BAUTOPIA 2A

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Dimitra Kondylatou and David Bergé

NEW KINDS OF SPACE MAKING

Public space design and governance have been gearing increasingly towards privatization and exclusive management in many European cities. This iteration of *BAUTOPIA* proposes, through theoretical frameworks and examples of specific practices, different ways of imagining and constructing the everyday culture and our spatial surroundings.

In *BAUTOPIA 2*, a European Creative Hubs Network publication that brings together newly commissioned and existing writing, we propose bold and compassionate practices for creating new kinds of spaces, designed along with the place and its human and non-human users, in a sustainable and long-term way. While some of these initiatives are externally funded, others are sustained by voluntary work and direct action. They are all ignited by the persuasion that different modes of space-making can and do exist beyond the current and dominant institutions and policies, actively involving the agency of the people and their participation in both the design and use of public space.

BAUTOPIA 2 raises questions about whether such initiatives inadvertently reinforce the very system they seek to challenge and the role of community in such endeavors, where each individual's actions contribute to the collective outcome. The publication looks at spaces that are in constant transformation by the agency of those who live, move, work, and act in them, through examples of different forms of organization, interaction, and communication.

Inside view of the Work Room

SENDE

Sende is a rural coworking and coliving space located in Galicia (Spain) and home to one of the oldest rural coliving spaces in the world. More than 4000 persons from 60+ countries have stayed in the village of 20 inhabitants, where the old mountain houses and gardens were transformed into creative spaces to welcome entrepreneurs, educators and artists who use Sende to develop their own programs, startups and events, while enjoying the company of curious people, homemade food, and a supportive environment.

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Edo Sadiković

previous page: Sende sunset

Jim Segers

COLLECTIVE ACTIONS IN TIMES OF COMPLEXITY

The following text is about social change in disadvantaged neighborhoods in Brussels and London. It grapples with ideas of collective action, community, and radical change, from the perspective of the design practice of City Mine(d) organization in Brussels. While collective action is often seen as a prerequisite for bringing about social transformation, this text interrogates to what extent collective action can become regime-confirming and convenient to the status quo, rather than challenge the power constellation that lies at the root of social, spatial, and environmental injustice. The same can be argued for community, which can contribute to social cohesion, and for some groups even form a route towards emancipation, while at the same time its fragmenting character can also disperse and thus ease resistance to the dominant order. In an attempt to reclaim a form of political substance, this text identifies the need to step outside the hegemonic discourse and to identify an alternative narrative and imaginary. It proposes complexity – the theory of complex systems – as a source of inspiration and possible lens for an alternative perspective on collective action in disadvantaged neighborhoods.

City Mine(d) crystallized in Brussels in 1997 around issues of social and spatial justice and environmental concerns. At the time, Brussels was characterized by an economic, political, and institutional deadlock caused by a weak state, a fragmented civil society and a speculative real estate sector (Moyersoen 2007). While initially combining direct action with arts interventions in public space, in recent years it focused on designing open-ended processes in which local residents/end-users/citizens take the lead. The processes aim at identifying the "agency" or "room for maneuver" for citizens in the big sustainability questions that structure our lives. City Mine(d) already initiated long-term processes on the topics of water, local economy, or energy. These have led to the creation of self-organizations of mostly marginalized users, but also to changes in policy. In recent years with La Pile, City Mine(d) set up one of Europe's first "inclusive energy communities," meaning we helped social housing tenant in energy poverty to reduce their carbon emission, slash their energy bill to one-eighth of the market tariff, run their own energy community, while also strengthening social ties.

City Mine(d)'s current work is very much inspired by system thinking – the thought that a subject can not be understood in isolation but is linked to many others – and more specifically complexity – the theory of complex systems – as a source of inspiration and a possible lens for an alternative perspective on collective action. In this article, I situate the work of City Mine(d) in its specific historical context and look at commonalities between different projects before taking the time to look at complexity as a source of inspiration and a possible alternative imaginary.

City Mine(d)'s current work is organized around 2 projects: La Pile in Brussels, highlighting the importance of energy for local development; and Elephant Path in London, tackling the future of work for disadvantaged neighborhoods.

One of the first topics City Mine(d) dealt with was the establishment of European institutions in Brussels's Leopold, Jourdan, and Stevin neighborhoods. The mismatch between local residents living in houses that had stayed in the family for generations, and the supra-national state apparatus claiming a space to touch the ground could not possibly be larger. Residents were angered by incidents like finding their bathroom windows closed by a brick wall because its view on the construction site was a potential security hazard. Developers, on the other hand, were too caught up in their strategic game of building a parliament that dare not speak its name, with all the stakeholder

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Breaking a local status quo through positive actions became City Mine(d)'s hallmark, gaining recognition from local authorities, researchers, but also activist groups

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engagement that required as well as increasing security demands. To break the stalemate, the group later called City Mine(d), introduced the issue to the public agenda, brought disparate grievances under one umbrella, and created a place for debate where different sides of the argument could meet and deliberate. As headquarters, a circus tent was raised on derelict land at the heart of the institutions. The campaign, titled "Sens Unique," made its way up through different scales of politics, until the European Commissioner responsible for infrastructure, Erkki Liikanen, accepted the invitation to step into the ring. His presence obviously shifted the position of other stakeholders, and paved the way for an inclusive consultation body in which local residents were guaranteed a place and a voice.

Breaking a local status quo through positive actions became City Mine(d)'s hallmark, gaining recognition from local authorities, researchers, but also activist groups. In 2001, during the meeting of the

European Council in Laeken, City Mine(d) contributed to the occupation of the Leopold Station, in front of the building designed to be the European Parliament. It offered a headquarters to post-Seattle anti-globalist resistance, yet managed to turn the destructive energy into creative outbursts like street parades and debates, which managed to link global discontent to local issues.

From an architectural point of view, City Mine(d) was referred to as a spatial practice. In their seminal work *Spatial Agency: Other Ways of Doing Architecture*, Nishat Awan, Tatjana Schneider, and Jeremy Till (2011) refer to the work of City Mine(d) as "highlighting problems in spatial structures" as well as "highly politicized and intended to influence policy." Interestingly, at the time of publishing, City Mine(d) was struggling with its work in public space. The lemma "City Mine(d)" in the book reflects this unease. It speaks of "temporary interventions to re-appropriate public space," yet it also explains micronomics: "an action-research into the role of small-scale economies in resisting capitalist forces, and questioning markers such as growth and productivity to measure the success of economies" (121).

Fast forward to 2019, and in the wake of micronomics, City Mine(d) combines local development with issues of social and ecological transition. Yet, to tell its story, City Mine(d) borrowed vocabulary from technology and business management. From Vermaak (2012) it adopted the concept of *Tough Issues*. The lack of green and public space, the loss of affordable housing, gender imbalance, decolonisation, and urban transport and mobility are examples of 'tough issues' because they are complex in their subject matter (*multi-factor*), they need the collaboration of many stakeholders (*multi-actor*) in order to be addressed, and they touch upon different levels of policy- and decision-making (*multi-scalar*).

Both Elephant Path and La Pile address tough issues – in the case of Elephant Path, the barriers to work in London's Somers Town area; for

La Pile, the role of citizens in the rapidly transforming energy sector, with a focus on Brussels' Midi neighborhood. Both areas are among the more disadvantaged in their respective countries; and both put forward ideas of boundary objects (Leigh Star 1989). Elephant Path explores ways of organizing a "micro-jobs cooperative" so that workers remain owners and beneficiaries of their work, without getting frogmarched down the path of entrepreneurship and start-ups. La Pile works towards becoming one of Brussels' first "inclusive energy communities," implying that local residents can produce and share production of electricity locally, but also keep financial and other benefits local. Despite their differences, both Elephant Path and La Pile have several things in common. I would like to highlight 3 of them here:

1] Both projects are clarion calls. They are calls to action, rather than blueprints waiting to be executed. They put forward ideas that require buy-in from many different agencies (public authorities, private individuals and institutions, etc). In turn, each of these agencies helps shape its final outcome. This links to a problematic nature of collective action. Beyond the issues already highlighted, there are more recent political or ideological concerns with collaborative practices. Mancur Olson (1965) has argued that individuals in large groups attempting collective actions always have incentives to "free ride" on the efforts of others. To what extent is collective action a vehicle for radical change, and at what point does it become a mere means of dealing with the failures of market mechanisms? Or to what point is it being harnessed for state-led or private development?

2] Elephant Path and La Pile are actualized in disadvantaged neighborhoods. Gabriela Rendón remarks that "area-based approaches in low-income neighborhoods are increasingly trying to activate residents that have been overlooked and even displaced. However, in some cases the previous urban renewal policies and interventions have resulted in residents' lack of trust and disengagement" (Rendón 2011, 44). This is a point made to City Mine(d) by local residents on their doorstep in both neighborhoods in

London and Brussels: many have seen different regeneration schemes come and go, none of whom managed to make a significant dent in deprivation statistics.

3] Both projects also share a specific hegemonic context. This is expressed in the options the projects are able to identify; the words they use and the results they obtain. Those modes of thinking have an economic flank – one that considers the free market as best to allocate resources in society, and thus renders state responsibilities and social practices tradable goods; a political flank – one that aims at shrinking the state and contracting out the services it normally provides, or subjecting them to internal competition; and all this shored up by an ideological flank – claiming that economic, political, and social relations are best organized through formally free choices of formally free and rational actors who seek to advance their own material or ideal interest (Jessop 2002). Together they combine into the edifice often referred to as neoliberalism. Its acceptance and even enthusiastic adoption by almost all governing agencies, from supranational bodies like the IMF, World Bank, WTO, and EU to most nation-states, the regional and even metropolitan and local level, has turned neoliberalism into an all-pervading ideology and makes it very difficult to think, let alone act, outside this framework. It is therefore understandable that social actors also adopt it. Jessop points out that within the neoliberal frame of mind, "community" (or rather several self-organizing communities) is promoted to deal with the failures of the market mechanism – failures like inequality, environmental degradation, poverty, and so on.

Similar reflections on the neoliberal context pose some startling questions for initiatives like Elephant Path and La Pile. At what point do the initiatives become the mere shoring up of a political ideology that may as well be at the root of the grievances it wants to address? And which part does bringing people together in a local community play? To what extent is it still possible to be radical?

To further their cause within the context described above, initiatives to promote social change, include marginalized groups, and even ponder a radical alternative, need to adopt the language of the powers they speak to. Cognitive linguist George Lakoff wrote profusely about framing; about the way language carries and invokes ideas. "Framing is about getting language that fits your worldview" (Lakoff 2004, 33). As a cognitive scientist, he claims that there is a crucial logic in the way the brain works with respect to public discourse. "Because of the effect of language and imagery on the brain, the constant use of one ideology's language over the other's has an enormous effect on our politics" (Lakoff 2004, 137). Take, for instance, the fact that all citizens need some form of energy to cook or keep warm, yet are mostly referred to as energy "consumers," rather than energy "users." The term "consumer" prioritizes a market-oriented framing of energy, rather than a basic need or right. As mentioned, a different narrative and imaginary impose themselves as first steps in a different direction.

According to MIT professor John Sterman, "you can't just do one thing, everything is connected to everything else" (Sterman 2004, 4). In a succinct way, this thought expresses the ideas behind system thinking and the ability to see the world as a complex entity. It acknowledges complexity and rejects a reductionism that pretends urban issues can be described in problems that can be solved mathematically or with an algorithm. This is also the thinking that inspires City Mine(d) when designing open-ended processes. Below I will dive deeper into some ideas relating to complexity.

A school of sardines gives the impression that they are executing a well-prepared plan. When threatened or migrating south, they form huge balls that can measure up to 20 meters in diameter and can last up to 20 minutes. Tens of thousands of fish swim in unison because it makes them look more prominent than the shark that wants to have them for lunch, improves their hydrodynamics, and increases the likelihood of meeting a mate. What is more striking still, is that there is

no larger plan, or a central command controlling shape and direction of the ball. It just emerges from the actions of each individual sardine. The formation has no leader, a fact that makes it a self-organizing system. There are other systems in nature that display similar properties, like the army ant. If you isolate 200 of them and put them on a table, they will purposelessly walk around in circles until they die. However, as a colony of 500,000, they are lethal to anything they find on their territory, and that includes snakes. And again, their maraud is not orchestrated by any central intelligence: The ants self-organize. The field of research that studies these phenomena is called complexity, and refers to them as complex systems. We are confronted with them more than we think (Mitchell 2009). At the very large scale, the weather system is one of them, consisting of many small and interacting elements that all contribute to rain or shine; the Internet is a global complex system of interconnected networks of 100 million servers hosting roughly 1.5 billion websites. Again, without a grand scheme or coordination behind it. But also on a small scale, our lives are affected by complex systems. Take our immune system as an example: Inside the human body keeps us from getting sick and consists of trillions of cells without any central control. Like little soldiers, these cells move around in the body trying to find germs, bacteria, fungi, and viruses, and defeat them collectively. Interestingly, measures of dealing with a pandemic (from lockdowns to tier systems and quarantines) and strategies towards finding a vaccine rely on complexity.

Two characteristics of complex systems are of interest to us: "self-organization," meaning that they can perform rather sophisticated tasks without central control or leader; and "emergence," which is colloquially described with the phrase 'the sum is more than its parts' but probably best understood by the example of the physical attribute of wetness: the individual H_2O molecule is not characterized by wetness, many H_2O molecules do. Or even more succinctly, at what point does a collection of grains of sand become a pile?

Because of its innovative way of thinking it triggers and draws on the

notions of self-organization and emergence, complexity holds seeds for a new perspective on the way cities develop and the direction in which we would like them to develop. The notion drew the attention of City Mine(d) when it was looking for inspiration for a different narrative and a new imaginary. There is something profoundly liberating in the recognition that there is rather limited control over the development of neighborhoods. Its character and development might be an emergent characteristic of the behavior of different agents, in this case local residents, rather than the result of the insights of a master planner.

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At the same time, this observation might make the discussion on collective action obsolete altogether. When we look at the residents as equally valuable agents, collective action is not an option: it is a statement of fact. It could be argued that it is a fallacy to believe that we can opt out of the systems that shape our daily lives. Rather, our daily lives shape those systems. There is no central command or control happening in public life. It is the accumulation of a plethora of activities which together make up what we refer to as public life. So those who initiate action, those who further it, but equally those who ignore it and those who oppose it, are part of the collective action and the complex system from which emerges each neighborhood as we know it.

This does not mean that all forms of actions are irrelevant. On the contrary, it allows us to focus our energy on activities that really matter – so as to empower the right agents, and thus to redistribute power. Approached from another perspective, it looks at the agency

each agent has and the ways in which it can be harnessed. The repercussions this approach has on the goals that can be attained as a society are more than liberating: they are sea-changing. When it comes to the challenges disadvantaged neighborhoods face, it is often heard that a collective effort is needed and we all need to contribute. This call not only presupposes an attainable goal we all need to work towards, but also that those who do not engage are in a way morally inferior to those who do; that acting is good, while passively observing is contributing to the downfall of humanity. Through the perspective of complexity, however, each action is a contribution to the neighborhood's development.

Nonetheless, this does not mean that more sustainable, socially just or culturally inclusive strategies can no longer be aspired to. John H. Holland (2014) teaches us that complex systems exhibit recurring patterns. He compares them to a game of chess, in which different moves can make up a pattern. An experienced player can use these patterns to lead a game to a win. But other complex systems, like the weather or our brains, equally display certain patterns. Comparing different systems holds lessons in steering a complex system towards a beneficial outcome. Again, not through leadership, a boss, or central command, but through a path that emerges from actions of different agents. Steering a development towards a specific area only happens when actors involved individually move in that direction. Different agents have more or less access to resources, and therefore their actions weigh more heavily on developments. Resources can be power, financial means, knowledge, or network. Which brings us back to the same practices and the same activities of empowering and emancipating disenfranchised local residents, be it this time with another narrative and with another imaginary.

This article highlights the difficulty of radical political action in the hegemonic neoliberal context. It identifies instances in which 'fair is foul and foul is fair,' most notably cases of collective action that can aspire radical change but might shore up the status quo. The dominant

character of the neoliberal project makes it difficult to imagine and discuss, let alone to implement political alternatives. For that reason, it is hereby proposed to look into the emerging science of complex systems, to explore a new vocabulary, new modes of organizing, and new ways of learning.

Jim Segers

Jim Segers is a self-declared development activist and co-founder of City Mine(d) in Brussels (1997) and London (2003). City Mine(d) emerged at the intersection of architecture, urban development, and urban activism. Through engagement of several years in deprived neighborhoods, from Tottenham, London, to Santa Marta, Rio de Janeiro, this initiative aims to increase citizens' agency and autonomy in relation to sustainability topics such as water, energy, or economy. Jim Segers holds a BA in Politics (Hons), a BSc in Econometrics (Hons), and is trained as a theater director. He involved City Mine(d) as stakeholder in international research programs, such as the EU Horizon Europe program and its precursors (eg. the Framework Programme for Research and Innovation), through which the organization tries to pass on its practice to research and policy makers, but also to get recognition for the knowledge that emerges from lived experience.

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RURAL HUB

Rural Hub is a program created by Dinamo10 (Viana do Castelo, Portugal) and dedicated to promoting initiatives that support Innovation, Entrepreneurship and Citizenship in a Rural context. The development, implementation and dissemination of different activities are directly linked to themes related to Identity, Traditions, Heritage and Endogenous Resources.

These activities aim to contribute to the definition of future strategies for attracting and settling people in lower or low density territories, as well as to the valorization and dissemination of local rural heritage, both material and intangible.

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previous page: AtelierDisplay

Angelos Varvarousis and Penny Koutrolikou

DEGROWTH AND THE CITY

The degrowth hypothesis posits that a radical, multiscalar reorganization of society is needed in order to achieve a drastic reduction in resource and energy consumption, and therefore remain within the planetary boundaries. Moreover, advocates of this hypothesis suggest that such a shift is not only necessary, but also desirable and possible. Degrowth started in France in the early 2000s as an activist slogan against consumerism and commodification, but has since evolved into both a subject of academic inquiry and an international social movement. Degrowth now operates as a starting point for envisaging new worlds that can provide better lives with less, in which sustainability goes hand in hand with equity and a pluriverse of alternatives substitutes the growth 'machine' that characterizes contemporary society.

Against this background, a series of innovative research agendas have been developed to support this hypothesis. Degrowth was first developed alongside the field of ecological economics, but its recent expanded agenda involves research in the fields of political ecology and environmental justice, anthropology, technology, philosophy, wellbeing, democracy, justice, and more. However, in a world that has been and is still being increasingly urbanized, degrowth has largely neglected the topic of urbanization. Its scholarship should thus develop theoretical and practical proposals in an effort to rethink what degrowth means as an urban form of life. Such a theoretical endeavor is urgent today since the global population has rapidly grown, the biggest part of which lives in cities; increasing GDP levels being produced in cities has tied economic

growth to urban expansion; and the ecological footprint of the cities has grown to become the main drivers of unsustainability. Most importantly, this growth has not been distributed evenly and has produced high levels of marginalization both in urban centers and the periphery. Against this background the following questions are crucial:

How can urbanization be compatible with degrowth? How can cities become places of experimentation that challenge and transcend the growth imperative? What is the role of architecture and urban planning in this process? How can urban dwellers contribute? What is the role of urban governance?

The existing literature on these complex and, perhaps for the moment, rhetorical questions is marginal and primarily focused on the case of shrinking cities; cities that have undergone a crisis of production and GDP reduction, and which managed to constructively adapt to this new reality. Despite the importance of these studies, the exploration of the relation between degrowth and the city is still underdeveloped. In order to envisage a tentative framework for thought and reflection on this topic, it is first crucial to examine the relation between growth and the current predominant model of urbanization.

The Urban Growth Imperative

Cities have been pivotal for the development of societies all around the world. In the last decades of the 20th century, they have gained further prominence and, often, became the signifiers of a country's identity and wealth. In a continuously globalizing and antagonistic world, cities became the epitome of the 'successes' or 'failures' of a country, and en-tered into competition for attracting human, cultural, tourist, and financial capital; themselves often becoming a commodity to be marketed and sold.

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These transformations, which have rapidly intensified since the 1970s, reflect not only economic and technological changes, but also the prominence and embeddedness of a particular 'culture' of growth connected to neoliberal ideas and practices. Thus growth has become associated with unlimited expansion and profit-making, with minimal care for the repercussions to people and places. This particular imaginary – and reality – of growth involves the idea that limits (to growth) are inherently negative, and that limitations are 'backwards' and out-of-context with the continuous demand for growth (and consumption) that 'people desire and require.' In some respect, the arguments supporting this culture of

> Thus growth has become associated with unlimited expansion and profit-making, with minimal care for the repercussions to people and places.

growth have worked as a further legitimation for the neoliberal project itself. Hence, urbanization has been linked to omnipotent beliefs such as that more urbanization leads to more prosperity for more people, or that 'greening' cities can become a prominent strategy for saving their ecosystems. Alongside these particular ideas of growth is the ideal of a competitive, self-reliant, and 'expansive' individual whose identity and status is shaped by these characteristics as well as what it possesses and what it consumes; by potentially unlimited having and possessing.

Cities have been the terrain where this culture of growth has been materialized, in actual as well as in symbolic terms. Among other ways, growth has been spatialized through increasing privatizations, enclosures, and departmentalization of the city into enclaves of regulated consumption, as well as through real estate speculation and the financialization of land and housing. It has been manifested by fancy office buildings, designer architecture of urban landmarks, and demand for ever bigger houses in city centers and the suburbs. While the spatializa-

tion of this growth imperative has resulted in increasing displacement and forms of exclusion from urban space and urban life as whole, it has also led to unlimited urbanization – by choice for the wealthier or by coercion for the poorer – and to the limitless use of resources. It has intensified practices of repression and mechanisms of control while exacerbating inequalities and injustices. In short, the model of economic growth and the culture that follows it has operated more as an amplifier of spatial and social injustices in the urban context than a means to mitigate them.

Architecture, if seen not only as a profession but as a set of intellectual and social practices and relations for the shaping of space and place, has played an important role in linking urbanization to the particular growth imperative, being tightly connected to both city branding and the entrepreneurial conception of the self as it is.

The architecture that is expressed by signature buildings and large-scale corporate developments has often been employed in – or consciously facilitated – the promotion, mainstreaming, or even celebration of growth-fueled worldviews. This architecture produced spaces exclusive to many, with costly, resource-demanding materials and construction techniques, and often involving highly exploitative labor relations with its workers. This approach reduces architecture into an act of design for the sake of design that is removed from the social and environmental. Conversely, growth-fueled architecture also entails extensive housing production for the less wealthy with unsustainable materials and a reduced building life-cycle, thus also resulting in greater resource consumption with inferior quality of living.

However, there is also a different side to architecture than this – or at least one that aspires to be. Numerous voices have criticized both the maximum-profit driven developments and the use of signature-buildings. Even more so, numerous other architectural initiatives have worked on local, community/common and participatory projects, advocating

through theory and praxis that another architectural rationality does and can exist. In the center of Athens, for instance, a former parking lot was transformed into an inclusive green park through the working together of residents, architects, activists, botanists, and other interested people (albeit not without conflicts with the state). Similarly, in the outskirts of Barcelona, residents, architects, users, and many other people successfully collaborated in order to redesign and re-construct the surrounding space of a former leper hospital and current well-known squat.

Therefore, architecture may also play an important role in destabilizing and finally countering this one-dimensional relation. The question that then emerges is: what kind of architecture and urbanism can contribute to the transition towards a city of degrowth, having social, spatial and environmental justice in mind? How can we create a new inspirational counter-narrative that also considers how urbanization and urban life takes place? How can we imagine cities and urban life without this (neo-liberal) culture of growth that has dominated the past decades?

Towards a City of Degrowth

There are multiple lines to develop a degrowth framework relevant for the contemporary city. Ecological economics, for instance, proposes that not every natural resource should be monetized or valorized in terms of exchange value, since there are resources that can be regarded as indispensable for the (re)production of human (and nonhuman) and social life. Although numerous activists and theorists have voiced similar views concerning the urban, this approach has remained mostly connected to natural assets. As a starting point, we could think of transferring and applying this approach to cities, which might prevent certain urban resources from being commodified or sold off. In this sense, public spaces would remain public, as do a number of other resources (such as water, energy, etc).

This logic could also be expanded to common resources; resources that could be produced and/or organized by residents, thus giving rise to a diverse landscape of institutions that could be molded and remolded in order to reflect the changing and plural needs of the multiple groups that use them. Although the terms 'commons' and 'public' are often used interchangeably, urban commons emerge and thrive in the interstices of law and outside the binary dichotomy between public and private. It is exactly this co-fertilization of the commons with the principles of degrowth that can give new meaning to the reorganization of urban space. Cities are not only where the culture of growth is materialized, but also privileged terrains for the flourishing of commoning practices that prioritize use values and collective creation over exchange values and commodification.

Housing is pivotal in this line of thinking. Unlimited speculation in housing has resulted in numerous evictions, displacements, exclusions, and in the development of a peri-urban urbanization that consumes both natural resources and agricultural lands. Thus, housing should be treated as an urban resource – be that public, common, or otherwise organized.

Such an approach doesn't only concern housing but other public infra-structures that could also be considered as urban resources (such as education, health, etc). This is particularly pertinent for today's cities that suffer economically while treating housing, public infrastructure, and other resources as a means for economic recovery and growth through speculation. Architecture could thus facilitate the optimization of the use of buildings without resulting in the reproduction of sameness or in "glossy distinctiveness."

As degrowth has its roots in ecological approaches, one could envisage a "degrowth city" as a field of experimentation with innovative forms of urban agricultural production, with widespread connections with the peripheries of the same bio-region. As part of efforts to transform the whole urban fabric into a broader food production ecosystem, local food

networks that directly connect producers to consumers, urban gardens, green terraces, and vertical indoor and outdoor food production can have both material and symbolic impact in the ways urban dwellers live, produce, and connect to each other.

Since unbridled consumption is at the core of the present culture of growth, challenging and changing such material and symbolic aspects of consumption is central to thinking about a city of degrowth. Diverse consumption patterns that reflect personal and cultural differentiations can exist and correspond to the bioregional profile of the broader area of the city. Degrowth implies a politicization of consumption, since every choice implies a simultaneous acceptance of certain limitations and a specific consciousness regarding the special characteristics of bio-regions. In this way, bio-regional differentiations are not necessarily considered as negatives that have to be resolved though imports. On the contrary, they can be treated as assets that form the basis of urban and regional diversification. Rather than homogenous patterns of consumption which end up in uneven and unjust impacts (and development), this might result in plural cities and regions.

Architecture is not a profession that is disentangled from the rest of social life and therefore is not only the responsibility of architects to envision and implement. If seen as a set of intellectual and social practices and relations for the shaping of space and place, then the question arises of who should participate in the architectural design? To this extent, a degrowth city incorporates forms of collective and/or participatory architecture at various levels; from the micro level of the communal building to the neighborhood and even the metropolitan level.

A degrowth city is not a utopian dream or a nostalgic reverie of a previous era. Instead, it would be a city that acknowledges the global character of the contemporary world and which tries to limit some of its most harmful social and environmental aspects in order to allow spaces for new connections and patterns of common life to emerge. A city of de-

growth would thus also be one that invents ways to welcome newcomers and allow mobility.

The idea of a city of degrowth does not attempt to homogenize, but rather focus on inclusiveness. Heterogeneity and plurality are not contrary to the values of equity, living together and effective sharing of the resources. Difference and plurality are inherent and essential for cities and therefore diverse spatial and social articulations are intrinsic in the production of a city of degrowth. They are also vital for the way such an idea of a city could be governed; possibly through local institutions and assemblies that try to combine forms of direct and delegative democracy.

Rather than developing rigid thought-images that demand people to conform to them, a flexible and inclusive socio-spatial imaginary about a city of degrowth would be more helpful; an open and inspirational urban narrative. These preliminary questions aim not to function as a complete narrative, but rather pave the way for such a broader socio-ecological transformation.

Angelos Varvarousis

Angelos Varvarousis is an urban planner and researcher based in Athens and Barcelona, whose work revolves around the topics of degrowth, the commons, solidarity economies, self-organization, migration and alternative lifestyles. He is also an activist, musician, dancer, and carpenter.

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WOW Cowork

WOW – Work On Wood by FINSA is a multipurpose and coworking space in Porto (Portugal) where creative individuals, architects, designers, engineers, industrials and students can gather and share a common interest – the imaginative universe of wood.

WOW is an innovative concept that combines all its areas and becomes a bridge between an industrial company and the creative community through knowledge, and networking, with dynamism as the central part of the project's DNA, with diverse initiatives for the community for enriching experiences.

www.wowbyfinsa.com

José Andrés Arias Pampín

previous page: Can Masdeu

Taru Elfving

TIME TO TAKE TIME TO GET GROUNDED

"There cannot be such thing as an irrelevant background in an ecological worldview."[1]

The wavering grounds of my writing may be a place to start here. These thoughts arise from a long-term engagement with and (in) frequent visits over the years to an island in an archipelago in a small sea. The land gradually rises here, half a meter in a hundred years, as it has done since the retreat of the glaciers at the end of the last ice age. The brackish water, meanwhile, is decreasing in salinity due to the increase in rainfall. At the moment, the salt content in the archipelago sea is approximately the same as that of human tears. Whether the global sea level rise will catch up with the glacial rebound here and bring more salt with it to these estuarine waters, no data modeling can tell us yet for sure. The slowly shifting shoreline of the island, and the surrounding marine life struggling to adapt their fluid embodiment to the rapidly transforming watery world of theirs, are constant reminders of the uncertainty of the trembling grounds – of our work and ourselves, communities and ecosystems – at the time of ecological crisis.

The Covid-19 pandemic has forced globally many, who have the privilege to do so, to withdraw to literal and metaphorical islands. It appears now more urgent than ever to reassess the circulations that make our work in the arts, and our very existence, possible. Virtual connections have become indispensable, questioning the arts' relatively recent addiction to cheap flights across the globe. Feet firmly on the ground again, yet our work mostly in the cloud, the question remains as to what exists in between and beyond the nodes of connections in the ever-expanding and furiously productive networks. It may be time to dig our heels and hands in the soil of our toils so as to pay closer attention to the backgrounds that used to be mere distant miniature landscapes, as viewed by the all-seeing eye framed by the plane window, and which have now disappeared under or are reduced to virtual wallpapers.

The global public health crisis is the latest reminder of the more-than-human communities, which our everyday practices both impact and depend upon. In order to critically situate professional practices in the arts today, to ground our work, it may be necessary also to refocus from backgrounds to sticky entanglements and attachments within myriad communities that we and our labors are always already part of. What if the grounds upon which our work rests, are (like) soil – heterogenous communities of diverse temporalities, where nothing is simply just dead matter? How to care for these lively grounds as "communities of kin," rather than add to the rapid depletion of the soils with extractive practices that view them merely as resources?[2]

While the pandemic has emphasized sealing and distancing in all of our everyday practices, it has likewise asserted the urgency to think and act away from detachment. The entwined climate and biodiversity crises have brought home the entanglement of the fates of all life forms. Yet how to embrace this ever-present viscous proximity of codependencies at the time of heightened fear of contagions? This question haunts here and now my ecological thinking together with a number of feminist and decolonial intellectual companions as well as myriad more-than-human others. The persistent "we," which has resisted my

attempts to erase it from the text, appears thus as a sticky concept that, I hope, performs its foundational heterogeneity and situatedness throughout the writing, insisting on collectivity while refusing universality.

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Colonialism is carried by currents in a weather-and-water world of planetary circulation, where we cannot calculate a politics of location according to stable cartographies or geometries.[3]

What does it mean to be mobile at the time of climate crisis and mass extinctions

Ceaseless planetary flows between water bodies big and small connect us all as the lungs and the arteries of life on Earth. Yet some have been able to detach themselves more than others from these intimate circulations and the effects of their disruption. Rather than acting as a great leveler, the global public health emergency has accentuated the inequalities that haunt reassessments of practices of mobility in the arts. What does it mean to be mobile at the time of climate crisis and mass extinctions, when global connectedness is accelerating the spread of disease and escalating rampant exploitation of natural and human resources alike? Who may choose to be mobile at the time of enforced migrations of human populations as well as myriad endangered species of flora and fauna, in a world of reinforced borders and protectionist policies, where both open xenophobia and toxic chemicalization has seeped uncontrollably everywhere?

Moreover, thinking about mobility today, we have to address not only water but also oil. The slick fluidity of oil is reflected in the technologically mediated existence, in what has been called "petro-subjectivity"

by Brett Bloom.[4] The culture of constant connectedness hides its colonial legacies and the underlying reality of destruction and dispossession that are the true costs of keeping the virtual clogs turning non-stop as if by magic. The inscrutability of oil, with its origins and production processes as well as myriad implications largely escaping visibility and attempts at containment, has numerous political and ecological as well as aesthetic effects, as Amitav Ghosh writes.[5] Oil has penetrated everything in our daily lives as well as all ecosystems across the globe. Microplastics, for example, can be now found in human bodies as well as in the deepest crevices of the sea bottom.

Could the pandemic really be a rupture in this ceaseless, all-pervasive flow of fossil-fuel powered linear progress towards the cliff edge of extinction – an opening for transition? Could we move away from extractive practices and the underlying *modus operandi* that the precarity in the arts, the project-funding logic and the market, together with the technologically-driven attention economy, have accelerated? Could we imagine international circulation otherwise than the standard currents and the current standards of the art world, with the help of soil and water ecosystems, where it is impossible to differentiate the ground from the various cycles of life it sustains?

*

[H]ow to inherit the layers upon layers of living and dying that infuse every place and every corridor [...].[6]

Everyday practices are in complex material and methodological ways implicated today in the extractive practices and legacies at the source of the depletion of the soils and the seas. Is the operating logic, economy, and business-as-usual in the international art world at all aligned with the critical content of much of the artwork produced, exhibited, and debated? The carbon footprint of professional activities in the arts may be small compared to some other industries, but claiming that it

therefore does not matter aligns implicitly with the arguments that marginalize the arts in the bigger societal picture. The science is clear that every sector must aim for rapid reduction of carbon footprints within the next decade. Here the responsibility must lie on institutions, and on collective and structural efforts, while everyone should have a stake in the process.

First of all, a sufficiently in-depth understanding of the complex impacts of diverse factors is needed. In support of informed decisions, it is necessary to calculate carbon footprints – such as travel, building infrastructures, energy use in technology etc. – but also to contextualize these measurements. Transition to carbon neutrality has to be tied in closely with social justice. Allocated time and resources are now urgently required for working out ecologically and socially sustainable practices and principles in every production, in each organization, and collectively in the local as well as global professional fields.

There are no blank canvases in ecological thinking. Materials and methods alike carry their own inheritances with them, bringing varying weight of meaning to our work. Where are objects found from, how and by whom? Have the previous lifeworlds and histories of the materials been acknowledged – whether minerals or lichen removed from their ecosystems, or synthetic materials with all their toxic legacies? Beyond ecological impacts, materials raise questions of the production processes and supply chains in all of their global inequalities. Perhaps the very idea of a found object or a blank canvas is a problematic heritage of (Western) modernity, which keeps on fostering the presumption of open access – for some – to materials, knowledges, ecosystems, and communities, without much attention to the protocols for gaining that access, or for figuring out who could possibly grant it.

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"The problem is not with attachment; the problem may be that some

of us, those who call themselves 'moderns,' confuse their attachments with universal obligations, and thus feel free to define themselves as 'nomads,' free to go everywhere, to enter any practical territory, to judge, deconstruct or disqualify what appears to them as illusions [...]."[7]

Myriad attachments tie us to places, communities, ecosystems. These attachments focus our attention to particular things in particular ways. They direct and ground partial perspectives. Furthermore, attachments do not merely connect but also commit. The connections and commitments bear significance that often goes unnoticed – or that becomes apparent when these attachments are ignored, as Isabelle Stengers argues.[8]

Acknowledgement of attachments is the foundation of critically situated knowledge and practices. They also allow us to come together across disciplinary and other boundaries, to gather around shared matters of concern and care. Cultural, professional, discursive, collegial, and numerous other attachments enmesh in all their intimate, mundane, and contradictory materialities and meanings in every practice with far-reaching implications. In addition to attentiveness to attachments, Stengers calls for "cosmopolitics" that challenges us to assess the complex affects of practices. Decisions should be made in the presence of all those affected, she argues, also beyond human communities.[9]

The heterogeneity of communities thus invited to gather around the table shakes the grounds and bounds of linear coordinates of time and space within which the modern capitalist worldview and sense of self is fixed. This reality is measurable and standardized in a hegemonic relation between humans and nature, whereas individual self-management and self-ownership "is assumed to be the fundamental social relation," Silvia Federici argues.[10] As the climate crisis now reveals the world to be unpredictable in its changes – although certainly not without warn-

ing – the order built on standards is being undone. This is a crisis also of culture, as Ghosh writes.[11]

How can art, whose canons and criteria of quality have been aligned with the Western bourgeois views and values, respond to the challenge the burning world presents today? As the faults and biases of this worldview are now spectacularly exposed, transformative work is necessary not only on the level of critical content but also deep in its foundations. Yet how to make sense of the temporally and spatially unequally distributed codependencies – whether in the dispersed causalities of global capitalism, or the accelerated manifold feedback loops between local ecosystems and planetary ecological transformations. To sense and to make sense of the out of order, which does not fit into the standards, demands return to fieldwork.

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The capacity to read the elements, to discover the medical properties of plants and flowers, to gain sustenance from the earth, to live in woods and forests, to be guided by the stars and winds on the roads and the seas was and remains a source of 'autonomy' that had to be destroyed. The development of capitalist industrial technology has been built on that loss and has amplified it.[12]

Autonomy based on situated knowledge and embedded practices in specific environments has been replaced not only with tools offered by technology and science, but also with diverse symbolic freedoms, which I would argue include the arts' illusory independence from ecological material boundaries. To reground practices in the arts calls for rethinking of the freedom of the arts, perhaps not so much as autonomy but as open potentiality. The singularity of the field of art may lie in its porous boundaries and capacity to inhabit gaps between knowledges in the face of the many unknowns. This draws to the fore an urgent demand for ethics to guide us on these uncertain grounds of

a field-in-formation.

Could this field be approached in its materialities and meanings as the soils, never simply singular, that nurture art work? What if these soils are depleted by monocultural plantations, like the planetary agricultural lands. How to work against the depletion of our field and soils? This requires careful attentiveness to the diverse temporalities in each particular place and the complex feedback loops between places, which our practices are also part of. Being grounded or rooted does not simply equal stability. Situated knowledges and embedded practices in all their partiality can thus be foundational for planetary perspectives.[13]

"[H]ow the universalizing figure of the Anthropocene might be grounded by engaging specific places (…) demands a multiscalar method of telescoping between space (planet) and place (island) in a dialectic or "tidalectic" way to see how they mutually inform each other."[14]

Writing from the critically situated perspective of postcolonial islands, Elizabeth DeLoughrey argues for the need to mediate between vastly different yet intricately interwoven scales. Zooming and diving into divergent temporal rhythms and situated knowledges challenges the universalising point of view that would erase some of them as incompatible. This multiscalar approach resonates with the demand by the Zapatista for "a world in which many worlds fit," referenced by Mario Blaser and Marisol de la Cadena, who call for a pluriverse as "a political ecology of practices." They propose "the uncommons as the heterogenous grounds where negotiations take place toward a commons that would be a continuous achievement."[15]

While virtual connections allow unprecedented capacity to share situated knowledges and form alliances across the globe, what is lost beyond the reach of the heads in the cloud? How are viewpoints framed, which senses and modes of engagement are prioritized? How do communities become detached bubbles, rather than many worlds in

a shared world? How can collectivity outweigh isolation? What disappears into the voids in between the nodes of connections? The lines between are, after all, literal cables cutting through the seabeds and 5G masts that promise ever more speed for the busy Global North. Meanwhile the escalating energy use and ecosystem disruptions by these infrastructures are still rarely acknowledged. The recycling of rare earth minerals essential for digital technologies mostly means cocktails of chemicals and burning mounts of e-waste in the Global South. Mining is expanding, creeping across the borders of nature reserves and indigenous territories as well as to the largely unknown ecosystems of the deep sea. The next step appears to be the star wars on minerals in outer space. Yet these minerals in themselves are not merely dead matter either, but rather a part of astonishingly diverse multispecies communities and cosmologies.

How are our practices aligned with the tempo and spatial organization of this order of things that continues the colonial practice of *terra nullius*? How to shift gears from looting to rooting? What is the potential already built into our practices to commit to differing temporalities and continuities, while being firmly grounded in specific contexts, communities, and ecosystems?

*

Care is not one way; the cared for coforms the carer too.[16]

How to make space for the heterogenous grounds and take time necessary for the continuous negotiations between worlds? Considerably closer attention needs to be paid to how divergent locally embedded practices can be brought together so as to navigate between places and the planetary. This requires longer-term commitments on all levels. Less may well be more when done slower. Yet slowing should not be understood within a linear progressive framework. More emphasis – also in budgeting and communications – on process and practices,

dialogue and collaborations, research and reassessment, rather than solely on outcomes, can allow the time it takes to do things with care, rather than following predetermined productionist timelines. The role of audiences may also be developed towards different durations of collaboration and participation rather than consumerist spectatorship.

A heterogeneity of situated knowledges should be acknowledged and their dialogue nurtured in all the operations as well as in the structures of organizations

Stronger alliances and collective approaches can work against cut-throat competitiveness, while it is paramount to carefully credit and compensate fairly for all the re/productive labor involved in the processes and supply chains of all the activities. A heterogeneity of situated knowledges should be acknowledged and their dialogue nurtured in all the operations as well as in the structures of organizations. While not doing away with exhibition and dedicated spaces for art, they could rather be opened up for differing processes and modes of engagement so as to nurture their very potential to become active civic spaces – or, even the "uncommons." Meanwhile, experimentation with all kinds of settings, sites, and situations may further resonate with the plurality of situated temporalities of the natural-cultural communities in question.

When gathering around shared concerns and matters of care, it is crucial to also ask, what is the value generated and for whom? How to keep resources – human, material, intellectual – in sustainable circulation within and for the multispecies communities they are sourced from, locally and across the globe? Or, how do we work with them not so much as resources but as re/producers? As Puig de la Bellacasa writes about soil, the community not only is the lively soil, but it actively makes it. Following her argument, to begin to re/learn to collaborate with and as part of the cycles of the soil(s) "as a mode of relational involvement required by ecological care," we could turn to permaculture, where the

first step is a step back from interventions to take time for immersed observation.[17]

To care well, situated knowledge is necessary. Yet the interlaced planetary currents of connectedness in the present also call for recognition of a multitude of differing attachments and tempos. This is a time for reparations, not only preparations, for the future. No fleeting contacts in oil-fuelled flows will suffice here. Rather, other modes of ecologically and socially just circulation have to be re-established. In the end, no borders, distancing measures or purification processes will work. Circulations as well as contagions are foundational for life. They only turn deadly when the balance in the mesh of relations, from the microscopic to the planetary scales, goes awry.

Taru Elfving

Taru Elfving is a curator and writer based in Helsinki. Her practice focuses on site-sensitive investigations at the intersections of ecological, feminist, and decolonial thought. As director of CAA Contemporary Art Archipelago, she has developed the multidisciplinary research platform "Specters in Change" in collaboration with the Archipelago Sea Research Institute on the island of Seili in Finland. Her curatorial projects include *Earth Rights* (Kunsthalle Turku, 2019); *Politics of Paradise* (Tallinn Art Hall, 2019); *Beyond Telepathy* (Somerset House Studios, 2017); *Hours, Years, Aeons* (Finnish Pavilion, Venice Biennale, 2015); *Frontiers in Retreat* (HIAP, 2013–18); Contemporary Art Archipelago (Turku 2011 European Capital of Culture); and *Towards a Future Present* (LIAF, 2008). She has co-edited publications such as *Contemporary Artist Residencies* (Valiz, 2019), and *Altern Ecologies* (Frame, 2016).

Departing from the inequalities in mobility and the destructive consequences of extractive practices brought forward in recent years, **Taru Elfving** (Helsinki) questions the role of the arts in addressing these issues. In her text, Elfving proposes a shift of focus towards art practices that are ecologically responsive and go beyond critical content. Elfving emphasizes the need for transformative (artistic) work that acknowledges the interconnectedness between places, communities, and ecosystems, and is informed by a cosmopolitical, multiscalar approach involving all affected parties.

Notes

1. María Puig de la Bellacasa, "Ecological Thinking, Material Spirituality and the Poetics of Infra-structure," in *Boundary Objects and Beyond: Working with Leigh Star*, ed. Geoffrey C. Bowker, Stefan Timmermans, Adele E. Clarke, and Ellen Balka (Cambridge, MA & London: MIT Press, 2016), 47–68.

2. María Puig de la Bellacasa, *Matters of Care: Speculative Ethics in More Than Human Worlds* (Minneapolis & London: University of Minnesota Press, 2017), 168.

3. Astrida Neimanis, *Bodies of Water: Posthuman Feminist Phenomenology* (Sydney: Bloomsbury, 2017), 36.

4. Brett Bloom, *Petro-Subjectivity: De-Industrializing Our Sense of Self* (Ft. Wayne, IN: Breakdown Break Down Press, 2015).

5. Amitav Ghosh, *The Great Derangement: Climate Change and the Unthinkable* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2016), 74.

6. Donna Haraway, *Staying with the Trouble: Making Kin in the Chthulucene* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2016), 138.

7. Isabelle Stengers, "Introductory Notes on an Ecology of Practices," *Cultural Studies Review* 11, no. 1 (2005): 191.

8. *Ibid*., 191.

9. Isabelle Stengers, *Another Science is Possible: A Manifesto for Slow Science* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2018), 152.

10. Silvia Federici, *Caliban and the Witch: Women, the Body, and Primitive Accumulation* (Brooklyn: Autonomedia, 2014), 143–9.

11. Ghosh, *op.cit.*, 9.

12. Silvia Federici, *Re-Enchanting the World: Feminism and the Politics of the Commons* (Oakland: PM Press, 2019), 191.

13. The notions of situated knowledge and partial perspective refer indirectly to Donna Haraway's seminal text. See: Donna Haraway, "Situated Knowledges: The Science Question in Feminism and the Privilege of Partial Perspective," *Feminist Studies* 14, no. 3 (1988): 575–99.

14. Elizabeth DeLoughrey, *Allegories of the Anthropocene* (Durham & London: Duke University Press, 2019), 2.

15. Mario Blaser and Marisol de la Cadena, *A World of Many Worlds* (Durham & London: Duke University Press, 2018), 4, 19.

16. Puig de la Bellacasa (2017), *op. cit.*, 219.

17. *Ibid*., 189, 201.

DINAMO10 entrance

DINAMO10

DINAMO10 is a Creative Hub from Viana do Castelo (Portugal), focused on exploring new models of innovation through cultural and creative industries. Grounded on the concept of collaborative work, they're constantly looking for new ways to establish a daily routine that enhances knowledge and idea sharing, wellbeing, productivity, and a networking effect among creative professionals. Besides the shared workspace (coworking), a multidisciplinary workforce aims to deliver value to the private and public sector, providing integrated and cross-sectorial solutions through consultancy services.

www.dinamo10.net

Joana Carvalho

previous page: Plankton, 2020, photograph by Jussi Virrkumaa

THE CASE OF XYZ OPEN CITY

In 1994 a non-commercial exhibition lab was initiated in Nørre Farimags-gade 55, Copenhagen, and this collaboration set stage for a new artist group called N55. One of the members, ion Sørvin is an internationally acclaimed artist, and a self-proclaimed 'closet architect'. He works with art as a part of everyday life and insists on challenging conventional notions of art, design, architecture and politics. "It is quite simple: Either we learn how to share knowledge and resources in a fair way or we will destroy ourselves and the planet. Our current activities are totally ruining the earth's biosphere. Environmental sustainability is only possible in a more just world where social sustainability is the core of the future societies. To understand language at the most basic level, and hereby logic and logical relations, is probably our best chance to find new ways of living together in a better way. This will enable us to leave a liveable planet for our children and future generations".

The N55 projects are based on the concept that we all are useful idiots, since we rely on a democratic society despite the fact, that our cities are monuments of injustice and unfairness. Capitalism and the institutional forces behind it rules. Large concentrations of power make the decisions that shape our behaviour, and our lives in general. Our cities act as parasites on the planet's resources and environment. The exploitation is staged and controlled by large concentrations of power. The N55 believe that if we don't take this seriously, we will end up destroying the planet for our children to inherit.

Introduction:

XYZ OPEN CITY is an open source, modular, low cost system that persons in local communities can use as a tool to implement a wide range of shared functions in public space. The XYZ OPEN CITY system can be used to build anything from urban gardens to fully functional insulated housing. Building materials can be new or recycled. XYZ OPEN CITY constructions can be dedicated to a specific purpose like for example an OPEN POWER STATION based on solar panels and/ or wind turbines or it can form multifunctional buildings providing a variety of facilities. It can also be used to construct new infrastructure like bridges, etc. With XYZ OPEN CITY N55 proposes to share things in public space as an alternative to state or private ownership and hereby to establish new commons. XYZ OPEN CITY can plug into existing infrastructure and change the functions of existing buildings, indoors or outdoors, or it can be used to build a new city from scratch. When the system is implemented in an area, it can grow in relation to local needs and wishes. The XYZ OPEN CITY system can be seen as a do-it-your-self urban planning tool; An alternative to the top down urban planning that dominates most cities in the world. N55 encourage persons to build their own XYZ OPEN CITIES and hereby influence their local urban environments. The single modules are so lightweight that a crowd of people can carry one each, gather up at a site and quickly create a large structure with different functions in public space

XYZ OPEN CITY is work in progress and new systems and solutions will be made available and shared at N55.dk. Please share your own XYZ OPEN CITY experiences and solutions by mailing N55 at n55@ n55.dk. The XYZ OPEN CITY by N55/ Ion Sørvin and Till Wolfer, is an open source hardware system provided under the rules of Creative Commons. (BY-NC-SA, It may not be used for commercial purposes and any use of the system must include proper credits to N55/ Ion Sørvin and Till wolfer and collaborators plus a link to N55.dk). Construction drawings of the basic cube used in the XYZ OPEN CITY system will be made available for download at N55.dk .

Construction:

The overall appearance and functions of the XYZ OPEN CITY are determined by the do-it-yourself builders. The basic cubic building blocks are identical and can be combined freely within an orthogonal system in all directions. Each module can accommodate a different function and modules can be combined to form overall functions.The building blocks themselves consists of identical struts made from locally available materials. For the prototype N55 used aluminum. XYZ OPEN CITY is based on the open source XYZ NODES construction system by N55. The XYZ NODES is a simple way of building light weight things from durable materials in a low cost way. It enables persons to build things similar to well known construction toys like Lego or Meccano, based on the principle of a few different parts used repeatedly to create an overall structure. All needed parts can be produced both manually using very basic tools or with advanced CNC technology. In this case, the structure is made from aluminum. XYZ NODES are based on rigid connections between aluminum square tubes that do not require welding. Structurally the XYZ NODES connection shares similarities with lashed joints used for example in the traditional wooden frames seen in inuit kayaks. Or rivet constructions such as airplane hulls or old ship hulls. It forms rigid corners that becomes flexible when exposed to forces that would break other joining methods like a welded joint. The XYZ NODES allows for the construction of rigid frames relying on corner connections to be build that are not necessarily triangulated for greater strength, hereby leaving a free open space inside the frame.. A number of mechanical solutions and special connections have been developed. Please have a look at various solutions here:

XYZ OPEN CITY PROTOTYPE:

N55 was invited as a guest teacher at the Academy Minerva, School for Fine Art, Design and Pop Culture in Groningen in the Netherlands in 2013. Together with teachers and students from the Minerva Academy, N55 have produced a prototype of XYZ OPEN CITY for the Energize Festival.

BACKGROUND:

We find ourselves in a situation where large concentrations of power determines the layout of our urban environments in most places in the world. Most architects, urban planners, designers, artists etc are more than willing to work for these concentrations of power despite the fact that these concentrations of power do not necessarily respect the rights of persons: Concentrations of power do not always respect the rights of persons. If one denies this fact one gets: concentrations of power always respect the rights of persons. This does not correspond with our experiences. Concentrations of power characterize our society. Concentrations of power force persons to concentrate on participating in competition and power games, in order to create a social position for themselves. Concurrent with the concentrations of power dominating our conscious mind and being decisive to our situations, the significance of our fellow humans diminishes. And our own significance becomes the significance we have for concentrations of power, the growth of concentrations of power, and the conflicts of concentrations of power. It is clear that persons should be consciously aware of the rights of persons and therefore must seek to organize the smallest concentrations of power possible. This is also the case when it comes to urban planning. N55 suggests that we find a different approach to urban planning and take into consideration what is right and wrong. Intelligent urban design would require the design of systems which adjust themselves to the persons who live in them and to their needs. Unlike a top-down master plan, such systems gradually dissolve themselves as the inhabitants take over and transform their city according to their needs and desires. Based on collaboration, cooperation and diversity, intelligent cities acknowledge that we are social beings needing space for being different. It is possible to let the growth of the city be framed by simple rules, which allows people to freely develop their own environments and systems. N55 propose a critical approach to city design by daring to give the inhabitants real and meaningful influence on the form and function of their city, and by using friendly technologies, which allows our urban environment to exist in symbiosis with our planet rather than as a parasite. The XYZ OPEN CITY can be seen as part of N55's

ongoing research aiming to find new ways of using public space while respecting persons and local communities. An attempt to find ways of existing with as small concentrations of power as possible

XYZ OPEN CITY POLITICS:

N55 hereby encourages persons in local communities to formulate simple and just rules that will enable the XYZ OPEN CITY to be established and developed further in compliance with local needs as well as the general societal situation. N55 suggests respecting conditions for description: logical relations and facts, as a basis for politics. Ideologies, religions, subjective opinions, social conventions, and habitual conceptions do not necessarily respect conditions for description. N55 propose that persons understand the following:

A person can be described in an infinite number of ways. None of these descriptions can be completely adequate. We therefore can not describe precisely what a person is. We do however have the possibility to point out necessary relations between persons and other factors. We have to respect these relations and factors in order not to contradict ourselves and in order to be able to talk about persons in a meaningful way. One necessary relation is the relation between persons and bodies. It makes no sense referring to a person without referring to a body. If we for example say: here we have a person, but he or she does not have a body, it does not make sense. Furthermore, there are necessary relations between persons and the rights of persons. Persons should be treated as persons and therefore as having rights. If we deny this assertion it goes wrong: here is a person, but this person should not be treated as a person, or: here is a person, who should be treated as a person, but not as having rights. Therefore we can only talk about persons in a way that makes sense if we know that persons have rights.

This leads to understanding politics on the most basic level:

The fundamental purpose of politics is to protect the rights of persons. If we deny this assertion we get: the fundamental purpose of politics is not to protect the rights of persons. This suggests that one of the basic tasks of politicians could be, for example, to renounce the rights of

themselves and of others. This has no meaning. Or that there is a more important purpose to politics which does not have anything to do with persons and therefore also has nothing to do with the rights of persons. That is plain nonsense. Therefore, we now know that the basic purpose of politics is to protect the rights of persons. In other words we can not talk about politics in a way that makes sense without the assumption that the fundamental purpose of politics is to protect the rights of persons.

Examples of potential functions that could be integrated in
XYZ OPEN CITY:

OPEN HOME
(basic functions for a home (eat, sleep, shit) for any person to use.)
OPEN FACTORY
(local production facilities)

OPEN POWER STATION
(harvesting energy from the local environment and distributing it for free for all persons to use)

OPEN URBAN GARDENS
(local food production)

OPEN BAR
(free bar based on sharing stuff with others)

OPEN KITCHEN
(cooking facilities for any person to use)

OPEN BAKERY
(baking ovens etc for any person to use)

OPEN BRIDGE
(structural construction to establish access)

OPEN THEATER
(a stage for any person to use for plays, concerts movies, talks, meetings etc.)

By N55/ Ion Sørvin and Till Wolfer

N55

In 1996, a number of persons started living together in an apartment located in the center of Copenhagen, trying to "rebuild the city from within" and using their everyday life situation as a platform for public events and collaborations. In the year 2000 FLOATING PLATFORM and N55 SPACEFRAME were constructed in the harbour area. N55 SPACEFRAME served as a starting point for local initiatives and interventions, a workspace and living space until 2003 when two of the participants left N55. In 2005 co-founder of N55 Ingvil Aarbakke dies, but N55 continues their activities locally and elsewhere in collaboration with various persons. Currently the N55 studio is situated in Burmeistergade 10,1429 kbh k, Copenhagen, Demark.

N55 works with art etc. as a part of everyday life.

N55 is a platform for people who want to work together, share places to live, economy, and means of production.

N55 is based both in Copenhagen, and in LAND

N55 has its own means of production and distribution.

Manuals for N55 things are published at www.N55.dk and in the N55 periodical.

N55 productions are implemented in various situations around the world, initiated by N55 or in collaboration with different persons and institutions.

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shared workspace (coworking), a mul-
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value to the private and public sector,
providing integrated and cross-sec-
torial solutions through consultancy
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Agustín Jamardo

Alastair Fuad-Luke

DESIGN ACTIVISM'S TELEOLOGICAL FREEDOMS AS A MEANS TO TRANSFORM OUR HABITUS

We have witnessed a 'social turn' in design over the last decade that is gathering momentum as existing and new power structures perceive 'designing' as a means to achieve their telos, goal directed purpose. I prefer to talk about the 'socialisation of design(-ing)', that is, how the 'field'[1] of design is becoming an activity that is not the sole preserve of professionally trained designers as their approaches, methodologies and processes are being adopted by other professionals, professional amateurs (pro-ams) and citizens.[2] There's a tension here between 'authorised/non-authorised designers'[3] and 'expert/diffuse design'.[4] 'Designing' here is seen as an activity geared to goals, objectives and aims within a broad societal context, as distinct from a context bounded purely by commerce, finances, politics or economics. Designing contributes to our civic political condition, elsewhere defined as 'the political'.[5]

Within this social turn we see new academic dialogues and design research activities; the rise of designers and design agencies providing services to specific clients within the societal context; and an increasing involvement of professionals and citizens who (knowingly

or unknowingly) apply design thinking, processes and approaches.[6] These dialogues have coalesced around two centres of discourse, 'design activism' and 'social design'. This essay examines the framing of these discourses, practices and their teleological orientations to raise questions about their agency and potentiality to challenge our habitus,[7] generate alternatives and create positive societal change.

New evidence has shown that language is so deeply embedded in culturally acceptable practices, it strongly influences the way we think.

The language of design activism and social design

Language is at the core of habitus, further understood as 'a structure of the mind characterised by a set of acquired schemata, sensibilities, dispositions and taste'[8] where 'schemata' are organised patterns of thought or behaviour. 'Repatterning' language is concomitant with periods of paradigm change or transition.[9] Design activism and social design are situated within the metafield of sustainability and sustainable development. They relate to Design for Sustainability (DfS), social sustainability and 'sustainism',[10] although, presently they have little alignment with more politically and philosophically radical positions such as 'sustainment'.[11] New evidence has shown that language is so deeply embedded in culturally acceptable practices, it strongly influences the way we think.[12] So, I thought I would start my inquiry by exploring the language of design activism and social design by taking published definitions and analysing them for commonality and difference.[13]

My first observation is that social design embraces a range of terminology including design for society, socially responsible design, socially responsive design, and design for social innovation, perhaps, in an attempt to sound less totalitarian and politically motivated as in 'social design' i.e. 'designing society'. Analysing the key words of the definitions, I created two 'wordles', one for design activism and the other

for social design. There are four prominent words for design activism 'change, social' then 'life, practice'. There is a hierarchy of prominent words for social design, starting with 'development, social', followed by 'socially', then 'economic, good, government, human, local, practices, providers, solutions'. The structuring of language already seems more developed in social design to the extent that it identifies certain contextual elements such as key stakeholders (government, providers), pragmatic framing (development, economic, solutions, practices) combined with moral intentions and approaches (social, socially, human, good). Activists appear in both of my wordles but, interestingly activists do not appear in three wordles recently included in a major European research

design activism is grounded in proposing, seeking and developing 'alternatives'

study, TEPSIE,[14] defining social innovation and its practices.

Further exploration of these minilexicons from these sourced definitions of design activism and social design reveals some key characteristics in specific areas of focus. In general, the main institutional and societal stakeholders are common to both design subfields, but social design specifies roles for various identified professionals – experts, facilitators, designers – with 'others', including users and 'non-designers'. For design activism the issues range across society, whereas the remit of social design seems more aligned with dominant political structures, policies, economic development and for the 'social good'. Contextually, design activism is grounded in proposing, seeking and developing 'alternatives', whereas the context of social design is driven by the agendas of the key stakeholders, especially the government, providers (of services, products, materials) and grass root innovators. The attitudes and activities of social design have an underlying pragmatism,

looking for effective outputs, capacity building and to developing capabilities and wise use of assets. In contrast, design activism reveals an ideological, experimental and more radical remit around contestation and asks, What could be? This is carried through to the outputs which strive for the means to encourage a better and different society based on new visions, beliefs, values and the forging of new 'norms' as outcomes. Social design absorbs grass roots innovations into new policies and professional practices in order to develop these innovations within the institutions. The key aim is about creating a social economy for the public and social good.

Differences in framing

This language reveals some common characteristics for design activism and social design based on prognostic framing. This framing helps identify alternatives by asking who can solve the problems and what can be done. It brings people together to participate in collective processes asking how we deal with sustainability challenges, particularly from a social sustainability perspective. However, further examination of the framing for design activism reveals some substantive differences. Design activism is not structurally coupled to economic/local/sustainable development. It contests the paradigmatic 'structural coupling', 'co-dependent affinities' and 'locked-in' 'constellations of meaning'.[15] Design activists are free to choose their focal issues and the type of power structures they work with, for or against. They are free to work with diverse communities - of practice, place, interest or circumstance - in a pluralist and agonist agenda which is shaped by participatory, not representative, democracy. Design activism is expressed in pluralistic, utopian and agonistic disruptions of habitus. The propositions are poly-teleological and aimed at diversifying our habitus. Its framing is highly motivational and a call to action(-ing). Its focus is radical change.

Social design is framed in representative democracy, entrepreneurial logic, diagnostic framing — What is the problem? Who is responsible? —, prevalent power structures, and effectiveness through neo-liberal consensualism. Social design appears more constricted as it is underpinned by a pre-defined purpose — public and social good within

a neo-liberal agenda — configured by the primary funders and driving organisations. Any alternatives it generates will only be 'scaled up' (to use a phrase gaining traction in social innovation discourse) if they align with the telos of this agenda. Consequently, it is difficult to see how it can offer more than incremental innovation to pressing social needs. Social design's latent agency is constricted by existing power relations.

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social design's latent agency is
constricted by existing power relations

It is not contesting our habitus, but seeks to effectuate society's capacity to act in the current neo-liberal paradigm of economic growth.

In contrast, design activism has significant freedoms to apply itself to re-assembling, re-association,[16] making new relations, and re-coding products, services and experiences in order to create 'alternatives' which challenge existing power structures and relations. Design activism hints at more polycentric governance and so, consequently, it is a direct challenge to the dominant power structures.

Agreement, agonism and antagonism

The teleological orientations of design activism and social design mean that consensus and dissensus tend to be applied in different ways[17]. The overall telos of social design is achieving consensus through the organisational structures, norms and practices of the key stakeholders. Dissensus tends to occur in dialogue, not in the actions or materialisations of design(-ing), and it must comply with accepted institutional cultural practices and language. Social design is, perhaps, therefore limited to expressions of 'weak agonism' because it needs agreement to effectuate change. Design activism is not bounded by such constraints and, indeed, has a history of applying practices designed to provoke (antagonise) and to create dialogue and positions of contes-

tation (agonism), but it can also encourage consensus (agreement). These practices not only involve an understanding of the problématique and the ideation of concepts, but the insertion of 'one-off' materialised designs or practices into different socio-spatial environments. Design activists can adopt the position of 'non-aligned social broker' to undertake maverick, solo or collective interventions.[18] Of course, social design applies the practice of 'prototyping' new services and other interventions, but its potential agency is restricted by its weak agonism and caution against provocation because of its underlying framing of representative democracy — it doesn't pay to antagonise the people while trying to represent and serve them. This might explain why we are seeing a proliferation of 'pop-up' designs and interventions in cities[19] that are being permitted, or at least not banned, by city municipalities because they wish to see the effects of this experimentation while not being directly responsible for it. Recently it has been observed that some of the challenging interventions made within the World Design Capital 2012, held in Helsinki, Finland, are being rapidly absorbed,-adopted and adapted by the city municipalities themselves.[20] This can be seen as socially progressive and, indeed, Helsinki City has recently appointed three 'city designers' to explore how design could better serve the citizens. Let's see how this evolves.

design activists can offer a potent contribution to developing counter-narratives, counter-dialogues and counter-actions which reframe every-day problems as possibilities.

So, the latent agency of design activism, resulting from its teleological freedoms, enables it to challenge our existing social 'material and expressive assemblages'[21] and suggest rich possibilities of re-association, re-assembly and posit new relations through design(-ing) as a

means to imagine and enact social change in everyday life practices. Gasper Mallol refers to 'design f(r)ictions' as micro-situations of dissent.[22] 'Fictions' should be understood as projections, and 'frictions' as irritations, 'in order to fabulate the commonplace'. Her word 'commonplace' can be translated as meaning ubiquitous social material assemblies which we share and encounter every day. I believe design activists can offer a potent contribution to developing counter-narratives, counter-dialogues and counter-actions which reframe everyday problems as possibilities.

Let me demonstrate this sense of agency with some existing examples contesting how we design in public space. Initiated and designed by Zones Urbaines Sensibles (ZUS),[23] Luchtsingel is a 350 metre pedestrian bridge which re-connects Rotterdam Central District with the Hofbogen in Rotterdam, the Netherlands. The project is phased over several years, but the first phase was completed in 2012 as part of a wider programme called I Make Rotterdam, an initiative of the International Architecture Biennale Rotterdam to explore more participatory ways of city-making. Luchtsingel attracted 1300 participants who crowd funded the construction, with each contributor's name appearing on planks or components of the wooden bridge. Involvement and consensus are at the heart of this project, but is an action intended to positively disrupt the local environs.

My second case study involves the French direct-action architectural organisation called Collectif Etc,[24] formed in 2009. Their projects are numerous, but all involve engaging professionals and citizens in challenging the vertical power structures of contemporary urban space and its planning. They express themselves through the construction of built interventions, street furniture, organisation of meetings and conferences, training workshops, or more artistic interventions (display devices, sculptures, installations). In 2012, they organised the 'Detour de France' along the theme of 'the civic fabric of the city', where a group of architects cycled around the country dropping into communities and co-building interventions in public space. These were consensual yet agonist, because they raised serious questions about the legal, civic and other issues of public space. Most interventions were

part of on-going projects by existing organisations. For example, the building of a public picnic bench in bamboo and wood in Le Jardin de Ma Soeur/The Garden of My Sister on wasteland in Bordeaux. Collectif Etc, members of the garden, a local social group, young people, the Directorate of Parks, Gardens and Rivers and local inhabitants co-built the bench. The reclamation of mine wasteland in the city of Darcy, Les Beaux Monts D'Henin – Les Saprophytes, where the site was directly occupied and the local community galvanised to action under the project title On the Moon. Geodesic buildings and a stairway-come-slide-come-rocket launcher were installed and special community events arranged. They created new perceptions and possibilities for the inhabitants, while raising debate about the near-future planning for these types of civic places that the municipalities have insufficient resources to develop in conventional ways.

A more antagonistic stance is taken by Santiago Cirugeda with his Recetas Urbanas project challenging building and planning regulations, and Michael Rakowitz focusing on the homeless in Parasites. Recetas Urbanas (Urban Recipes) offers a series of downloadable blueprints for making additions and alterations to housing in urban situations that fall within a grey legal/illegal boundary, prompting reaction, debate and contestation. PARAsites is a series of inflatable shelters for homeless people which Rakowitz designed using transparent or translucent plastic. They could be fixed to any Heating and Ventilation System, using the waste air from public or corporate buildings. Of course, both interventions are also richly agonist in how they bring attention to issues through what Thomas Markussen calls the 'disruptive aesthetics of design activism'.[25]

The agency displayed in these case studies of design activism invokes a range of consensual and dissensual activities, at times invoking agreement, agonism and antagonism, but always consistent in the presentation of counter-narratives, counter-dialogues and counter-actions.

Urgent areas of inquiry for design activism

I think the teleological freedoms of design activism give it licence to

explore and probe areas of inquiry that social design might find difficult to go to. For example, we need much more discourse on re-establishing more symbiotic relationships with nature, a 'sympoiesis'.[26] Perhaps, the emergence of 'bio design' as a sub-field[27] of design provides some focus here, although we should be careful to differentiate between design activists and designers working within the ethical constraints of the technologists and scientists. Better ways of living with nature are especially important as population experts predict that up to 60% of people will live in cities by 2030 and 70% by 2050[28] continuing the urbanisation trend of the last 300 years and further distancing us from experiencing a natural, as opposed to a 'human-made' environment. As Jane Bennett pointed out in her book Vibrant Matter,[29] a more holistic view of materialisation and removal of binary divisions such as human/nature, living/non-living might help us rethink what it means to sustain our lives and build resilient eco-systems, now and in the future. Design activists are certainly questioning how we can and might have to re-relate with food and its production.[30] Those exploring energy generation and conservation, medicine and architecture are challenging our relations with living components. We also know, from recent events in the global economy, that the vast majority of wealth generated during the recovery of national economies is going to the already wealthy people while ordinary citizens' assets and financial prospects are diminishing.[31] Such inequality reveals a serious structural imbalance in governance and fiscal mechanisms. In southern Europe, hit hard by the economic crash of 2008/9, we are witnessing a surge of alternative, often non-monetary, exchange systems, such as time banks, community initiatives and local 'transition' currencies.[32] These are, perhaps, reflex responses to economic systems that are failing large numbers of people. They involve different forms of exchange, sharing, cooperation and mutualism based on new relationships. This re-relationing is underpinned with emergent new values. We should be raising questions as design activists as to how we can help with these processes — how can we contribute to the growth of 'alternative economies' and developing Our Commons,[33] or what Elinor Ostrom, in 1990, defined as our 'common-pool resources'.[34] We have some emerging signals from the

open design movement,[35] from the activities of architects seeking new forms of spatial agency,[36] and from the contributors in this book, as to the direction our investigations, provocations and collective actions can take. Those applying design(-ing) need to be cognisant with how they can contribute to alternative models of enterprise which embed equity in the relationships between the stakeholders, human and non-human. They also have to be aware that language and actions of the activists are easily appropriated by neo-liberal forces, so it is essential that design activists are seen as a non-aligned social broker, independent of political power structures and capable of contributing to a positive culture of dissensus.[37] This raises questions of how design activists might encourage people to participate in the discourse and acts of dissent. Yanki Lee sees Participatory Design (PD) as being firmly linked with present day meanings of innovation, but Design Participation (DP) as 'a way of thinking about design' and its wider roles in society.[38] She states that DP can be understood as 'paralogy', explained by the philosopher, sociologist and literary theorist Jean-Francois Lyotard as 'Paralogy must be distinguished from innovation: the latter is under the command of the system, or at least used by it to improve its efficiency; the former is a move (the importance of which is not recognised until later) played in the pragmatics of knowledge. The stronger the 'move'; the more likely it is to be denied the minimum consensus, precisely

a central tenet of design activism is that it simultaneously addresses societal issues of concern while changing the essence of what it means to design

because it changes the rules of the game upon which the consensus has been based.' This suggests design activism is paralogic and that social design is tied to efficacious, incremental innovation that leaves the command of the system intact.

While I have positioned design activism as having teleological free-

doms beyond that of the current remit of social design, the activist will undoubtedly find actors and stakeholders from both arenas which he/she can help to smartly recombine existing resources towards designing preferred situations.[39] However, for me, a central tenet of design activism is that it simultaneously addresses societal issues of concern while changing the essence of what it means to design. These mutual activities will help answer Tomás Maldonado's call for design to develop a lucid critical social and ecological consciousness to address contingent realities.[40] He made this call forty years ago. It is time that the design activists made their 'moves' to create a critical mass to positively disrupt our habitus.

Alastair Fuad-Luke

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Notes

1 I use the term 'field' here to denote a 'field of study' with its own body and theory of knowledge, definitions, language, cultural conventions and way of knowing and validating, i.e. its own epistemological position.

2 We can see that this 'socialisation' has been driven by the shift, over the last two decades, from a focus on materials,artefacts and spatial expressions of design(-ing) towards more conceptual and/or ideological goals where the application of design thinking, participation and processes are integrated by involving diverse actors and stakeholders within an inter-disciplinary environment.

3 Fuad-Luke, A., 2014. Design(-ing) for Radical Relationality: 'Relational design' for confronting

dangerous, concurrent, contingent realities. In: Emerging Practices in Design. Professions, Values and Approaches. Shanghai: Tongji University Press, pp.42-73.

4 Manzini, E., 2015. Design, when Everybody Designs. An Introduction to Design for Social Innovation. Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press.

5 Here the work of philosopher and political theorist Chantal Mouffe and her framing of 'agonistic pluralism' defines what politics is and is not. For Mouffe ''politics'... 'indicates an ensemble of practices, discourses and institutions which seek to establish a certain order and organise human coexistence in conditions that are always potentially conflictual because they are affected by the dimension of 'the political' ' where the latter is seen as 'the dimension of antagonism that is inherent in human relations, antagonism that can take many forms and emerge in different type of social relations'. See Mouffe, C., 2000. Deliberative Democracy or Agonistic Pluralism. Reihe Politikwissenschaft, Political Science Series, Vienna: Institut für Höhere Studien (HIS)/Institute for Advanced Studies, p.15.

6 See the definition of design activism in Fuad-Luke, A. 2009. Design Activism. London: Earthscan. p.27.

7 'Habitus' is a term applied by philosophers (originally attributed to Aristotle, but developed by Bourdieu, Weber and others), phenomenologists (Husserl, Merleau-Ponty) and sociologists (Mauss, Weber) to denote the structuring of the mind by non-discursive knowledge i.e. by its learned habits, one's bodily skills, and by the cultural forces of taste and style. In short, we can change our habitus if we, or something, changes our worldview.

8 Scott, J. and Gordon, M., eds. 1998. A Dictionary of Sociology. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

9 Wood, J., 2013. Meta-designing Paradigm Change: An Ecomimetic, Language-Centred Approach. In: Walker, S. and Giard, J., eds. 2013. The Handbook of Design for Sustainability, London: Bloomsbury. pp.428-445.

10 'Sustainism'-is a concept coined by Michiel Schwarz and Joost Elffers describing the relations between 'global connectivity, sustainability, open exchange, and resurgence of the local.' Schwartz, M. and Krabbendam, D. 2013. Sustainist Design Guide, Amsterdam: BIS Publishers. p.19.

11 'Sustainment (the overcoming of the unsustainable)' in Fry, T., 2011. Design and Politics. Oxford/New York: Berg. p.viii.

12 Deutscher, G., 2011. Through the Language Glass. Why the world looks different in other languages. London: Arrow Books.

13 For my analysis I took definitions of 'design activism' from the following sources: Chick, A. and Micklethwaite, P., 2011, Design for Sustainable Change. How design and designers can drive the sustainability agenda, AVA Publishing: Lausanne. p.59; Fuad-Luke, A., 2009. Design Activism. Beautiful Strangeness for a Sustainable World. London: Earthscan. p. 27; Leeds Festival of Design Activism, 2009, available at http://www.designactivism.org; Markussen, T., 2011. The Disruptive Aesthetics of Design Activism: Enacting Design Between Art and Politics. In: Nordes '11: the 4th Nordic Design Research Conference, Making Design Matter!, 29-31 May 2011, School of Art and Design, Aalto University, Helsinki. pp. 102-110. Available at www.nordes.org; Thorpe, A., 2008. Design as Activism: A conceptual tool. In: Peruccio, C. and Peruccio, P. eds. 2008. Changing the Change Proceedings. Changing the Change conference, Turin, Italy, June 2008. pp.1523-1535. Available

at http://www.changingthechange.org/papers/ctc.pdf; Thorpe, A., 2008-2012. Design activism. Available at http://www.designactivism.net. For 'social design' I sourced definitions from the following: Chick, A. 2012. Design for social innovation: Emerging principles and approaches. Iridescent: Icograda Journal of Design Research, 2 (1); Mapping Social Design project, University of Brighton, http://www.mappingsocialdesign.org; Margolin, V. and Margolin, S., 2002. A "social model" of design: Issues of practice and research. Design Issues, 18, (4), pp.24-20; Miettinen, S., ed. 2007. Design Your Action. Social Design in Practice. Helsinki: University of Art and Design. p.7.; Thorpe, A. and Lorraine G., 2011. Design with society: why socially responsive design is good enough. CoDesign International Journal of CoCreation in Design and the Arts, 7 (3-4), pp.217-219; Yongqi, L., 2013 Shè Jì – Change for Sustainable Futures. In: Walker, S. and Giard, J. eds. 2013. The Handbook of Design for Sustainability. London: Bloomsbury. pp.347-362

14 The first wordle emphasises 'new, changes, definition, dimension, needs, economic, process, dimension' (Part I, p.10); the second wordle on 'social innovation' highlights 'social, public, sector, innovation' (Part II, p.5); and the third wordle, on 'social innovation trends', stresses 'new, people, services, problems, thinking, open'. Source: Caulier-Grice, J., Davies, A., Patrick, R., and Norman, W. 2012. Defining Social Innovation. A deliverable of the project: 'The theoretical, empirical and policy foundations for building social innovation in Europe', (TEPSIE), European Commission – 7th Framework Programme, Brussels: European Commission, DG Research.

15 These terms refer to existing power structures. See ibid. Wood. 2013. Wood refers to 'co-dependent affinities', where the existence of the car/automobile creates many affinities, such as 'rapid response/hospitals, roads/taxation, out-of-town/supermarkets and so on', which as a phenomenon is described as 'structural coupling' by Maturana and Varela, 1980 cited in his article. In the same compendium, Knowles et al. refer to cyber-sustainability and near-future web developments as being already 'locked in...constellations of meaning'. See Knowles, B., Walker, S. and Blair, L., 2013. Design for Cyber-Sustainability: Toward a Sustainable Digital Future. In: Walker, S. and Giaard. J. eds. The Handbook of Design for Sustainability. London: Bloomsbury. pp.488-512.

16 I borrow the terms 'reassembling' and 're-association' from Bruno Latour who used these words to expand the meaning of the word 'social' as a 'particular sort of thing, but only as a very peculiar movement of re-association and reassembling'. Labour, B.2007. Reassembling the Social. An introduction to Actor-Network- Theory. Oxford: Oxford University Press. p.7.

17 In 2012, I developed this framework for showing the roles of the designers and other stakeholders in terms of consensus and dissensus, and first presented it at a keynote talk entitled 'Design(ing) for Transition and contingent eco-socio-political realities' at the U Design '12 conference organised by ID+ research group of the University of Aveiro and the University of Porto, Aveiro, Portugal on 14 July 2012.

18 Fuad-Luke, 2009, ibid, p.xxi.

19 See the diverse examples presented in the Pop-Up City blog, http://www.popupcity.net

20 See the Special Issue on 'design activism' in Design and Culture, July 2013, especially Bergland, E., Design as Activism in Helsinki: Notes from the World Design Capital 2012, pp. 195-214; and Julier, G. From Design Culture to Design Activism, pp.215-236.

21 'Material and expressive assemblages' is drawn from assemblage theory from the work of Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guarttari, later further developed by Manuel De Landa. An assemblage is based on the concept of exteriority, that any one component of the assemblage can be unplugged and inserted into another while maintaining its identity. The 'material' refers to content and the 'expressive' to the roles components can play. For further reading explore: Deleuze, G., and Guattari, F., 2000 (1980). A Thousand Plateaus: Vol 2 Capitalism and Schizophrenia. Brian Massumi. London and New York: Continuum; De Landa, M., 2006. A New Philosophy of Society: Assemblage Theory and Social Complexity. London and New York: Continuum.

22 Gaspar Mallol, M.,2011. F(r)ictions. Design as Cultural Form of Dissent. Paper presented at Design Activism and Social Change conference, organised by the Design History Society, 7-10 September, Barcelona, Spain.

23 See ZUS and the Luchtsingel project, http://www.zus.cc/work/urban_politics/155_Luchtsingel.php

24 See Collectif Etc, http://www.collectifetc.com/

25 Markussen, T., 2011. The Disruptive Aesthetics of Design Activism: Enacting Design Between Art and Politics in Nordes' 11: the 4th Nordic Design Research Conference, Making Design Matter!, 29-31 May 2011, School of Art and Design, Aalto University, Helsinki, pp.102-110. Available at www.nordes.org

26 Ibid. Wood. 2013. p.439, Nieuwenjuijze and Wood, 2006, define 'sympoiesis' as 'the more profound stages of co-authorship within team building and in maintaining symbiotic relations'. Here I suggest that 'humans' and 'nature' can have a sympoiesis to heal the split which has been created by a dominant technologically driven economic growth paradigm which places humans in a largely artificial, synthetic, human-made environment to the exclusion, or exploitation, of nature.

27 See, for example, Myers, W., 2012. Bio Design. Nature, Science, Creativity. Thames and Hudson: London.

28 According to the Global Health Organisation, http://www.who.int/gho/urban_health/situation_trends/urban_population_growth_text/en

29 Bennett, J., 2010. Vibrant Matter. A Political Ecology of Things. Durham and London: Duke University Press.

30 See, for example, the biohackers, biomimeticists, urban design agriculturalists and food phreakers at Next Nature, http://www.nextnature.net; Futurefarmers, http://www.futurefarmers.com; and the Centre for Genomic Gastronomy, http://genomicgastronomy.com.

31 See, for example, Fry, R. and Taylor, P., 2013 A Rise for Wealth of the Wealthy: Decline for the other 93%, 23 April 2013. Pew Research Social & Demographic Trends. Available at http://www.pewsocialtrends.org/2013/04/23/arise-in-wealth-for-the-wealthydeclines-for-the-lower-93/

32 'Transition currencies' refer to local money systems to complement national currencies, for example, those created by the Transition Towns movement, such as the 'Totnes pound', http://www.transitionnetwork.org/projects/totnes-pound

33 I have made several blog posts on these topics, see http://window874.com

34 Elinor Ostrom created 18 design principles for governing our commons, i.e. common-pool resources; these were recently extended with seven new principles for our global resource commons by Paul Stern. Stern, P. C., 2011. Design principles for global commons: natural resources and emerging technologies. International Journal of the Commons, 5(2), August 2011, pp.213-232.

35 See van Abel, B., Evers L., Klaassen R. and Troxler, P., 2011, Open Design Now. Why Design Cannot Remain Exclusive. BIS Publishers: Amsterdam.

36 See Awan, N., Schneider, T. and Till, J., 2011. Spatial Agency. Other Ways of Doing Architecture. London: Routledge.

37 In his book, The Three Ecologies, originally published in 1989 in French, Felix Guattari wrote about the need for cultivating a dissensus.

38 Lee, Y., 2007. What are the social responsibilities of designers? Investigating new perspectives for design participation. Paper presented at IASDR07, International Association of Societies of Design Research, The Hong Kong Polytechnic University, 12th to 15th November 2007.

39 Invoking Herbert Simon's observation in his 1969 book, Sciences of the Artificial, that design is applied to change existing situations into preferred situations.

40 Maldonado, T., 1972. Design, Nature and Revolution. Toward a Critical Ecology. Translated from Italian by Mario Domandi. New York: Harper & Row. p.50.

Espacio Arroelo

Arroelo is not just a spot in the centre of Pontevedra (Spain); it's a hub for connecting the rural and urban worlds, actively engaging the city for the past 10 years. Through collaborations with ECHN and rural spaces like Anceu Coliving, they have built a network that transcends boundaries and communicates the richness of diversity. This corner in the heart of Pontevedra is a space of freedom, where curiosity ignites every day. Mornings at Arroelo are special, marked by "Cafés a la Fresca," where people from Arroelo and nearby communities share their lives, projects, and stories. It's a place where being open to discover is a main value, because echoing the wise words of Ortega y Gasset: "to surprise and to wonder is to begin to understand".

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África Rodriguez

previous page: Alastair Fuad-Luke at the European Creative Hubs Culture and Creativity Conference in Porto, October 2022, photographer Matilde Cunha

Bénédicte Vidaillet - Youcef Bousalham

COWORKING SPACES AS PLACES WHERE ECONOMIC DIVERSITY CAN BE ARTICULATED: TOWARDS A THEORY OF SYNTOPIA

Abstract

This article reports a qualitative study of several coworking spaces conducted over 3 years. We build on Foucault's reflection concerning heterotopias to develop a new concept – that of 'syntopia' – for theorizing this type of space, whose main characteristic is that its alternative potential lies in enabling its users to articulate economic diversity. Our contribution is twofold: on one hand, our theorization of coworking spaces helps better account for their complexity, for the tensions that can arise within them and for their impacts; on the other hand, with the concept of syntopia, we provide a concept that could help identify other places of a post capitalocentric economy, likely to be a source of profound change in our society. We propose to develop a 'syntopology' whose object would be to study systematically the different forms of syntopias, their characteristics, potentials and limitations.

Keywords

Alternative, capitalism, coworking, Gibson-Graham, heterotopia, post capitalocentric, syntopia

In the last 10 years, an increasing number of studies have investigated alternative models that could promote a post capitalocentric economy (Fournier, 2008; Gibson-Graham, 1996, 2006; Gibson-Graham et al.

2013; Healy, 2009). Those studies advocate documenting and theorizing economies, organizations and systems that 'exhibit values, modes of exchanges, work, ownership and practices that do not follow the logic of capitalist accumulation and profit maximization concentrated in private ends' (Zanoni et al., 2015: 623). Noteworthy is the fact that these alternatives already exist or have existed before. Some of them, such as the pirate organizations of the early 18th century (Rediker, 2004) or the Familistere of Guise in France (Lallement, 2009), have now disappeared, but lessons can be drawn and contemporary versions can be identified from those past models (Durand and Vergne, 2013). Other models, from cooperatives to mutualist organizations (Azkarraga et al., 2012; Cheney, 2002; Draperi, 2005; Laville and Glémain, 2009), from kibbutzim (Warhurst, 1996, 1998) to communities of interest or self-managed social centres (Fournier, 2013) are still relevant today. All of them show that alternative approaches have been experimented with, in various forms and in many cultural and economic contexts. A central issue, from a performative perspective, is to identify those alternatives, explore their diversity, understand their functioning and bring to light the conditions under which they can serve as models that can be disseminated or improved (Lallement, 2015; Parker et al., 2014a). Thus, building on existing alternative practices, we attempt to develop a new political imaginary and to strengthen levers for change in society.

However, studying such alternatives is no easy task because, as Parker et al. (2014c) have highlighted, the forms taken by these alternatives can be varied and complex. They present contradictions and tensions, related both to their stage of development and to the fact that they do not 'grow out of thin air' but within a world in which they can be variously related to non-alternative practices and forms of economy. This diversity and complexity can be seen as intrinsically linked, in a post capitalocentric perspective, to an essential characteristic of the economy. Indeed, rather than considering the economy as being centred on and determined by a homogeneous and unified capitalist system (Gibson-Graham, 2006), one can see it as a diverse array of economic relations, practices and arrangements, fundamentally heterogeneous and permanently intertwined. From this perspective, 'capitalism be-

com[es] just one particular set of economic relations situated in a vast sea of economic activity' (Gibson-Graham, 2006: 70).

In this context, it is interesting to note the emergence of new spaces, called 'coworking spaces'. Those spaces are shared workplaces utilized by different sorts of professionals, mostly freelancers. Practically conceived as office-renting facilities where workers hire a desk and a wi-fi connection, coworking spaces offer a solution to the problem of isolation that these workers can experience when they work from home, and enable them to work side-by-side with professional peers (Gandini, 2015). The founders and promoters of these spaces specifically bring to the fore their alternative nature and potential to change society. Thus, they present these spaces, which have developed very rapidly, as 'contribut(ing) to a necessary and profound change in organizations and work methods' (De Mazenod et al., 2014: 29); as endowed with a 'transformational, creative, and even transgressive potential' (Duriaux and Burret, 2014: 32); and as being part of 'a profound cultural revolution' (Mutinerie, n.d.). On the other hand, these spaces can also be considered as corresponding to the most advanced forms of neoliberalism due to the type of workers (freelance, independent) and activities (start-ups, new economy) they consist of. It is noteworthy that the semantic field used within them – autonomy, entrepreneurship, creativity, innovation, project, network and so on – corresponds precisely to the vocabulary used to refer to the New Spirit of Capitalism (Boltanski and Chiapello, 1999). Other contradictions can be identified, for example, between the supposed cooperation among mostly independent workers and the potential competition between them; or between altruistic social relationships and the need to build a reputation-based social capital (Gandini, 2015). Thus, these spaces seem to be characterized by tensions and contradictions, which makes it difficult to assess their potential to become credible and viable alternatives. Do these coworking spaces constitute a potential for progressive and transformative alternatives, and if so, where does this potential lie? How does one interpret the diversity in the economic practices and arrangements that characterize them, with the potential tensions that this diversity can generate? Does this characteristic jeopardize their alternative potential

or, on the contrary, does it contribute to it, and if so, in what way?

This research builds upon a study conducted over 3 years of several coworking spaces and on 48 interviews with users and founders (themselves often users) of such spaces. This study fits within the social scientific tradition of using qualitative data to inductively develop 'grounded theory' (Corbin and Strauss, 1998; Glaser and Strauss, 1967; Lincoln and Guba, 1985). We show that what characterizes these places is, first of all, the coexistence, within them, of various, heterogeneous and potentially conflicting economic forms, relations and practices, which we have organized around three dimensions that inductively emerged from the data (the involvement dimension, the relational and exchange dimensions); second, the fact that these places offer those involved with them the possibility to articulate this diversity. It is, in our opinion, at this level that the emancipatory and alternative potential of these spaces resides. It is a potential which users are free to capture or not, and which, in this respect, is indeed an opportunity that the space offers, without guaranteeing that this opportunity will be realized. Our first contribution, therefore, lies in emphasizing the economic diversity that characterizes coworking spaces, and in proposing a more complex analysis of places that are too often described, in a binary manner, either as welcome alternatives or, negatively, as dream spaces for neoliberal entrepreneurs. Our second contribution is, building on Foucault's concept of heterotopia, to theorize the concept of 'syntopia' in an attempt to define this type of space, whose main characteristic is that their potential as alternatives lies in their enabling those involved in those spaces to articulate this economic diversity. Thus, we propose a new concept that can be applied to other types of places and could help identify and characterize the forms taken by places which, in a post capitalocentric perspective, could impulse profound change in our society.

Coworking spaces: potential alternatives or dream spaces for neoliberal entrepreneurs?

In the last 10 years, places have emerged that claim to be both innovative and alternative, putting forward values such as autonomy in work,

empowerment, social experimentation, collaboration and account-ability, and in this regard seem to match the minimum criteria defined by Parker et al. (2014c). Indeed, the so-called coworking spaces bring together people, most of whom are freelancers, independent workers or entrepreneurs who own their work tools, work on their own projects and are provided with a working space and community, in return for a generally low contribution proportional to the amount of time they spend in the space. They have access to spaces for working and socializing, to a desk and a wi-fi connection, but also to an 'ecosystem', a 'community' and professional networks (Gandini, 2015; Spinuzzi, 2012). Since the first experience in 2005 in San Francisco, the number of coworking spaces worldwide has grown dramatically: 15,500 at the end of 2017 (against 600 in 2010), accounting for 1.74 million workers, four-fifth of whom in Europe and North America (Deskmag, 2018). The development of these places is accompanied by profound changes in the ways people work: independent, flexible work, in networks and in which computer and digital technologies play a central role.

This rapid development is valued discursively within a 'celebratory framework' (Gandini, 2015: 193) initiated by those who run and develop these places and who are organized into highly connected networks. Thus, there appears to be an 'emergence of a new kind of interpersonal relationships and the development of exchange Communities, with people sharing values of openness, cooperation and readiness for change' (Coworking Europe, 2014), in places that are conducive to emancipation and present a profoundly transformative potential (de Duriaux and Burret, 2014; De Mazenod et al., 2014; Suarez, 2014; Van den Broek, 2013). Coworking is also being increasingly used for branding and business purposes (Moriset, 2014).

A diverse body of academic literature has recently flourished around coworking. As Gandini (2015) puts it, 'though with notable exceptions, most contributions in the literature build on the assumption that coworking represents an inevitably positive innovation, with few dwelling upon empirical findings and rarely offering a critical understanding' (p. 194). One of the most observed positive aspects highlighted by researchers is the fact that those spaces make it possible to build lively

and 'authentic' communities (Garrett et al., 2014; Spinuzzi, 2012). The workers who use them are described as motivated by the desire to build relationships of trust with one another, escape the competitive frameworks, engage in different forms of negotiable collaboration, and as connected by common values (autonomy, sharing, cooperation and entrepreneurship; Lange, 2006) and by what some call an 'open source' community approach to work, translated into a physical space (Duriaux and Burret, 2014; Lange, 2011). The desire to collaborate and to develop communitarian social relations and knowledge dynamics between small-size actors (Capdevila, 2013) is strongly emphasized; hierarchical relations are rejected in favour of fluid organizational arrangements based on competence and likely to be constantly renegotiated (Lange, 2006, 2011). 'The idea underlying this assumption is that social relations are the main factors of productivity across coworking spaces, conceived as collaborative environments where micro businesses and freelancers deploy new production opportunities in non-hierarchical situations' (Gandini, 2015: 196).

Another important aspect highlighted by researchers is the physical and spatial dimension of these communities. The authors bring to the fore the ability of coworking spaces to locally relocate the activity and the created value (Capdevila, 2013; Johns and Gratton, 2013) and to promote territorial development (Lange, 2011). Some researchers (Montgomery and Dacin, 2013), as well as some participants in coworking (De Mazenod et al., 2014; Duriaux and Burret, 2014), use the term 'third place' coined by sociologist Ray Oldenburg (1989) when he discussed the essential role in the city of specific places that can be visited freely, promote encounters and exchanges, and create and maintain communities.

However, some researchers emphasize the contradictions they observe in these spaces. Spinuzzi (2012), for example, asked proprietors and coworkers at coworking locations in the Austin area to describe what coworking is and why people cowork. Their responses are characterized by contradictions: contradictions in terms of the nature of activities conducted (work in the strict sense of the term or a wider variety of activities beyond the realm of work), in terms of how the users work (in

parallel or in collaboration), of the coworkers' profiles (homogeneous or heterogeneous), of the relationships that develop between coworkers (from informal social interactions to collaborative relationships and cross-outsourcing) or of their motivations (finding affordable working space, creating friendships, building social and professional networks, etc.). 'I have described so many contradictions that you might suspect that coworking does not even describe a coherent phenomenon' (p. 428). He then proposes a typology of coworking spaces for structuring these contradictions around two coherent types of coworking spaces: 'good neighbours-configuration' or 'good partners-configuration'. However, this conceptualization tends to conceal the diversity and the tensions that may occur within the same space and to reduce the differences observed in the world of coworking to differences in positioning from one coworking space to another.

More recently, Gandini (2015) has sought to organize, from a critical perspective, the contradictions he identified in the literature on coworking. He has observed tension between 'the establishment of communitarian relationships of trust among [coworkers], largely escaping the competitive frameworks to engage in different forms of negotiable collaboration' (p. 199), and the primacy given to individual success as well as the competition likely to occur in a population composed predominantly of independent workers and entrepreneurs. Thus, he advises researchers to 'more deeply explore this issue of competition and how it is embedded in professional networks' (p. 199). He draws attention to the opposition that may exist between selfless relationships of mutual help, on one hand, and a utilitarian perspective, on the other, pointing out that coworking can be regarded as 'a complex socio-economic scene based upon networked dynamics of interaction, where old and new organizational practices coexist in an instrumentally coherent "rationale" that leverages on social capital to access network resources with expected economic return' (p. 199). In this perspective, reputation construction is seen as a key resource from which to capitalize, and coworking spaces as places that are particularly functional in constructing social networks and reputation-based social capital and in sustaining a market position. Gandini (2015) also notes that these spaces, with their

physical reterritorialization of working activities and highly networked forms of collaborative production, are often described as the new intermediaries for value production, embodying Florida's (2002) 'creative class' revitalizing urban areas. But he also stresses that these places can concentrate number of professionals in precarious situations and accompany 'the rise of these atomized entrepreneurial subjects of

and coworking spaces as places that are particularly functional in constructing social networks and reputation-based social capital

neoliberalism' (Gandini, 2015: 202) rather than of any creative class. Paradoxically, it is these places that could give rise to a new class consciousness and to political or even revolutionary demands among these workers, provided they have the ability to form a 'coworking class' (p. 202). Gandini encourages researchers 'to seriously take into account the contradictory nature that coworking spaces come to embody in the broader debates regarding the "sharing economy," in order to disentangle from the diverse issues that lie under the surface' (p. 203). It is this perspective that we adopt in this research by proposing a theory of syntopia.

Envisaging and developing alternatives from a post capitalocentric perspective: with and beyond heterotopia

The question of what could constitute an alternative, and in what form, cannot be dissociated from how we understand the economy. Thus, as Parker et al. (2014b) have pointed out,

> at the centre of these questions is how we imagine not only alternatives, but also the capitalism that they are alternative to. The omnipotence projected onto capitalism – reinforced by its own refrain of inevitability (Aune, 2002; Fisher, 2009) –

> becomes disempowering and depresses any possibility of
> active, positive engagement in making worlds. (p. 368)

Imagining alternatives requires acknowledging that the concept of capitalism, far from referring to an unequivocal, single and intangible reality,

> is haunted by heterogeneity, by the historicity and singularity of each form of economy that might be called capitalist. Each capitalist site is constituted within a social and political context, and that contextualization is itself contaminating of any pure or essential and invariant attribute associated with the concept [...]. There is no capitalism but only capitalisms. (Gibson-Graham, 1996: 246–247)

These authors rightly emphasize the need to recognize the plurality and contradictions of capital-ism as well as its coexistence alongside a range of non-capitalist forms.

If one defines alternatives as forms of organization, production or consumption which embody quite distinct ethical values and political potentials, and, more specifically, which 'respect personal autonomy, but within a framework of cooperation, and which are attentive to the sorts

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There is no capitalism but only capitalisms

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of futures they will produce' (Parker et al., 2014c: 32), one must then also recognize that they can take highly different forms (Williams, 2014). 'All of them share, however, a spirit of critical questioning as well as a critical optimism with respect to social betterment' (Parker et al., 2014b: 363). They themselves are criss-crossed by contradictions, tensions and ambiguities (Parker et al., 2014d), which reflects the multiplicity of possible models.

Some authors have suggested using the term 'heterotopia' developed by Michel Foucault ([1966] 1998) in his famous conference 'Des espaces autres/Other spaces' to describe spaces 'that encourage the

exploration and imagination of alternative modes of being and doing' (Spicer et al., 2009: 551). Building on the notion that these spaces 'are sorts of actually realized utopias' (Foucault, [1966] 1998: 178), these researchers consider this neologism useful for describing 'new forms of team working (Heckscher and Adler, 2006), and analyses of the new economy and so-called "cognitive capitalism" (Hardt and Negri, 2000, 2004)' (Spicer et al., 2009: 253). They emphasize the performative potential of 'heterotopias' without, however, precisely conceptualizing the term, which, in Foucault's work operated not as a stabilized and fully theorized concept but rather as a thought-provoking heuristic category, open to elaboration. Providing a stimulating foundation for theorizing places which, in a post capitalocentric approach, could play an essential role in the transformation of society, this category enables us to imagine and develop, based on our research on coworking spaces, the concept of 'syntopia' that we will present later.

More precisely, the aspects of Foucault's reflection that catch our attention and which we use as a basis for developing our concept of syntopia are the following. First, emphasizing the political function of space

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we are in an era of the simultaneous, of juxtaposition, of the near and the far, of the side-by-side, of the scattered

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in the contemporary world, Foucault ([1966] 1998) develops his reflection on heterotopia by arguing that 'we are in an era of the simultaneous, of juxtaposition, of the near and the far, of the side-by-side, of the scattered' (p. 175). He then advocates challenging the oppositions and separations by which 'our life is still dominated': 'oppositions we take for granted, for example, between private space and public space, between the family space and social space, between the space of leisure activities and the space of work'. He argues that 'we are not living in a homogeneous space' (Foucault, [1966] 1998: 177), just as 'we do not live in a void' but 'inside an ensemble of relations that define emplace-

ments that are irreducible to each other' (p. 178). He then draws our attention to heterotopias, 'real places' (unlike utopias) which 'have the curious property of being connected to all the other emplacements, but in such a way that they suspend, neutralize, or reverse the set of relations that are designated, reflected, or represented by them' (Foucault, [1966] 1998: 178). Thus, his definition of heterotopias highlights both their heterogeneity relative to ordinary spaces, their nature of 'counter-spaces',[1] 'that are outside of all places' (Foucault, [1966] 1994: 755), and also the relations that link them to these ordinary spaces. Foucault specifies this function – function which according to him is essential – of being 'in relation to the remaining space', by distinguishing between two extremes according to whether heterotopias create 'a space of illusion' that exposes the non-heterotopic space as even more illusory (like brothels), or a 'space of compensation', 'as perfect [...] as ours is muddled' (like colonies) (Foucault, [1966] 1998: 184). He also refers to 'heterotopias of deviation' (like psychiatric hospitals) which contrast with the norms that characterize the remaining space.

Second, one of the principles of heterotopias highlighted by Foucault ([1966] 1998) is that they 'have the ability to juxtapose in a single real place several emplacements that are incompatible in themselves' (p. 181). He takes the example of the ancient Persian garden, which was a sacred space (and was therefore radically different from normal spaces) that contained and 'joined together within its rectangle four distinct parts representing the four parts of the world, with a space even more sacred than the others [...] at its centre' (pp. 181–182). Through this example, he seems to suggest that, beyond a simple juxtaposition, there is a form of 'arranged' heterogeneity, without, however, developing what might characterize this 'arrangement'.

In short, the category of heterotopia proposed by Foucault is the basis upon which we reflect on coworking spaces. In particular, we notice the importance he attaches to specific emplacements that make it possible to call into question the oppositions we take for granted. These places are characterized, on one hand, by the specific relations that link them to the remaining space while differing from them and, on the other hand, by their own internal heterogeneity which juxtaposes

and includes disparate elements. However, we think it is necessary to develop the concept of syntopia. This enables us, first of all, to better take into account what we observe on the ground, as we shall show. More specifically, the concept of syntopia makes it possible to place emphasis on the possible articulation of the heterogeneity characterizing those spaces, articulation which goes far beyond juxtaposition, or even the fact that heterogeneity can be more or less 'arranged' as Foucault suggests. Second of all, using a different term enables us to indicate that we do not situate our reflection in the same framework as Foucault's. Foucault's work on heterotopias was part of his reflection on power and in particular on the places, forms and practices through which power is distributed and experienced in societies, heteropia being understood as a category of the spatial forms of power/knowledge. Our research is not situated in this framework, but rather fits in line with the reflection conducted by Gibson-Graham, who, in a post capitalo-centric perspective, seeks to account for the diversity and complexity of the economy. More precisely, we seek to understand the positioning and functioning of the places that have the capacity to promote such a perspective.

Methods

We develop a theory of syntopia, building on a study conducted over 3 years (2012–2015), of several coworking spaces in France and Belgium. Given the lack, during the early stage of our investigation, of academic literature on coworking, our research was qualitative and inductive in nature. Our research questions were as follows: can coworking spaces serve as alternatives, in the sense of new organizational forms that embody distinct ethical values, modes of subjectivization and political potentials? If so, where does their alternative potential lie? In order to answer these questions, we first had to understand the intention of their creators, why and how people used these spaces and, more broadly, the role they effectively played and for whom. The social scientific tradition of using qualitative data to inductively develop 'grounded theory' (Corbin and Strauss, 1998; Glaser and Strauss, 1967; Lincoln and Guba, 1985) seemed perfectly suited to this goal. However, it took us a

long time to be able to develop a theory on the subject, given how difficult it was to fully grasp this contradiction-filled phenomenon. These difficulties, which we initially thought were related to our research process (during which we struggled to form a 'stable' representation of the phenomenon studied), eventually revealed themselves to us as precisely what needed to be theorized.

[...]

Findings

Tensions on three dimensions: nature of involvement/ activity, of relationships, of exchanges

The findings of our analysis show, first of all, that the coworking spaces studied can be organized around three dimensions pertaining to (1) the nature of involvement or activities, (2) the nature of relationships and (3) the nature of exchanges that occur in those spaces. Each of these dimensions is characterized by the coexistence of various and heterogeneous practices that potentially oppose each other; a coexistence that can be explained by the economic diversity found in these places. We divided those aspects into groups in such a way as to reveal polarities within each dimension, thus redefined as tension (see Table 3).

The first tension is related to the nature of involvement or activities that those spaces can offer. On one hand, they are experienced as spaces that provide an easily accessible and useable professional environment in which independent workers (freelancers, entrepreneurs, nomadic workers, teleworkers, etc.) can work or perform other economic activities. Coworkers can then use the space to conduct their professional activities, work on their projects and develop skills through interaction with peers. On the other hand, they appear to be home to various activities that contribute to the quality of human life and may be non-work related: for example, a coworker can conduct his or her hobbies or activities he or she is passionate about (such as introducing sewing or permaculture, forming a group of cinema, soccer or pool enthusiasts), he or she might develop activities related to food (such as retailing local

organic products, cooking free of charge with other coworkers and eat meals with them, as is the case in Lille 3, or cook for other coworkers in return for a small fee, as is the case in Lille 1) or they may use the space and the tools made available to them to repair various objects. Activities can also include the participation of coworkers in the life of the space itself, either by being involved in decisions related to its development and operation or by directly participating in the daily running of the space (manning the reception desk, participating in the running of the association that manages the place, making improvements to it). Co-workers can experience these activities as a civic, or even political, ex-perimentation, in that they test new practices of production, consump-tion, decision making and management, or of mutualization and social protection (e.g. in Lille 2 and Lille 3, coworkers have the opportunity to join an 'activity and employment cooperative', which enables them to convert their fees into salaries and, in so doing, to receive social protection benefits which waged workers are entitled to while remain-ing independent workers). The diversity of activities coworkers can get involved in should not be confused with the phenomenon, whereby, in some companies, the boundaries between what is work and what is not are no longer clear (mainly because of technological developments) or whereby leisure activities are incorporated into work (Hochschild, 1998; Ling and Haddon, 2009). Indeed, in the latter case, the 'fun' and 'non-work activities' always serve to improve productivity and are colonized by work in a process of neo-normative control (Fleming and Sturdy, 2009; Kunda, 2009), whereas in the coworking spaces studied, the aim is to be active and to regain control of activities that are usually exclud-ed from the sphere of work (for instance, cooking, setting up the place, taking part in decisions concerning its operation, making repairs).

The second tension concerns the nature of relationships that develop within these spaces. On one hand, the latter is experienced as bringing together independent workers who give each other identity support and can develop their network. In these spaces, they find partners, sup-pliers and customers and develop their reputation. They can draw on a culture that is specific to independent workers and entrepreneurs, one that stimulates them and also supports them when they face difficulties

inherent in these professions. On the other hand, many interviewees also describe these spaces as places of socialization that promote the development of a human community and a territorialized policy; they facilitate interaction among different actors in one territory, and promote conviviality and sociability between people united primarily by mutual trust, in that their relationships are free, non-competitive and free of any self-interested agenda, institutional and even professional constraints. Some interviewees describe them as enabling their users to absorb values and new practices experimented with their peers and to disseminate them beyond the coworking spaces.

The third tension pertains to the nature of exchanges undertaken in these spaces. On one hand, many interviewees describe those coworking spaces as places of commercial, contractualized and utilitarian exchange: indeed, the coworkers can enter into multiple contracts with one another, in the framework of projects involving several parties and outsourcing and/or partnership relations. The relations between the coworkers and the coworking space can also be defined through a contract, the coworkers being considered as targets with a demand which coworking can satisfy on a developing market. On the other hand, the interviewees also describe coworking spaces as being home to many practices in which relations cannot be contractualized, as in the case of bartering, of multilateral bartering, gratuity or gifting. Some of the practices can develop outside the boundaries of the law (such as giving cracked software to other coworkers, or not keeping accurate accounts concerning certain services offered by the space, such as eating a meal cooked by other coworkers). Finally, collective solidarity can lead to different financial contributions according to the contribution of the coworker to the community or his or her financial situation.

Regarding these three dimensions, it appears that the tensions described refer: on one hand to an instrumental polarity coherent with a capitalist and liberal conception of the economy, and on the other to a non-instrumental polarity, encompassing a diversity of exchanges, modes of relations, activities and practices that refer to a conception of the economy as intrinsically varied but also resocialized and reterritorialized.

Coworking spaces as enabling the articulation of economic diversity

Beyond the existence of heterogeneous and potentially contradictory aspects in the three dimensions studied, what appears to characterize

these spaces is the opportunity given to their users to articulate this diversity and these contradictions: this is, we believe, where the emancipatory and alternative potential lies, a potential which users can seize or not, and the realization of which is not guaranteed.

First, some coworkers do not seem to be interested in the alternative possibilities provided by these spaces and only use them because they support their business activities:

> I was looking for an affordable and flexible workspace, close to home, where I could set up my business. Here I have what I need; I come here when I want to, I interact with other entrepreneurs and when I first started my business, it encouraged me. There are no bad surprises: I know what I pay and why. I use the premises for client meetings, it looks professional; and I sometimes participate in training courses offered by the space. If my business grows, I will move to bigger premises. (Swann) This coworker is in a contract relationship with the place (category 3.1.); the latter offered him support to launch his business (category 2.1.) and a flexible and easily accessible business environment (category 1.1.).

Other coworkers were initially interested in one of the aspects and progressively discovered the alternative potential of the space. Thus, Robert started using the space to avoid working in isolation and in so

doing boost his motivation to work. He initially enjoyed the social and community aspects, the opportunity to reinvest himself in his neighbourhood (category 2.2.) before gradually getting involved in designing and setting up the premises, investing himself in its operation on a voluntary basis (category 3.2.) and changing his 'view on life' (category 1.2.). Thus, he experiences a personal evolution, facilitated by the coworking space:

> I translate patents and I couldn't stand staying alone at home anymore. I felt demotivated, doing the same thing everyday, without seeing anyone. Here I found a social and friendly space. Most of all, I use this place to be with other people. It's motivating to come here to work, to know that I'm going to see my group of 'work friends'; they are like colleagues but there's no competition, no tension, and we can trust each other. To me, this is a place where I can interact, be heard and discover new horizons with people who have different ways of seeing things. And I live across the street; I feel like I'm reinvesting myself in my neighbourhood, I'm developing new relationships [...] And then, little by little I got involved in the 'country house' project: we spent several weekends renovating the farm. I had never done that before. I discovered the joy of doing DIY with other people, of attempting a communal experience, of having great times with friends. [...] I'm involved here for the long term and I feel that my life and my views on life are changing.

Others gradually discover the possibilities the place offers and integrate into their project the new forms of exchange or activities they discover within the coworking space. Charles, who used to be a senior executive in a multinational agribusiness company, resigned so as 'to find meaning in work', 'to feel independent again and enjoy myself'. He decided to create a new concept for a coffee shop:

> I came here because I was not productive enough at home to work on my project. I wanted a friendly and flexible place, without constraints, an environment in which there were

other freelancers or entrepreneurs, because I did not have this culture. But in fact, I found much more than that: I gained awareness about what is collaborative economy, ecology, short circuits, because X is also here [X is a network that puts producers and consumers in direct relations with one another] and I will keep this close in mind in my project. It's funny ... I come from the food industry and I wasn't at all into that kind of thing. It's a change ... let's say an 'ethical change' for me.

He initially used the premises as a workspace (category 1.1.) dedicated to entrepreneurs (category 2.1.); he became aware of alternative practices (category 1.2.) that modified his project. This learning process is similar to what Lave and Wenger (1991) call 'legitimate peripheral participation' – in communities of practices – a process through which newcomers, by being given the opportunity to observe the practices, activities and vocabulary of longer standing members of the community; appropriate those practices and progressively participate in their development and, in so doing, become experts themselves. These coworking spaces facilitate unobtrusive, situated and localized learning processes that are rooted in practice and can be used freely by those who experience them. The 'ethical change' mentioned by Charles testifies to the emancipatory and transformative potential offered by this type of learning process.

Other coworkers experience a change inverse to that which Charles has experienced; a voluntary activity can evolve into a professional project. Isidora, for example, is employed by an association and was looking for a friendly workspace to avoid working in isolation (category 2.2.); she is passionate about cooking and developed a small business outside the boundaries of legality (category 3.2.) – in parallel with her job – cooking for some colleagues (category 1.2.):

I make a very small profit, it's not enough to pay myself for the time I spend preparing the food. It is undeclared economy, because when you get into food catering for other people, you have to deal with very strict regulations. So it's an arrangement between us. In a way, it also gives me a chance to test, to try new things, and I'm starting to think that

> I might eventually start a new professional activity in the field of cooking.

She is planning a professional shift towards a business project in the field of cooking (category 1.1.); the activity and hobby she is performing on an almost volunteer basis (category 1.2.) would then become a commercial activity (category 3.1.). Here, too, an unobtrusive, personalized and praxis-based learning process occurs thanks to the experimental space provided to the coworker.

[...]

These examples were chosen because they are representative of the different ways in which coworkers can invest themselves in coworking spaces, and they clearly show how these spaces enable coworkers to combine heterogeneous and sometimes contradictory economic practices and forms.

Granted, not all coworkers seize this potential: whatever the alternative potential of the place, it can be used just as a non-alternative place would be. Furthermore, the possibilities presented in Table 3 do not occur identically in all coworking spaces: in the extreme scenario, some spaces can position themselves as spaces dedicated to work and economic activities (category 1.1.) for independent workers who wish, in order to successfully implement their business project, to develop their network and reputation in a stimulating environment (category 2.1.) and are willing to pay a price for this service (category 3.1.). Similarly, being affiliated to an association or owned by private owners in itself modifies some possibilities offered by the place.

Discussion

This study highlights the existence of original spaces that present potential alternatives (such as they are discussed at the beginning of this article and in this special issue). Indeed, they juxtapose heterogeneous and potentially contradictory aspects that come with the economic diversity inherent to a post capitalocentric economy, and give their users the opportunity to articulate this diversity. We believe that their potential to change society lies precisely at this level. We define these places as

syntopias. Let us now clarify this concept and attempt to distinguish it from the term heterotopia as defined by Foucault ([1966] 1998). We have drawn from the following aspects of Foucault's reflection: the importance attached to specific emplacements that make it possible to challenge oppositions we take for granted, the fact that these spaces must be approached in their relations to the remaining space and the – more or less arranged – heterogeneity that characterizes them. However, we thought it necessary to develop the concept of syntopia, which, we believe, better accounts for the specificities observed on the ground of our study.

One first characteristic of a syntopia is that it is a place in which various and heterogeneous economic forms and practices coexist. In this respect, the heterogeneity that characterizes them is much more specific (i.e. it pertains to economic diversity) than that which Foucault refers to. But above all, while Foucault ([1966] 1998) insists on the simple 'juxtapos[ition] in a single real place' of 'elements that are incompatible in themselves' (p. 181) and suggests without, however, developing this idea that this heterogeneity can be more or less 'arranged', the concept of syntopia explicitly emphasizes the possible articulation of this diversity. Thus, a syntopia can play an integrative role, far beyond the mere juxtaposition of disparate or heterogeneous dimensions. Our etymological construction of the term 'syntopia' places emphasis on this dimension and helps to better understand both the proximity and the differences between 'heterotopia' – source of our conceptual inspiration – and 'syntopia'. The term 'syntopia' is formed with the suffix 'topia', which comes from the ancient Greek word 'topos' meaning 'place', 'space' and is also found in 'heterotopia'. Indeed, we need a concept that describes a specific type of space. But the prefix 'hetero' refers to the ancient Greek 'heteros' which means 'other' and by extension refers to a difference or an opposite, while we want to place emphasis on the key idea of articulation and possible conciliation. The prefix 'syn' is derived from the ancient Greek word 'with', 'together', and refers to the action of putting/arranging two or more things together (thus, it is found in 'synthesis' or 'symbiosis'), and therefore seems the right prefix to use.3

In syntopias, the possible articulation of economic diversity is carried out by those who participate in and use these places. In some cases, this articulation potential is not exploited; in others, it is realized by the 'syntopists', in a way which, as we have shown, is unique to each space and can thus take a great variety of forms. Some of the researchers that have studied coworking have emphasized the contradictions that characterize them. However, while Spinuzzi (2012) organizes these contradictions by distinguishing between different types of spaces ('good neighbours-configuration' vs 'good partners-configuration'), our concept of syntopia draws attention to the fact that these dimensions

these contradictions are related to the economic diversity that characterizes these spaces

can coexist within the same space, but may not be articulated in the same way from one coworker to another. As for Gandini (2015), who rightly draws attention to contradictions identified in the literature on coworking – for example, competition versus cooperation, instrumentalization of relations versus involvement in a community or a growing job precariousness among independent workers versus a political organization of a 'coworking class' – he fails to recognize the fact that, first of all, these contradictions are related to the economic diversity that characterizes these spaces and do not result (or not only) from the (more or less critical) postures of the researchers who study them, and second that the alternative potential of these spaces precisely refers to the possibility for their users to articulate (or not) this diversity.

Another characteristic of syntopias resides in their relation to the outside. Foucault considered heterotopias as having an essential function: that of reflecting on, questioning, challenging, 'contradicting' the remaining space (Foucault, [1966] 1994: 755).[4] Heterotopias are described as 'counter-spaces' (p. 755),[5] 'other spaces' (p. 755), that

operate outside of normal space, are heterogeneous to it and strongly distinguish themselves from it. Whether they are heterotopias of illusion, compensation or deviation, they have in common that they make the outside space exist through contrast. In a different way, the concept of syntopia draws attention to the fact that they reflect the outside space, not through their contrast with it, but rather by the fact that they are characterized by the coexistence within them of various economic forms, which also exist outside but in a more dispersed fashion. Syntopias are spaces that concentrate various economic forms and practices, and make it possible to articulate this diversity. In the case of the coworking spaces studied, some of those who use or design them do not claim to perform an act of resistance nor to be radically challenging the existing world, but rather to be experimenting with alternative practices without opposing practices that are not alternative. While in

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It is not the case for syntopias, which involve a relative ease of entry and use, a freedom to come and go, to enter and exit

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heterotopias norms are radically challenged, the concept of syntopia draws attention to the fact that the potential for transformation can be embedded in what already exists; in this regard, the concept of syntopia fits in with Gibson-Graham's (1996, 2006) work.

This characteristic can be linked to the relative ease with which one can enter and exit those spaces. Foucault emphasizes that heterotopias always presuppose a system of opening and closing that can make them isolated (prison, barracks) or make exit and entry conditional to a set of rules or even rituals intended to sort, select or exclude. It is this system that can be associated with certain forms of alternatives such as cooperatives, mutualist organizations (Azkarraga et al., 2012; Cheney, 2002; Draperi, 2005; Laville and Glémain, 2009) or kibbutzim (Warhurst, 1996, 1998). It is not the case for syntopias, which involve

a relative ease of entry and use, a freedom to come and go, to enter and exit and – for some of them – to circulate from one to another (thus, some coworkers use several coworking places simultaneously). Our observations suggest, however, that in order to enjoy the place's potential of articulation, one must first appropriate it and settle in it for a long enough period. Moreover, the ease with which one can enter these places needs qualifying: while there is no apparent criteria preventing a person from joining coworking spaces, an implicit selection may occur via the professions the members work in, the types of capital they possess – for example, cultural or social capital (Gandini, 2015) or via their income, which must be sufficient for them to pay the subscription to use the facilities. However, in most of the coworking spaces we have studied, these restrictions are identified and, in most cases, solutions are explored: for example, forms of barter (whereby a person may do some work for the space in return for using it), the existence of 'free zones' (e.g. a specific table) or a degree of tolerance for unpaid dues – taking into account the situation of certain coworkers (unpaid accounts are then treated as 'expected losses') can then enable people with insufficient income to use the space. The organization of events, the presence of a bar or a tuck shop open to all or the variety of activities performed there (associative activities, provision of tools, etc.) makes it possible to have a diversity of users.

From a post capitalocentric perspective, the fact that there is no selection based on coworkers' sensibility to alternative possibilities is both an advantage and a limitation. First, integrating coworkers who make more instrumental use of the coworking space makes it possible to develop a broader user base for these places, which contributes to their economic viability. Second, one can – just as Charles did – enter it for a utilitarian purpose of developing a personal project and then gradually discover alternative dimensions offered by the space: the evolution occurs by immersing oneself in the space; it requires neither a break from the world one comes from nor a visible commitment. The example of Stéphane also shows that being able to stay in the space even when one pulls back from the alternative potential provided by the place is precisely what allows one to seize this aspect later on. Howev-

er, among other coworkers, this sensibilization does not occur. Thus, future research will have to examine the factors that contribute to developing individuals' sensibility to those alternatives or, on the contrary, that hinder it.

The articulation we are referring to here, and the potential it holds, also encompasses a temporal articulation. Foucault ([1966] 1998) draws our attention to the fact that heterotopias are linked to what he terms, 'for the sake of symmetry, heterochronies' (p. 184). They are 'temporal discontinuities', put 'men [...] in a kind of absolute break with their traditional time' (p. 184) (Foucault uses the example of the cemetery). As for syntopias, they allow for the articulation of usually heterogeneous times: time of work, time of leisure, time of personal projects, time of collective projects, time of production and time of experimentation. Syntopias are linked to synchronies: dimensions which the normal segmentation and organization of space and time generally separate can be integrated (e.g. work, activities usually considered domestic such as DIY or cooking; or democratic participation in decisions about the future and the operation of the space). A consequence in terms of subjectivity is that they are places whose users can make sense of their existence: the sense of a lack of meaning is often related to experience incoherencies, to the difficulty to link together and integrate different areas of life (Morin and Forest, 2007).

Gibson-Graham (2006) points out the ethical and political implications of subjectivity, that is to say, the role played by the latter in changing the world in which we live, and raises the question: 'How do we become not merely opponents of capitalism, but subjects who can desire and create 'noncapitalism?'(p. xxxvi). It seems to us that syntopias have an important role to play in the perspective of a post capitalocentric economy because they can participate in the development of such subjects. Indeed, the fact that coworkers can link together hitherto separate dimensions of their lives, or progressively find that they, themselves, have changed without having planned to (like Charles, who says that he has gone through an 'ethical change'), prompts us to consider syntopias as spaces of potential subjective and ethical transformation, which corresponds to what Foucault ([1984] 2009) calls 'ethical self-transfor-

mation', or to Connolly's (1995, 1999) 'micropolitics of (re)subjectiva-tion', or to what Gibson-Graham (2006) refers to as engagement in 'new practices of the self'. In syntopias, the subjects are both constituted and constrained by desires, discourses and dominant practices but are also sensitized to new desires, new identifications, new ways of thinking and acting, 'new forms of sociability, visions of happiness, and economic capacities' (Gibson-Graham, 2006: xxxv), which transform their subjectivity and therefore also their relationship to the world and to their own capacities to act in this world. The fact that these places remain open to the outside and that 'syntopists' can easily come and go facilitates the dissemination of ideas and practices from syntopias into other places. But political change can also occur at a more collec-tive and organized level: thus, Gandini (2015) suggests that coworking spaces could be places from which could emerge a politically orga-nized 'coworking class' able to influence socio-political choices based on the experiences they have conducted.

Conclusion

Building on a study of coworking spaces conducted over several years, we have developed the concept of 'syntopia' to define spaces whose main characteristic is to juxtapose heterogeneous and potentially contradictory aspects that come with the economic diversity inherent to a post capitalo-centric economy, and give their users the opportunity to articulate this diversity. Their emancipatory and alternative poten-tial lies in this possibility of articulation. It is also at this level that their limitations lie because there is no guarantee that the users of the space will realize this alternative potential. Worse still, this potential may be brought to the fore for promoting the coworking space, without it nec-essarily being realized. An important research question for the future is, we believe, to understand what makes a coworker exploit this potential or not, depending on his or her own history but also on the character-istics of the place and the encounters he or she makes there. This type of research calls for specific methodologies: longitudinal methodolo-gies, for example, to monitor coworkers over a certain period of time; to examine their possible process of subjective, ethical and political

transformation; and to identify the factors that influence this process – life-story type interviews to understand how the possibilities offered by a coworking space can be more or less resonant with the history of the coworker.

This new concept could be applied to other types of places and help identify and characterize alternative places typical of a post capitalocentric economy

Our main contribution is to propose a new concept which, we believe, fits well with the vision of a post capitalocentric economy, by bringing to the fore a form of spatial arrangement that both encompasses economic diversity and enables its users to articulate this diversity in a unique manner, without this articulation being necessarily guaranteed. This new concept could be applied to other types of places and help identify and characterize alternative places typical of a post capitalocentric economy and able to bring about profound change in our society: for example, hackerspaces, makerspaces, TechShops or FabLabs. It would also be interesting to examine the relevance of using this concept in reference to emerging initiatives that consist in temporarily using urban wastelands (industrial or railway areas, for example), or even abandoned public buildings, and which involve a large diversity of actors: institutional and informal, individual and collective (artists or artisans setting up their workshops, neighbourhood residents looking for spaces for leisure, experimentation or simply socializing, associations using the space to conduct their activities, temporary retailers, etc.) (Dejolivet, 2014; Diguet et al., 2017). Just as Foucault ([1966] 1998) advocated developing a 'heterotopology' with 'the object [...] of studying, analyzing, describing' (p. 179) heterotopias, we think it is essential to develop a 'syntopology' whose object would be to study systematically the different forms of syntopias, their characteristics, their functioning, their potential and limitations.

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Notes

1.We refer, here, to the original French text because the term 'contre-emplacements' ('counter-space'), though it is essential, was purely and simply eliminated from the English translation published in 1998. 'Il y a également, et ceci probablement dans toute culture, dans toute civilization, des lieux réels, des lieux effectifs, des lieux qui sont dessinés dans l'institution même de la société, et qui sont des sortes de contre-emplacements, sortes d'utopies effectivement réalisées' (Foucault, [1966] 1994: 755) was trans-lated as 'there are also, and probably in every culture, in every civilization, real places, actual places, places that are designed into the very institution of society, which are sorts of actually realized utopias' (Foucault, [1966] 1998: 178).

2.Lille is situated in France, at the border with Belgium, and the two cross-border regions have strong ties.

3.This neologism was examined by an ancient Greek specialist, who confirmed its relevance to our con-ceptual project.

4.This essential word 'contredisent' ('contradict') is used in the original French version: 'Ces espaces, en quelque sorte, qui sont en liaison avec tous les autres, qui contredisent pourtant tous les autres emplace-ments' (Foucault, [1966] 1994: 755). Much of the meaning is lost in the translation from 'contredire' to 'to be at variance with': 'Those spaces which are linked with all the others, and yet at variance somehow with all the other emplacements' (Foucault, [1966] 1998: 178).

5.As this essential word 'contre-emplacements' ('counter-space') was eliminated from the English version, we refer to the original French version. See Note 1.

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VIANA ABORDO

A monthly participatory event, Viana Abordo is a program developed by Di-namo10 (Viana do Castelo, Portugal). Once a month, there is a local community that promotes shared learning and collective intelligence: citizens, artists, students, entrepreneurs and local policy makers are invited to actively engage in an open reflection on the city's future and co-create possible solutions to the local challenges.

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Joana Carvalho, Helder Teixeira