) p.16

⁵⁰ Sitzia, Emilie, *The Ignorant Art Museum: Beyond Meaning-Making*. *International Journal of Lifelong Education* 37, no. 1 (February, 2017.) pp.73-87

through alternate systems of study such as storytelling, music, textiles, and everyday encounter. From this view, what is learned at the kitchen table, the park bench or the playground is just as important as the institutionalized teachings of the classroom in order to embrace diverse knowledge formations through the sharing of understanding, information, wisdom, voice and experience.⁵¹ Such a conceptual lens therefore does not serve to discriminate against *who* is speaking or *what* is being said, but instead enables an open platform for diverse wisdoms to be connected and held together through the act of commoning.

To consider knowledge as a democratic exchange first requires examining the processes that facilitate such a system of sharing. Within this chapter this will be achieved through the exploration of how *formations* of knowledge, *patterns* of knowledge and *spaces* of knowledge help us in understanding how, collectively, these approaches produce and disseminate knowledge whilst still facilitating the thinking of the commons.

3.2 Forms of Knowledge: Ramón Grosfoguel's *Multitudes of Knowledge*

Commons thinking aids in the exploration of knowledges typically neglected or pushed to the periphery of Western intellectual recognition. Thus to promote diverse forms of thinking within the institution is to honor different, and frequently undervalued, knowledge practices and learning styles. For this to be achieved, a shift in perception is required to reevaluate the ways in which we understand and validate the formation of knowledge.

From this view, the introduction of *multitudes* and *multiplicities* of knowledge can assist in offering critical perspectives that sit beyond current socio-political dichotomies of individualism vs. collectivism and West vs. the rest. Such critical analyses invoke the thinking of leading postcolonial scholar Ramón Grosfoguel who emphasizes three guiding principles he believes are fundamental to achieving multiplicities in knowledge production. These include an epistemic perspective that entails a broader canon of thought other than just simply that of Western origin, a truly *decolonial* stance that celebrates the diversity of the

⁵¹ Grosfoguel, R. Decolonizing Post-Colonial Studies and Paradigms of Political-Economy: Transmodernity, Decolonial Thinking, and Global Coloniality. *TRANSMODERNITY: Journal of Peripheral Cultural Production of the Luso-Hispanic World*, (2011.) pp.1-38

pluriversal - a world where many worlds, worldviews and epistemologies fit, rather than just one assumed, homogeneous *universal*, and, finally, a *decolonized* knowledge that takes into account critical thinking from the Global South alongside other under or non-represented races, ethnicities and genders.⁵² To implement such a diverse criterion within an art setting relies upon the establishment of a theoretical foundation and knowledge production that encompasses a different conception of the *universal*. Deconstructing such a dominant mindset entails forming a different geo and body politics that calls to offset the creation of monocultures and homogeneous epistemologies currently maintained by imperialist and authoritarian thinking. In dismantling the dominant hold of the *universal*, the additional principles of *decolonial* stance and *pluriversal* perspective are granted the space and opportunity required to infiltrate and thrive as part of contemporary, societal discourse.

By tackling the modern/colonial/capitalist/patriarchal world-system, Grosfoguel encourages the break down of imposed narratives, whilst simultaneously pushing for the inclusion of other knowledges from regions of thought often sidelined, such as Indigenous or ecological.⁵³ When combined with knowledge formations such as storytelling, music and textiles the resulting configurations of thinking become complex, diverse and *uncommon* in nature. Crucially, Grosfoguel's thinking is not in favor of representing or speaking *for* the marginalized, but instead providing space, encounter and opportunity for them to speak for themselves and produce their own forms of knowledge.⁵⁴ *Pluriversality* therefore encompasses the formation of critical discussion beyond epistemic racism and sexism, achieved through inter-epistemic and trans-local exchange that may be facilitated or mediated by the institution, but are always produced by those who have been marginalized.

The call for multitudes of knowledge may indicate why programmes such as *Conversas* are so widely celebrated. What began as a discussion group between friends in Lisbon soon developed into a monthly event in multiple cities across Europe including Tbilisi, Berlin and Rotterdam.⁵⁵ During *Conversas* three "participants" from a variety of backgrounds meet and

⁵² Grosfoguel, R. (2011). Decolonizing Post-Colonial Studies and Paradigms of Political-Economy: Transmodernity, Decolonial Thinking, and Global Coloniality. *TRANSMODERNITY: Journal of Peripheral Cultural Production of the Luso-Hispanic World*, (2011.) pp.1-38 p.4

⁵³ *ibid* p.5

⁵⁴ *ibid* p.5

⁵⁵ C O N V E R S A S. Accessed June 21, 2019. <http://conversas.net/>.

speak for thirty-minutes each, to an audience, about a topic of interest to them.⁵⁶ The emphasis of each event is not just placed on what each selected participant discusses, but also on the interjections of questions and comments from the “audience”. Such an open system of exchange builds inter-epistemic dialogues that span topics, localities, spaces and time. These mediations not only form relationships and micro-communities, but disseminate local pockets of knowledge that could otherwise be easily forgotten. From food histories and recipes, to languages and local art projects, *Conversas* is an example of programming that intends to represent the non-canonized as part of an equal knowledge base alongside honoring different forms of understanding that follow along the lines of commons thinking and Grosfoguel’s *pluriversality*.

By maintaining the guiding principles introduced by Grosfoguel, and continuously challenging dominant Eurocentric, colonial and patriarchal discourses, commons thinking forges new systems of institutionalism that offer space for complex forms of knowledge to be discerned. The solution to the problems of patriarchy, capitalism, imperialism and coloniality require this openness to alternate forms of knowledge production that integrate multiple local, colonial histories alongside diverse epistemic perspectives that are mediated through commons logic and commons thinking within an institution setting.

3.3 Patterns of Knowledge: Donna Haraway’s *Tentacular Thinking*

The formation of knowledge is part of a larger process that serves to inter-connect and disseminate diverse understandings of commons thinking. Donna Haraway seeks to situate *pluriversal* forms of knowledge production with her conceived patterns of *thinking-with* and *tentacularity*.⁵⁷ *Patterns* of knowledge is a method of exploring knowledge not just as one, static entity, but as part of a larger web of thought that holds the potential to be continuously evolved and built upon with new perspectives. In this sense, patterns form part of an ecology of practice that develops the relationship between humans, non-humans and their environments in order to shape our awareness and understandings of the world.

⁵⁶ CONVERSAS. Accessed June 21, 2019. <http://conversas.net/>.

⁵⁷ Haraway, Donna J. *Staying with the Trouble: Making Kin in the Chthulucene*. (Durham, England: Duke University Press, 2016.) p.31

From here we can understand *thinking-with* as a thought process that serves to further intersect patriarchal, capitalist and homo-centric epistemological productions by recognizing how the interweaving of voices, ideas, cultures and species knowledge can assist in the production of other *worldings*.⁵⁸ Haraway emphasizes “it matters what ideas we use to think other ideas. It matters what knowledge knows knowledge.”⁵⁹ To Haraway our actions, our practices and our *worldings*⁶⁰ are based upon the forms of knowledge we choose to think with and live amongst. Therefore, it is not just the formation of knowledge itself that is crucial to producing alternative modes of being, but also how these form connections with one another through dissemination and exchange. Although Haraway places an emphasis on the incorporation of “other-than-human” knowledge, *thinking-with* can be adapted to *all* forms of knowledge so as to construct entanglements and connections that produce new ways of thinking. This aligns with notion that we cannot solve problems with the same thinking that created them, as Haraway encourages us to relearn how we view the spaces in between knowledge to form new connections, new layerings, new patterns and, subsequently, new solutions.⁶¹

Another of Haraway’s envisioned patterns, *tentacularity*, aims to provide a particular style of thinking that “runs along lines and currents rather than singular points.”⁶² Haraway asserts that “*tentacularity* entails other worlds, other narratives, other patterns and other times.”⁶³ This implies a multiplicity that is not isolated to the realm of human knowledge. From this approach, *tentacularity* provides a larger relational and pluriversal understanding of society as it seeks to challenge dualist depictions and their subsequent formations of binary world systems. The untangling of such dichotomies between nature and culture oppose the ways in which dualism limits our perception of the world as centered solely around Western ontology. By merging understandings of human and nonhuman, living and nonliving, material and

⁵⁸ Haraway, Donna J. *Staying with the Trouble: Making Kin in the Chthulucene*. (Durham, England: Duke University Press, 2016.) p.33

⁵⁹ Haraway, Donna J. *Staying with the Trouble: Making Kin in the Chthulucene*. (Durham, England: Duke University Press, 2016.) p.31

⁶⁰ *Worldings* embody a certain articulation of how we understand our lived reality and direct social and ecological environment so as to shape our collective understandings of the worlds we inhabit. Multiple worlds and worldings can exist at any one time

⁶¹ *ibid*

⁶² Haraway, Donna J. *Staying with the Trouble: Making Kin in the Chthulucene*. (Durham, England: Duke University Press, 2016.) p.32

⁶³ *ibid*

spiritual, our approaches to thinking are subsequently woven together in *tentacularity* and therefore become inextricably entangled as part of a larger, uncommon knowledge exchange. Much the same as *thinking-with*, Haraway predominantly uses *tentacularity* in relation to human and other-than-human relations. As much as we can learn from this crossing of species thinking, *tentacularity* can also be adapted to other forms of knowledge to strengthen the bonds and connections that challenge the artificial boundaries imposed by neoliberal agendas. Overall, *tentacularity* seeks to untangle new and hidden means of producing and disseminating uncommon and unknown forms of knowledge that can aid institutions in both envisioning and providing alternative structures to live and work within.

To combine the patterns of *thinking-with* and *tentacularity* with commoning is not only to make visible the destructive nature of dualistic perceptions but also to emphasise the importance of creating relations between different forms of knowledge. Donna Haraway asserts that knowledge is the key to reformulating our communal, societal and planetary relations, yet this cannot rely upon new *forms* of knowledge alone, but also in how we *use* and *share* such revised understandings.

3.4 Spaces of Knowledge: Fred Moten and Stefano Harney's *The Undercommons*

From here, we look to how a reconceptualization of space can provide sites for learning and knowledge production. Poet Fred Moten and academic Stefano Harney together initiated the conversation surrounding spaces of study with their work on the *Undercommons*, as a way of investigating the importance of knowledge outside of the classroom and the institutionalized sphere.⁶⁴ The *Undercommons* can be considered many things: a space, a tool, a concept, an encounter, but what unites all interpretations is its existence to promote and provide the *representation* that many institutions fail to secure for those who are considered marginalized. Through the deconstruction of current hierarchies of knowledge that assume Western, academic understandings as superior, the *Undercommons* aims to bring people together across difference, to collude and collaborate and share radical histories, politics, and experience the joy of community.⁶⁵ By providing room for conversation to take place, skills to

⁶⁴ Harney, Stefano, and Fred Moten. *The Undercommons: Fugitive Planning & Black Study*. (New York, USA: Minor Compositions, 2013.)

⁶⁵ Harney, Stefano, and Fred Moten. *The Undercommons: Fugitive Planning & Black Study*. (New York, USA: Minor Compositions, 2013.) p.5

be learnt or experiences to transpire, *spaces* of knowledge aid in situating forms and patterns of uncommon knowledge so they can be mediated, held together and reproduced within the cycles of commons thinking.

Furthermore, it is evident that the *Undercommons* provide direct links between learning, study and space. Fred Moten explains, “when I think about the way we use the term “study,” it’s talking and walking around with other people, working, dancing, suffering, being in a kind of workshop, playing in a band, in a jam session, or old men sitting on a porch, or people working together in a factory. The point of calling it “study” is to mark that the incessant and irreversible intellectuality of these activities is already present.”⁶⁶ To Moten and Harney, study is not a place where everyone “dissolves into a student” but instead a space for people to learn from socializing and exploring new modes of being through the act of collaboration.⁶⁷ From this perspective, space plays an integral role in the reconceptualization of intellectuality and in turn, how this can be addressed not just within the institution, but in the creation of the spaces in-between.

Moreover, the *Undercommons* formulates a space where emphasis is placed on asking questions that do not necessarily hold answers and instead examining *real-life* issues.⁶⁸ Such patient experimentations of thought arise from *encounter* and *life-living* rather than textbook analysis. As a result, the challenge is not in crafting the conditions to solve problems, or to answer larger, complex issues, but to illuminate regions of thought that have not yet been given the platform for exploration. By assembling new spaces to think in, the *Undercommons* provide conditions for revised modes of intellectual encounter that cut across normative accounts of what it means *to know* or *to think*.

Naturally, the art institution will never be considered an *Undercommons* due to its status and structure as an institutionalized space. However, that is not to say the institution *cannot* be influenced by the ways in which *the Undercommons* seek to break down what it means to study and what it means to *know*. Cultural theorist Erin Manning argues that “the *Undercommons* is not a given site, not a place predefined, not even a recognizable enclave

⁶⁶ Harney, Stefano, and Fred Moten. *The Undercommons: Fugitive Planning & Black Study*. (New York, USA: Minor Compositions, 2013.) p.110

⁶⁷ *ibid* p.109

⁶⁸ *ibid*.p.38

we could return to. It is an emergent collective that is sited in the encounter.”⁶⁹ To cohabit the space of the *Undercommons* is to provide new modes of encounter and life living, to promote active enquiry and speculative presence, it is a way of using space rather than a defined space itself. Therefore, for the institution to regard the in-between of study with a matching intellectual importance to academic production, is for it adopt the thinking of the *Undercommons* and situate itself as space that seeks for alternative forms of life-living and life-learning.

3.5 Observations

Together, forms, patterns and spaces of knowledge aid in reconceptualizing the ways in which understanding is produced and shared in view of the commons. When placed together it becomes evident that knowledge is not only found in textbooks or through top-down hierarchical approaches, but is also widely produced through space, thought exchange, encounter and speculative intervention. To revisit Pelin Tan’s argument regarding the formation of inter-relationships and instant alliances, it seems that it is only through the layering of each of the three elements that such relationships and connections can be produced in order to create common spaces for uncommon knowledge.

Although the aim of this theoretical base is not to suggest that each approach must be adopted in order for an institution to be considered a space that facilitates commons thinking, it is important to consider the links between key approaches to forms of thinking and methods of dissemination that contemporary thinkers are asserting. To study these issues as a whole, an imperative need to address certain topics of colonialism, capitalism and patriarchy, in manners which seek to engage with typically silenced voices, comes to light. By providing tools and space to untangle what knowledge means within a critical, contemporary context and, as a result, develop responsive patterns of thinking, institutions begin to confront not only such integral topics, but also other imposing societal frictions that threaten their very existence. The theory that has been built through the examination of forms of commons knowledge, knowledge patterns and spaces of encounter will subsequently be applied to the two case studies so as to bridge the theory of commons thinking with real life examples.

⁶⁹ Manning, Erin. *The Minor Gesture*. (Durham, England: Duke University Press, 2016.) p.11

3.6 Case Study: *Casco Art Institute Working for the Commons*

Much of *Casco's* institutional orientation is communicated through writing in the forms of a vision and mission statement and set of ethical principles. Both pieces of writing clearly articulate the ways in which they constitute their role as an institution in relation to knowledge production and the dissemination of understanding. As part of their vision and mission, *Casco* state a consideration for art that is "with an agency for enquiry, imagination and invention, and, subsequently, as a way of protecting and generating commons against increasing privatization, inequality and oppression."⁷⁰ Such a stance on *agency* suggests a positionality less as a presentation institution and more as a space where art can provide active modalities to engage with practices of commoning. Furthermore, within their ethical principles *Casco* define art as "a technique, a tool or an approach towards thinking and acting in an open and transparent way."⁷¹ An emphasis on openness and transparency could further link to *Casco's* stated concerns regarding representations of intersectionality in relation to knowledge production through race, gender, class, ability, orientation, legal status and age. This suggests art to be a medium in which these can be communicated and represented both within the institution and to its publics with openness and accessibility.⁷² From this orientation it appears *Casco* consider art, the institution and commons as interconnected actants that inform one another through the production and dissemination of intersectional knowledge formations.

To make this vision and mission more approachable, *Casco* have devised several *Study Lines* that each of their six team members dedicate themselves to. The formation of lines of study not only serves to disperse top-down hierarchies of knowledge exchange, as each team member fosters their own, personal contribution towards institutional practice and identity, but also aligns with how curator, Staci Bu She describes *Casco's* take on the commons as a complex concept with "tentacles."⁷³ Such a choice of language and method of study invokes Haraway's patterns theory of *tentacularity* that seeks to understand knowledge formation

⁷⁰ *Casco Art Institute*. Casco Art Institute. Accessed June 21, 2019. <https://casco.art/en/about>.

⁷¹ McNally, James, *Temporary Art Review* "Working for the Commons: A Conversation with Binna Choi of Casco Art Institute." *Temporary Art Review*. Last modified December 1, 2017, <http://temporaryartreview.com/working-for-the-commons-a-conversation-with-binna-choi-of-casco-art-institute/>. Accessed June 20, 2019

⁷² *Casco Art Institute*. Casco Art Institute. Accessed June 21, 2019. <https://casco.art/en/about>.

⁷³ Bu Shea, Staci "Personal interview with Staci Bu Shea curator at Casco", Amy, Gowen April 20, 2019

not as singular, static points, but along lines of enquiry that cross and interconnect to find new meanings and understandings.

The first Study Line, *Poetics of Living* is cared for by Staci and takes the form of a long-term, continuous research project that considers the aesthetic and affective forms of social life derived from our most “ubiquitous shared experiences.”⁷⁴ The thinking behind *Poetics of Living* is predominantly informed by black, crip and queer intellectual aesthetic perspectives, implying a further emphasis on notions of intersectionality and representation. In order to realize this, *Casco* work in collaboration with activist groups, artists, scholars, schools and local communities to engage and exchange in conversations that challenge social infrastructure and provide foundations for diverse commons to be facilitated.

Furthermore, Staci stresses the importance of the act of conversation as part of “study”, as she believes it plays an integral role in *Casco’s* approach towards knowledge production. She explains, “what is learned outside the institution, in between the exhibitions, or between workshops and the classroom is just as important as the exhibition itself.”⁷⁵ In leaving space for encounter and improvisation and giving room for dialogue and negotiation, *Casco* nurture opportunities for new insights and modes of thought that engage with the politics of knowledge access, excess and distribution put forward by the *Undercommons*. This combination of form, pattern and space illustrates how *Poetics of Living* makes visible the dynamic, diverse and organic nature of knowledge production when regarded as a complex, evolving entity rather than a prescribed, static, academic response.

By cultivating a knowledge that seeks to exist outside of, yet still inform their the main programming, *Casco* develop what they term “deep understanding.”⁷⁶ *Deep understanding* embodies the ideas, voices, wisdoms and experiences of multitudes of people and is built over extended periods of time with the intention of broadening understandings “among and beyond ourselves.”⁷⁷ Part of the system of *deep understanding* includes formulating

⁷⁴ *Casco Art Institute*. Casco Art Institute. Accessed June 21, 2019. <https://casco.art/en/studylines>.

⁷⁵ Bu Shea, Staci “Personal interview with Staci Bu Shea curator at Casco”, Amy, Gowen April 20, 2019

⁷⁶ Sky, Vivian *Frieze* “Working for the Commons.” In *Frieze*. Accessed June 21, 2019. <https://frieze.com/article/working-commons>.

⁷⁷ *ibid*

programmes and exhibitions that consistently question and reassess the role of the commons within contemporary society. Such consistent, critical analysis surrounding the concept and context of commoning serves to inform *Casco's* institutional approach towards the commons framework and visualize its outcomes in forms which are not necessarily always art-specific. By revising new and atypical ways of disseminating commons thinking, *Casco* orchestrate an intention to reach wider audiences and encourage further and farer encounters with commons understanding and the implications of the concept.

Institutionally, *Casco* can be considered a space where artistic, theoretical and social engagements are mediated and layered with complex, underrepresented and often contradictory understandings so as to further inform and entwine the growing tentacles of the commons. Through such entanglements, *Casco* build more equitable and interconnected communities that provide spaces for thinking and rehearsing new ways of being and living with one another. The time and knowledge *Casco* dedicate to the conceptualization and visualization of the commons is unparalleled and provides a clear theoretical base for which they maintain as a reference point and are easily recognized by. This being said, *Casco* toe the line between *theoretical* knowledge and every day, *lived* knowledge. With an emphasis on queer, feminist, decolonial theory, a clear level of academic intersectionality can be discerned which informs the role and function of the institution. Yet the theory is actively balanced through the use of *Casco's* space and agency to invite others to create their own narratives, suggesting lived experiences help shape and mould existing theories to ensure they are never fixed and are always placed in new contexts.

Furthermore, with an emphasis on *deep understanding*, the recurring subject of *the commons* is made visible through *Casco's* exhibitions and event programme and is given the space and time to evolve as a concept. Rather than simply defining and leaving the concept to remain static, *Casco* seek to investigate, tear apart, reformulate and reconstruct the ideas and conceptions around the commons. Such long and intensive methods of study bring the commons and its associated thinking and practice firmly within the setting of the art institution and directly situate it relation to contemporary, societal interests. Through such an in-depth, analytical approach *Casco* have developed a wealth of knowledge around what the commons *is* and what it can *do*, which, when coupled with a clear intention of to engage

and participate alongside a breadth of audiences, can be further reformulated through collective endeavor.

Overall, *Casco's* depictions of knowledge production and dissemination blur the lines between academic and everyday knowledge, alongside how the functions of form, pattern and space both shape and complicate the process. Through such entanglements *Casco* realistically portray the interconnected nature and, at times, difficulties in discerning between forms knowledges, patterns of thinking and alternative spaces of study. This provides an evolving institutional identity base that is informed by collectivity and precarious uncertainty yet with clear theoretical guidance from the concept of the commons that is always maintained at its core.

3.7 Case Study: *Primary*

As an institution, *Primary* possess a clear positionality and institutional orientation directed by locality. Their vision and mission clearly states an intention to create an open environment for artistic research and production both *within* and *outside* of the building so as to explore new ways for local and international audiences to engage with contemporary art.⁷⁸ Such a specification of environments both inside and outside of the institution alludes to programming that relies less on a site-specific institutional practice and instead takes on a hybrid form of nomadism that reflects the direct, situated engagements and flexible relationships *Primary* have developed with their publics and local communities. Rebecca Beinart, Engagement Curator at *Primary* conveys that as concerned as *Primary* are with generating knowledge through their direct programming and exhibitions, the art organization are as equally interested in keeping understandings *alive* by sharing knowledge beyond events and projects. This not only invokes the thinking of the *Undercommons*, that intellectuality is not confined to institution-based spaces alone, but that *Primary* are interested in a certain distribution of knowledge that breaks institutional boundaries and permeates into communities where it can live on and continue to evolve.

Primary's longest running public programme *Making Place* is a clear amalgamation of knowledge and practice that situates itself upon the sharing of resources such as stories,

⁷⁸ *We Are Primary* | A Unique Creative Facility for Artists, the Public and Local and International Communities. Accessed June 21, 2019. <http://www.weareprimary.org/>.

images and myths with connections to the local area so as to offer a snapshot of place, memory, loss and hope.⁷⁹ *Making Place* is carried out with the intention of learning *from* a local neighborhood, to understand and articulate what a public space can inherit from systems of sharing and how can we reimagine our personal and collective relationship with the city as a result. This is especially poignant as much of the *Primary's* public were not born or raised in England or are students who have moved to Nottingham from distant areas. Therefore, such a patchwork of community members suggests that the sharing of interpretations towards concepts of *community*, *identity* and *locality* can lead to discussions around larger, more complex topics of collective identity and the roles of space and place in creating lived realities. *Making Place's* system of knowledge exchange encompass walks and talks and skill-shares between community members in order to create a space and platform for exchanging stories and exploring themes of power, inequality, imagination and commons that directly relate to and, in some cases, threaten these neighborhoods. Such a relationship with locality conveys that the programme itself is not fixed, but is consistently informed by lived experience among community members.⁸⁰

As a reflection of their vision and mission statement, many of the *Making Place's* sessions occur away from the institution, meaning *Primary* situate themselves among the localities in which they work and communicate. What is notable is there is no distinct theory or academic guidance leading these sessions, instead the participants are provided the opportunity to interpret or discuss themes, knowledges and ideas that they so choose, suggesting tentative approaches towards co-authorship, co-production and collectively. Rebecca discusses the lack of leading theory by stating, "people are in shitty situations, it is their lived experiences, their everyday realities and the issues that directly affect them that they want to discuss rather than a distant academic theory."⁸¹ *Primary's* intention therefore seems not to focus on communicating a certain definition of commons or navigating what knowledges can or should be produced, but to instead provide a space and platform to support multitudes of exchange that rely on the encounter rather than theory to provide a *lived* approach.

⁷⁹ *We Are Primary* | A Unique Creative Facility for Artists, the Public and Local and International Communities. Accessed June 21, 2019. <http://www.weareprimary.org/>.

⁸⁰ *ibid*

⁸¹ Beinart, Rebecca, "Personal interview with Rebecca Beinart curator at Primary", Amy Gowen April 30, 2019

Another way in which *Primary* seek to mediate between the forms of art, knowledge and the institution is in their approach towards “knowledge as a place for creative research.”⁸² Key questions such as *what it means to conduct creative research, what we mean by knowledge production, who is producing the knowledge, who is it for and where does it go?* guide the process of *creative research* rather than specific or desired outcomes.⁸³ Creative research in this sense is a way of encapsulating often informal projects or exchanges of understanding. Moreover, it is a method of recognizing alternate forms of art, styles of practice and productions of knowledge. In this sense, the process of creative research connects to another of *Primary’s* ongoing public programmes, *Tell Me Something I Don’t Know*, a series of short talks essentially by anyone about anything.⁸⁴ Examples of previous talks include a history of pigeons, a session on cheese-making, how to navigate local rivers and what a one-way trip to Mars would look like.⁸⁵ Rebecca describes these sessions as a “live action Wikipedia.”⁸⁶ Such a style of programming embodies *creative research*, where non-canonized knowledges are given the same room and respect as tradition methods of production. *Tell Me Something I don’t Know* does not just play a role in exchanging information or facts, but in forming communities, encouraging exchanges of interest and circulating methods of knowledge production that begin and end in collective endeavor.

Primary’s institutional approach towards knowledge formation and dissemination undoubtedly aligns with aspects of *multitudal* knowledge formations, *tentacular* thinking patterns and alternative uses of space. The being said, as an institution they take a conscious distance away from academic theory so as to establish a grounding for commons knowledge production that encircles community. From the perspective of the *lived* experience, space plays an integral role in the process of *Primary’s* knowledge formation, not only in that their vision and mission stresses the importance of locality as a guiding imperative, but that most of the forms of knowledge *Primary* seek to facilitate takes place away from the institution and in locations that are more aligned with the wants and needs of its recipients. Therefore, *Primary’s* role as an institution appears more as facilitator and host rather than art-world

⁸² Beinart, Rebecca, “Personal interview with Rebecca Beinart curator at Primary”, Amy Gowen April 30, 2019

⁸³ *ibid*

⁸⁴ *We Are Primary* | A Unique Creative Facility for Artists, the Public and Local and International Communities. Accessed June 21, 2019. <http://www.weareprimary.org/>.

⁸⁵ *ibid*

⁸⁶ Beinart, Rebecca, “Personal interview with Rebecca Beinart curator at Primary”, Amy Gowen April 30, 2019

leader. As a space *Primary* brings together communities and presents the tools and the encounters necessary for equitable knowledge to be built from. The commons therefore act as a tool, an encounter and an approach to investigate the day to day issues and societal contexts that question the use of resources and the importance of relations between institutions and communities. Through this active investigation institutional insides and outsides and deconstructed and community, collectivity and collaboration is continuously maintained through the formation and exchange of diverse, local knowledges.

4. PRACTICING THE COMMONS

Curator Magda Tyżlik-Carver interprets *commoning* as the form in which “shared knowledges are actively held in common through the process of action.”⁸⁷ Such an interpretation proposes that commoning practices contribute to the visibility of a commons within an institution alongside providing a unifying link between ideological agenda and actual practice. With an intention to disrupt and defy consistent representation, such practices contain the ability to bridge daily practice with longer-term visions in order to provide complex and evolving systems of operation. Such a relationship between shorter and longer temporalities enables these practices to act *multiply* and *differentially*.⁸⁸ Therefore, to practice commoning is to interpret multitudes of knowledge whilst responding with the methods of collectivity, creativity, co-production and collaboration that are intrinsic to the framework of the commons. With this in mind, this chapter serves to explore commoning practices as *strategies* within the artistic field that embody heterogeneous thinking and explore methods of working that open diverse, complex and alternative worlds to live both *in* and *with*.

4.1 Strategy as a conceptual lens

As a concept, strategy is typically understood as a plan of action designed to achieve longer-term or overall aims.⁸⁹ Yet in the context of the art institution, strategies can also be discerned in relation to different levels of organization, proving the concept to be complex whilst still remaining ubiquitous in nature. In order to explore the role of commoning practices in the formation of institutional identity, the conceptual lens of strategy will be used for two purposes. The first is to explore the various levels in which commoning operates within the art institution. For example, at times strategies can provide a basis for institution-wide vision and mission building, whilst at others can form part of the minute details for the daily running. This demonstrates the ability of strategies to articulate broader, organization-wide methods of working whilst simultaneously informing specific, situated practices. In view of this, *strategy* will first be used to study the organizational systems of the institution, to then subsequently explore institutional practice and situated curatorial strategy in order to

⁸⁷ Tyżlik-Carver Magda, *Solar system as it really is and curating as/in common/s*, APRJA Journal (January 2013) pp.1-13 p.11

⁸⁸ Manning, Erin. *The Minor Gesture*. (Durham, England: Duke University Press, 2016.) p.8

⁸⁹ Stevenson, Angus. *Oxford Dictionary of English*. (New York: Oxford University Press, USA, 2018.) p.775

understand how these three levels of organization can produce an ecology of practice that works together as part of a larger, institutional eco-system.

The conceptual lens of strategy will then be further expanded to explore how knowledge production is united with practice through modes of sustainable reproduction, exhibition planning and curation. As a result, strategy will aid in considering the relationship of the space *between* knowledge and practice. With this in mind, an emphasis will be placed not just on *what* is produced in the space of the institution, with also *how* it is produced.

4.2 Organizational Structure: Silvia Federici's Reproducing the Commons

Art institutions are structured around the consistent reproduction of knowledges, practices and internal and external relations. Therefore, the navigation of commoning practices first of all requires an understanding of how the reproduction of a commons can uncover essential structural foundations of an institution. Feminist scholar Silvia Federici argues that the conventional understandings of the commons as an equal base of organization are borne predominantly from feminist perspectives.⁹⁰ This is due to their link with female reproductive labour, which Federici understands as “the rock upon which society is built and by which every model of social organization must be tested.”⁹¹ The invisible, unpaid domestic female reproductive work Federici refers to can therefore be understood as providing the backbone to capitalist society and infiltrating all systems of organization from education to healthcare, to sociality to lifestyle, to public to private.

In reference to the art institution, the reproductive work that occurs comprises not only of conventional activities of production, management and curation but also lesser observed duties such as conversation and email exchange, cooking and cleaning, DIY and maintenance and hosting and hospitality. Therefore, with Federici's thinking in mind, the practice of reproduction embodies an analysis of the way in which we organize ourselves and our institutional structures, leading us to question what we recognize as labour and who is given the responsibility of completing it.

⁹⁰ Federici, Silvia, *Feminism and the Politics of the Commons*. The Commoner, (24 January 2011.) pp.1-14 p.2

⁹¹ *ibid*

Subsequently, what then becomes important is how reproductive labour is viewed and *used* within the art institution. Federici lambasts the exploitation and discrimination that reproductive laborers face, yet also observes how, when placed with the thinking of the commons, reproductive work can aid in the formation of collective identities and facilitate new realities of living.⁹² An example of the formation of collective identity through the medium of practice is the creation of the urban gardens initiative by African and Caribbean immigrant communities in New York in the 1990's.⁹³ Although initially devised as a strategy to control food production and regenerate environments in run-down areas, the gardens transformed into far more than a source of food security. Instead, the community space became an epicenter of sociality, knowledge formation and cultural/intergenerational exchange. Historian Margarita Fernandez has described the initiative as a strengthener of "community cohesion," as it became a space to play cards, hold weddings and birthday celebrations, to share meals, play music and sing and dance together.⁹⁴

To relate the case of the New York gardens to the art institution, a space where cultural production naturally emerges, it seems that by understanding reproductive work as a collective strategy, commoning practices can aid in reproducing the same sociality and community cohesion, collaboration and co-production as was witnessed with the communal gardens. What is more, the example of the urban gardens shows how much can be learnt from the power of everyday activity. This focus on everyday, lived experience emphasizes the importance of giving room to smaller, daily activities so they can consequently evolve and inform larger organizational structures. Federici's theory of reproducing the commons provides a clear message to reassess institutional hierarchies and reconsider how both micro and macro practices inform and influence the structure of an institution.

Moreover, Federici emphasizes the slogan, "there is no commons without community," and proceeds to articulate that here, community is not intended as a gated reality, but something formed through the quality of relations, the principles of cooperation and an intrinsic

⁹² Federici, S (2011). Feminism and the Politics of the Commons. *The Commoner*, (24 January 2011.) pp.1-14 p.6

⁹³ Fernandez, Margarita. "Cultivating Community, Food, and Empowerment: Urban Gardens in New York City." Project course paper, (2003.) pp.1-82 p.67

⁹⁴ *ibid*

responsibility to each other and our living environments.⁹⁵ Alternative realities cannot be produced unless we redefine reproduction as a cooperative venture that puts an end to the separation of the personal and political, the public and private. By placing commoning and community on the institutional agenda, the organizational structure of an art space is consequently informed by the collective instead of the individual and can therefore adopt collaborative and communal reproductive labor to aid in the formation of collective and institutional identity.

4.3 Institutional Practice: Nataša Petrešin-Bachelez's Slow Institutionalism

In terms of more confined forms of institutional practice, commoning prompts the reflection and deconstruction of certain learned institutional behaviors or *habits*. One habit that has become particularly prevalent in relation to the commons is the aspect of temporality. This reconfiguration of the current relationship between the institution and time has been considered especially important in the midst of growing *accelerationism*.⁹⁶ The favorability of *slowing down* is so institutions can incorporate longer-term, more elaborate programming. This desire for programming that spans longer lengths of time is not only to distance institutions from accelerated capitalistic pressures, but to also prevent shallow, thematic programming where the subject matter is soon forgotten after the exhibition is over, and to instead form exhibitions and events around pertinent, guiding subjects where the subsequent thinking produced can permeate within the institution and form part of an underlying institutional identity.

The implementation of *slowness* was proposed by curator Nataša Petrešin-Bachelez as a curatorial response to Isabelle Strengers' call to slow down scientific research and production as a protective measure against the growing threat of capitalist appropriation.⁹⁷ Nataša believes that by inviting institutions to slow down their ways of operating, new ecologies of care can be formulated by studying the relationships between the institution and its publics

⁹⁵ Federici, S (2011). Feminism and the Politics of the Commons. *The Commoner*, (24 January 2011.) pp.1-14 p.7

⁹⁶ *Accelerationism* coined by Mark Fiser is the idea that capitalism should be accelerated instead of overcome in order to generate radical social change and achieve ultimate marketization of resources

⁹⁷ Petrešin-Bachelez Nataša, On Slow Institutionalism in Lucy Steeds. *How Institutions Think: Between Contemporary Art and Curatorial Discourse*. (Cambridge, England: Mit Press, 2017.) p.34

and integrating topics and subjects that inform our day to day lives as much as they do larger social movements.⁹⁸

One example of such action is *Nottingham Contemporary's Slow Reading Group*. A monthly meet-up where a small group read a selected text slowly, collectively and out loud whilst frequently stopping to discuss, question and consolidate ideas that arise in relation to the text. Such a change in temporality acts as a method for slowing down traditional approaches towards knowledge production and distribution. From this perspective, slowness not only transforms the practice of "study" but also considers it a collective endeavor, suggesting a relationship not only between time and the space of an institution, but time and notions of collectivity. This is further reflected in the example of the *Slow Research Lab* in Amsterdam, a multidisciplinary research and curatorial platform that utilises theoretical reflection and creative experimentation to "bring balance to the pace at which we encounter the world."⁹⁹ Through critical thinking and deep reflection, the research group collaborate to produce exhibitions, workshops, lectures and reading groups that all experiment with the notion of time, and aim to produce deeper understandings of contemporary issues shaped by collective experience and the benefits of longevity.

In reference to both examples, temporal strategies appear to mould how institutions approach multiplicities of knowledge through the medium of practice. By providing time and opportunity for ideas and voices to permeate within the institution and continuously feed cycles of knowledge and strategy exchange, the subsequent exhibitions and programmes produced within the space carry the potential to be built upon and evolved by those who visit. From a broader perspective, slowness further encourages us to address the complexities of contemporary artistic production as well as providing a method for institutions to counter late-capitalism. As an institutional practice, slowness is a way for concepts of collaboration such as co-working, do-it-together and do-it-with-others to trickle down from larger organizational structures into more specific methods of practice. *How we think together* is just as important as what we produce as an end result. Temporality is as much a state of mind as it is a collective endeavor or strategy. It acts as a permanent institutional practice that the

⁹⁸ Petrešin-Bachelez Nataša, On Slow Institutionalism in Steeds, Lucy. *How Institutions Think: Between Contemporary Art and Curatorial Discourse*. (Cambridge, England: Mit Press, 2017.) p.32

⁹⁹ Slow Research Lab. Accessed June 21, 2019. <https://slowlab.net/>.

art institution can seek to consistently learn from and reproduce through on and off-site responses.

4.4 Curatorial Strategy: Magda Tyżlik-Carver’s Curating the Commons

To focus on more direct, situated forms of commoning practice we turn to curatorial strategy. Usually understood as the act of selecting, organizing or looking at artworks in a collection, curation can also be perceived as a method for crossing the boundaries between theory and practice, public and private.¹⁰⁰ In this sense, curators can be considered practitioners who hold a responsibility for bridging the gap between knowledge and practice and curating the spaces between.

Curator and scholar Magda Tyżlik-Carver suggests that curatorial practice contributes models and methods that assist in the reproduction of commons.¹⁰¹ This is because, in her view, both curation and commoning are methods of organization where governmentality and social reproduction are placed at the center.¹⁰² In some respects this can be considered true, as curatorial strategy requires an involvement with, or organization of, resources in a given space with the overall intention of connecting with audiences and dissemination meaning. Yet the power structures at play and the dominant voice of the curator suggests a considerable contrast to the style of organization of the commons, especially when regarding notions of collaboration and collectively. Therefore, to place curation and commons together requires a different form of organization that emphasizes the exploration of power distribution, direct public engagement, active participation and social reproduction.

From Tyżlik-Carver’s view, curating as commons is a “speculative intervention and experimental practice of curating.”¹⁰³ Speculative intervention suggests that when the figure of the curator and the practice of curating act with the concept of the commons and practices of commoning, revised forms of knowledge production and distribution are activated and visualized within the space of the institution. By producing a hybrid between the two

¹⁰⁰ Stevenson, Angus. *Oxford Dictionary of English*. (New York: Oxford University Press, USA, 2018.) p.302

¹⁰¹ Tyżlik-Carver Magda. *Solar system as it really is and curating as/in common/s*, APRJA Journal, (January 2013.) pp.1-13 p.3

¹⁰² *ibid* p.2

¹⁰³ *ibid* p.7

contrasting methods of practice, curating through commoning initiates new techniques and strategies that use the spaces in between knowledge and practice to evolve ideas and understandings with a non-confined public in mind. This process of visualizing ideas with a purpose of engendering publics to engage with and evolve the content, invokes a sense of care in relation to a community and its resources. This suggests the curator as a *caregiver* that focuses on social reproduction through art and discourse rather than their own voice. The process of social reproduction therefore incites new arrangements of social and aesthetic relations that can reevaluate the role of the curator as a mediator of co-production between curator and commons, team members and wider partners and the institution and their publics. When the act of curation and the practices of commoning meet, the boundaries between public and private can be broken down and challenged both in the act of practice and in the subsequent evolutions of knowledge produced. In this sense, curating reveals the opportunity for practice to nurture knowledge and for knowledge to re-inform practice, so that curating as commons does not only curate the space in between the two entities, but also acts as a space and a mediator itself.

As it stands, organizations are becoming increasingly interested in the role of the curator as initiator and explorer of techniques, technologies, and practices. Magda Tyżlik-Carver believes the merging of curation and the commons can provide curatorial strategies “where the self of a curator is unimportant and where the curatorial event is a situation that alters the traditional power relations.”¹⁰⁴ Curating as commons can therefore be recognized as a situated practice that embodies and visualizes larger organizational structures and institutional practices of the art institution. To common the institution is to common curation, in turn invoking revised forms of organization and social production through the means of collective ownership and collaborative endeavours as part of a larger eco-system of organisation.

4.5 Observations

When striving to understand the implementation of commoning practices within an institution, it soon becomes apparent that such practices cannot be adopted as a blanket

¹⁰⁴ Tyżlik-Carver Magda, *Solar system as it really is and curating as/in common/s*, APRJA Journal, (January 2013.) pp.1-13 p.8

process. Instead, commoning must be strategically adapted to each layer of the institution, from organizational structure, to institutional practice to curatorial strategy via methods that are mindful and responsive to their potential impacts. What complicates and arguably adds more nuance to the process is that each of these levels of organization form concentric connections with one another, in turn developing an eco-system of operation that is intricately connected. Therefore, although certain recurrent strategies such as collaboration, collectivity and reflexivity remain integral to every layer of the institution, they must be performed alongside specific reproductive methods, institutional habits and strategies of organization for the commons to be made visible within the institution, for knowledge and practice to effectively liaise and for commoning practices to reach their full potential in shaping the way an institution operates internally and externally.

In this sense, the art institution can be seen to treat knowledge with a certain care that incubates and nurtures, partly through systems of openness and transparency so as to keep knowledge accessible and *alive* and partly through shaping its outcomes via the process of action. This moulding of outcomes is further seen through modes of curation that seek to embrace complex narratives and abstract ideas and visualize them in ways that others can engage with and respond to.

Furthermore, multitudes of voice and collective endeavor are as integral to commons practice as they are to commons knowledge, and it is through the treatment of the space in between, through the process of visualization and translation that the two can unify and connect with one another. Overall this suggests commoning practices as vital to new forms of institutionalism and recognizable identities that will subsequently be placed in the context of *Casco* and *Primary* in order to explore how the two institutions relate to commoning practice as part of their institutional approach and how they seek to translate acquired knowledge through visible, active means.

4.6 Case Study: *Casco Art Institute Working for the Commons*

When discussing their changing modus operandi with *Frieze Magazine*, *Casco* state an intention as a self-organized institution to articulate a “position within the arts while moving

outside of the fields of art.”¹⁰⁵ Despite objectives to move in flux between art world inside and outside, *Casco* remain as an art institute with clear organizational structures, institutional practices and curatorial strategies. Within the same conversation, *Casco* explain their approach towards the institution as a “body” that is continually informed by the commoning processes, practices and relationships that are produced and evolved within their space.¹⁰⁶

Reflecting the thinking of Silvia Federici, the institutional *body* that encompasses *Casco*’s organizational structure places a noticeable emphasis on invisible “art work” and the labour that maintains it.¹⁰⁷ As part of their vision and mission *Casco* further articulate an agenda to make visible whom they are working with, how it is made possible and what finances are used to sustain each and every project that materializes within their space. Such adoptions of transparency and openness towards every element of their institutional make-up suggests *Casco* consider collaboration and ethically maintained labor a leading imperative towards their work and their practice. This responsive institutional infrastructure works towards generating art and knowledge as itself a commons that can be nurtured and protected through approaches of *care* in regards to *Casco*’s material and immaterial resources and its institutional eco-system.

The maintenance of an eco-system that comprises of team members, volunteers, interns, audiences, funders, partners and publics, each of whom are considered to contribute an active role towards the reproductive labor of the institution, is paramount to *Casco*’s institutional structure. *Casco* state it is through the formation of internal and external relationships that *commoning* takes place, underlining the importance of practice in the process of relationship-building.¹⁰⁸ When discussing their team structure, *Casco* affirm that they are sustained by an evolving ecosystem of *financial, emotional, and intellectual* supporters all of whom collaborate closely with one another.¹⁰⁹ It therefore appears that instead of being based upon a system of actions or strategies, *Casco* choose to structure themselves around relationships of care and trust. *Casco*’s ecosystem becomes a working

¹⁰⁵ Sky, Vivian, *Frieze* "Working for the Commons." in *Frieze*. Accessed June 21, 2019. <https://frieze.com/article/working-commons>.

¹⁰⁶ *ibid*

¹⁰⁷ *Casco Art Institute*. *Casco Art Institute*. Accessed June 21, 2019. <https://casco.art/en/about>.

¹⁰⁸ *ibid*

¹⁰⁹ *ibid*

modus operandi where every position and perspective that works on a project or participates in a programme has the potential to inform the institutional structure and practices of *Casco*. Overall this provides a clear sense of collective identity and an emphasis on the benefits of social reproduction.

To aid in further articulating the role of their institutional body, *Casco* have also embarked on the process of *unlearning the institution*. As a long-term research project with artist Annette Krauss, *Unlearning the Institution* began as an exhibition but soon became part of *Casco's* daily institutional practices. The aim of the research was to unlearn *busyness* as a structural regime of productivity, but has since expanded into many other areas of the institution so as to *unlearn* given norms and replace them with new and revised habits of working together.¹¹⁰ This sense of the decomposition and re-composition of institutional practice not only appears to break-down institutional boundaries through commoning acts and *unlearning exercises*, but also embodies the institutional practice of habit building and *slowness* as what began as an exhibition has permeated into the daily working environment of the *Casco* team.

These contemplations of temporarily are made further visible through the long-term running of *Casco's* exhibition programmes, including *Grand Domestic Revolution* and *Composing the Commons* which both remained in *Casco's* space for over three years.¹¹¹ *Casco* state that they view art as practice and as prefiguration, therefore their exhibitions provide a space for contemplation and thought but also provide opportunity to be evolved and developed through collective and collaborative means between the institution and their publics. In this sense, the exhibitions themselves form part of an assembly of labour as they are conceived through the relationship with *Casco's* commoners rather than the curator's oeuvre.¹¹² This is supported by Staci's articulation of her role as curator which she understands more as a *midwifing*.¹¹³ From her perspective, curation at *Casco* is conducted through collaborative means, with the team providing consistent feedback and considering the subject matters of each show as collective endeavor. Staci disclaims that she is granted the final say on the

¹¹⁰ *Casco, Unlearning Exercises: Art Organisations as Sites for Unlearning*, (Amsterdam, The Netherlands: Valiz, 2018.) p.23

¹¹¹ *Casco Art Institute*. Casco Art Institute. Accessed June 22, 2019. <https://casco.art/en/program>.

¹¹² McNally, James, *Temporary Art Review* "Working for the Commons: A Conversation with Binna Choi of Casco Art Institute." *Temporary Art Review*. Last modified December 1, 2017, <http://temporaryartreview.com/working-for-the-commons-a-conversation-with-binna-choi-of-casco-art-institute/>. Accessed June 20, 2019

¹¹³ Bu Shea, Staci, "Personal interview with Staci, Curator at Casco" Amy Gowen, April 20, 2019

exhibition, but never recognizes it as her own exhibition, instead as a collective venture produced by the whole team.¹¹⁴

As an institute, it can be argued *Casco* work towards generating art, knowledge and practice as a commons through various long-term projects, methods of social production and the conscious maintenance and care for an extensive and diverse ecosystem. In relation to their organizational structures, institutional practices and curatorial strategy, *Casco* convey an intricate working system bound by and to relationship-building, collaborative venture and collective learning. Such an eco-system of entwined relationships and practices is built upon a system of trust and mutual sharing. This, in turn, embodies all of the defining elements of the framework of the commons and puts them into clear, discernable practice.

Furthermore, *Casco's* decision to use their eco-system as a foundational structure places emphasis on the strength of co-production and co-management both as forms of commoning practice and as systems of operation. By practicing an environment of optimal transparency and openness in regards to their internal and external structures, *Casco's* collective approach towards instituting permits audiences to inform and evolve each project, discussion and exhibition that takes place in its space. This conveys that *Casco* are active in their approach in breaking the boundaries between institutional inside and outside and public and private.

Furthermore, it appears that the practices that take place seek to strengthen and develop *Casco's* commons base, and, in turn, allow knowledge to guide the process and form a cycle of knowledge, commons and practice, where knowledge and commons are held together at the core and practice seeks to shape and redefine the process. These systems of not reserved for the institution alone as it is clear that commoners from *all* backgrounds are welcome to aid in joining, participating and collaborating in the expansion and shaping of *Casco's* eco-system of knowledge, practice and commoning.

4.7 Case Study: *Primary*

¹¹⁴ Bu Shea, Staci, "Personal interview with Staci, Curator at Casco" Amy Gowen, April 20, 2019

Despite *Primary's* intentions to actively devise programming that takes place away from the institution, they balance community engagement with a long-standing artist residency programme, over forty studio spaces and a bakery and gardens that each have a specific relationship with the site and surrounding area of *Primary*. Therefore, clear organizational structures, institutional practices and curatorial strategies remain in place so as to facilitate such a complex mix of programming and responsibility.

Notably, *Primary* became an NPO (National Portfolio Organisation) in 2017, which at face value means they now receive substantial funding for their activities from the British Arts Council. Yet from a more structural perspective such a title also connotes an increasing pressure to further “institutionalize” themselves so as to meet requirements for such funding opportunities.¹¹⁵ Rebecca explains that in order to maintain an identity of creative research and practice in the wake of increasing pressures, *Primary* have developed a policy stating their board must be made up of at least fifty percent artists, to ensure that key guiding principles of collaboration, creative endeavor and risk-taking remain at the core of their organization structure, off-site programming, institutional practices and crucially, their identity.¹¹⁶

Rebecca is a firm believer that art offers solutions for the everyday challenges of heightened austerity measures, increasing societal alienation and social divisions facing communities.¹¹⁷ Yet she is also aware that tackling such issues cannot be achieved through knowledge exchange alone, but also through the acts of collaboration, collectivity and connectivity established through *practice*. In this sense, commoning practices within *Primary* do not just seek to visualize or present knowledge that has been formulated through mediations of exchange, but to also produce active interventions that can shape the ways in which community members relate to their cities, their surroundings and their *selves*. Rebecca asserts that in order to achieve this, *Primary* structure themselves in ways that facilitate responsiveness and support. As a result, institutional *learning* and *reflection* form a defining part of the iterative cycle of theory, practice and reflection that *Primary* operate by.¹¹⁸ Such a process of thought, action and reflection not only helps in reproducing commoning within

¹¹⁵ Beinart, Rebecca, “Personal interview with Rebecca Beinart curator at Primary”, Amy Gowen April 30, 2019

¹¹⁶ *ibid*

¹¹⁷ *ibid*

¹¹⁸ *ibid*

their space as their practices and engagement are consistently evaluated, but it grants *Primary* a consistent level of responsiveness to the changing needs and demands of their audiences and wider society, in turn, providing a firm foundation for the institution to based upon and strategies for which they can devise their practices in relation to.

The cycles of theory, practice and reflection seem to be similarly echoed in *Primary's* institutional practice that is mainly visualized through residencies, exhibitions, talks and workshops, all with an emphasis on *production* over presentation.¹¹⁹ Therefore, in a sense, *Primary* honor the making and evaluating of the artistic process rather than the act of showcasing an end result. In relation to practice, Rebecca explains that *Primary* do not have a set number of exhibitions per year like most other institutions, instead they bestow resident artists the freedom to produce *anything* they choose as the outcome of their process, be that a performance, a lecture, a public art installation or, if they so choose, an exhibition.¹²⁰ This is because, as an institution *Primary* base themselves on the notion of *unknown outcomes* through unknown encounters.¹²¹ Notably, the single condition for each residency is that the chosen artist must respond to the local area within their production. This means that *Lenton* as a space and a place must have some influence on the work produced and that the artist is encouraged to collaborate and engage with local community members through their practice. Such an approach towards institutional practice creates what Rebecca terms “active, lived projects.”¹²² The emphasis on the unknown encourages new understandings, new perspectives and new realities to be borne out of active procedure. The process of practice therefore becomes an entanglement of engagement between the individual and the collective, the local and the global, between art and the community, commons and the institution.

In terms of specific curatorial strategies, Rebecca’s professional history lies within artistic practices and approaches. Such a background provides a unique approach to her strategy of curation, as she states her previous experience is based upon collaborative projects,

¹¹⁹ *We Are Primary* | A Unique Creative Facility for Artists, the Public and Local and International Communities. Accessed June 21, 2019. <http://www.weareprimary.org/>.

¹²⁰ Beinart, Rebecca, “Personal interview with Rebecca Beinart curator at Primary”, Amy Gowen April 30, 2019

¹²¹ *We Are Primary* | A Unique Creative Facility for Artists, the Public and Local and International Communities. Accessed June 21, 2019. <http://www.weareprimary.org/>.

¹²² Beinart, Rebecca, “Personal interview with Rebecca Beinart curator at Primary”, Amy Gowen April 30, 2019

community work and group project coordination and facilitation.¹²³ As a result Rebecca's curatorial strategies reflect her more practice-based expertise as *Primary's* overall approach is to encourage artists to experiment and develop their practices, to challenge the traditional and the typical and find collaborations both inside and outside of the institution.¹²⁴ Although Rebecca does not directly refer to this collaborative process as curating in line with the commons, the revised method of organization and the emphasis on the unknown and atypical suggest a similar approach to Tyžlik-Carver's *curating in/as commons*. From this understanding, it seems Rebecca's role places more emphasis on *engagement* than *curator*, as she claims no authorship over what is exhibited within the space and aims to mediate between the artists, the institutions and the public.

Overall, it appears as though *Primary* are predominantly interested in how they can use the thinking and the practice of the commons to negotiate space for uncertainty and the unknown, in order to produce art that challenges social, financial and ecological enclosures and finds new and exciting ways of working together. This is reflected in the freedom and space that is permitted for artists to explore subjects and localities as part of their residencies alongside the ways in which art production and public programming are nurtured so as to inform one another. From this view, it becomes clear that knowledge and practice are in constant conversation through a process of *action* that serves to confront issues of locality, imagination, commons and community through the cycles of theory, practice and reflection.

From such a perspective it could be argued that *Primary* develops an epithetic relationship with its communities, artists, audiences and partners where it acts as host site and base, supporting its wider networks through a process of "institutionalism" that seeks to care for and develop cyclical processes of thought, action and examination. Overall, it is clear that *Primary* embodies collectively and seeks no authorship or control for what is produced in its space. Instead the art institution uses commons thinking and commons practice to develop a site that has a clear institutional identity of responsiveness and community engagement as well as spaces for the unknown and the unexpected.

¹²³ Beinart, Rebecca, "Personal interview with Rebecca Beinart curator at Primary", Amy Gowen April 30, 2019

¹²⁴ *ibid*

5. CONCLUSIONS: COMPOSING THE COMMONS INSTITUTION

5.1 The Cases of Casco working *for* the Commons and Primary working *with* the Commons

In order to articulate the influence of commons knowledge and practice in the formation of institutional identity, *Casco* and *Primary* prove pertinent cases to study in relation to one another due to their adoption of corresponding commons frameworks yet the significant variation of outcomes that appear as a result. In the case of *Casco* it can be argued that their title, *Casco Art Institute Working for the Commons* works as a manifesto nested in a name. Everything that is produced within their space seeks to inform or be informed by the process and the thinking of commoning. Therefore, the commons essentially become *Casco's* identity as they continue to work *for* the commons, within the commons, against the commons, and alongside the commons, allowing for the concept to guide their renewed approaches towards institutionalism. Within *Casco*, thinking is a commons and practice is a commons, therefore their institutional identity follows suit. With a strong emphasis on protecting material and immaterial resources, creating and supporting eco-systems of community and continuously building and renewing a strong theoretical and practical basis, *Casco* embody the terminology and defining features of the commons and perform it as part of their institutional practice and identity.

Although not to be used as direct comparison, conversely, with the case of *Primary* the commons do not act as a leading imperative but instead as a “thread of thinking.”¹²⁵ Instead, the maintenance and support of community engagement is what defines *Primary's* thinking and actions alongside a drive to support the notion of the *unknown*, through thinking, practice and encounter. In this sense, a framework of the commons is reproduced more through *Primary's* actions than through its thinking, as the guiding imperatives of collective understanding, collaborative venture and community support systems inform all of their internal and external workings and relations. *Primary* do not directly define themselves as a commons institution, yet they embrace and embody a certain commons thinking and acknowledge how its associated practice can be utilized within their specific context especially in relation to the features of co-production, co-management, co-authorship and

¹²⁵ Beinart, Rebecca, “Personal interview with Rebecca Beinart curator at Primary”, Amy Gowen April 30, 2019

collaboration. What is important however, is that *Primary* take on this influence of knowledge and practice whilst still seeking to form their own individual, idiosyncratic identity based on the unknown and the unexpected.

Casco and *Primary* provide two examples of how commoning can be adopted in contrasting manners. *Casco* take on the role of the commons institution and allow it to inform every level, every knowledge, every practice and every decision they take as they endeavor to work *for* the commons. This being said, in the case of *Primary*, as an institution they instead seek to work *with* the associated thinking and practices of the commons as a continuous point of reference and guideline for them to build upon so as to enable them to engage with others and develop their own positionality as community-oriented yet commons-driven.

5.2 Commoning as Institutional Identity

Framed within a contemporary societal context that entails heightened social friction, the formation of artificial social and financial boundaries and a fast-paced ecological demise, the art institution and its subsequent institutional identity are being placed under increasing scrutiny in relation to their role, their positionality and their relationship within wider society. Whereas institutional critique in the past tended to concentrate solely on isolated institutional activity, now, increasing pressures are being placed on the art institution in relation to matters much bigger and broader than those purely existing in the art world. To link this to the framework of the commons, a resurgence in the thinking and the practice of commoning has been witnessed in the past in correspondence with increasing ecological, financial pressures, now in a contemporary context it is also being seen in response to social crises.

As a standalone concept, *institutional identity* seeks to intercept the ways in which institutions operate and hold themselves in relation to contemporary issues and contexts, publics that are both local and global, and in reference to a wider, critical discourses surrounding the relationship between art and society. Yet when united with the conceptual lenses of *knowledge* and *practice* institutional identity expands to new levels and meanings that unravels internal and external systems of operation, revised modes of thinking and exchange

and renewed methods of participation and interaction so as to produce a conceptual trifecta of intricate workings that unveil the integral working elements that make up an institution.

When studying the concepts of *commons*, *knowledge* and *institutional identity* in combination, it becomes apparent that commons thinking and its subsequent approach towards knowledge production and dissemination seeks to ask more questions that it attempts to answer. *Knowledge* therefore becomes a critical lens that the art institution turns as much onto itself as it externally employs to engage with publics in wider societal discussions, debates, exchanges and critiques. Knowledge, as a conceptual lens therefore asks the art institution how they relate to their publics, how they respond to one another and what their active role within a society riddled with hierarchy and binary is. When these critical questions are combined with commons thinking it becomes clear that the purpose of the institution is not to provide the answers or solve such issues, but to formulate the tools to articulate the nuances and the connections between art, collectivity, societal responsibility and the role of the institution. The thinking of the commons provides an awareness and a sensitivity of what it means to *institute* and what it supposes to not only discuss the concept of community, but to create real, lived examples inside and outside of its space. *Institutional identity* via *knowledge* encourages us to critically rethink, reflect and reformulate current institutional models in order to understand that the commons institution is far more than just a sum of its physical parts, but is a site of continual evolution, growth and reactivity based upon thinking, activity, space and the people who encounter it.

This being said, it can be argued that it is when commons knowledge is coupled with commons practice that we begin to see the breaking down of institution walls and the dissolution of institutional inside and outside, public and private. The *act* of commoning visualizes, mediates and materializes the complex and ongoing narratives that arise from the commons thinking, therefore the space in between must be treated with a certain level of care. Through commons practice we witness community engagement, relationship building, a visualizing of the commons and the materialization of *instituting*. It is therefore through practice that we *see* the commons within the institution and as part of institutional identity. Yet this could not be completed without the formation of knowledge, suggesting commons knowledge,

commons practice and a commons institutional identity to be part of a symbiotic, co-conspiring, continuously reproducing, conceptual tripecta.

There are of course limitations to this approach. As stated, the commons is a precarious, slippery and notoriously abstract framework that is typically hard to ground, but especially so when placed in relation to the complex concepts of knowledge, practice and art. Therefore, it would seem worthwhile to apply the same understandings to other commons-based institutions that can produce more tangible results in order to develop the discussions, theories and examples of commoning as part of institutional identity. Furthermore, in order to fully articulate the process and change that commoning can entail for an institution, a longer and more in-depth approach that studies that detailed process of commoning from conceptual start to executed completion so as to compare a before and after could add immense value to a deeper understandings of the transition to commons-identity that the scope and limit of this particular thesis can not achieved. Finally, and perhaps most importantly, to learn from the very thinking of this thesis and to fully articulate the potential of the commons in shaping identity, a mixture of approaches other than just academic should be implemented in order to integrate *multitudal* and *plurverisal* perspectives previously discussed. This would entail engaging in more conversations with other institutions, non-institutions, communities and *commoners* to provide a more intersectional and colorful understanding of the impact of commons thinking and commons practice on institutional identity.

Overall, despite the precarious nature of the framework of commoning, when contemplating commons thinking and commons practice together, as separate entities and as co-existing spheres, their resulting impacts on institutional identity are plentiful. The conceptual tripecta of *knowledge*, *strategy* and *institutional identity* together work as part of a cycle that continues to inform, shape and evolve an institutions space so that no two commons institutions are the same yet all seemingly maintain the core values of criticality, reflective and accessibility.

From this view, it can be concluded that through the implementation of commons knowledge and commons practice, the commons art institution embodies an identity that is in turn self-aware, self-critical and self-transformative. That thinks with the times and acts with the times.

That subjects its structure, its strategies, its practices and programme to continual review that reflects changing social conditions and responds to both direct and indirect societal frictions. The commons institution recognizes that it cannot be separated from its social context, and selects its methods of social engagement and social practice accordingly. It seeks to develop new and revised forms of institutional environments. It redefines what it means to be a public institution and embraces groups that are otherwise marginalized or discriminated against, seeking to establish representative and intersectional knowledges through production and exchange. Finally, the commons art institution deems art, knowledge and practice as a universally shared asset to which everyone has a right to think, practice and identify with.

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