

More Common, More Public

Working with products for transvaluation.

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Abstract

‘More common, more public’ brings together two creative practice research projects to explore, firstly the themes within them that offer a critical perspective on the making of values and relational ethics more attuned to commons and collective life. Secondly, in framing the material-social practices of these art-architecture practitioners as research, we question opportunities for learning from the potential of transference of values and ways of valuing knowledge between different practice and research publics. Both projects, introduce the idea of working with products, which enable the performance and practice of new values, of collective making and sharing. In particular they suggest a different mode of production and use, other than commercial or commodified ones. The values of the products are wrapped in the stories around them, as well as their *capacity* in making connections, and new claims to space. Amidst the aggressive privatisation of space, and not least of knowledge and language, we are interested in how these forms of practice might translate and survive processes of enclosure, in both public space and the revaluing within cultures of standardization and evaluation in the academy.

Keywords: Commons, Publics, Collaborative Making, Creative Practice Research

Introduction

‘More common, more public’ brings together two creative practice research projects to explore, firstly the themes within them that offer a critical perspective on the making of values and relational ethics more attuned to commons and collective life. Secondly, in framing the material-social practices of these art-architecture practitioners as research, we question opportunities for learning from the potential of transferal of values and ways of valuing knowledge between different practice and research publics. The expression ‘more common, more public’ could be read as an imperative: we need to become ‘more common(s)! and ‘more public!’ in life, work as well as importantly here the academy, when intellectual

and social acts are being enclosed by value systems that treat knowledge and even language as property, as well as those modes of judgement and valuation that focus on efficiency and measurement.

Commons, as David Bollier notes, is a difficult concept to introduce succinctly precisely because commons are so varied (Bollier, nd). Whilst there are many types of commons and understandings, they usually imply a set of practices. These are practices of use, the extent of which and their rules for sharing are self-governed and determined.¹ In this paper, we will introduce two different understandings of commons but underscore the values these practices of ‘commoning’ can encompass. We will then go on to explore the way contemporary practitioners are nurturing, introducing or rekindling aspects of commons in their work, and the impact of viewing their practice through the lens of ‘practice research’. In particular, we wish to draw attention to ideas and tensions around using objects and products in spatial practice to foster these ‘more common’ practices within practice research. We are interested in the potential of these items to enable ethical forms of action and relating, and how the values embedded within these forms of practice might translate and survive processes of enclosure, in both public space and the revaluing within cultures of standardization and evaluation in the academy.

Public, as a more known, yet equally complex term, is seen particularly in urban contexts to be something quite distinct and even opposed to ‘commons.’ Public is often seen as a more inclusive term where commons are potentially not only parochial but limited in the scale of their actions.² In this paper we are interested in the behaviours and orientations of creative practitioner-researchers towards different publics, looking at how they orientate their work, whom it addresses, who is ‘invited in’ to the work in terms of contributing to is making or happening, and also where and for whom the knowledge from creative practice, as research, is expounded or shared. We consider that commons and publics are not opposed concepts, and both are valuable and important in underscoring the ethical orientations (even obligations) of both practice and research.

Structure of the paper

Our discussion of ‘More Common, More Public’ explores some of the differences in practices that address the commons and are oriented towards different notions of ‘public’. We will begin with a discussion of these terms, and then explore these ideas and tensions through two case studies, which are presented as instances of creative practice research.

The first instance is a pair of interconnected projects by artist and architect Gitte Juul, who is undertaking her PhD by practice as part of the ADAPT-r (Architecture, Design and Art Practice Research-training) network in which Anna is researcher. Working with the idea of the ‘street kitchen’ in two very different contexts, rural Sweden and urban India, Juul created sites of exchange and collectivity. Specifically, she worked in collaboration with a Swedish village Interest Society and the donated skills and time of villagers, and, in India, she worked with clay chai cup makers in Kolkata to create pottery that interacts with rituals of cup-making and chai-drinking. Critically engaging with questions of traditions and privileges, the work raises questions of design and commodity, and ownership rights and use rights of space.

¹ See for instance the discussion of the historic commons in England and Wales, Linebaugh (2008) and Neeson (1996).

² See for instance the discussion by Margaret Kohn (2004) or the discussion and distinctions made by Gidwani and Baviskar (2011). or the discussion on scale and governance by David Harvey (2008)

The second is Kim's collaboration with art architecture and design practice, *public works* and the cultural geographer, Mara Ferreri, during their on going residency in London's Queen Elizabeth Olympic Park (QEOP). The work, amongst many concerns, explores the re-situating of an archive of objects, products, memorabilia and literature that document the changing landscape into the park. The objects and products of the archive are testament to the activities and places that were once part of the urban commons, which have now been evicted, erased and replaced by the current, neoliberal development consisting of a highly regulated, private and commercial landscape.

Both projects operate, although in different ways, through an exploration of objects and their potential to support more ethical relations to others and to space. It is this element that we draw out through questioning the notion of objects, products or commodities, as material things connecting and enabling social relations, particularly where these connections cross cultures and engage a shift in valuing.

Finally we try to articulate some of the questions that these instances of creative practice research pose for a politics of value within our own work and relate this to the broader international research communities in which we are operating.

Why common?

Commons can be understood in many ways and are being created around us all the time. One of their more known and discussed forms is commons as democratic and collective resource management such as the indigenous forms of cooperatively managing the land, forests, rivers as well as new forms in digital technologies, cultural movements and open source. However, the notion of commons has received considerable attention in the economic and philosophical investigations of the political left for its offer of understandings of collective ownership and uses, which challenge dominant economic understandings of capitalism (Midnight Notes, 1992)(Gibson-Graham, 2006) (Harvey, 2012).

In this paper, we are interested in understanding contemporary and future commons, and the recognition of commons as not only being in flux, through the enclosing and appropriation of collective resources, but also being generated through different forms of production and reproduction. As David Harvey describes it:

“The common is not something that existed once upon a time and has since been lost, but is something like the urban commons, continuously being produced. The problem is that it is just as continuously being enclosed and appropriated by capital in its commodified and monetized form, even as it is being continuously produced by collective labour” (2012: 77)

These ideas of flux, and the need for constant making and remaking through use and the threat of enclosure and appropriation *show a dynamic approach to valuing and revaluing*. This dynamic understanding of commons is tied to modes of production and relations of use, which is critical to our development of a focus on the commons in creative practice research. In his seminal work on commons the historian Peter Linebaugh elucidates an understanding of commons as an activity, through the study of the historic English commons:

“To speak of the commons as if it were a natural resource is misleading at best and dangerous at worst. The commons is an activity and if anything it expresses relationships in society that are inseparable from relations to nature. It might be better

to keep the word as a verb, an activity rather than as a noun, a substantive.” (2008: 279)

The practice and values of commoning, in the historical commons are not only practices of use (such as gathering wood, fishing, grazing animals), but are predicated on the values of democratic and mutual agreement around those practices, to ensure equity amongst the group and the environmental sustainability of those resources. In particular, such practices emphasise ‘being-in-common,’ where commons are spaces of ethical interdependence (Gibson-Graham, 2006). Linebaugh and Federici in particular emphasise ‘commons’ as a way of being in the world, and their enclosure as a form of biopolitical regulation (Federici, 2004). With value lying in the labour, collective processes *and the relations*, a focus here on the material ‘thing’ or ‘product’ might seem contradictory. As de Angelis (2010) and Linebaugh (2008) point out, the danger of focussing on the ‘thing’ or the resource alone is that the very labour and collective practices that produced them ‘disappear.’³ In spite of this risk, we keep a focus on products for now, to refer to both processes of making and producing as well as their material outcomes.

Why public?

The dynamism and negotiation inherent in the understandings of commons above as something reproduced through practices of use, yet subject to enclosure and revaluing are proposed by Gidwani and Baviskar to “lie at the frontiers, or within the interstices, of the territorial grid of law” (2011:42). This understanding is contrasted with a more static and legally defined notions of public, as a juridical category, contrasted to private ownership.

Yet, critically, notions of commons and public in practice are culturally specific. For example Margaret Kohn questions the value of the ‘commons’ when it “can legitimately be applied to forms of joint ownership that are still extremely elitist and exclusive”, noting that gated communities and common interest developments in North America meet a certain definitions of the commons, but “do not provide an alternative to the balkanization produced by private interests or a solidaristic, egalitarian oasis within the market economy” (2004:10).

Proposing instead the more open possibilities of discussion within the term ‘public’, Kohn acknowledges the potential for different understandings of this term also, drawing attention to Weintraub’s cataloguing of four different senses of the word:

“ 1) In some contexts the words ‘public’ and ‘private’ suggest the difference between the state and the family, whereas 2) in others they are synonyms for the state and the market economy. 3) Political theorists influenced by Hannah Arendt use ‘public’ to describe the political community that is distinct from the economy, the household, and the administrative apparatus of the state. 4) Finally, cultural critics treat the public realm as the arena of sociability, a stage for appearing before others.” (2004: 10)

Within this paper we wish to focus on a sense of public which draws on the latter understanding of the public realm as the ‘arena of sociability’ but also as a way of understanding a positioning or orientation towards or within different publics through the development of creative practices and the exposition of these practices as research. This understanding is informed by observations from a long-standing model of practice-based

³ This is the case for instance with forests, which appear as ‘natural’ but are in fact the results of both human and non-human labour and interaction. See for instance Linebaugh (2008).

research, that of the RMIT PhD by Practice, instigated in Melbourne Australia, and subsequently within Europe as part of the RMIT PhD programme offered at Sint Lucas School of Architecture, Gent, now part of KU Leuven (Schaik and Johnson, 2011).⁴

In developing the model for this research program through an inductive theory-building process involving observation of successive cohorts of practitioners, a focus on the ‘public behaviours’ of practitioners has become emphasised. This broad term encompasses the context, or more precisely the contextualisation of practice. It may be seen to relate directly to how the practitioner chooses to engage with different forums in which they practice and in which they choose to seek recognition for their work, as well as the connections or bonds they have to other creative practitioners and where and how they position themselves. In terms of developing knowledge through practice, these public behaviours are a critical part of gaining feedback or peer review within the practitioners’ field. Van Schaik’s development of the term owes something to Howard Gardner’s biographical analysis of creative individuals in the nineteenth and twentieth century, and an understanding of an ‘oscillation’ between individual creative activity and engagement with groups of other practitioners to tests or gain recognition for this work (Gardener, 2011).

We seek to expand this focus on ‘public behaviours’ to look at the activities of practice-based researchers as they develop projects that critically engage with different publics in their work through wider social, material and spatial practices, and questioning of different forums of knowledge creation and use. In the following section we present two critical spatial practice projects whereby different publics are ‘invited in’ to the explorations of creative practitioners. Rather than a search for recognition of work already produced, this method of self-initiating projects is proposed as an epistemic practice of making and thinking with others.

Introducing Two projects

1. Street Kitchens in Kättilsmåla and Kolkata, a project of Gitte Juul. Street Kitchen Kättilsmåla, Sweden (May-November 2013) and Street Kitchen Kolkata, India (November – December 2013) are two interlinked projects initiated by the artist and architect Gitte Juul. Juul obtained funding to support the projects from the Danish foundation ‘Dreyers Fond’, but importantly the projects were also supported by work ‘in kind’ from the participation and help of local residents and tradespeople.

The projects explore, question and, in part, establish customary rights of usage of space. In Kättilsmåla a piece of land within a small village is in private ownership but supports/contains the village bus stop, mailbox and information board. The project initiated by Juul in collaboration with the local Interest Association develops the usage of this land for collective activities: growing an edible garden and hosting a street kitchen.

In Kolkata, Juul in collaboration with Dev Nayak, a photographer from Kolkata, and Anja Franke, a Danish ceramicist worked with local craftspeople to develop a customised product based on disposable/recyclable ceramic chai cups. They set up an informal street stall to serve chai and invite discussion and reflections with chai customers about waste and recycling. The siting of the stall engaged with the conflicting claims of street space in the crowded city, the relationship between formal development and informal street vending and the system of agreements and bribes in place which govern the management of these informal

⁴ Within the PhD by Practice model developed at RMIT, creative practitioners with seven or more years of experience in developing their own practice are invited to research through the medium of their practice. The model fosters critical reflection on past work, identification of modes of operation and the implementation of this informed understanding in ongoing practice.

selling spaces. Juul's street stall was only in place for a day, and was sited through negotiation with the legal land owner, the sweet shop adjacent to her pavement plot, and through discussion with the vendors using the adjacent street space.



Fig. 1 (left) Chai cups drying. Fig.2 Experiments with making the "Seed stamp".
Both images from [www. http://gittejuul.dk/flora-indica-clay-cups/](http://gittejuul.dk/flora-indica-clay-cups/)

The process of making the cups is equally significant in that it forms part of a social and ecological cycle. Juul explains:

“Chai cups are made of clay, excavated from the bottom of the river, The clay are turned into cups and tried in the sun. For generations Chai wallahs have sold their chai in the little clay cups, which are thrown to the ground as soon as the chai has been drunk. This action testifies the presence of Indias many hands for production, but at the same time it shows the traditional class distinction, where people from the low casts earlier on were not allowed to come into contact with people from a higher cast. Today all indians participate in this ritual many times every day” (Juul, nd)

When the cups are smashed, the clay returns to the river. Yet in this instance, Juul and co-designers worked with this cycle and introduced a stamp into the clay, containing seeds, and gave a new name to the product: *Flora Indica*. Juul's intention here was to play on the Danish associations of *Flora Danica*, a valuable porcelain dinner service produced in the 18th century for the Danish royal family, with designs taken from the *Flora Danica* botanical atlas of wild plant species native to the crown lands of Denmark. Working from the equivalent botanical atlas of *Flora Indica*, Juul chose native seeds to embed stamps after the firing process of the clay cups, with the idea that the discarded clay items, with their embedded seeds could have the potential for an unexpected garden, or at least initiate discussion of the life of these products after their initial use (Juul, 2014).

However, perhaps unsurprisingly, the experiences of product use and valuing in the re-designed cups differed from these expectations. The *Flora Indica* chai cups were similar enough to the standard chai cup that visitors to the stall initially used them in the manner of the traditional product. However, the inclusion of the seed stamp (and potentially the presence of the artist) gave the cups a different value in the eyes of users and affected their behavior towards them. People refrained from smashing the cups after use, and instead laid them gently down on the ground. They also asked to take them away as souvenirs (Juul, 2013).



Fig.3 (Left) Drinking chai from a *Flora Indica Clay Cup* at the *Streetkitchen_Kolkata* event on the street
 Fig. 4 Used *Flora Indica Clay Cups*. Both images from [www. http://gittejuul.dk/flora-indica-clay-cups/](http://gittejuul.dk/flora-indica-clay-cups/)

An important element of the work is the ‘inviting in’ of others, from a desire to work with available resources, and (also from necessity due to a self-initiated project with limited budget). This inviting in, and the discussion around explaining and enrolling other in a self-initiated project in public space, involves the articulation of values and beliefs about space and democracy amongst project actors. In *Streetkitchen Kättilsmåla*, Juul opened discussion with the owner of the land on which she was proposing collective activities. This area of the land is adjacent to a public road and is the site of public functions such as the bus stop and mailbox. Yet the landowner struggled to understand that Juul’s intention was to promote further collective activities of use, as his assumption was that a private individual approaching him about the land could only be articulating private interest, either to buy it or to enclose it for private use (Juul, 2014).

2. *The Wick Common Shop*

The ‘Wick Common Shop’ is the latest incarnation and outing of The ‘Wick Curiosity Shop’, first begun in 2008 by *Public Works* and the artist Hilary Powell. The Shop documents the areas unofficial and ‘minor’ history through an eclectic collection of memories, local produce, memorabilia, oral history, songs and stories. It doesn’t provide an overarching narrative, but a tapestry of mostly disregarded facts and experiences one can navigate in various ways creating as many narratives. The Shop highlights the area’s industrial and working-class history, and provides the elements to connect it with present-day circumstances. The collection started with the announcement of London’s winning bid for the 2012 Olympics, and in an informal way the Wick Curiosity Shop has registered the changes in the area.

The ‘minor history’ of the Shop is important for many reasons, and one of these is that it provides a counter point to the dominant narrative of the games and the mega-development around it. The site was once was host to affordable, co-operative housing for over 500 tenants, 100 year old allotments which provided food to over 100 individuals, self-organised markets, greyhound racing, speedway, auto repair, the recycling and processing of waste materials and goods. The site could in many ways be seen as an urban commons and not least for its biodiversity along the river. In documenting and registering the changes the archive provides testament and counter narrative to the dominant narrative of development.⁵ It highlights the values of commons, of self-production and informality amidst and prior to

⁵ The development narrative is that the Olympics has transformed a ‘wasteland’ where there was nothing other than social problems, crime, waste and toxicity from industry. The development, in this view is seen to bring/ create wealth. This view is particularly problematic, given that the development relies heavily on state finance. The development, in taking a ‘tabula rasa’ approach, also erases and disregards, other narratives, experiences that were in fact more attuned to commons and to resilience.

this land which is now privatised, ‘spectacular,’ and conspicuously based around consumption.

Over six months ‘The Shop’ takes up residency in ‘the Shed’, a mobile unit in the Olympic Park. Using commons as both lens and ethical horizon, the project continues to explore and register the changes to this increasingly ‘less common’ and ‘less public’ landscape. Through its collection, the shop tries to make different narratives and practices visible and in this residency, we question what it means to put these objects back into the park, exploring if, and in what ways we can re-introduce values that have otherwise been hidden and erased?

Each of the objects in the collection tells a specific story. For example the comfrey fertilizer [Fig.6], is produced by Charlie Seber, who for last 40 years has been illicitly cultivating comfrey in the Lower Lea Valley, the river that runs through the Olympic site [Fig. 7]. He pursues many experiments in permaculture and growing, both privately and, in this case publicly. Whilst comfrey is an invasive species, this use of the land brings with it the complexities of commons. He presses the leaves to produce liquid fertiliser which is not sold, but given as a ‘gift’ during outings. *Public Works* try to make this process of production visible and Charlie’s story is printed on the label (public works, 2013).



Fig 6 (left) The comfrey fertilizer, with story and labels by public works. Fig.7 Charlie showing the comfrey plants, Photographs courtesy of public works.

Another example in the collection is the ball [Figs. 8 and 9], whose story begins with the autobiography of a local resident. As a child, he explained that they used to make cricket balls from papier mache, which were then wrapped with string. Another resident, originally from the Caribbean exclaimed that he also used to do this as a child, but using elastic bands. *public works* organised a workshop, where the residents could work with the group to make their own. Whilst not a ‘remarkable’ object in terms of its aesthetics, the process of collective making is more significant as is the fact that its is ‘self-made’.



Fig 8 (left) Showing how to make the balls Fig.9 workshop organised by public works. Photographs courtesy of public works.

Other objects in the collection include for example, memorabilia from the speedway. Speedway racing is part of popular, working class culture, where teams race speedway bikes (motor bikes without brakes). The teams are local, yet are part of leagues that mean they have fixtures across the UK. The speedway material in the archive is striking, in that it marks a former collective culture, of self-organised entertainment and sport that is important to many, yet is not ‘valued’ (from above). This is not the kind of culture that is ‘desirable’ and is not the kind of sport that is endorsed. It is part of a self-made culture, which in this case is working class culture, and therefore perceived to have less value.

In the shadow of the Olympics, these items along with all the other artefacts in the collection tend to symbolise non-commercial forms of production. The ball, for instance, whilst it does not tell you what to do, does hint that you might make your own ball, and invent your own game with its own rules. The products in this context are a way to draw attention to other values, rights and uses of space.

In situating the archive in the park, we were concerned to avoid being overly nostalgic or romanticise the past. Yet, at the same time these items do provide a small glimpse of commons and ‘other values’ in making the city, which have now been erased.

During the residency we are currently mapping the current conditions of the park and development in and around the ‘shed’ in four different locations. Paying particular attention to the shifts of common to public to private (not least in the funding of infrastructure and projects within the development), we are exploring the ways that this particular space produces certain kinds of subjectivity and relations. Contrasting the regulation of commons, as self-managed, democratic activities to the now highly regulated and policed park, we are beginning to explore the potential for new products to perform new ‘common rights.’

In the debate around commons and publics, this development⁶ signals something of a problem. Whilst the development might be unique in terms of its scale, and seem unique in terms of its structure (it is the first mayoral development corporation), it is in many cases paradigmatic of the privatisation of public space (Minton, 2012). The use of ‘public’ and ‘public interest’⁷ have become difficult, even, corrupted notions in this context, which have become instrumental in the privatisation and space, and used to erase urban commons.

Objects, Products, Commodities in illuminating value and transvaluation: Material and social exchange

In the examples described above, creative practitioners use material objects as a means of

⁶ By development, we refer to the entire jurisdiction of the LLDC site, which includes within the Queen Elizabeth Olympic ‘Park’ along with new housing, shopping mall and so on.

⁷ The site, not dissimilar to other developments, was brought into ‘public’ ownership through compulsory purchase orders and private development heavily subsidized by public funds. (Minton, 2012)

engendering interaction and generating engagement with uses of space. In this section we will look at how these objects are designed for use and how their biographies sit in relation to the design intentions.

In the historical commons, commoning practices persisted through objects even though the spaces of the commons had been privatised (Kropotkin, 1987). As a clue in times of new enclosures and privatisation, ‘products’ might be a potential point of entry. Is this relationship, suggested as a last vestige of communing, also a way back in to commons? And/or could the use of products become a means to claim or rework spaces? As objects are more mobile than the space, do they potentially allow for the fostering of connections or alignments across boundaries of space?

In the case of *The Common Shop*, the values of the products do not yet carry over into the space of the park. They currently exist more as artefacts or art objects, which hint towards other cultures and their values. Yet the effects of ‘spectacularisation’ in this mega-development are overwhelming. The projects in and of themselves become artefacts to be seen, they are on display and fit comfortably within the current programme of the park, just as artefacts in a museum might be similarly ‘visually consumed.’ In this case, the values of the space (commercialisation, neoliberal subjectivities and values) seem to dominate and do not always allow transvaluation⁸ to occur. The products do however, open up potential for conversation, to hear stories of those who also remember this part of the world in the past, and have so far enabled these kinds of connections.



Fig 10 The Byelaws of the Park, with security team passing. Photograph by Public Works

For the next part of the project we are focussing on the development of new products, ones that are concerned with use and play with ‘the rules’ of the park. We are interested to see how they might enable new common rights to be claimed and performed. Customary practices, as historian E.P Thompson tells us, were often not historic customs, but ones

⁸ We work with definition of transvaluation to mean ‘representing something, such as an idea, custom, or quality in a different way, altering people’s judgment of or reaction to it.’

‘invented’ as forms of protest and a means of establishing new rights and practices (Thompson, 1993). In Juul’s *Streetkitchen Kolkata* The idea that a product can help support claims to space and enable new common rights is also something Juul’s *Chai Cups* facilitate.

We use the term product, rather than object or artifact as the latter neutralises the fact that they have been produced (Baudrillard, 2005). These products suggest a different mode of production and use, other than a commercial or commodified one. Their values lie in their *capacity* in making connections, new claims and so on.

Whilst scholars have shown and elaborated important differences, such as focussing on commodity as form of exchange rather than on forms of production or products (Appadurai, 1996), in these cases we are interested in both the processes (and sociability involved) in production, the physical product and the way they circulate. The products, in working with different values (of collaboration, of self-making etc.) are also able to make things visible, or draw out things that are under threat, hidden and otherwise undervalued. Yet *how* those products are produced, who is involved, and the way such processes bring about new relationships, is critical for the practitioners.

Comments on a work in Progress, some thoughts about working with products for research

In the case of the *Common Shop* and *Street Kitchens*, the material product is of interest for its story of production, the social relations instigated through production. The stories wrapped around and into the product and its practices signify values and meanings of sharing, collaboration and non-regulated activity. In carrying meanings they also provide inspiration for product-based ways of communicating research. They give us a base around which to weave stories of practices, in which different research audiences might find something they can relate to and develop new understandings. Whilst the products are recognisable, they challenge us to look at them in different ways, and allow a glimpse into other worlds and other ways of acting and being together.

Working with products allows the communication and inclusion of the ‘non-measurable,’ such as the affective relations involved or affects and meanings in the performance (for instance in drinking tea). In this respect they pose a challenge and a difficulty for academic research, on the one hand they enable engagement with ephemeral connections and meanings, yet at the same time, precisely these qualities which may escape dominant modes of measure, may also contribute to their own discrediting or non-recognition. In other words, because they work with the non-measurable and different values, they are not necessarily valued by those seeking the empirical or the definite.

Returning to ‘public behaviours’ as a lens for considering how the audiences and forums in which practitioners present or make sense of their work contribute to it, we can also question where different contributions to knowledge are made in the projects discussed. From the perspective of practice-based research, the knowledge embodied in these practices could be an experiential knowledge of intricate ways in which to engage with public space and the creation of the commons through social-material-spatial practices. Knowledge instantiated in the practices of using products to claim spaces for public or common uses could not, however, be claimed as *new knowledge* without a clear understanding of a wider field of similar critical spatial practices. Yet in thinking of the transvaluing that occurs in the production of products and adjusted practices across particular cultures, embedded in spaces, we might imagine a social-material-spatial knowledge which opens up the possibility of new ways of operating for *this combination of people and products in this context*. They give

clues to collective approaches for addressing the challenges of the context (place/economies/hegemonic practices) which can then be developed through ongoing practice. We wish to suggest that in this way such an ‘art-architecture-research project’ has transformative capacity in supporting claims to space, in times when its enclosure is relentless.

The projects discussed in this paper develop ways of practicing, which value interaction with different publics, and engage with notions of public space and the commons through production and use of designed products. However, both projects may also be considered in terms of their ways of researching. As form of research they are a live testing of spaces and their possibilities for more common, more public life. There are parallels that can be drawn between practice and research, and the importance of working for commons and public(s) needs to be brought much more into the academic field, where research, knowledge and languages are becoming increasingly commodified. Could the use of products for working with urban commons also be a tool to help reclaim knowledge commons, in order to make research more common, more public?

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