The Art Institution as a Commonist Training Ground

On Casco's Attempt to (Prefiguratively) Become an Institution of the Commons

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In this article the current attempt to (prefiguratively) transform the Utrecht-based exhibition space Casco into an institution of the commons is introduced and discussed. Focusing on this shift where commoning is conceptualized as both a working method and as a long-term horizon, the article analyses Casco's aim to put into practice a commonist aesthetic as an art institution. The article identifies how Casco uses the current (economic, social and climatic) crisis to perform a commonist alternative to neoliberal capitalism. The article discusses different readings of related institutional projects. Some critics find such projects to be arty recuperations of potentially subversive strategies of resistance; others argue that the horizontal strategies of commoning risk being assimilated too easily by neoliberal capitalism, which uses them to re-launch itself, with the result that the commons end up forming the basis of new capitalist growth. Although the creatively playful experiments at Casco in many ways are characterised by paradoxical and contrasting tactics of resistance, the article argues that they constitute an important suggestion on how art can be used to point out alternative ways of inhabiting the world in a present situation characterized by ideological breakdown and crises.

From Casco—Office for Art, Design and Theory to Casco Art Institute: Working for the Commons

In the middle of May 2017, after more than 25 years of activities, the Utrecht-based non-profit exhibition space Casco—Office for Art, Design and Theory—announced in a newsletter that it was to begin a year-long

shift which among other things involved changing its name to Casco Art Institute: Working for the Commons (CAI) (Casco, 2017). As was explained, the name change was part of a general re-orientation of Casco's mission and program around a new modus operandi, and was the culmination of long-term studies on how art and the art institution can contribute to the practice of commoning as a political-aesthetical alternative to neoliberal capitalism. The change indicated that Casco wanted to utilise more consistently the consequences of its research and learning process, which since 2009 had been the guiding principle for its long-term projects—from *Grand Domestic Revolution* (2009/10–2013) to *Composing the Commons* (2013–2015/16). If Casco intended to practice commoning as a strategy of resistance it was—as was pointed out—essential that both "the front end" (exhibitions, programs and projects) of the art institution and the more hidden "back end" (working conditions and infrastructures, social relations and economy) reflected the solidary community and equality-based value system that is embedded in the idea of commoning as an anti-capitalist practice of "making common," which opposes neoliberalism's attempt to enclose and privatize.

In other words, it was no longer enough to merely discuss, theorize and study the commons; Casco as an institutional whole had to reflect and act in accordance with what it proclaimed. If Casco intended to institute the commons as an alternative way of organizing, working and being together in its daily practice and as a long-term horizon, it was—as was explained—necessary "to act on our [Casco's] political-aesthetical intentions and face their urgencies with "working for the commons" as the guiding imperative for all Casco operations" (Casco, 2017). As was further explained, this required that the space, in collaboration with the public, had to be rearticulated and restructured. If Casco really wanted to act as an institution of the commons (Raunig, 2013, 2015), it necessitated, as art theorist Andrea Philips has written, "a more humble and messy approach in which the aesthetic is placed on lateral terms with the more mundane opening up of facilities and capacities" (Philips, 2014, p. 228).

CAI is an 'institution-in-progress' and there has yet to be published lengthier academic articles analysing the project. The following text is therefore an attempt to introduce and critically analyse Casco's intention

to put into practice a commonist aesthetic as an art institution.[1] The text is not intended as an attempt to introduce the self-critical experiment that is currently taking place on the basis of a neutral scientific position. Since Casco in itself—like other politicized art projects—is producing a discourse and is characterised by a high level of self-reflexivity, my primary aim is not to initiate an objective reading of the experiment. Casco does not wait for a subsequent external art critical reception but writes itself actively into art history, for which reason the subsequent introduction and analysis of CAI should be regarded rather as a committed dialogue with the experiment.

As Casco works with, and self-critically activates, specific socio-political issues, the main purpose of the text is to try to situate the experiment in a contemporary context and to think with and through the project. In the text, I will be following the Marxist geographer David Harvey who describes the present period as "neoliberal capitalism." According to Harvey, this period is characterized by de-industrialization in the center of capital, and a relocation of parts of the industrial production to China and other countries in South-East Asia. The period is also characterized by the development of a global logistics network, where goods are produced and circulated according to a just-in-time production system, and by the introduction of large amounts of credit. On a political-economic level, neoliberalism has resulted in privatization and cuts in the welfare introduced in the Western world in the period after 1945. The result has been an enormous growth of inequality, globally as well as locally. Harvey describes this development as the deliberate attempt by the ruling classes to appropriate still more of an increasingly smaller growth: "The 1970s were characterized by a global crisis and stagflation, but this was the period when the power of the upper class was most seriously threatened. Neoliberalism arose […] as a response to this threat" (Harvey, 2006, p. 13).

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1 — Besides visits and informal conversations with the employees, I have primarily used Casco's self-discursive newsletters as source material in my analysis.

CAI—a new art institution in the making

The institutional transformation experiment currently taking shape at Casco, and the idea of making itself available as a commons and as a site for commoning, was initially emphasized by what Casco called a preliminary exhibition phase that, as such, turned the art institution Casco inside out. The organizational infrastructures, social relations and processes, which are normally hidden and constitute the support structure (the "back end") of the art institution, were exposed and "exhibited" to the audience, who were inclusively motivated to consider how it is possible to rethink the art institution as a space based more on community and equality. By means of an open, self-critical and negotiation-based approach, the exhibition phase focused on uncovering and making Casco available with a view to using the space prefiguratively as a micropolitical model to point out alternative non-capitalist ways of working and being together. As was explained, among other things, the audience-inclusive exhibition phase was considered "an important part of working for the commons, since it is our [Casco's] conviction that *the commons exist when made into a verb: commoning*" (Casco, 2017). If Casco intended to work for the commons it was essential that the space was presented and imagined as a kind of common property, and that the process of change that had now prefiguratively jump-started was considered as a collective project of co-creation. As it became clear from the aforementioned newsletter, the exhibition phase was regarded as a beta version of CAI (Casco, 2017). It was now time to test and further develop the commons-based ideas and practices—that until now had primarily been discussed and tested internally at Casco in smaller reading and research groups, and in different art institutional networks—in collaboration with a wider circle of commoners. (FIG. 1)

The actual exhibition that had the explanatory subtitle "a new name and modus operandi in the making," reflected the overall attempt to begin a collective imaginary process. Consequently, all the exhibition rooms at Casco were transformed into different zones for working, conversation, and negotiation, involving the audience as active co-creators/commoners. As was pointed out, the preliminary exhibition phase was intended to "de-institute while, in the spirit of solidarity, re-institute through sharing

FIG. 1
Riet Wijnen, *Disposition Table (Conversation Five)*, 2017, Casco Art
Institute: Working for the Commons exhibition phase, 2017.
Photo: Cee Burgundy

with a wider circle" (Casco, 2017). The entire Casco interior looked like an active laboratory and a conceptual toolbox for commoning, consisting of a mixture of art works, different objects, models and other material with which the audience could interact. In some rooms the audience were met with diagrams (that pointed towards alternative practices and organizational models) and posters that they could move around (with statements and questions on an alternative political-aesthetical practice beyond capitalism). In other rooms different material was presented to the audience, which mapped the reproductive aspects of instituting that happen mostly in the organisational "back end" of Casco, such as budgets, funding structures, networks and working relations, while various work-in-progress material was also presented to the audience. (FIG. 2)

FIG. 2
Maja Bekan and Gunddís Yr Finnbogadóttir, *What if … (Panel Conversations)*, 2017, Casco Art Institute: Working for the Commons exhibition phase, 2017.
Photo: Cee Burgundy

By exhibiting Casco in this way, and thus exposing the traditionally hidden aspects of the art institution publicly, it became clear that it was Casco, as such, that was up for negotiation.[2] The primary intention behind

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2 — As mentioned in the second newsletter released in connection with the exhibition phase, the idea of exhibiting an institution as a kind of artwork is not new. Former examples of this strategy are e.g. Marcel Broodthaers' *Musée d'Art Moderne, Departement des Aigles* (1968), Thomas Hirschhorn's *Musée Précaire Albinet* (2004) and Tania Bruguera's *Museum of Arte* Útil (2013). While CAI is influenced by these exhibition experiments, it also actualizes the idea by ultimately wanting to transform (in the long run) the already existing exhibition space into a commonist art institution.

the inclusive exhibition phase, which resembled more a process-oriented workshop than a traditional art exhibition, was to begin a collective and open imaginary process of democratization. If Casco was supposed to function prospectively as a commonist art institution it was, as the exhibition phase made visible, important to collectively rethink the way traditional, professionalized (neoliberalized) art institutions normally operate and are organised—based on growth-promoting (capitalist) values of productivity and effectiveness. If Casco wished to practice a different form of art institution that reflected non-capitalist ways of working, and move towards a horizontal, equality-oriented principle of co-management based on reproductive values—such as care, mutual respect, support, trust and collective responsibility—it was necessary to try to collectively "unlearn" conventional ways of acting and thinking related to the art institution.[3]

Casco aimed to begin a collective imaginary process of unlearning and breaking free from the traditional working methods and terms of the art institution, such as "exhibition," "publication" and "education" (which primarily refers to the visible "front end" of the art institution). In order to achieve this, Casco introduced a trifold parameter for restructuring and rearticulating itself, composed of three interconnected forms of practice. The three forms, which were called "Action," "Body" and "Kirakira" were, among other things, presented on a wall diagram in the exhibition, having been created in a collaboration between artist Fernando Garcia-Dory and the members of the Casco team. As was explained, Casco considered the three forms as the very ontological basis for an art institution working for the commons (Casco, 2017). By introducing these three forms of practice, as illustrated in the wall diagram, which intersect and feed into each other,

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3 — Casco has over a period of years, and in collaboration with artist and researcher Annette Krauss, tried to "make common" earlier hierarchical and functionally divided tasks—from cleaning to planning the exhibition programme—through practical exercises. The exercises ("Site for Unlearning: Art Organization"), which are still ongoing, focus on "unlearning" the institutional habits and practises we all (often unconsciously) constantly keep internalising and sustaining. For a description of the project see: http://casco. art/casco-case-study-2-site-for-unlearning-art-organization-0
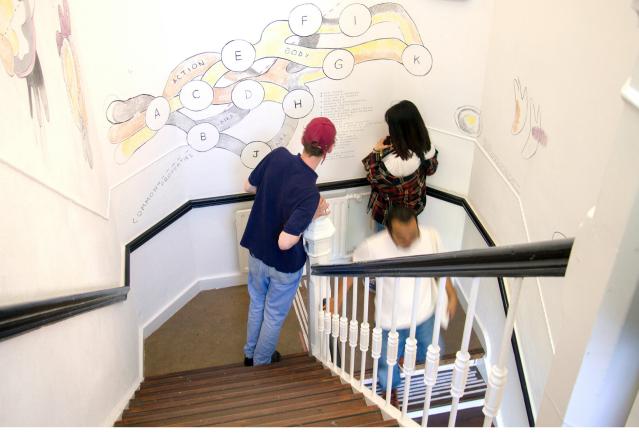
Casco tried to disturb conventional art institutional ways of thinking in a playful and creative way, and to point towards a new "holistic" modus operandi. The leaflet accompanying the exhibition explained how "Action" refers to the part of the institutional practice concerned with using art works to point out experimental proposals to existing circumstances, and putting into practice a long-term plan that can (hopefully) stimulate social and political change. "Body" refers to the organizational processes, which support the very institution—that is, the organizational forces, which are traditionally hidden, such as networks and diverse administrative affairs. While "Kirakira" ('twinkle, twinkle' in Japanese) refers to a disobedient way of being and learning together in resistance to capitalist mantras and oppressive systems (Casco, 2017). (FIG. 3 AND FIG. 4)
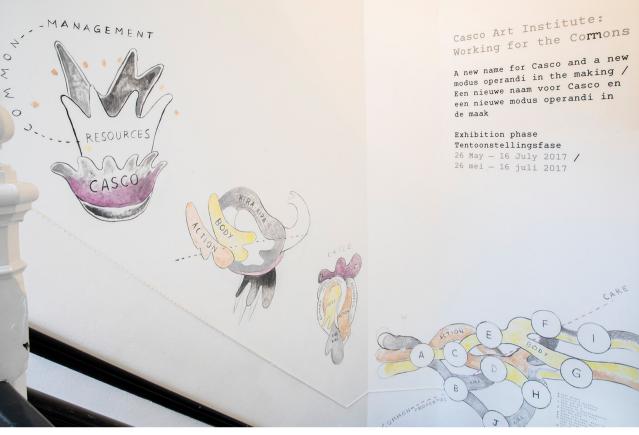
FIG. 4
Fernando García-Dory & Casco Team, 2017, *Diagram for Articulation*,
Casco Art Institute: Working for the Commons exhibition phase, 2017.
Photo: Niels Molenaar

As part of the critically playful transformation experiment, the entire communication strategy of Casco was also given a creatively disturbing twist, which manifested itself in the different newsletters that were released during the exhibition phase. For instance, under the headline "Who is Nina?" the second newsletter was about a revolutionary figure by the name of Nina Bell Federici, who was invented by Casco's team of employees in an attempt to personify CAI (Casco, 2017). The fictitious character Nina was lovingly named after a fusion of three politically engaged feminists—the American jazz singer Nina Simone, the American writer and activist bell hooks, and the Italian educator and activist Silvia Federici—all of whom, in different ways, have influenced the feminist-oriented understanding of the commons, which Casco's long-term research projects have been based on since 2009.

Nina constituted a kind of feminist ideal for Casco as 'she' represents "our radical collective imagination. She is better than us together (like a kind of feminist Captain Planet), she is an ethical compass" (Casco, 2016).

The usually neutral information and the anonymous approach, which normally characterize newsletters, were replaced by creatively playful and slightly distorted texts, addressing the reader in an affective, inclusive and friendly tone. All conventions had vanished. Self-critical reflections and sociopolitical considerations intermingled with uncertain thought experiments and practical questions. The point was obviously more about using the newsletters to establish a common room for reflection and imagination, than about creating a sense of overview and giving concrete answers to what was really going to happen with Casco prospectively. Everything that usually doesn't figure in a newsletter was laid out to the reader—the uncertainties, the doubt, the questions and the process. The newsletters, which were written by shifting members of the Casco team, addressed the reader as a part of a common 'we'. The 'we' that, together with the employees at Casco, was going to (re)articulate the space. As one of the newsletters explained: "an integral part of the commoning process [...] depends on your feedback and common desire to (un)learn!" (Casco, 2017). In other words, it wasn't possible to realize CAI without the participation of the public because, as eco-feminist Maria Mies has pointed out, "there are no commons without community: commons are always maintained and managed by a community" (Mies, 2014). To emphasize the common effort and the horizontal principle of organizing, which constitute the support structure (the invisible body) of Casco, all the people commoning Casco on a daily basis, and thereby generating the commons, were mentioned by name in the first newsletter as well as in the exhibition leaflet. Those mentioned ranged from artists, technicians, translators and graphic designers to volunteers, regular and temporary employees, members of the board as well as financial funders, collaborators, groups and networks in which Casco takes part.

About one year later in June 2018, after several months of further attempts to sharpen focus, define and verbalise CAI's commonist mission, the final name change became a reality. At a social event with roundtables and collective working sessions, CAI launched its new website and modus operandi as well as the redesign of its office space. A number of new infra-

structural initiatives of co-management were also introduced; for example, the digital communication platform *commons.art*, which collects, makes accessible, shares and redistributes common-pool resources, such as texts, pictures and other types of research material on practices of commoning that are produced and accumulated by CAI's so-called "ecosystem" of commoners.[4] In addition, an annual Casco Assembly is to discuss collective decisions about the use of CAI's financial resources, physical facilities and infrastructures. Through mutual processes of learning and exchange as well as practical exercises, the annual assembly will focus on collectively rethinking and continuously developing CAI further. At the social event it was also announced that part of Casco's new modus operandi was to draw up a "protocol for use and maintenance (of CAI)" as well as an "ethical charter" that will function as a guideline for CAI's different focus areas. This will be revised and updated in collaboration with the CAI ecosystem and in connection with the annual Casco Assembly. With a view to practicing commoning on a daily institutional level, it was also announced that Casco had started a process of reorganizing job functions and establishing new cooperative constellations, as well as choosing to scale down the general level of activity, resulting in fewer exhibitions and events. Infrastructural and organizational changes that are being put in to practice with the aim of strengthening the overall commonist agenda.

The crisis as a window of opportunity and the art institution as a commons

As the short introduction to the preliminary (exhibition) phase of CAI illustrates, certain parts of the art field are currently preoccupied with using art and the art institutional frame to create alternative ideas for ways of working and being together. The institutional experiment—which

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4 — As explained on *commons.art*, CAI's ecosystem is made up of all the commoners who contribute to the daily activities and practices of the space, ranging from artists, curators, architects, graphic designers, critics and art theorists to activists, social workers and different art and non-art organizations and networks. See: http://www.commons.art/en/ecosystem

is being processually developed parallel to the production of this text—points both forward, given that it constitutes the starting point of a longer critically playful transformation process, as well as backwards, as it gathers the threads in the long-term attempts of Casco to cultivate the commons through art and by means of the artistic imagination.

In many ways CAI represents both an interesting and important example of a current art institution, which—in light of the present situation we find ourselves in, ten years after the outbreak of the financial crisis—at one and the same time creatively, critically and optimistically tries to use the art space as a platform to prefiguratively point out alternative social-political horizons. As the certainties of yesterday have disappeared, and neoliberal capitalism has shown itself to be built on enormous amounts of debt and money created by the banks, CAI attempts to use the art institution to present alternatives to neoliberal ideology, which for the first time in many years is weakened as a result of the financial crisis that broke out in 2008. A crisis that has not only resulted in a financial collapse but also in an ideological impasse (Berardi & Fisher, 2013, p. 151), in which experimental art institutions such as Casco try to point out alternative models of action, reflecting other more solidary and equality-based ways of working and being together, than those offered by neoliberalism.

In line with a range of other institutional experiments, which also try to turn the art institution in (what they consider as) a progressive direction,[5] Casco tries to take advantage of the current situation of crises, which have opened up a process where normal frames (economic, social and political) start to fall apart, and make room for alternative perspectives and actions.[6]

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5 — E.g. smaller art institutions such as BAK – basis voor actuele kunst in Utrecht, The Showroom in London, Shedhalle in Zurich and Tensta Konsthal and Konsthal C in Stockholm as well as museums such as Van Abbemuseum in Eindhoven, MSUM in Ljubjana and Reina Sofia in Madrid.

6 — It is outside the framework of this article, but the institutional experiments should, of course, be embedded in a longer historical analysis that accounts for the institutional experiments of the late 1990s known as "New Institutionalism." I have myself attempted such an analysis in *Keep turning and learning and turning. Selv-institutionalisering, kuratorisk reformisme og* commonistisk *organisering.* (PhD-dissertation, University of Southern Denmark, 2018)

Casco tries to use the crises as windows of opportunity and tries to act in the current situation, where previous forms and institutions have suddenly become porous and can therefore potentially be transformed and used for alternative political purposes (Rasmussen, 2018, pp. 161–162). In this interregnum where "capitalist realism"[7] is being called into question, and where the ideological field is therefore potentially open, Casco tries to use the art institution as a creative laboratory to foster a commons-based anti-authoritarian practice of self-government which—it is hoped—can initiate a destabilization of the language, norms and relations of neoliberal capitalism.

As already mentioned, the concept of CAI has been developed over a longer period of time, dating back to 2009 where the financial crisis had developed into the deepest global recession since the 1930s, and where it became clear to many people that the massive cuts—which were the political response to the crisis—had become a fixed part of everyday life. In this period, in which the Dutch-Korean curator Binna Choi became director of Casco, the space began to sharpen its focus on the possibility of using the art institution progressively, in order to discuss alternative ways of reproducing our lives beyond capitalism and its logic of accumulation and domination. Keeping pace with the accelerating crisis, and the increasingly obvious fact that neoliberal capitalism was based on inequality and existential precariousness—and the general population was going to pay the bill for the financial crises—Casco tried to point out alternative non-capitalist ways to inhabit the world in long-term projects, beginning with *Grand Domestic Revolution* (2009/2010-2012).[8] Based on

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7 — Mark Fisher describes the period from the 1990s until the financial crises in 2008 as "capitalist realism." According to Fisher, the period, which was characterised by the full implementation of neoliberal capitalism, was typified by the fact that it was practically impossible to imagine an alternative to an increasingly more intensive and aggressive (late) capitalism; Neoliberal capitalism appeared as an indisputable reality which completely occupied the whole imaginary horizon. See *Capitalist Realism. Is There No Alternative?* (London: Zero Books, 2009, p. 2)

8 — For an introduction to the comprehensive project see Binna Choi & Maiko Tanaka (red.): *Grand Domestic Revolution Handbook*, (Amsterdam, Valiz, 2014)

a feminist understanding of the concept of the commons,[9] a concept that was re-actualized in the aftermath of the crisis by the radical left, Casco utilized different political-aesthetical methods and strategies to articulate the possibility of a radical refusal of a still more objectified and anti-social capitalist world. *Grand Domestic Revolution* evolved over a three-year period and, as Choi has pointed out, focused on ways to

> find our way back to a place and time that pushes against the capitalist "pro-ductivist" force and its perpetuating cycle of over-production, exploitation, and consumption, by collectively engaging with that struggle as well as col-lectivizing the everyday work of reproduction. (Choi, 2014)

The explosive emergence of the movements of the squares (Occupy, M15) in 2011 saw angry protesters occupy squares, practicing commoning as a dis-obedient form of social co-existence, which rejected neoliberal capitalism's four modes of subjectivation—the indebted, the mediatized, the securitized and the represented (Hardt & Negri, 2012). At the same time, Casco further developed the idea of using the art institution as a training ground for com-moning.[10] While the protest movements attempt to transform the public space into a temporary commons was fatigued relatively quickly—because of the state's rough attempts to oppress the resistance—Casco continued to put itself at the disposal of new commonist (art) experiments. In the com-

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9 — For a central source on discussions of the commons as an anti- and post-cap-italist practice, and on its theoretical foundation see, for example, the English web journal 'The Commoner', www.commoner.org.uk edited by the Italian thinker and economist Massimo De Angelis.

10 — Many of the key organisers behind Occupy Wall Street came from the field of art activism, such as 16 Beaver Group, for example. 16 Beaver Group were a collectively run New York-based discussion platform, who since the begin-ning of the 2000s had used their space on Beaver Street as an open platform for collective discussions about the possibility of anti-capitalist resistance and commoning as an alternative political practice. Cf. Yates Mckee: *Strike Art: Contemporary Art and the Post-Occupy Condition*, (London: Verso Books, 2016). Ayreen Anastas and Rene Gabri, two of the main initiators behind 16 Beaver, have on several occasions organized and conducted workshops at Casco on practices of commoning as anti-capitalist ways of being and work-ing together.

prehensive research project *Composing the Commons*, which was launched in 2013, it was further studied and discussed how commoning—with art as a tool and a resource—can point out more solidary and equality-oriented value forms here and now than the one percent ideology of neoliberal capitalism.[11]

Within-and-against the art institution

As Casco opens up and makes itself available for ongoing sociopolitical struggles, it also experiments with new forms of institutionality, turning its back on the increasingly neo-liberalized industry of contemporary art, through disobedience and a constant process of self-transformation. As already stated, Casco represents an important self-critical experiment with and in the art institution, which—in light of the recent years of financial as well as social, political and climatic crisis—contributes to pointing out alternatives to the status quo. By means of an instituent practice, Casco tries to create self-governance inside the existing art institution based on the conception that an actual outside (of capitalism) is not possible. Casco therefore employs a "within-and-against" strategy of resistance that can be described as "immanent desertion" (Raunig, 2015, p. 36), as it, on the one hand, strategically uses and takes advantage of the existing art institutional frame and the resources available.[12] On the other hand, it disobediently rejects the (still more) unjust neoliberal norms, values and (saving) demands, which are the result of the current capitalist crisis.

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11 — For a more detailed account of the long-term preliminary research process, which constitutes the starting point of the—in many ways—radical attempt to transform Casco into an "institution of the commons," see Rasmussen 2018.

12 — The economic foundation of Casco consists of both public and private funding. Casco's program is primarily made possible with financial support from the City Council of Utrecht, Mondriaan Foundation and DOEN Foundation via the institutional network Arts Collaboratory, which, besides Casco, consists of 24 arts organisations from Africa, Asia, the Middle East and Latin and Central America. As a result of Casco's new modus operandi and the reduced amounts of exhibitions and events, the space has lost 40% of its financial foundation. Cf. Stine Hebert: "Se elefanten i øjnene," *Kunstkritikk*, November 19, 2018.

Casco, in other words, pretends that it does what is expected but actually does something else, and in this way tries to point out alternatives to the economic, growth-driven capitalist society and towards social forms and systems capable of supporting a solidary and sustainable life in common.

In the aftermath of the crisis, public art institutions in the Netherlands were hit by comprehensive cutbacks, which either meant they were handed over to the market or were controlled by state mechanisms—which to a greater extent favoured the ruling classes at the expense of the broader public. As a result of these circumstances, (self) critical art institutions such as Casco are trying to find ways of transforming themselves in the dissolving welfare state by critically trying to (re)activate the art institution as a commons and as a space for commoning. The struggle about and for the commons can in many ways be considered as an attempt to wrench free the art institution from the grasp of capitalism and to actively create an alternative self-organized para-institution. The aim of institutional experiments such as CAI is to mobilise the art institution, so to speak, against the goals of neoliberal capitalism, by means of refusal and self-governance.

Through a process-related strategy of resistance, which aims to transform the existing art institution from within and to turn it into an open and inclusive platform, Casco tries to point out alternative visions now and into the future. In addition to this attempt to politicize the art institution, Casco fuses anti-authoritarian principles of self-organization and collective knowledge production, and uses a para-institutional movement of resistance, where it at one and the same time acts as co-player and adversary. By moving under the radar of neoliberal capitalism, and at the same time strategically creating alliances across social movements, art institutional networks and grassroots initiatives, CAI attempts to occupy the cracks in the current capitalist crisis by means of commoning.

Commonist organizing, radical refusal or critical reclaiming of the art institution?

From *Grand Domestic Revolution* that was started in 2009 to the present institutional transformation experiment, Casco has tried to institute a non-capitalist practice of commoning through continuous collaborative

processes. The space puts itself at the disposal of collective political-aesthetical experiments, and attempts to foster a liberating strategy of self-governance aimed at shattering the way neoliberal capitalism controls our lives. By using an alternative "within-and-against" strategy of resistance, Casco disobediently refuses to follow the dominant norms, and attempts to disarticulate the connections and forms of subjectivation that neoliberal capitalism has created—what Hardt and Negri talk about with the four forms of neoliberal subjectivation (Hardt & Negri, 2012). Overall, the commonist experiment is guided by a belief that it is possible to change the art institution from the inside and use it progressively in the struggle against neoliberal (crisis) capitalism.

But as a number of critics including Mikkel Bolt Rasmussen, Anthony Davies, Stephan Dillemuth and Jakob Jakobsen argue, the question is whether such a politicized art experiment tends to neutralize (originally) subversive practices of resistance. They suggest that inside the safe interior of the art institution this turns into a somewhat harmless and soft grassroots activity of "making commons," with already dedicated (and often like-minded) talks about co-management, sharing economy and anti-capitalist self-organising, without actually lifting the critique 'back' and activating it outside the privileged and exclusive frame of the art institution.[13]

As Bolt Rasmussen, Davies, Dillemuth and Jakobsen point out, one could critically ask whether an experimental art institution such as CAI, which tries to act politically, shows a tendency to de-politicize and aestheticize the political commoning practices of the protest movements. Doesn't CAI end up neutralizing and recuperating originally radical strategies of resistance, and thereby transform them into a kind of radical chic? And are we then confronted with a further destruction and emptying of the critical

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13 — Such an avant-garde modernist position is most recently represented by Mikkel Bolt Rasmussen in his book *After the Great Refusal*, (Winchester: Zero Books, 2018), pp. 64–77; and by Anthony Davies, Stephan Dillemuth & Jakob Jakobsen in their text: "There is No Alternative: THE FUTURE IS (SELF-)ORGANISED PART 2 in Stine Hebert & Anne Szefer Karlsen (eds.): *Self-Organised*, (London: Open Editions, 2013), pp. 27–36.

position, staged as urgent crisis critique? In this light, the critics argue that it is necessary to try to position oneself outside the art institution in order to establish the necessary radical critique of capitalism instead of trying to reactivate it from the inside.[14]

Another question being raised by certain critics is, whether the attempt to mobilise a critical engagement in the art institution by means of horizontal principles of self-organization and self-government—such as Casco does—tends to be counter-productive in the current situation of crisis. Theorists such as Mark Fisher and Nina Möntmann fear that such a commonist position of resistance—where art institutions disobediently try to turn their backs on the existing power structures, and capitalism as a system, in order to practice common self-government in the margins— might end up supporting neoliberal capitalism as "the favouring of networks over 'top-down,' 'hierarchical' structures; the belief that the state is both inefficient and corrupt: these 'horizontalist' ideas are pushed as much by neo-liberals" (Fisher & Möntmann, 2014, p. 175). As Fisher points out elsewhere, the part of the left wing that praises anti-management, anti-state and anti-authority (self-organization, commoning and horizontality) tends to echo the same anti-institutional agenda as neoliberalism pursues. An agenda which—both before but especially after the breakout of the crises— aims at dismantling public institutions and infrastructures with an eye to leaving the social and cultural reproduction to the individual citizen and to civil society (Fisher, 2014b). According to Fisher and other theorists, there is a latent danger that such horizontal strategies of commoning risk being too easily assimilated by neoliberal capitalism, which uses them as a plan B to relaunch itself, with the result being that the commons ends up forming the basis of new capitalist growth (Federici, 2011; De Angelis, 2013; De Bloois, 2016).

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14 — In some ways one could argue that the attempt to transform already existing institutions from the inside actually opposes the whole idea of commoning. As an alternative political practice, commoning insists precisely on creating self-government beyond the market, the state and the established (and corrupted) institutions and power structures—as the movements of the squares exemplify.

Rather than being in danger of reproducing the neoliberal discourse[15]—and thereby indirectly supporting the attempt to dismantle the remains of the welfare society—Fisher believes it is necessary that the left, and the politicized field of contemporary art, tries to break the continuous hegemony of neoliberal capitalism more directly. Instead of disobediently turning its back on capitalism with the aim of creating ambiguous pockets of resistance—a practice that the radical left has tried to use several times[16]—the left and the critical field of contemporary art needs to gain ground, he argues, and far more offensively reoccupy the institutions of society. A too narrow focus on immanent desertion and network organizing only contributes to further weaken the left, and renders it an easy target for the right, which applies the same (anti-state) rhetoric as the left while simultaneously making sure it rules and controls the state (Fisher, 2014b). If the left and critical art institutions hope to gain ground, Fisher argues, they need to "return to the old leftist ambition" (Fisher, 2014b) and once again (as in the post-war era) try to take over all the institutions of society—from the Tate to the BBC to the Labour Party—with the aim of using them in a counter-hegemonic manner in the struggle against neoliberal (crisis) capitalism.

Rather than "deriving a tepid jouissance from its very failure to overcome capitalism" (Fisher 2013a), the left and the politicized art field

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15 — As Fisher points out, the political 'Big Society' program that David Cameron introduced in 2010 employed a rhetoric that indicated precisely that top-down control, government, hierarchy and bureaucracy are old, inefficient and oppressive political concepts. By assimilating democratic ideas of horizontality, co-government and the commons, Cameron tried to launch a more community-oriented ideological value system at the same time as he launched significant cutbacks in social and cultural welfare. Cf. Mark Fisher: "Indirect Action. Some Misgivings About Horizontalism" in: Pascal Gielen (ed.): *Institutional Attitudes. Instituting Art in a Flat World*, (Amsterdam: Valiz, 2013b) p. 106.

16 — At first in the Italian autonomist movement in the 1970s. Then later in the alter-globalization movement in the 2000s. And most recently in "the movement of the squares." All of these practices are attempts to withdraw from existing power structures in order to point out and create alternative social forms of life outside of the established network and infrastructures of the power of the state.

need to re-establish the idea that "we can run things better than capitalism" (Fisher, 2014b), by strategically recapturing the institutions and using them to gain access to the structures of power and to the great narratives. The institutions are territories on which the left needs to struggle, and develop experiments that neither "remain in the margins" (Fisher, 2014a, p. 223) nor "replicate the existing form of mainstream" (Fisher, 2014a, p. 223). The reason why the left hasn't managed to gain territory—even in the current situation of crisis—is, according to Fisher, that it keeps using and repeating the same strategies and methods as neoliberal capitalism: "It has contributed to the left's continuing failure to make any hegemonic headway, despite the spectacular discrediting of neoliberalism caused by the financial crisis" (Fisher, 2013b, p. 104). According to Fisher, it is crucial to not focus too unambiguously on the notion of commonism and anti-capitalist resistance in the margins. Only by directly recapturing the institutions will it become possible for the art public of the left to challenge neoliberal capitalism, and to develop a radical *common sense*, which points out of the crisis. Rather than prioritising the discourse of commoning as Casco does—which according to Fisher doesn't really exert pressure on neoliberalism, it merely applauds and assimilates the strategy—he argues that a more offensive strategy of resistance needs to be given priority if politicized art institutions such as Casco should hope to generate resistance against crisis-ridden capitalism.

Art as an imaginary tool

Whether art institutional commoning experiments, such as CAI, can contribute to the production of an alternative political practice is an open question. Fisher doubts it and he proposes to return to a more traditional counter-hegemonic left-wing approach, while other theorists want to leave the art institution altogether since it always, according to them, ends up neutralising subversive strategies of resistance (Bolt Rasmussen, 2018, pp.64–77; Davies, Dillemuth & Jakobsen, 2013, pp.27–36).

      Although the experiments at Casco are in many ways (unavoidably as all critical art experiments) characterized by paradoxical and contrasting tactics of resistance—and in other ways constantly in danger of being

assimilated and neutralized—I would still argue that they constitute an important suggestion on how art and the art institution can be used to point out alternative world views in a current situation characterized by ideological breakdown and crisis. Casco uses an important twofold within-and-against strategy of resistance. On the one hand, it tries to escape from and reject easily identifiable positions of resistance. On the other hand, it prefiguratively tries to point out another possible (non-capitalist) future here and now from within the existing art institution. By ambiguously and playfully betraying the rules of the game, CAI exemplifies how it is possible to use the art institution to institute creative dissent and thereby challenge the status quo.

Even though (self) critical institutional experiments such as CAI in some ways tend to contribute to reproducing and stabilizing the global processes of neoliberal capitalism, they also simultaneously contain very important critical and utopian elements, which make it possible for them to offer other ways of looking upon the world and talking about it. CAI therefore constitutes a significant critical experiment that illustrates how with and through art it is possible to point out alternative visions now and into the future. As CAI illustrates, art can create alternative models of thought and collective imaginaries, and can therefore indirectly participate in the production of the political. At a moment where the political public is characterized by right-wing populism and cuts, CAI—in spite of con-tradictions and difficulties—represents a valuable response, which shows that another more solidary and common world is actually possible.   ✳

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