CHAPTER 5

REINVENTING COMMUNITY THROUGH COMMONING

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Commoning is usually considered as a form of goods distribution that is based on rules of sharing rather than on practices of individual appropriation or profit-oriented transactions. In such a prospect, conditions of power arrangement and collective choices related to culture are expected to shape commoning, since they will directly influence the priorities and the scopes of sharing.

If, however, commoning is to become a process that directly challenges the logic of social organisation which characterises contemporary capitalism, then relevant practices are expected to produce emergent forms of an alternative social organisation. Alternative forms of goods and services distribution are merely one part of an overall process of the rearrangement of power relations.

Could we then possibly attempt to trace one of the fundamental aspects of such a rearrangement, the re-invention of community in the prospect of sustaining a potentially emancipating project? As this chapter will try to show, the re-invention of community through commoning will be the result of a collective culture of sharing, based on the power of collective creativity unleashed in the context of the project of autonomy.

Creativity will be explored as a collective process that challenges the limits of the possible which are crafted by dominant values and norms. The art of rule-making will be considered as a crucial part of this process that establishes autonomous open communities. Culture is the contested terrain on which such inventiveness potentially flourishes. That is why a critical reassessment of modernity is needed in order to open current urban imaginaries to different visions of the relationship between land and community. If community is a tender rather than the owner of territory and community rituals are means to establish bonds of sharing and equalitarian conviviality, then commoning becomes both a material force and a value establishing process that creates common worlds. As the chapter concludes, cultural commoning may become a crucial shaping factor for the re-invention of communities characterised by equality and solidarity.

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AUTONOMY AS COMMUNITY AUTOPOIESIS

One way to understand the project of autonomy is to compare it to what has been known as the autopoietic process which according to certain biologists characterises living beings. Autopoiesis actually attempts to describe a certain level of autonomy that characterises the unfolding of life: Tracing a path between the opposing views that either overemphasise the role of environment in shaping life or the role of inherent characteristics that simply develop, this theory suggests that autopoietic systems are at the same time open to their environments and "operationally closed" (Maturana & Varela, 1980; Varela, 1997). This means that interaction with the environment takes place under certain structural conditions that characterise the living entity which is opened to such a relational condition. Autonomy in such a context does not describe an organism able to reproduce itself no matter what its environment is constituted of. Autonomy refers to a constitutive nucleus that responds to changes in the environment in ways that tend to reproduce the organism's mode of interaction.

As Varela explicitly specifies, an autopoietic system is a "minimal living organisation", that "continuously produces the components that specify it, while at the same time realising it (the system) as a concrete unity in space and time which makes the network of production of components possible" (1997: 75; Maturana & Varela, 1980).

Two important propositions are crucial for this approach to life, to the 'living'. First, autopoiesis is a process that constitutes the organism's identity, "a unitary quality, a coherence of some kind" which, however, "is not meant as a static structural description" but as an ongoing process within the boundaries of an "operational closure" (Maturana & Varela, 1987; Varela, 1997: 73). Second, "reproduction is not intrinsic to the minimal logic of the living… Reproduction is essential for the long-term viability of the living, but only when there is an identity, can a unit reproduce." (Varela, 1997: 76).

One thing we may agree upon is that by considering an organised human community as a living organism we employ a kind of analogical thinking that we need to consider with a certain caution. Bearing this in mind the central question arising from a need to explore autonomy as a project of social emancipation is this: which relations and what elements of community life are to become the anchors of a community's autopoietic self-creation if this community is to liberate itself from the dominating power of a social environment that actively aims at controlling community life?

By accepting the fact that inside a community, antagonisms of different kinds exist, we already partially question the validity of the autopoietic metaphor. Changes may occur not only through the community's interaction with its outside but essentially because community itself includes forces and actions which develop towards opposing scopes. The "living organism" in this case is potentially torn apart from inside. There is however a kind of force that may retain a community's "coherence" without equating it (as Varela

rightly suggests in his model) to an identity. This force necessarily re-invents community as a process of negotiation that limit the opportunities of power accumulation by some of its members while aiming at an equalitarian future. We may recognise this force in practices of commoning that support equality and mutual support without eliminating differences (Stavrides, 2016, 2019). To be more exact, this kind of transformative force will develop through negotiations that will create a common ground between different perspectives, provided that these perspectives want to sustain this common ground as a shared guarantee of equality. For some non-western cultures this kind of common ground may be defined as an area of complementarity and harmonious co-existence. It is not by chance that such a possible common life-world is described by some of these cultures as *buen vivir* (living well) rather than *vivir* (living). Living well directly challenges the limits of a model aimed at understanding the "living".

By critically employing the autopoietic principles to community's claim for self-reproduction, we may actually distinguish between two possible opposing projects. The one tends to barricade a community from outside influences by emphasising the community's power to preserve intact its integrity, while the other tends to see community as a collective entity that claims its right to change in ways and directions collectively chosen, produced and supervised. In the last case, the autopoietic structure is not a condition inherently connected to community's reproduction but a collective choice made in the direction of the collective emancipation project.

In other words, autonomy is in a constant struggle to develop itself in confrontation with powers that tend to control the community's life. It is not always external powers, what Castoriadis describes as the forces of heteronomy (Castoriadis, 1987). Forces developed within the community may also tend to block any change; forces we might call conservative. Autopoietic autonomy should then be clearly connected to a change that aims at transcending community's reflexes for self-preservation.

Esposito (2013) introduces the term *immunisation* to describe the process through which communities develop these self-preservation tactics. Interestingly, for him the same process is employed to protect the individual members of the community from the very obligations that bind them to all the others.

Esposito locates a constitutive contradiction in immunitary dynamics: "that which protects the body (the individual body, the social body, and the body politic) is at the same time that which impedes its development" (2013: 85). The way out of this contradiction lies in a kind of compromise: immunisation needs to be effectively controlled so that it will not reach a point which will threaten the community coherence itself. And this may only be accomplished, according to Esposito, if community members struggle to ensure the expansion and maintenance of the common (2013: 89). Here lies "the possibility of a positive, communitarian reconversion of the… immunitary *dispositif*" (2006: 54, author's italics).

In this approach, the common lies at the heart of community's reproduction. Offering an etymology of the word community that supports his claim, Esposito sees *munus* at the word's root. *Munus* means duty, post and gift. "What predominates in the *munus* is… reciprocity or 'mutuality'… of giving that assigns the one to the other in an obligation" (2010: 6). Thus, community, "isn't the subject's expansion or multiplication but its exposure to what interrupts the closing" (ibid.: 8). Community, is constituted by the obligation to give and to assume responsibilities (ibid.: 5). Opening oneself to others through offering essentially means sacrificing the individual safety that immunisation promises. Immunity encloses, community tends to open individual or shared enclosures towards the proliferation of the common.

Of course, the immunity metaphor that directly connects to a biological mechanism of protection which is part of an organism's defence against recurrent outside threats, as every metaphor, has its limits. When applied to societies in general or to particular communities specifically, the metaphor of immunity needs to be nuanced and related to the historical context. How do specific organised groups of people collectively recognise threats to their collective existence? In what cases do perceived or imaginary threats cause splits in the corresponding communities? How is openness experienced and practiced as a force that expands obligations and offerings in different arrangements of power relations?

AUTONOMY AS COLLECTIVE CREATIVITY

For Esteva in "genuinely democratic politics", "the art of the possible consists of extending it: the art of making the impossible possible" (2015a: 140). In what seems at first glance a poetic reaffirmation of hope for changing society is in reality a clever statement regarding the limits of social order. Reversing the well-known motto, Esteva seems to suggest that instead of developing the art of finding solutions within the framework of a given society (and democracy allegedly is meant to provide us with this capacity), we need to develop the art to transcend such a framework. Thus, inventiveness and creativity will not be used in order to adapt to the defined social reality but to challenge it, to extend it and to go beyond it. The possible should be disentangled from the dominant framework of imaginaries and behaviours that tend to circumscribe it.

Rancière (2010) understands politics in a similar way. For him, politics emerges when the dominant framework, the order of the sensible, is challenged by those who were not meant to have the right to speak, think and express themselves within this framework. Re-staging and thus re-arranging the distribution of the sensible opens the road to emancipation for the dominated ones.

Interestingly, Rancière also talks about art connecting it with the power of politics to transcend the limits of dominant reality. However, he chooses to put an emphasis on the "aesthetic experience" that refers to the specific condition under which art "produces a

gap with regard to ordinary forms of experience" (Rancière interviewed in Batista, 2017: 251). Distancing himself explicitly from didactic, pedagogic and self-proclaimed critical forms of art, Rancière (2006) supports artistic acts and works that open up possibilities of experiences not already included in the field of the possible defined by the dominant ones.

However, the opening up of the field of possibilities develops, according to Rancière, not only because creativity expands and transcends the limits of the sensible, but also because those who "receive" the artworks are equally creative (2009). The "emancipated spectator" is the one who uses artworks to express, narrate and depict his or her own stories. Emancipation in this prospect has to do with the opportunity to integrate the creativity of others (producers, artists) to the creativity of one's own life that acquires, thus, the power to transcend the limits of the possible.

Comparing the two approaches we may conclude that art (literally, as an instituted form of practice or generally, as the capacity to invent and to create) may be used to explore the possible, without even accepting the limits within which the possible is defined according to the dominant forms of the sensible. Either viewed from the perspective of the creative producer or that of the creative receiver, art may *potentialize* experience, as well as the means we have to give meaning and value to experience. As collective creativity unfolds, the distinction between production and reception as well as that between active creators and passive interpreters is decisively challenged.

Under different lines of reasoning but following similar paths sustained by emancipatory aspirations, Esteva and Rancière use the notion of autonomy in close connection to practices of individual and collective creativity. Esteva explicitly relates autonomy to the creative power of the collective unleashed by the democratic self-government. In contrast to "ontonomy" which is "the regulatory system based on a cultural tradition itself" (2015a: 143 note 15), autonomy "appears when the members of the current generation modify existing rules or create new ones" (ibid.). In autonomy, thus, collective creativity expands the limits of the possible.

Rancière talks about "aesthetic autonomy" as "what makes the work available to anyone and thus no longer the expression or signature of its creator" (Rancière interviewed in Batista, 2017: 250). Autonomy, in this context, frees the work, the product of someone's creativity, from the burden of its creator's intentions.

Couldn't this approach to creativity also be applied to the art of rulemaking? Not connected to a prevailing authority that gives them form and determines their jurisdiction, rules become part of a process of an ongoing creativity. But if rulemaking may be compared to the art of autonomous creation, could it be also related to Agamben's suggestion that "[o]ne day humanity will play with law just as children play with disused objects, not in order to restore them to their canonical use but to free them from it for good" (Agamben, 2005: 64)? This is a possibility based on Agamben's

idea about the "coming community" in which "singularities form a community without affirming an identity" and "humans co-belong without any representable condition of belonging (even in the form of a simple presupposition)" (Agamben, 1993: 86). As Mills rightly points out (2008), Agamben's coming community is directly related to the play with law through which the constitutive experience of historicity is made possible. By playing, humans truly experience human time, the time of *Kairos*, the time of contingency, as they are freed from the burdens of sacred time that prescribes the future and interprets the past. Such an experience is meant to give "onto a new communism, in which nothing is shared except the power and possibility of life itself, and life escapes the caesuras and impotence to which law has relegated it" (ibid.: 26).

Creativity lies, in this prospect, not in the power to collectively explore possibilities of devising new rules that would re-define the common but in the unleashing of the pure, unrestricted and indeterminate potentiality of life itself that will characterise the acts of the "whatever singularities". Playing with rules is just part of this essential playfulness of life that unfolds against the restrictions imposed by law.

Deactivated rules, rules having lost the power to direct and punish behaviour, may possibly become toys in the hands of a self-liberating humanity, even in the form of a revealing joyous play of obsolete roles (more like children playing pirate adventure games). Such a capacity to inventively play with rules may indeed enhance collective creativity. After all, since antagonistic societies teach their members how to always be fighters by offering them a series of war-games, why should not egalitarian societies play with past laws, in this way enriching shared imaginaries of collective emancipation? However, to play with the deactivated products of history that used to explicitly aim at controlling the future (as the laws do by prescribing what should not be done) should not be equated with the romanticised potentiality of "whatever" singularities "sharing nothing except the being-thus of happy life, in which all belong without any claim to belong" (Mills, 2008: 26). As opposed to Agamben's formulation, collective rulemaking creativity needs to be developed in a constant and reflexive redefinition of a mutually imagined and produced common ground.

In line with Rancière's suggestion who proposes that we need to suspend or rather, to transcend the distinction between producers and receivers, we may understand autonomy as a process in which the power to create rules belongs to those who try to collectively define a shared future while being both co-producers and individual interpreters of these rules. Sovereign laws are meant to last and to control the future by banishing certain acts. But rulemaking, understood as an act of commoning, opens the potentiality of change by opening the process itself to a community that keeps on inventing itself.

Esteva insists that autonomy is not the grand project of a political proposal aspiring to have a universal validity. "In the barrios and pueblos of the world, in Africa and Asia as in Latin America, spaces of freedom have been spawning where autonomy and the art of

living are being exercised more fully" (Esteva et. al., 2013: 140). Autonomy seems to be emerging according to this logic in the context of everyday survival efforts of populations living in the peripheries and poor neighbourhoods of metropolises. But, people on the margins (in many cases forming the majority of the relevant megacity population, as for example in Mumbai) do not live in conditions of autonomy simply because the state has no interest in imposing its laws and providing its services to those vast "neglected" urban areas. Struggles to preserve "autonomous ways of living" (ibid.: 136) emerge in such places against invading 'development projects' or harsh militarised interventions to control the 'dangerous classes'. There is a positive potentially emancipatory element in the autonomy of the marginalised populations. And this, according to Esteva but also to other thinkers and activists, can be described as the emergence of "the new commons" (ibid.: 136). As Esteva describes them: "They are contemporary ways of life, sound spaces for comfortable living, sociological novelties that activate traditions and reappraise modernity" (ibid.: 142).

Collective creativity, directly or indirectly related to art, redefines, extends and develops the common. Both the immunitary dynamics and the autopoietic hypothesis though, not only offer the means to explain an organism's (be it a living being or a community) self-reproduction but also suggest ways to understand interaction between organisms. Communities may employ collective creativity to explore and develop relations with what lies outside: the common may thus become the fertile meeting ground of different collectivities. Potentialising experience, challenging the limits of the possible and questioning dominant reality will in this prospect become not only forces that make communities change but also practices that open communities and build bridges towards what used to be considered as outside, "other", alien or even hostile.

BEYOND TRADITION AND MODERNITY?

Emancipatory potentialities are being produced in urban life through a constant cross-influence of two main sources: tradition and modernity. Tradition may be activated by reference to past experiences or collective memories that certain urban populations carry from their recent rural past. Interestingly such traditions cannot be transferred wholesale to the urban context: urban space and urban networks as well as the prevailing neoliberal ethos privilege individuality instead of community, alienation instead of a feeling of belonging. Such populations, therefore, have to re-invent community and to readjust habits of collaboration and sharing. Above all, they have to deal with extensive and unpredictable forms of differences instead of taking for granted a homogeneous body of dwellers sharing familiar and slowly changing (if at all) living environments. Autonomy in such a context would mean the potentialising of traditions (and not of 'tradition') in order to collectively craft a common ground of negotiations.

According to Virno's (2004, 2008) and Hardt and Negri's (2005, 2009) analysis (among others) the city has become a vast and polymorphous site of capitalist production. The

production process itself (still centrally depended upon the exploitation of labour) has been expanding to even include private house spaces (as in the case of tele-work).

Reappraising modernity in such a context would mean carefully exploring the new conditions of exploitation and the spatiality's that they give rise to, as well as the mutations of the modernist imaginary. Benjamin was one of those first to call for this re-appraisal, claiming that an inherent emancipatory potential had to be reclaimed in an effort to redeem the modernist project. In his reading of urban modernity, large cities are not simply symptoms of the modernity's hopes and failures but, crucially, shaping factors of modernity's reality. That is why he searched in large cities to locate the potentialities of the modernist project that were blocked or perverted by the capitalist command of the modernisation process (1983, 1999).

Reappraising modernity needs not be limited to those who have been accustomed to modernity's dominant, hegemonic normality. Different collective life traditions had to face the invasion of urbanised modernisation to their communities. Resistances, especially developed by colonised indigenous populations, were never simply obstinate struggles to preserve their traditions intact. Zapatista communities, to take a highly indicative example, distanced themselves from a possible Maya fundamentalism while at the same time embracing emancipatory ideas coming from the West. The result was (and this is still a work in progress) a kind of re-invention of community that struggles for autonomy neither with the aim of preserving an absolute otherness nor with the scope of establishing borderlines demarcating an 'outside' and an 'inside'.

Zapatista territory is territory connected to specific self-governed communities that take care of it and protect it from the 'bad government', as they call it. Such a renewed understanding of Mayan territoriality contributes to the re-invention of indigenous communities by the Zapatista movement. What shocks most of the visitors from outside is that the territory of an emancipatory rebellion that clashes with the Mexican state's policies and control mechanisms cannot really be defined by a borderline to be drawn on a map as well as on the ground. Appropriation of feudal land and the use of existing road networks are forms of expanding the territory of autonomy and developing a network of autonomous settlements in cooperation.

Another interesting treatment of tradition in the prospect of community re-invention can be found in the renewed momentum the Buen Vivir indigenous culture has acquired. Buen Vivir (living well) is a view of life in which the indigenous Andean peoples express a harmonious respectful coexistence of human communities with Nature. Buen Vivir includes an understanding of community's commonwealth as the result of relations of cooperation between its members based on solidarity and complementarity. Cooperation is supported by an ethos that permeates both the human relations as well as the relation of the community with Nature. "Production and work is done with respect for and in harmony with nature" (Prada, 2013: 146). Since,

however, nature is not considered as a resource but as a sacred entity, as the mother who provides and must be taken care of, "pacts with it are renewed through ritual" (ibid.). For Andean people the ritual reaffirmation of Buen Vivir relations is a way of establishing such relations of mutual care between community and nature.

Community, thus, is not the collective owner of natural resources (including land) that are to be found in this territory. Community is more like a tender of its territory, attached as it is to it, not only out of need to dwell and survive but also through links that relate community to its past and its future, its ancestors and its collective aspirations. Commoning in this case is more like an extensive participation in exchanges within and through nature that aim to be just, sustainable and based on mutual care.

Buen Vivir principles were in a way integrated to the Constitution of two Andean countries, Ecuador (in 2008) and Bolivia (in 2009). The Ecuadorian Constitution explicitly states "We hereby decide to build a new form of public coexistence, in diversity and in harmony with nature, to achieve the good way of living [buen vivir]." In Bolivia, indigenous people form the majority of the population. In Ecuador the presence of indigenous population is less dominant in terms of numbers but equally powerful in terms of culture. But, as Prada explains, the adoption of Buen Vivir "as a state and government objective" (ibid.: 147) rather attempts to create a meeting place, an area of agreements based on the ethics of pursuing harmony through complementarity. Cooperation thus is elevated to a governance model that will lead to a "plurinational state" which is meant to guarantee and protect an inclusive and equalitarian pluralistic society.

In many efforts to implement this new legal condition, Buen Vivir principles clashed with extremely strong elite interests as well as with taken for granted hopes in 'progress' through 'development'. True, rural communities in these countries had the opportunity to protect their established customs of collective care for land and their ritual and practical ways of expressing a bond with nature that explicitly clashes with the predominant *extractivist* ethos (Acosta, 2013; De Sousa Santos & Meneses, 2020). Urban communities also have the opportunity to use the same legal guarantees to protect their neighbourhoods and shared spaces from an advancing urban extractivism (including gentrification, urban expansion, public land grabbing, aggressive 'touristification' etc.). The integration of the Buen Vivir approach into constitutional legislation has performative effects in practices that reinvent both urban and rural communities in the context of de-centralisation, horizontality and plurality of social organisation forms. However, progressive governments in both countries did not choose to confront fundamental inequalities and to limit existing power asymmetries. Without attacking the development model based on extractivism they also became complicit with a governance ethos that gave no room to movements and to organised communities so as to act as organised contesters of developmentalist priorities. There seems to be no way to reinvent communities of commoning that is not based on the power of communities to reinvent themselves.

SPACE COMMONING AND AUTONOMOUS COMMUNITY BUILDING

In certain indigenous languages in Mexico the word for community and territory is the same. In Tzotsil and other Maya languages the word used is *jlumaltik* (Baschet, 2018). However, this does not indicate an attitude of possession. Land is the common ground to be shared by all. *Pacha Mama*, Mother Earth, does not belong to anybody. To say therefore that community and territory are the same thing means that there can be no community without a land to which it is embedded.

This somehow reveals the powerful connection an indigenous community has to its territory, not only as a means to sustain itself but also as a constitutive element of the operational relations this community has with its surrounding environment (both "natural" and "social"). Escobar suggests that a community's territory is to be understood as "a system of relations whose continuous re-enactment re-creates the community in question" (2018: 173).

And if in rural communities these relations are developed through practices of cultivation, farming, raising livestock etc., in urban communities these relations are developed by producing the city in its everyday uses and rituals.

Community's relation to space is multifaceted. It activates practices of care and exchange, processes of production and social reproduction as well as the construction of shared world views. Those shared world views explicitly construct community bonds either by strengthening inherited ones or by opening the field to re-arrangements in power geometries. In such a context, rituals contribute to the reproduction as well as to the re-construction of community and can be taken to consist of powerful means of community re-invention.

Byung-Chul Han explicitly connects the current diminishing importance of rituals (for him "the disappearance of rituals"), with the advance of neoliberalism. According to his approach, neoliberalism shapes a predominant "compulsion to produce" and an ethics of "communication without community" (2020: 1). Both those predominant tendencies destroy community bonds and develop individualism through a "narcissistic cult of authenticity" (ibid.: 21), "an obvious decay of the social" (ibid.: 18) and a "culture of interiority" in which the public expression gives way to "a pornographic exhibition of the private" (ibid.: 21). In place of this social condition, he proposes a rediscovery of play and ceremonial acts as forms that mediate and shape the social. "Rituals… bring people together and create an alliance, a wholeness, a community" (ibid.: 6).

Interestingly, Han connects rituals to a closure in space and time. The experience of closure he contrasts with a continuously escalating demand for developed performances, production, "extensivity" (ibid.: 7) and seriality ("serial habitus") all

of which characterise the neoliberal regime. However, closure, as he admits, is not "invariably positive", "given the possibility of violence associated with a fundamentalist closure of sites" (ibid.: 32).

Here lies a challenging potentiality of rituals rediscovered and reclaimed. How can ritual practices transcend the closure of a community as well as the closure of time (trapped in the eternal) in search of a creativity immersed in history? How can rituals support a rediscovery of history as a process of collective creativity in place of the dominant practices of consumption oriented exclusively towards the present? It seems paradoxical to ask for openness in processes essentially based on the production of repeated performances within a 'magic circle' (Bourdieu, 2000; Hastrup, 2004; Mauss, 2001). These are processes that seemingly employ a kind for temporality that refutes change (time that stands still in Han's description) and a kind of spatiality that epitomises spatial closure – a closure that ignores its outside.

Let us explore the possibility of rituals that play with closure, of rituals that develop through their performed closures the potentiality of open communities. Seen from a certain perspective the *mistica* ritual of the Brazilian Landless Rural Workers Movement (Movimento dos Trabahadores Rurais Sem Terra – MST) is an interesting example.

MST is a movement with a long tradition of struggles including, predominantly, land occupations. It is a very well organised movement and it has successfully established self-governed settlements, mostly close to large areas of collective cultivation that were in most cases recuperated *latifundios*.

MST "has been advocating an alternative way of life. It is a struggle that goes beyond land redistribution" (Issa, 2007: 85). So, MST is organised not only to develop the strategy and tactics of struggle but also to promote within its members a collective identity that makes them builders of a new kind of community. The occupation, the temporary camp, and the settlement become important areas of living together in which this emerging collective identity is being shaped. In such "interactive spaces" (Hammond, 2014: 383) MST militants share experiences and aspirations and learn from each other's stories. They become empowered and even raise the identity of the landless poor to a positive marker. Commenting on an activist's words who proudly proclaims "I am a Sem Terra with capital letters", Hammond notices that "not only does she invert the status of landless from pejorative to proudly acknowledged; she converts it from an attribute to a noun, from an incidental characteristic to the essence of *what she is*" (ibid., author's italics).

Mistica rituals play a very important role in the formation of this emerging identity, which actually radiates as a kind of call to action and participation to all those who will potentially join MST. Mistica rituals are not merely identity performances, however. Comprising of expressive acts as diverse as theatrical pieces, flag waving, collective singing, organised sceneries for assemblies, poem reading, commemoration of movement's struggles and

heroes, symbolic arrangements of objects (seeds, candles , rural worker's tools etc.), mistica rituals actually lack strict formal rules. Nevertheless, they are recognised by MST members as important empowering experiences that give them the strength to continue in struggles that are difficult, dangerous and not always successful.

Interestingly, one of the movement's leaders, João Pedro Stedile, declares that MST is open to "all truths, not a single truth" (quoted in Hammond, 2014: 375 and in Issa, 2007: 128). Such an approach clearly differentiates MST's cultural and ideological formation from other explicitly Marxist, anarchist or populist movements. Without being a religious movement, it has managed to appropriate both Catholic ritualism as well as Indigenous and African religiosity producing an almost animistic amalgam of belief in the "sacredness of nature" (Issa, ibid.).

Ritualistic behaviour is therefore meant not only to become instrumental in raising members' self-esteem and morals. It is meant to create, albeit on a symbolic level, the condition of a different social context and a different set of social relationships leading to new forms of social organisation. Community building becomes the process of building autonomy not only by commoning the means of a community's existence but also by reproducing on a ritual level the shared values that constitute a common world. And as has probably become evident throughout this chapter, no commoning practices and performances can unfold without literally taking place. Shared land, common ground, common space. These are the concrete material as well as the symbolic ways in which space commoning becomes a shaping factor of communities re-invented through commoning.

A POLITICS OF BEING-IN-COMMON?

Establishing community bonds through autonomy that is grounded on a relation of mutual definition with the land on which the autonomy project flourishes, challenges both the Arendtian tradition that considers public space as the space of appearances" as well as Nancy's ontological grounding of "being-in-common" in a space of mutual exposure.

According to Arendt's approach, the space of appearances becomes the locus of politics since it is constituted by individuals acting together in the presence of others. "Wherever people gather together [the space of appearances] is potentially there, but only potentially, not necessarily and not forever" (1958: 199). Arendt's distinction between the social, the private, and the political, attributes to public space a potentiality that is activated when people do not act under the pressure of needs or particularistic motives. Public space is inaugurated as a pure space of freedom produced by the creativity freedom engenders in pluralistic societies. Space, thus, is more like a scaffold of potential political activities rather than a shaping factor of the relations a community builds within itself and with its outside.

Buen Vivir communities for which there is no actual outside but only expanding relations between partners (including what the West would call non-humans) actually re-produce themselves as they co-produce their living environment with forces, entities and agents that are deeply interrelated. In such an approach a clear-cut distinction between nature and culture is not accepted. Arendt's view ignores the inherent connection between the social and the political considered as the multifaceted engagement with community's governance.

Buen vivir principles transverse all areas of common life and thus define community as an extensive field of relations between living beings. Complementarity rather than antithesis is at the root of this *cosmovision*. A re-invention of community inspired by such principles can develop out of practices of expanding commoning that depart from the capitalist plundering of resources and the ruthless exploitation of humans and non-humans alike. A relevant politics of community autonomy, thus, establishes forms of living together that are based on mutuality, collaboration and on respectful and balanced relations with nature. In search for a politics for community building, it is better to look at the potentialities of the social rather at the exceptional presence of the political, understood as a demarcated area of common life (as in Arendts's hypothesis). The social with all its latent or potential resistances is where a politics of commoning emerges as a force to reclaim what should be discovered and sustained as the source of the common.

Nancy, let us recall, understands the "being-in-common" as constitutive of the existence of humans. For him, being-with-others should be understood with an emphasis on the constitutive "with" (2000). It is here that his problematisation of the political is grounded: "The political is the place where the community as such is brought into play… the place of a specific existence, the existence of being in common…" (1991: xxxvii). Being in common does not mean for Nancy being similar. Quite the contrary: being in common is the condition in which singularities may co-exist and expose themselves to each other by sharing a common ground, a "stage", the "space of a co-appearing" (2000: 66-7). As in Arendt, the space of co-appearing is more like a receiver of action rather than a concrete shaping element of action, a perceptible, reflexively made meaningful, and often ritually established and reproduced constituent of action in the context of community.

Putting an emphasis on the openness and contingency of shared spaces is a prime concern of both Nancy and Arendt, as Dikeç rightly suggests (2015). What however, both fail to notice is that a "we" is being crafted in the materiality of concrete relations with land as well as with those with whom this land is shared (views that also challenge western dominant ideologies from within the context of today's multicultural mega-cities). Public spaces as well as spaces developed through commoning (common spaces) are spaces performed and performative. They participate in the construction of social bonds and shared world views as they support all aspects of social life. Being-in-common is a spatiotemporal set of performances. To re-invent community through commoning might then mean to explore a possible politics of being-in-common.

In Buenos Aires, during the days of 2001 uprising, neighbourhood assemblies have become "space[s] of experimentation on the possibilities of producing popular and autonomous forms of administration" (Colectivo Situaciones, 2002: 170). Thus, "in the assemblies people put forward practical hypotheses of re-appropriation – no matter how partial – of the living conditions" (ibid.: 168).

Isn't this a well stated synopsis of what it means to collectively re-invent communities by exploring the very core of commoning? For this potential community re-invention, which is to distance itself from enclosed (including self-enclosed) communities as well as from state controlled or market developed community simulations, it is not enough to re-appropriate what must be and has been the commons. Emergent communities have to rethink the commons, to re-evaluate forms of defining what it is to be shared and how, and to, therefore, reinvent commoning by re-inventing open communities of equality and mutual support. Autonomy describes the practices and the ethics of such communities and it should not be confused with "self-sufficiency" (Escobar, 2017). Rather, it is about constructing an "archipelago of conviviality" (a term of A. Gorz to which Esteva, 2015b refers) that may be described in condensed form by the motto of the National Indigenous Congress of Mexico: "We are a web when we are separated and an assembly when we are together" (in Esteva, 2015b: 86).

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