

Title: Can the commons be temporary? The role of transitional commoning in post-quake Christchurch

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Can the commons be temporary? The role of transitional commoning in post-quake Christchurch

Abstract

In recent work on commons and commoning, scholars have argued that we might delink the practice of commoning from property ownership, while paying attention to modes of governance that enable long-term commons to emerge and be sustained. Yet commoning can also occur as a temporary practice, in between and around other forms of use. In this article we reflect on the transitional commoning practices and projects enabled by the Christchurch post-earthquake organisation Life in Vacant Spaces, which emerged to connect and mediate between landowners of vacant inner city demolition sites and temporary creative or entrepreneurial users. While these commons are often framed as transitional or temporary, we argue they have ongoing reverberations changing how people and local government in Christchurch approach common use. Using the cases of the physical space of the Victoria Street site “The Commons” and the virtual space of the Life in Vacant Spaces website, we show how temporary commoning projects can create and sustain the conditions of possibility required for nurturing commoner subjectivities. Thus despite their impermanence, temporary commoning projects provide a useful counter to more dominant forms of urban development and planning premised on property ownership and ‘permanent’ timeframes, in that just as the physical space of the city being opened to commoning possibilities, so too are the expectations and dispositions of the city’s inhabitants, planners, and developers.

Keywords: Commons, community economies, subjectivity, transitional spaces, urban development, Canterbury earthquakes

Introduction

In times of tragic disruption, we become most acutely aware of our deep interdependence. Indeed, while we all depend on many forms of commons for our survival, disruption may push us to experience an unfamiliar form of being-in-common with others that is often glossed over with myths of self-reliance and independence. The 2010 and 2011 sequence of earthquakes experienced by the residents of Christchurch, Aotearoa New Zealand, are one such tragic disruptive event. The most destructive earthquake on the 22nd February 2011 killed 185 people, injured thousands of others, destroyed and damaged thousands of homes, and reduced the central business district to an uninhabitable area destined for demolition (Parliamentary Library 2014). The city subsequently entered a lengthy period of transition where rubble was cleared, insurance claims filed and investigated, and (eventually) rebuilding and repairing began. This period has featured both the enclosure of some public spaces but also new forms of temporary commons as previously private spaces or spaces with limited public access were brought under forms of community management in the transitional period.

There has been a burgeoning literature in Aotearoa New Zealand and beyond analysing various aspects of this transitional period. From collectivised responses to trauma (Sepie 2015), the emotional and psychological effects on people (Adams-Hutcheson 2017; Gluckman 2011), issues around insurance (Hargreaves 2012), to Treaty of Waitangi settlements between the Crown and south island iwiⁱ of Ngāi Tahu – all of which contribute to shaping the rebuild of the city (Ngāi Tahu N.D.; The Press 2013).

Christchurch residents, activists, local politicians and others have also critiqued the Government's top-down approach to re-building and planning in this transitional period. Some argue that these top-down approaches have sought to allow the re-privatisation and enclosure the city, leading to frustration, exhaustion and political exclusion for many (see for

instance; Macfie 2016; Minto 2016; Shaky Town Blues 2016). However, alongside this frustration and critique, there has also been a burgeoning literature on – and participation in – transitional activities and autonomous community led projects across the city, many of which draw on commoning practices in some way (see for instance FESTA Festival of Transitional Architecture 2012; Cretney and Bond 2014; Syben N.D.). While these transitional and temporary activities have been praised for literally ‘filling the gaps’ left after the earthquakes and demolition, they have also been critiqued for their impermanence, and seen by some as stop-gaps until the real project of re-building the city gets underway. As we see some of the larger anchor projects near completion in the city, many are asking the question – is there still a role for transitional activities and community led projects now? A related question for us is whether these commons represent merely temporary use of vacant land, or if something else is going on here. Echoing these views about the limitations of temporary projects, much of the literature on commons suggests that a key aspect involves sustaining the use and care of a commons for a long time, often across generations (Gibson-Graham, Cameron, and Healy 2016). In this article we interrogate the temporality of commons, asking what the value might be of more ephemeral and transitional forms of commoning in a city in flux. We argue that the commons can be temporary, and there is important value in temporary commoning practices, namely, that they have the potential to normalise practices of commoning for a wider range of people and institutions.

In what follows, we review literature on commons to show how thinking has moved away from understanding commons as a descriptor for particular types of commonly owned or managed resources to a focus on use, care, benefit, access, and responsibility for any type of resource that goes far beyond ownership. We then draw on the work of two different commoning practices in post-earthquake Christchurch to show emerging norms of commoning as a practice. Firstly, we examine the commoning practices enabling the physical

space of “The Commons” to be co-created and co-managed as a central city space hosting the headquarters of Gap Filler and other community-instigated transitional projects. Secondly, we examine the commoning practices of Life in Vacant Spaces (LiVS), an organisation which emerged following the earthquakes to broker access to temporary spaces for community groups, start-ups, artists and others, in an effort to transform relationships between people and urban land in the rebuilding city. We contribute to recent research to illustrate the connections between temporary commons and property arrangements (see for instance Finchett-Maddock 2016; Bresnihan and Byrne 2015), how commoning practices can become normalised or seen as sensible (see for instance Huron 2016, 2018), and how subjects are moved to become commoners (see for instance Singh 2017). While inter-generational care is important for commons, the use of transitional common spaces with insecure tenure can also be a condition of possibility that helps to foster a new kind of ‘common sense’ where vacant urban land and resources are used for a whole range of purposes.

Commons, commoning and commoners

Many have raised concerns about the ongoing privatization of a variety of commons – intellectual, affectual, natural, biopolitical, biogenetic (see for instance Escobar 2016; Hardt and Negri 2009; Harvey 2003; Hutchings 2015; Swyngedouw 2010). These authors have outlined the troubling ways colonial, neoliberal capitalist processes, multi-national companies, and political and economic elites seek to privatise common resources, knowledge and ‘public’ spaces, thereby forcing people to pay for the previously commonly-held resources upon which their livelihoods depend. While these exclusionary processes and actions are important to document and mobilise against, there is also a growing body of work tracking the creation, use, care, and access around a variety of both old and emerging commons (Caffentzis and Federici 2014; Gibson-Graham, Cameron and Healy 2016;

Gidwani and Baviskar 2011; Healy 2016; Ostrum 1990; St Martin 2005). This work has sought to illustrate the enduring ubiquity of the commons around the world *in spite of* colonial and neoliberal capitalist enclosure. This work on commons has focused on a variety of aspects – from the ownership and access arrangements that sustain a commons over time, to understanding commons as a temporal process that a community forms around, to theorising how people are moved over time to become commoning subjects. We deal with these themes in turn below.

Commons, property and access: sustaining the commons over time

Gibson-Graham, Cameron and Healy (2013) argue that to function as a sustainable commons, the commoning-community must negotiate around five key aspects of a common: access, use, benefit, care and responsibility. In order to ‘common’ a resource, *access* must become shared and inclusive; *use* must be negotiated by a commoning-community rather than just an individual; *benefit* must be distributed to the commoning-community or beyond; *care* must be performed by commoning-community members; and finally *responsibility* must be assumed by commoning-community members (see Figure 1). Ownership is of course important, but only to the degree that it enables the practices of commoning -- indeed, common ownership may often be the most effective way to sustain practices of commoning over time. Caffentzis and Federici (2014, 102) suggest that it is through the very negotiation of these five questions and processes that specific communities are created and a ‘common is brought into existence and sustained’. While questions of access, use, benefit, care and responsibility relate to social negotiations between humans, they also inevitably involve non-humans and as Linebaugh (2008, 279) notes, express ‘relationships in society that are inseparable from relations to nature’. Examples of sustainable commons and successful long term commoning communities are found in traditions all over the world, and what we outline here is nothing new for indigenous communities with traditions of caring with and for the land and its

inhabitants (Weir 2009, Bollier 2014). What is useful here, however, is the degree to which we can apply thinking about temporality and commons to complex urban environments.

The daunting list of criteria for sustainable commons does not seem to have the expected effect of reducing the number of properties, practices or knowledges that could be understood as commons. Rather, as illustrated in Figure 1, commons are not *necessarily* limited to properties, practices, or knowledges that are owned in common, but may extend to many other kinds of arrangements that don't require private or individual 'ownership' (see Gibson-Graham, Cameron and Healy 2016). Somewhat surprisingly, sidestepping private or individual ownership in favour of 'commoning' practices allows a more nuanced understanding of the diverse socio-natural relations that sustain and care for commons in different assemblages. For example, St. Martin (2009) uses maps of fishing practices on the north-east of North America to make visible existing commoning practices that counter more dominant narratives of fisheries as an over-exploited commons by self-interested fisher-people. He shows how many fisher-people are already caring for and invested in sustaining this commons that tends to be represented as suffering from the classic narrative of the 'tragedy of the commons' because private 'ownership' cannot be enforced. Even where private ownership of a resource is enforced, examples of commoning abound. For example, until recently in Brazil, land was being expropriated from unused or misused private estates and redistributed to landless workers through agrarian reform processes (Gibson-Graham, Cameron and Healy, 2013). In Cologne, Germany, Follmann and Viehoff (2014) show how the community garden, *Neuland*, has experimented with a new form of urban commons despite broader neoliberalising processes across the city. Similarly, Hill (2011) outlines how the temporary use of underutilised private property in Mindanao, Philippines for community gardening is resulting in food and social surpluses centred on commoning practices. And in Australia, Gibson-Graham, Cameron and Healy (2013) describe movements to common

aspects of private property through conservation covenants on privately owned farmland that bring together different actors - land owners, hunters, scientists, environmentalists and policy makers. These examples illustrate that formal group ownership of a resource is by no means a requirement for commoning practices.

<<Figure 1: The Commons Identikit>>

Commoning as a temporal social practice

A key theme of recent work documenting commons is the idea that ‘commons are not essentially material things but are social relations, constitutive social practices’ (Federici and Caffentzis 2014, 101). Similar to Caffentzis and Federici, Gibson-Graham, Cameron and Healy (2013; 2016) understand a commons to be a property, practice or knowledge that is shared and cared for by a community. They draw on Linebaugh (2008), to frame commons ‘as a verb, as commoning’ that involves a certain labour (Gibson-Graham, Cameron and Healy 2016, 195). Gudeman (2001) likewise argues that ‘commons’ create and maintain community, or ‘being-in-common’. He states that ‘without a commons, there is no community, without a community, there is no commons’ (Gudeman 2001, 27). Gibson-Graham, Cameron and Healy (2016) point out that this understanding of community is not premised on either a sense of subjects’ ‘sameness’ or even necessarily self-identification with a certain community. Rather, the understanding of community here draws on what Nancy (1991, 2) calls ‘being-in-common, or being-with’, which can include unlikely human subjects and non-humans that come together around a specific concern or practice. For Gibson-Graham, Cameron and Healy (2013) this process involves moving a property, practice or knowledge towards common use, benefit, access, care and responsibility, and away from open access or private models (see Figure 1). In this article we draw on this understanding and see commoning as diverse – as properties, practices and knowledges that support life and are collectively controlled by members of a community. This connection between

property/practice/knowledge and community is key: it suggests that subjects can therefore move towards, or away from, commoning practices over time.

Commoners – subjects who common

The barriers to commoning are daunting, and reflect strong neoliberal capitalist approaches to organising society. Not only are commoners up against decision makers, economic elites and politicians who continue to pursue neoliberal capitalist approaches to economic development and the management of public services. Commoners also come up against infrastructural and techno-legal obstacles at individual and community scales because of these more dominant forms of econo-sociality based on individual property ownership and waged labour. In New Zealand and many other places, these obstacles include the need for complicated legal agreements and finance arrangements, tricky insurance requirements and other forms of risk management, and importantly, the affective and embodied aspects of people's habits and attachments in terms of their relationships with others, with waged labour, and with land. This includes their negative attachments to the impotence that these obstacles engender and how these change over time.

We find Gibson-Graham's (2006) work on economic subjects to be helpful here. In their analysis of Argentinian workers commoning their bankrupt factories, they point out that people didn't wake up wanting to be a revolutionary, they woke up wanting a job. Gibson-Graham and others working in the tradition of community economies emphasise that subjects are 'always in the process of becoming' (Cameron and Gibson, 2005, 4). As a result, community economies scholarship has looked at how subjects can 'become differently', and the kinds of practices, language and affects that help subjects (including academics) to move away from their attachments to capitalocentric framings of both people and the economy and towards collective action (Byrne and Healy 2006, Gibson-Graham 2006, Healy 2010,

Roelvink, St. Martin, and Gibson-Graham 2015, Roelvink 2016). All this implies a temporality of becoming.

Static and dualistic understandings of what it means to common often lend themselves to capitalocentric framings. Moving away from these involves highlighting already existing and ubiquitous commoning practices throughout time. Community economy scholars have drawn on notions of affect to show how commoning can be fostered over time. For example, Cameron, Manhood and Pomfrett (2011) draw on Latour's idea of 'learning to be affected' to show how embodied and collective learning can bring about social change in relation to community gardening. They suggest that this kind of performative research is about 'crafting rather than capturing realities' (2011, 1). Roelvink draws on theories of affect (2010) and assemblage thinking (2016) to show how collectives move beyond more conventional and pessimistic understandings of resistance to neoliberal capitalism to begin building the kind of world they wish to live in. Hill, Cameron and Gibson (2014) and Dombroski (2016) argue that we need to be attentive to the diverse human and non-human actors that come together in a community economy. They use the concept of a hybrid collective (including non-human actors) to conceptualise how those who share concerns about community food economies and hygiene practices can amplify insights and practices. As Dowling and McKinnon (2014, 14) write, over time, '[t]he hybrid collective shifts attention away from closed identities and individual positions to a collective identity, characterized by diversity, and assembled around a shared desire to create change'.

For many community economy scholars then, there is a deliberate avoidance of 'strong' political characterisations, particularly when it comes to theorising what motivates people towards commoning practices over time. As Huron notes, for many people who engage in commoning, it's not about some pre-existing political orientation but rather, a pragmatic need. She writes:

Participating in the commons [for many people]... is simply what makes sense. They may not have an explicit critique of capitalism. But capitalism has not worked for them. The commons does. Commoning is a rational choice often made by people with a relatively narrow range of choices: people for whom capitalism isn't working. (This is most people in the world, by the way) (2016, 2-3).

The work outlined above doesn't prescribe a method of making commoning subjects. In some cases, it is a 'rational choice' and in others an affective disposition. This diversity in ways of becoming commoners encourages us to attend to different contexts and explore the range of socio-environmental practices and prefigurative actions people are already engaged in, while encouraging us to see our very research as shaping the world.

Commons in Christchurch

If we look for commons, commoning and commoners in Christchurch, we should begin with tangata whenua, the first people of the land, who have practiced forms of commoning for centuries (see for instance Bargh and Otter 2009). Prior to colonisation, local Māori of the iwi of Ngāi Tahu held the land in common, before colonial infrastructure was imposed and dispossessed Ngāi Tahu of both land and access to mahinga kai (food gathering resources), and other sacred places such as urupā burial grounds (Ngāi Tahu, N.D). Paying attention to indigenous commons teaches an important lesson: while commoning-communities are by definition more widely inclusive than private ownership, it is worth pointing out that they are not endlessly inclusive: an indigenous commoning-community such as Ngāi Tahu is based on whakapapa or genealogy, and includes those who have an ancestral connection to Ngāi Tahu. The resources of the iwi are managed according to the saying “mō tātou, ā, mō kā uri ā muri ake nei” – for us and our children after us. Part of the process of commoning for Māori in New Zealand has been to assert ownership of stolen land, and to use the Treaty of Waitangi

and the Waitangi tribunal processes to reclaim portions of land and resources for common tribal use (see our discussion in Diprose et al. 2017). This ongoing (re)commoning process is important for all New Zealanders to acknowledge and support, alongside other attempts at commoning in urban spaces such as Christchurch.

While there is much to critique about early colonial visions and violences in Christchurch (see Cupples and Glynn 2009), early city planners did also make provision for a large common space near the central city. Hagley Park was modeled after an English 'commons', with meadows and grazing sheep, thereby providing recreational space for residents which endures to this day and is protected through local government management plans (see Christchurch City Council 2007). More recently there have been a diverse range of commoning practices in Christchurch that include community centres, public libraries, roads and parks, as well as alternative food networks (see Canterbury Fruit and Vegetable Co-operative 2015), housing cooperatives (see Cooperative Sections N.D.), and community oriented art and cultural organisations and events (see for example FESTA N.D; Greening the Rubble N.D.).

By turning our attention to historic and contemporary forms of commons, we can see that some commoning practices have made an ongoing groove in the social topology of Christchurch, while for other forms of commoning, there is more of a sense of moving against the natural flow. In what follows we explore how two post-earthquake organisations have worked to create new grooves in the social topology of Christchurch, to make commoning even more possible in temporary and transitional spaces, for a wide range of enterprises (including social, community, family and owner-operator enterprises), art installations, wellbeing projects, and community events.

Disruption and renewal: community responses to 'readjustment events'

The Canterbury earthquake sequences and the social aftermath certainly provided a moment of disruption where the topology, infrastructure and social relations for Christchurch people were all painfully altered. In some instances, people's initial responses showed an immediate 'commoning' of resources where neighbours helped neighbours clear up, where food was shared, where know-how and tools were exchanged, where pit latrines were dug, where individually owned generators became a central hub for charging all the phones in the street. The Student Volunteer Army was mobilised and began clearing silt from roads and gutters around the city (Student Volunteer Army N.D.). Te Rūnanga o Ngāi Tahu (the management group of the iwi Ngāi Tahu) distributed food and door-knocked close to 10,000 homes to check on residents (Kenney and Phibbs 2015). Large churches such as Salvation Army and Grace Vineyard Church began redistributing meals, food and toiletries from their congregations and outreach programmes to people around the city (The Salvation Army 2011; Harvey 2012). An early post-earthquake inventory report found 92 initiatives for community wellbeing following the earthquakes (Fitt 2011) and Carlton and Vallance (2013) identify many more practices and organisations involved in community wellbeing in their subsequent longitudinal studies, noting 450 initiatives by 2013. Carlton and Vallance (2013) note that over half of these 450 initiatives emerged following the earthquakes, while most of the remainder were pre-existing the earthquakes but have added disaster recovery to their work in some way.

While much useful work has been written about various post-earthquake community responses in Christchurch, what we want to focus on here is the degree to which these responses are able to use the disruption to push back against ongoing enclosures of public space, and enable new forms of commoning to arise. Because as the initial rush of emergency response commoning subsides and people begin to 'return to normal', the city has faced the significant political and material challenge of how, and what to rebuild. Art galleries, cafes,

bars, sports facilities, churches, schools, tertiary education institutes, community centres, libraries and other City Council facilities were damaged, or needed to be demolished and rebuilt (Potter et al. 2015). Transportation infrastructure was significantly damaged in parts of the city. Consequently, many people were left without the ability to access the public and private spaces, activities, and social relationships that they had previously found sustaining (Sepie 2015). In addition to this, once the official responses got underway, there was the very real danger that the disruption would be used to further enclose the public spaces and community commons on which lower-income people in particular depend.

For example, the initial response to the earthquakes included the New Zealand Government implementing a series of new acts to establish and empower the Canterbury Earthquake Recovery Authority (CERA) in 2010 and 2011 (see Canterbury Earthquake Recovery Act, No 12 Stat., 2011). Yet the power and authority wielded by CERA was well beyond that of a city council, and was widely criticised as being undemocratic and ignoring community aspirations for the city (Vallance and Carlton 2015). The government also allocated money and resources for infrastructure repair and wellbeing services (such as counselling) for affected residents. At a local government level the Christchurch City Council has implemented a whole range of initiatives, new planning documents and funding specifically targeted towards supporting the rebuild and urban regeneration (see for instance the Christchurch Central Recovery Plan 2012; Land Use Recovery Plan N.D. and Resilient Greater Christchurch N.D). At a community level what emerged were a wide range of spontaneous actions that have been called ‘transitional’ projects that spanned public and private spaces, that blurred boundaries between commercial activities and community interests, and that had different levels of local Council, central government and community investment (Carlton and Vallance 2017). However, these responses (combined with what often became quite divisive politics in relation to CERA) prompted ongoing debate over the

kind of urban environment and infrastructure that should be rebuilt (Dionisio and Pawson 2016, Vallance and Carlton 2015), and how to best foster people's immediate social connectedness and wellbeing in the face of the enormous loss of public, community, and private space (see for instance FESTA Festival of Transition Architecture 2012; Hayward 2013; Jacobsen 2016).

In what follows we draw on a 'weak theory' (Sedgwick 1997, Roelvink 2016) approach to reflect on two different sites of commoning in Christchurch - the physical site of The Commons and the diverse sites and practices represented in the work of Life in Vacant Spaces (LiVS). Like Bresnihan and Byrne (2015) argue in relation to Dublin's experiments in urban commoning, these practices have not emerged from any unified political motivation. Rather, the commoning practices they have facilitated emerge out of a shared sense of concern and necessity to help people connect with others and to create more liveable spaces and socio-economic relations to endure in the face of loss, trauma and disruption. The empirical material is drawn primarily from publically available sources enhanced with the insider experience of one of the authors, who until recently was the chair of the board of LiVS as well as being intimately involved with a number of projects associated with Gap Filler and FESTA.ⁱⁱ The methodology therefore reflects a mixed method approach that draws on aspects of autoethnography, secondary data research, and sustained engagement with various organisations and groups over the last five years in Christchurch.

Commoning "The Commons"

An important early post-earthquake commoning project was the transformation of an 'empty' site in the central business district into a temporary garden and public meeting space, café, arts performance and cinema venue, called 'The Commons'. From 1988 until 2012, the Victoria Street site had been taken up by the Crown Plaza Hotel, which was demolished in 2012 after suffering damage in the February 2011 earthquake. The hotel itself was a form of

enclosure: prior to its construction, Victoria Street had actually run through the site towards what was then known as Market Square. The Commons website notes that:

Many small shops occupied either side of the street such as a cobbler, pharmacist and spice and coffee traders. This area of the city has long been associated with trade and food and is significant for Ngāi Tahu in its proximity to the river as a place where trading activity took place (www.thecommons.org.nz/about/).

After the demolition of the hotel in 2012, the community organisation Gap Filler occupied the site, constructing a sheltered community space with volunteer labour and some 3000 pallets, which stood in place until 2014.

Gap Filler describe themselves as an ‘urban regeneration initiative that facilitates a wide range of temporary projects, events, installations and amenities in the city’ (Gap Filler N.D.). They have played a significant role in advocating for, and supporting other individuals and community groups who wish to undertake creative, transitional projects. These projects have been numerous and detailed elsewhere (see for instance FESTA Festival of Transitional Architecture 2012; Life in Vacant Spaces 2015). Gap Filler founders, Coralie Winn, Andrew Just and Ryan Reynolds, found themselves advising and helping to negotiate transitional projects for other organisations, and in June 2012, they founded a new organisation similar to Gap Filler, but which would focus primarily on liaising between individuals and community groups interested in transitional projects, and property owners who could provide the space for free. This organisation is known as Life in Vacant Spaces (LiVS). In 2013, LiVS took over the license agreement of The Commons with the property owners, in order to facilitate the use of the space by other groups. In the same year, the occupiers of the site began taking suggestions from stakeholder communities for a name for the site, which at that time was known as ‘the Pallet Pavilion site’ (see Figure 2). Eventually “The Commons” was settled on

as an appropriate name, and a set of values or aspirations drafted for the use of the space (see Box 1).

<<*Figure 2: The Pallet Pavilion: A community constructed space*>>

These aspirations correspond to many of the criteria of a commons set out by Gibson-Graham, Cameron and Healy (2013) and other authors on commoning. Access is shared and wide (public); use is negotiated by a commoning-community (the organisations and users); benefit is distributed to the commoning-community or beyond (in this case wider Christchurch people); care is performed by commoning-community members (the organisations involved); and responsibility is assumed by commoning-community members (The Commons Council) (see Table 1). Potential site users are invited to join a collaboration, and explicitly asked to collaborate and coordinate with other site users to produce a commons space that is acceptable to all. This reflects Gibson-Graham, Cameron and Healy's (2013) insistence that a community is always in negotiation over its core ethical concerns, in particular around encountering others and caring for commons.

<<*Table 1: A commons analysis of 'The Commons'*>>

While The Commons meets most of the criteria of commoning, what differs is the emphasis on enabling post-earthquake organisations with an explicit social change goal via projects with *a limited timeframe* and the *possibility of relocation*. The limited timeframe of The Commons seems to jar with the assumption that commoning is about moving private or open access resources into *long-term* common management and use. Gibson-Graham, Cameron and Healy (2013), for example, use the seven generations 'yardstick' to plot key dates of commoning action and sustainment from past into the future. Yet in the case of The Commons, there is a very real possibility that the site could be absorbed back into private or state use and ownership at the whim of the Christchurch City Council. Should we thus

interpret The Commons as failing in commoning, as being ‘not a real commons’ in a purist sense?

To return to our point about cultivating new subjectivities and desires for different kinds of economies, we would suggest, no, The Commons should not be interpreted in such a way.

The importance of a space like The Commons is not only in bringing land into common management and use, reversing trends of enclosure, but in (re)cultivating commoner subjectivities that spill over into other parts of life, and other parts of the city where enclosure might be resisted in other ways.

Gibson-Graham, Cameron and Healy (2013, 2016) argue that commoning can occur on all forms of property ownership, and play down the importance of ownership in commoning practice. Yet in the Aotearoa New Zealand context, reclaiming common legal ownership over land has important significance for Māori who have been forcibly dispossessed through violent processes of colonisation (see further discussion in Diprose et al. 2017). Our point in this case, however, is that what was once the site of a privately owned hotel is now managed by a number of groups as a commons, and that those people -- mostly Pākēhaⁱⁱⁱ or other settlers -- are cultivating commoner subjectivities through experimenting with commons management in ways that could potentially make space for further decolonisation in the area of property ownership and beyond.

In some ways, we can see this already happening: the Christchurch City Council has noted what Gap Filler and LiVS are doing in the space of The Commons and elsewhere, and has begun to work more closely with both organisations, including providing some core funding. Indeed, we might say that the outcome of the commoning process is not The Commons at all, but the knowledge commons of transitional commoning and the commoner subjects and commoning communities that have developed through this post-quake experimentation. This

ongoing knowledge commons is maintained by LiVS and made publically available via their website.

Commoning the knowledge of commoning

LiVS is a registered charitable trust with a board of trustees, an employed director and sometimes other shorter term project staff. LiVS works to reduce the bureaucratic, liability, and risk issues associated with transitional projects so people can focus their energies on the actual projects. LiVS uses a license agreement and acts as the licensee on behalf of the owners of the sites. ‘Licensors’ then sign a license agreement which grants them the right to ‘enter and use the licensed area for a specific permitted use and for a defined term’ (Life in Vacant Spaces N.D.). The most popular term is 1 year with a 30-day notice period. LiVS is partially funded every year, through the Christchurch City Council. The organisation has become relatively well known, both to funders like the Christchurch City Council and community groups. Indeed, LiVS has facilitated over 300 projects since its inception, often providing mentoring and advice to those setting up projects.

Providing this care work for community projects and startup businesses fits within the broader vision for LiVS, which was to facilitate temporary projects on vacant or under-utilised private and publicly owned land that would provide some kind of benefit for the community. In many cases this means moving private or public land into forms of commons. LiVS does not use the language of commoning, but understands the benefits of temporary projects for communities very broadly, providing:

visual, social, cultural, recreational, psychological and emotional relief from earthquake-related impacts (including loss of community amenity, visual detraction, social isolation, environmental nuisances); increased biodiversity; opportunities for community engagement, participation, education and recreation; opportunities for

artists, crafters, innovators, entrepreneurs and employment; recognition and celebration of cultural diversity of Christchurch Ōtautahi (Life in Vacant Spaces N.D.).

Here we can see that LiVS aims to encourage projects that have shared and wide access, use, and benefit for the local community including diverse cultural groups. LiVS shoulders some of the responsibility for the sites through forms of liability insurance and power/activation costs for many sites, also ensuring aspects such as security are considered. Care for sites is performed in a variety of ways, often by the groups setting up projects or businesses there. LiVS recognises the importance of both waged employment and non-monetised exchange and activities.

Reflecting a diverse understanding of community benefits, these projects have been varied, from one-day events to pop-up shops and 'free' restaurants, art and architecture installations, murals, urban farms, play centres, dance mats, creative labs and workshops. Some of the enterprise projects have evolved into money-making businesses after the project partners trialled their idea in a low risk context (by not paying for access to land or inside space). Some of the more well known examples include the clothing brand Blackeyedpeach, social enterprises Rekindle and Gardencity 2.0, Rad Bikes and Dorothy's pop up tea room. What this means is that LiVS is not particularly committed to a form of ideology around commoning that is exclusive of profit making enterprise, but it does encourage and enable social and community enterprise to develop.

LiVS also enables forms of commoning through negotiating with the Christchurch City Council to make changes to by-laws and in other ways. For example, in an attempt to encourage land owners to participate, LiVS negotiated with the Christchurch City Council the

option of a rates rebate. Currently, if private land is used for a temporary project, the landowner can apply for a maximum rates rebate of \$5,000 in a 12 month period.

The negotiations that LiVS goes in to on behalf of all organisations are not insignificant nor always successful. There have been a number of promising projects that did not go ahead due to lengthy bureaucratic requirements and the challenges of working with different agencies (including local and central government, such as CERA). These kinds of experiences to some extent reflect the issues noted earlier around the top-down politically disempowering nature of the CERA's management of the rebuild, which at times has extended to transitional/temporary projects as well. LiVS has also had to navigate the central Government 'economic recovery' model which has focused on employment, waged jobs and standard forms of large-scale investment. In this context, LiVS' work (and transitional approaches) is sometimes viewed as a 'competitor' to the top-down CERA rebuild approach because it uses land in 'non-economically' productive ways, when it could be used by a paying tenant.

In response, LiVS have tended to promote what appears on the surface at least, to be relatively apolitical stance – presenting themselves as a partner who works with landowners to 'activate' unleased office and retail spaces while waiting for a paying tenant, and a way for start-up businesses or businesses that had to move from damaged sites (often while still paying rent) to have time and space to build up a customer base before renting somewhere else, while still valuing and actively enabling art and community projects. LiVS have at times struggled to demonstrate the 'value' of the projects they've helped facilitate as they cannot be easily measured in monetary terms. Hence in many ways, commoning is enabled but not directly discussed: LiVS adapts itself to the language used by policy makers and funders.

Does this indicate some form of co-option of the work of LiVS by government and business?

Perhaps in some cases -- but for us, enabling commoning in a proportion of the 300 or more

projects is enough to think of LiVS as an important agent in enabling new forms of commoning in post-earthquake Christchurch.

What does it mean then to be an enabler of commoning, even if this is temporary? As discussed above, the cultivation of commoner subjectivities is one ongoing effect of these temporary commons. But there is something more in the case of LiVS. While the sites themselves are temporary, we argue that the key contribution of LiVS is the knowledge commons it maintains for all who are interested in contributing to forms of life in vacant spaces in Aotearoa New Zealand. The LiVS License Agreements are available on an open access website, freely available to anyone to use and adapt. As Table 2 demonstrates, the knowledge commons of LiVS is opened up beyond the relational network through the use of an open access online resource, used by many for the benefit of many, cared for by LiVS staff and under the responsibility of the LiVS board. Beyond the website, there are also changes to city by-laws and the shift to more official relationships with the CCC works to enable transitional projects beyond the official earthquake recovery period, into a new era of adaptive urbanism. This is not insignificant and works to enable these forms of commoning to become further normalised for a variety of actors in the city and to potentially be more possible into the future, both in Christchurch and elsewhere. Exactly how this resubjectification occurs is the topic of current research for us, as we begin related research into an urban farming initiative on a LiVS site, which works towards underprivileged young people's wellbeing and transformation (Dombroski et al. 2018).

<< *Table 2: A commons analysis of Life in Vacant Spaces*>>

Commoning for the future

The Commons and LiVS have co-created (along with many people in Christchurch) an alternative approach to urban development and use that has gained both credibility and

popularity. Through their work and the projects they have facilitated, we have observed changes to Christchurch City Council rules and bylaws, and changes in community perceptions of what is possible. Amidst often divisive national and local politics following the earthquakes, LiVS have managed to carve out spaces for urban commoning practices. These commoning practices don't rely on ownership of land and resources, or even necessarily long-term security of tenure. However, the sheer number of projects and initiatives Gap Filler and LiVS have helped facilitate have shifted the institutional possibilities for commoning subjects to emerge. We suggest that temporary commoning activities have become part of what people see as possible, and even 'common sense' in Christchurch. Indeed, we might even return to Gibson-Graham, Cameron and Healy's (2013) take on the seven generations rule for sustainability (practiced by many indigenous groups) and plot the moments of commoner (re)emergence against it, rather than the dates for a specific common property arrangement (see Figure 3).

<<Figure 3: A common(er) yardstick>>

At this stage, this plotting is partially hypothetical -- to what degree can we show and measure the development of particular kind of commoner subjectivity in Christchurch, and its potential for longevity? The important point for us is to continue, in different places and ways, to highlight the ubiquity of commoning practices in a non-purist fashion, in order to contribute to making further commoning practice possible and the emergence of commoning subjects. As the Scholars Concerned for Life in the Anthropocene note, the time is ripe for experimenting with commoning as we face some of the largest global common crises in environment (Gibson, Rose, and Fincher 2015). These crises can only be averted as humans and nonhumans work together to common atmospheres, oceans and ecosystems where the benefits are wide, the use is wide, the care and responsibility is wide and the temporality of this governance is sustainable. Is it too much to claim that any (even temporary) initiatives

that help us practice and experiment with commoning are helpful in preparing us and those that come after us for that task? Our re-subjectification as commoners has to start somewhere -- why not here?

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Box 1: Values and Principles of The Commons

Box 1: Values and Principles of The Commons

In the interests of clarity and transparency, the key stakeholders on this site have developed a set of values and principles by which they wish to be bound in their operation, activation and management of this site. These are not presented as absolutes, but as a set of evolving aspirations:

1. The project or group should exist for the greater community good and be focused on community engagement.
2. The group or project should be related to the post-earthquake environment and is likely to have started up as a result of the quakes.
3. The group or project should be engaged in some level or form of social change.
4. The group or project should actively respond to questions of site, space, and/or design in their proposed work on the site, and be interested in collaborating with other groups on responses to these questions.
5. The group or project should be focused on locale and locals: it should be by locals, for locals but not be exclusive in its audience.
6. The group or project should show evidence of being resourceful and self-managing.
7. The group or project should be able to show evidence of adding value and diversity to the site.
8. The group or project should be relocatable.
9. The group or project should be able to demonstrate some evidence that it is creating spaces or equivalent for (local) producers, creators or similar.
10. The group or project should demonstrate a pragmatic fit to the site and its transitional ethos.

The group that meets to make decisions about the The Commons includes representatives from Gap Filler, LiVS, and the Arcades. We call ourselves the 'Commons Council'.

Source: www.thecommons.org.nz

Figure 1: The Commons Identikit

	Access	Use	Benefit	Care	Responsibility	Ownership
Commoning enclosed property	Narrow	Restricted by owner	Private	Performed by owner or employee	Assumed by owner	Private individual Private collective State
Creating new commons Commoning unmanaged open-access resources	Shared and wide	Negotiated by a community	Widely distributed to community and beyond	Performed by community members	Assumed by community	Private individual Private collective State Open access
	Unrestricted	Open and unregulated	Finders keepers	None	None	Open access State

The shaded area indicates the criteria for identifying a common. ‘Commoning’ refers to the process of bringing either private or open-access property and resources into common access, use, benefit, care and responsibility.

Modified from Gibson-Graham, Cameron and Healy (2013) under creative commons licence.

Figure 2: The Pallet Pavilion, June 2013



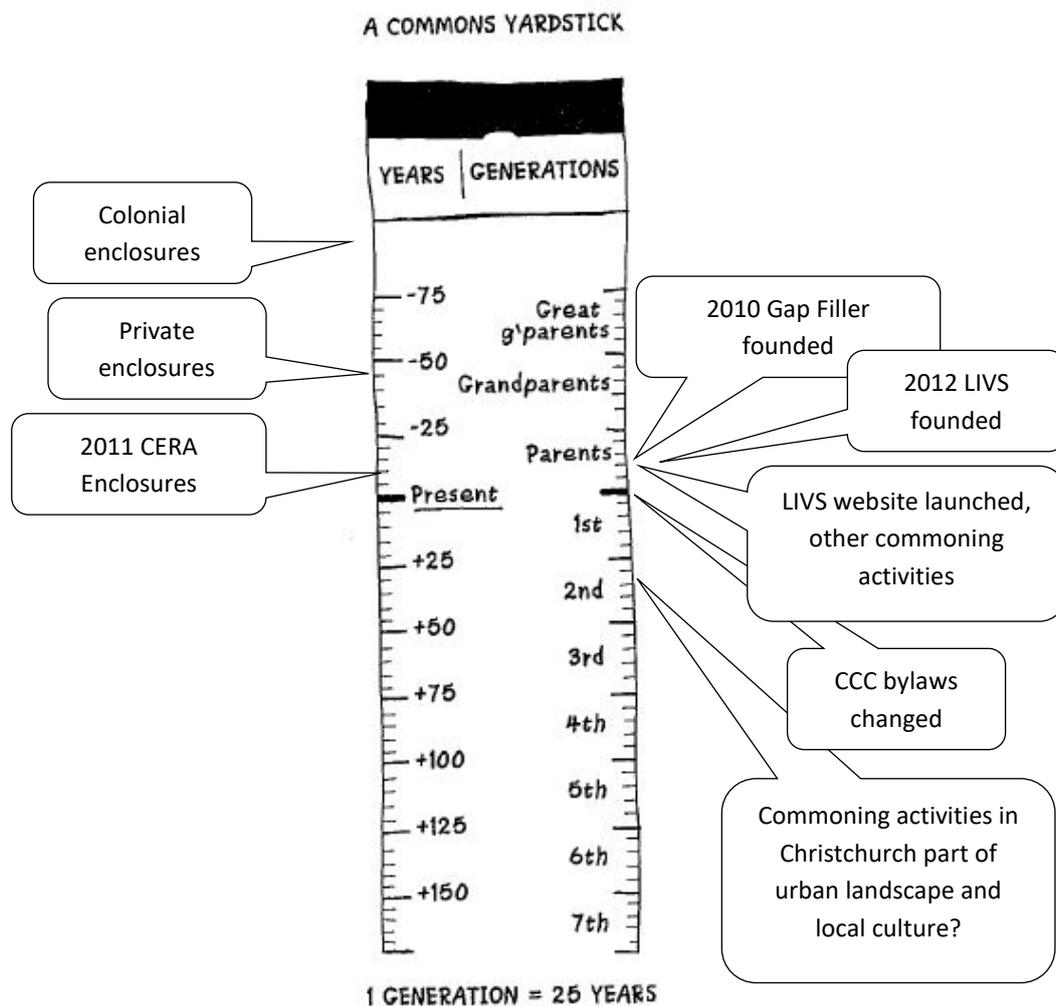
Table 1: A commons analysis of ‘The Commons’

A Commons Analysis of ‘The Commons’						
	Access	Use	Benefit	Care	Responsibility	Ownership
<i>Commons</i>	<i>Access shared and wide</i>	<i>Negotiated by a community</i>	<i>Widely distributed to community and beyond</i>	<i>Performed by community members</i>	<i>Assumed by community</i>	<i>Any form of ownership (private, state, or open access)</i>
THE COMMONS	Open access (anyone can enter ‘The Commons’)	Public space, with use negotiated for offices, markets, community projects and food trucks	To Christchurch locals, tourists, community organisations and food vendors	The Commons Council, Christchurch City Council, Gap Filler, other users	The Commons Council	City Council

Table 2: A commons analysis of Life in Vacant Spaces

A COMMONS ANALYSIS OF (the knowledge commons of) LIFE IN VACANT SPACES					
ACCESS	USE	BENEFIT	CARE	RESPONSIBILITY	PROPERTY
Interested organisations and landowners	Organisations & landowners moving forward with transitional projects	To Christchurch locals, tourists, community organisations, entrepreneurs and small business owners, landowners and more	Life in Vacant Spaces board and associated groups: Gap Filler, Greening the Rubble, City Council and more	Life in Vacant Spaces board and staff	Open access: www.LIVS.org.nz
<i>Shared and wide</i>	<i>Negotiated by a community</i>	<i>Widely distributed to community members and beyond</i>	<i>Performed by community members</i>	<i>Assumed by community members</i>	<i>Any form of ownership (private, state, shared, or open access)</i>

Figure 3: A common(er) yardstick for Christchurch



Modified from Gibson-Graham, Cameron and Healy (2013) under creative commons licence.

ⁱ In New Zealand English, the Māori word 'iwi', meaning 'tribe' or 'tribal group', is used to refer to the same. Ngāi Tahu was one of the first iwi to settle with the Crown under historic breaches of the Treaty of Waitangi. For more information on the Ngāi Tahu settlement of 1997, see Goodall and Cant (2001).

ⁱⁱ Two of the authors (along with others) have begun a National Science Challenge 11: Building Better Homes, Towns and Cities funded project, working with another Christchurch organisation that operates from a LIVS commoned site. See www.cultivatingurbanwellbeing.wordpress.com to follow progress on this project. During the writing of this article, another of the authors also joined the board of Life in Vacant Spaces.

ⁱⁱⁱ Pākehā is the Māori word used to describe people of European descent, but can also refer to non-Māori more generally. Many New Zealand European settlers use it as a self-identifier.