

Public Spaces, Domestic Commonality. Some Ethnographic Notes and Theoretical Considerations on Everyday Practices, Commoning, Conflicts and Domesticity in Public

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Abstract

This contribution offers an incursion of my ongoing reflections on public spaces and contemporary urban culture under the double focus of commoning and conflicts built on situations observed in different European cities (Paris, Brussel, Rome). My observations will focus not only on everyday practice of producing and taking care of the city but also on past and ongoing spatial projects claiming the importance of commoning. The aim is inherently transdisciplinary: to build a coherent connection between theory, professional practice, and everyday actions. The goal is to uncover opportunities for new heuristic insights that can inform theoretical understanding, project-based work, and daily practices—ultimately reinforcing the political dimensions embedded in our everyday acts. By examining different scenes of interaction, I argue that the social cohesion task we give to public space is not merely ensure by looking for social peace but rather it is by making peace with conflicts. By taking into account the spatiality and social dynamics of urban process aiming at producing a more just city, I advance the idea that empowering domestic practices in public spaces define a breach in the production of the modern-liberal city where more ecological commoning could happen.

Questo contributo offre un'incursione delle mie riflessioni in corso sugli spazi pubblici e sulla cultura urbana contemporanea, attraverso la duplice lente del commoning e dei conflitti, basata su situazioni osservate in diverse città europee, in particolare Parigi, Roma e Bruxelles. Le mie osservazioni si concentreranno non solo sulla pratica quotidiana di produzione e cura della città, ma anche su progetti spaziali terminati o in corso che rivendicano l'importanza del commoning. L'intento è intrinsecamente transdisciplinare, mirando a costruire una relazione coerente tra teoria, pratiche professionali e azioni quotidiane. L'obiettivo è identificare opportunità per nuove riflessioni che possano informare sia il discorso teorico che le pratiche progettuali se non addirittura la vita di tutti i giorni, rafforzando la dimensione politica dell'agire quotidiano. Analizzando queste diverse scene d'interazione sostengo che la missione di coesione sociale che attribuiamo allo spazio pubblico non si raggiunge ricercando la pace, ma piuttosto nel fare la pace con i conflitti. Considerando la spazialità e le dinamiche sociali dei processi urbani volti a produrre una città più giusta, avanzo l'idea che potenziare le pratiche domestiche negli spazi pubblici possa produrre fratture salutari nella produzione della città liberale, da cui potrebbero emergere forme di commoning più ecologiche.

Keywords: Ethnography, Domesticity, Commonality.

Parole chiave: Etnografia, Domesticità, Comunità.

Episode 1 Maintenance Practices: Early March 2023, just before noon, Brussel/Note Excerpt

Antonia, my Spanish neighbour in her 70s, stands in front of her house, broom in hand and apron tied securely around her chest. As usual, she is cleaning the area in front of her door – sweeping and throwing buckets of water when needed. Thanks to her, the sidewalk and street around 115 Rue des Tanneurs stay clean and tidy in every season, ever since she moved to Brussels with her Spanish family in the 1960s. In the way she cares for and maintains this small stretch of sidewalk – sometimes clashing with neighbours who, in her words, «don't care like I do» – she makes it her space, though not exclusively. She takes responsibility without closing herself off. She invests her time, her body, asserting her presence without claiming ownership. As I leave the house, I trip over a hole left by a cobblestone that has been missing for days, right in the middle of the sidewalk. Looking up, I meet the gaze of a worker in an orange work coat. He's trying to straighten the trunk of a tree about a meter from where I fell – it had been knocked over by a car. «You need to report it, madam» he says, referring, I assume, to the public *Fix My Street* platform. «I could report it myself, but it'll be faster if you do it as a citizen. Don't you have a smartphone?» I feel a wave of frustration. In my mind, I wonder why he can't take care of it—after all, he's already working on the sidewalk. At the same time, I think maybe I should just do what Antonia would: fill the hole with some earth or sand and carry on¹.

¹ Fieldwork notes taken during a research about the link between maintenance process and the city material production within the frame of an action-research made in collaboration with the architect studio MAMA for Bruxelles-Mobilité on *Fix My Street* application. See <http://mama.brussels/office.html#fms>



Fig. 1 My Niegbour on her daily mission, Brussel January 2022
Source: © V. Milliot



Fig. 2 FixMyStreet_Rapport de recherche (glissé(e)s)

Introduction: on public anthropology, urban questions and the use of concepts

As an anthropologist collaborating with architects and urban planners, I find it reassuring to share a commitment to transcending disciplinary boundaries while prioritizing the subject of study itself: cities, urban environments, public spaces². However, interdisciplinary discussions can reveal that, even when using similar language and concepts, we may not be fully aligned in meaning. Recognizing such misalignments is crucial for deepening our understanding of arguments and their differences. I will then begin this contribution by clarifying my perspective and briefly outlining how the urban and public anthropology I defend produces commoning and conflicts in public spaces as object of inquiry and can contribute, with its epistemology, theory and practice, to interpret them today. Originally bounded to exotic and not urban locations (Lévi-Strauss, 1955) anthropological engagement with urban contexts

² This note is an opportunity for me to express my gratitude to the AESOP Thematic Group on Public Spaces and Urban Cultures (TG PSUC, <https://aesop-planning.eu/thematic-groups/public-spaces-and-urban-cultures>) for having been a reflection companion for the last sixteen years.

have been banalized by increasing percentage of human beings living in urban context (more than half of the population following United Nations report, 2019) and consuming urban culture. Studying the city requires anthropologists to explore the production of meaning tied to the production of space, as theorized by Lefebvre (1991), as well as the spatial dimensions of symbolic patterns. This work involves demonstrating the many ways in which space is produced – the *city-making* at the level of citizen as opposed to *city-planning* of decision makers in Michel Agier approach (Agier, 1999).

Precisely at the contact of urban societies, anthropology, traditionally concerned by structural and therefore supposedly stable side of culture, has progressively learnt to account for changes and the dynamic dimension of society (Balandier, 1985) at the very contact of the city, as both the place of power reproduction and social emancipation (Bauman, 2005). When anthropologists describe fragments of cities, they reflect how social reality itself is composed of these fragments. The anthropological gaze required *to see* and understand these fragments as inherently particular, situated and, at the same time, diffused and therefore numerically majoritarian because produced and lived everyday (De Certeau, 1984). Colette Pétonnet coined the term 'floating observation' (Pétonnet, 1982) to describe her investigative method navigating through these fragments. More recently, Anna Tsing has emphasized the 'arts of noticing' and the political importance of polyphony in cultivating an understanding of – and a way of living in – our damaged planet, particularly at the edges and in the ruins of capitalism (Tsing, 2015). Tsing, alongside other anthropologists and philosophers, advocates for a 'new ethic and ecology of attention' (Cottin, 2017; Tsing, 2015). This renewed focus on the importance of noticing and the quality of attention echoes for me anthropologist Marc Augé's notion of 'strabisme' which calls for a multi-scalar and local/global construction of the object of inquiry (Augé, 1995), and Agier's 'decentering gaze', which advocates for a marginal positioning as a heuristic method (Agier, 2015) and allow anthropology to operate a fundamental destabilization of normative definitions, consolidated notions, consensuses, and entrenched frameworks of sense-making. Anthropology, as I use to summarize, examines simultaneously

transparencies and opacities. This approach is both a physical and mental disposition – a commitment to defy stereotypes, change perspectives, observe patiently, and exit the normative dimension of each society (Lamotte and Palumbo, 2012).

Moreover, anthropologists, both by method and by profession, bear the responsibility to return their knowledge to society. They are, in a sense, 'indebted' to the very communities in which their knowledge is generated. Thus, anthropology emerges from and is deeply intertwined with societal concerns and cross on their path architects and urban planners on the field of practice and research claiming a situated approach, taking under consideration power interplay and domination process in the city production. By examining these processes, urban anthropology not only seeks to understand the complexities of urban life but also contributes to address fractures and inequalities produced by urbanization and inherent to the urban environment, underlining the civic aim of what can be defined *public anthropology*³.

Following this scholarship, between urban and public anthropology, I aim to share some reflections on public spaces, conflicts, peace, and commons. Is therefore in the backstage of the anthropologist on the fields, or better, in the pages of its 'carnet de terrain' that I will attempt to bring the readers of the following pages. The kind of knowledge that, built on my interaction with Antonia, my frequent encounters with her, and my keen observation of her gestures, lead me to reflect on our actions in the city – the uneven distribution of knowledge and power to shape urban spaces, the nature of this everyday agency, which is far from being fully acknowledged in formal decision-making and that shows structural epistemic injustice

3 Public anthropology, according to Robert Borofsky, professor at Hawaii Pacific University, «demonstrates the ability of anthropology and anthropologists to effectively address problems beyond the discipline – illuminating larger social issues of our times as well as encouraging broad, public conversations about them with the explicit goal of fostering social change» (quote from Borofsky's Public Anthropology website www.publicanthropology.org. [accessed June 09 2025]). A similar purpose has pushed a group of anthropologists, among which myself, to found a french review called *Monde Commun: des anthropologues dans la cité* published by Presses Universitaires de France. This review has edited special issues on topic such as Violence and Justices (N°1, 2018), Fake News (N°2 2019), Migrants (N°3 2019), Invisibilized Citizenship (N°4 2020). The last number of this collection will be published in 2025 and will be giving voice to reflexions about such "public anthropology" project. See as well Michel Agier, «Pour une anthropologie publique». *Monde commun*, 2018. For more details see DOI: 10.58079/rlnv

we are all entertaining (Fricker, 2007).

Finally, by exercising some reflexivity, it is interesting to underline that the *situations* I will draw my reflection from (two from research fieldwork and one from urban project observation) also exemplify different positionalities in ethnography, ranging from external observation (two cases in which my use of the space does not precede my status as an observer) to that of observant inhabitation (where the daily practice of living or frequenting these places precedes and thus encompasses my role as a researcher).

To conclude, it is important to precise another characteristic of anthropology: its distinctive relationship to concepts. After structuralism, anthropology epistemic approach has established a specific relationship between theory and fieldwork. Somehow fieldwork constitutes the origin and the limits of theoretical speculation. Ethnographers give value to the descriptive capacities of concepts which are considered as instruments and not as finality *per se*. Therefore, in the following pages we will explore situations that prompt the anthropologist to reflect on the interaction between commoning, conflicts, and public spaces, by following a *minima* definition of commoning. We will primarily define it as practices of co-presence and collective action that reestablish a relationship with space – one not based on consumption, but on production, or, better, on appropriation, not in the sense of *making something one's own* (as in ownership), but rather as *interacting with or producing within* a relationship that reflects a state of non-alienation (as articulated by Lefebvre). Emphasis will be placed on the performative dimension of commoning practices as non-capitalist practices (Dardot and Laval, 2015) producing good, such as space, extracted from the productive logics of the market (Harvey, 2011) – and of communities that are expending their openness, as emphasized by Stavrides (2019) and Esteva (2014), the latest being a militant and a disciple of Ivan Illich. It is also important to clarify that, while Italian audiences may be familiar with the Beni Comuni (commons) movement, our focus here is less on the sharing of material goods and more on *communal* practices. That said, theories of care – often mobilized in discussions on the commons to examine the maintenance and equitable distribution of shared resources – remain

relevant to our analysis, though in a different way. Specifically, ethnographic observations call for a reframing of commoning and public space discourses in relation to domestic practices. While ‘domestication’ is often employed in urban studies to describe the processes of everyday use and familiarization with the city, I use the term *public domesticity* to refer to domestic practices – such as cooking, eating, cleaning, parenting, and hosting – that take place in and inhabit outdoor public spaces. The ambiguous nature of common spaces – situated between, and in some ways opposed to, the rigid binary of public and private – appears to share the same performative quality as these domestic practices in fostering conviviality (Illich, 1973) and communality (Esteva, 2012). What I aim to highlight here is that the performativity of commoning practices often unfolds in contexts where a certain degree of public domesticity becomes possible, and that this dimension of domesticity in public space may be understood as a way of practicing, producing, and caring for the city differently.

The street as a common

Episode 2 Street Swap: 13 May 2012/Chateau Rouge-Paris/ reworked fieldwork notes.

At the small informal daily market, African ‘mamas’ sit on recovered cardboard boxes, chairs, or makeshift stools along the even-numbered side of Rue des Poissonniers. They offer passersby their merchandise: safou⁴, yams⁵, dried smoked river fish, neatly arranged in baskets salvaged from the Asian wholesaler down the street, who discards them after unpacking cassava leaves and other imported goods. Other women, dressed in traditional boubous, blend in with potential customers until they stop, open their carts, and offer hot corn to passersby.

Here and there, men speaking Bengali among themselves address pedestrians in broken French, lighting up when they find an English-speaking customer. They stand in front of half-opened sacks filled with peanuts, raw or roasted, spending time carefully rearranging their small mounds of peanuts, which keep toppling over the edge. Behind them, a little further away, a man shields his brazier from the wind using the construction site’s fence near 34 Rue des Poissonniers. That

4 The safou is the fruit of the safoutier (also known as the plum tree or atangatier, depending on alternative names for the fruit). It is an oil-rich fruit native to Central Africa, more specifically the Congo Basin.

5 Yam is a starchy tuber that is widely consumed in tropical regions.

very spot once held a building, then became an empty lot, a wasteland, a shared garden. Today, garbage piles up, awaiting the start of construction. A sign for Operation Château-Rouge announces: «Here, the City of Paris and Semavip⁶ are building six new apartments». The man is roasting peanuts using a repurposed supermarket cart and a perforated metal surface – likely a scrap piece from an old household appliance.

It's Sunday, and as on almost every Sunday here, pedestrians spill on the roadway, cars inch forward and park wherever they can find a spot. License plates hint at journeys of varying lengths to get here [...] Parisian cars are in the minority. On advertisement posters, the faces of Congolese, Beninese, and Mauritian musicians mix with those of religious preachers: in Aulnay, the Church of Sanctification and Fear for the Kingdom is organizing a three-day seminar led by Prophetess Grace Kalombo. To celebrate Colombia's National Fiesta, Wilson Manyoma y su Orquesta invites you on Saturday, July 21, to the Palais des Congrès in Montreuil. Reserve now for the second edition of La Nuit d'Outre-mer at Paris Bercy, organized by Tropique and Espace Production. Madi Bella, the global sensation, and Les 2kiTU, the number one stars, will perform at La Piedra Club Privé on Rue Lafayette. Dyva Lamarkyz announces that her album *Entre Amour et Réalité* will soon be in stores, while Lassa Lacolite's release is scheduled for July 13. Amidst all this, an ad from All United Drinks asks, «What's better? Guadeloupe, Martinique, Guyana, Réunion?» – promoting new canned beverages with packaging that mimics the colors and shapes of each island.

At the corner of Rue Poulet and Rue des Poissonniers, on a small square, the row of African mothers selling goods is interrupted: about fifteen people display plants, potted flowers, and packets of seeds. Everything is placed directly on the ground or on the same baskets and banana boxes as those used by the women selling food. «We came super early to set up» explains one of the organizers. The tree trunks surrounding the square are covered with A4 posters featuring a photo of high heels filled with soil and grass, announcing a Green Swap – a plant exchange organized by the Collectif Culture(s) Urbaine(s). People pass by, some stop; others cross without a glance. A local resident, newly moved into a recently completed building, comes down with a few nasturtium seedlings, exchanging them for a lavender plant. «It will grow well on my terrace—look, I'll put it up there» she says, pointing to her balcony on the top floor of the yellow and gray new building at the corner of Rue Doudeauville and Rue des Poissonniers. «Would you like some tomato seeds?»

⁶ SEMAVIP is a public-private enterprise responsible for the development and construction projects within the city of Paris.

«Yes»

«Where's your garden?»

«In Algiers»

«In Algiers?»

«Yes», «Okay»

The location is strategic, ensuring foot traffic. People trade plants, seeds, gardening tips, and advice.

At the lower end of Rue des Poissonniers, a pedestrian police patrol appears. The women selling safou and the peanut vendors discreetly step away. Ironically, the officers are here to check whether the organizers of the Green Swap have obtained the necessary permits for such a gathering in public space—which they have. So, the police leave, and the illegal safe and peanuts vendors return to their spots.

Tensions flare. Two African women argue over their selling spot just near the Green Swap. A third woman steps in to mediate. Once «you leave, you leave. And if you come back, you can't accuse me of taking your spot», says one. The other woman moves slightly down the street, closer to the Green Swap stands, nearly adjacent to a small table set up by Les Cuisiniers du Monde, a neighbourhood association promoting exotic cuisine. Today, they are serving tea and homemade pastries, prepared by Livia and her husband, who live on Rue Cavé.

The walking patrol returns. This time accompanied by a police car that stops by the Green Swap.

«What now?» sighs one of the organizers.

The safou vendors scatter, their baskets left untouched. Some disappear into the crowd with their shopping bags and carts. Others step into nearby shops, re-emerging as casual shoppers. The women selling hot corn keep walking, blending back into the flow of pedestrians. The Green Swap continues. Now, even an accordion player joins in—a quirky man who strolls the neighborhood on sunny Sundays with his barrel organ. He regularly plays beneath my apartment windows, and some residents, myself included, toss coins down to him. He sets up in the middle of the Green Swap stalls, takes a seat, and begins playing. A police officer, perhaps uncertain or disoriented by this unexpected legal street market mixed with the regular illegal one, approaches the basket of a woman near Les Cuisiniers du Monde. It contains a few remaining 'chikwangué' (a type of cassava bread). From far I can see the vendor owner of the basket watching the scene from across the street, inside a 'bar-tabac', laughing over coffee with a friend.

The officer picks up the basket when: «Can I take it?» Asks a woman from the Green Swap, unsure where to place the plants she wants to trade. «Madam, I don't think you want this for your plants», the officer replies, holding the basket at arm's length. «It really smells bad!» he adds, before walking off with it, leaving the woman to find another container.

A few minutes later, the safou seller returns, reclaims her spot, and rearranges her goods. Another woman arrives, another argument begins, this time in a language I don't understand. The accordionist continues playing. The safou vendor near Les Cuisiniers du Monde turns toward him, stands up, and starts singing:

«Vers les docks où le poids et l'ennui Me courbent le dos...»

The crowd gathers into a circle around them, joining in the chorus of Charles Aznavour's classic song:

«Emmenez-moi au bout de la terre Emmenez-moi au pays des merveilles Il me semble que la misère Serait moins pénible au soleil».⁷

The only person who doesn't know the lyrics — or does not pretend to — is me, the Italian anthropologist.



Fig. 3 Screen Shot. On Line Traces of my PhD fieldwork. La Goutte d'Or, Probably 2013

Source: © C. Girardi

Fig. 4 Rests of Informal Market, Rue des Poissonniers, 2015

Source: © M. Palumbo

All commoning are good but some of them are better than others

Our first step takes us to the 18th arrondissement in northern Paris (France), in a well-known area situated near the Sacré-

⁷ Written and composed by Charles Aznavour 1968 Éditions Musicales Charles Aznavour

Coeur and close to Gare du Nord. The complexity of this area arises from the layering of successive migratory waves and its evolving socio-economic fabric in terms of residential as much as commercial landscape shaped both by national migration and urban policies. For decades, this neighbourhood has functioned as an *immigrant centrality* (Toubon and Massamah, 1990), where newcomers shaped the neighbourhood through distinct traditions, cultural expressions and ways of engaging with the city. Progressively, Barbès has developed into a vibrant open-air trading hub, with Château Rouge becoming an *African centrality* renowned both nationally and internationally (Bouly de Lesdain, 1999; Palumbo, 2014). Over time, the neighborhood shifted from a residential space for working-class migrants to a local manifestation of what Tarrius (1996) 'terms transnational circulatory territories'. This transformation introduced new logics of mobility and commerce, blending formal and informal economies. The public space became a stage for trading practices often perceived as non-European, reinforcing Barbès' image as a space of informality and illegality. While integrating into global economic networks, these dynamics also reactivated stereotypes of Barbès as a *territory of elsewhere* (Palumbo, 2013). If gentrification process has introduced a new urban dynamic, albeit with significant differences compared to other working-class and migrant areas in Paris (Bacqué and Fijalkow, 2006; Chabrol, 2011; Palumbo, 2020), its public space still functions as a pluralist and everyday cosmopolitan experience (Palumbo, 2009; Milliot, 2013) while urban transformations are making more and more visible a conflicts between the clame of different *villages*, the residential one versus the migrant centrality one, differently coping with the City political agenda of a Global Paris (Palumbo, 2013; 2020).

If I chose this scene among many others in my field notebook⁸ it is because it seems particularly appropriate to observe everyday politics of commoning, their functioning as social glue and, at the same time, their interplay with dynamics of urban conflicts and their regulations. First, in this scene we can observe co-presence – of different ways of being and acting in public – producing a

8 For an extended analysis of Barbès transformations see M. Palumbo. *Barbès, Château-Rouge, Goutte d'Or. Ailleurs commence ici: anthropologie d'un espace d'altérité dans Paris*. EHESS (École des Hautes Études en Sciences Sociales), 2014. <https://hal.science/tel-04789784v1>

repertoire of behaviors and modes of engagement that become available for borrowing, circulation, and reinterpretation. In that sense, Barbès' public spaces function as a «relational school» (Joseph, 1998: 87), where human interactions are negotiated through proximity and misunderstanding. These spaces serve as arenas for cultural translation and symbolic bricolage (Lévi-Strauss, 1960; Bastide, 1970), offering opportunities for hybridization and reciprocity. The repertoire of behaviors and engagement emerging from Barbès reflects its unique relational dynamics, fostering what Arendt describes as 'thinking broadly' (Arendt, 1991, cited by Joseph, 1998). Through the different practices it hosts, the street reveals itself as a flexible, porous, and hybrid space, where misunderstandings and agreements, friction and repair, exchanges and reserve attitude multiply.

Moreover, in the depicted scene we find different interpretations of what constitutes public space and how it serves as a space of commonality. Each practice of commoning seems to assert a particular *scale* of public space: The *weak ties* of street-space agreements and episodic reciprocities mix with the processes of appropriation that define spaces of residence and daily use. These processes that transform the city into a familiar space (Agier, 1999) respond here to two different framework (Goffmann, 1991) of domesticating space, articulating two urban scales: at the register of proximity, as the street of a neighborhood, and at the register of affinity, as a street constituting a minoritarian centrality (Raulin, 1988). Centrality and proximity together produce a dual scene for communing practices. Here, the rules of neighborhood sociability intersect with an urban hospitality that accommodates practices excluded elsewhere in the city. This highlights the meaning of public space not solely as the place where commoning can happen but as the possible space for diverse commoning porosity.

In such co-presence of different commoning practices, another *common* emerges, here to be understood as a communal experience. As theorized by Gustavo Esteva with the word *comunalidad*, translated into *communality*, these situations open up the possibility to «see and experience the world as a We»⁹: though fragile and ephemeral, continuously composed

⁹ As explained by Esteva himself, the notion of *comunalidad* was coined by two indigenous Oaxaca intellectuals, Floriberto Díaz, Mixe, and Jaime Martínez Luna, Zapotec. See Esteva in Bolliern D., Helfrich S., 2012.

and decomposed through the loss (or gain) of its members and through the effects of external figures: the police officer initially brings the two markets together by placing them on the same side of the scene – as unusual street markets. He later differentiates them by dismantling their unity, seeing one as a *legal* market and the other as *illegal*. Finally, he disappears and gives way to the musician, who then reassembles a new scenic unity, including other passersby while excluding the anthropologist due to her lack of knowledge of French musical culture. This situation reveals the plasticity of what we might call a sequence of differential identifications, shaped by the composition of the scene, shared activity, and the external gaze. First, there is a practical commonality that is not affinity-based but positional, opening to reciprocal borrowing and mutual adjustment. Then, a commonality of complicity emerges, blurring categories and conventions in response to a normative external gaze. Finally, we see a historicized (or inherited) commonality, constructed on the basis of shared Francophone musical culture and common cultural consumption. A sketch of a plastic, flexible, mimetic *We* emerges from this game of association and dissociation, challenging any fixedness or independence from the constant production of otherness and sameness. Yet the possibility of distance and difference between commoning practices might, in fact, be the guarantee of emancipatory dimension of public spaces. As emphasized in Arendt work, politics results from what separates and imposes on individuals a relational effort (Arendt, 1995; Lussault, 2007). This reaffirms the social effectiveness of more distant relationships, as opposed to an overemphasis on proximity and social mixing. Finally, the reminder of the normative code of conduct in public space, with its prohibitions and pre-established uses, comes from the passage of the police redefining order, distinguishing legitimate from illegitimate commoning. Policemen reintroduce a hierarchy that was latent before their arrival, reinforcing a distinction that echoes the specific context framing this street market, remembering to everybody that if commoning can be seen as social glue, not all commoning are equal after all.

First short note for the next space revolution: on the importance of different commoning and the possibility of conflicts in public spaces

Drawing on Southern Urbanism scholarship, Barbès can be understood as a *tropical common* at the level of Paris – a space where the urban fabric absorbs and reconfigures diverse logics of social, cultural, and economic exchange, challenging the Eurocentric notion of urban commons and commoning by embracing the multiplicity of interactions rooted in diasporic and transnational exchanges. These interactions decenter established frameworks of public and private, inviting new conceptualizations of shared urban life. This perspective reframes urban theory by centering the Global South's practices, experiences, and epistemologies as sites of theoretical innovation (Robinson, 2006; Roy, 2009; Mbembe and Nuttall, 2004). And yet, despite such interpretations that can valorize the social dynamism of public spaces in this area, Barbès sociability is bothering public authorities. To better understand the situation here, it is not irrelevant to recall that Barbès public space has been shaped by a 40-year urban renovation effort (in the frame of the national well-known *Politique de la ville*), initiated in the 1980s to improve infrastructure and socio-economic development. Grassroots associations have played a critical role in steering these interventions, often contesting municipal policies to prioritize local needs. The dual goals of *normalizing* Barbès while preserving its unique character reflect the complexity of this urban project. Current efforts, including aesthetic reorganization and commercial regulation, suggest a shift toward the *pacification* (Agier and Lamotte, 2016) of public spaces. Here we see another similarity that Barbès shares with others ethnic neighbourhoods of western cities that make this configuration a sort of recurrent urban figures: a mix of working class-low income-exotic commercial centrality where mix of social and cultural otherness take public space. A global landscape of popular and tropical centralities emerges and it is not by chance that these places correspond to the next possible extension of the generic, guaranteed city (Breviglieri, 2018), where urban renewal policies attempt to banalize the urban experience and the esthetic appearance of uses and spaces in order to ensure the *good experience* of

an equally generic citizen. Past and present efforts of public policies of organization, rehabilitation and ordering of public space aim to redefine the architecture of an experience without flaws, misunderstandings, fractures, displacement or conflicts. If we look closely, the primary factor tackled by public policies is precisely the disorder created by the extensive use of the street, its domestication by exotic habits, the exposure of the backstage of everyday life - a routine that produces noise, leftovers, and waste; a routine that, in the street, cooks, sings, laughs, argues, and that, at every level, lacks the restraint of a space without visible fractures, the smooth surface of a well-ordered space where kitchens, plumbing, laundry and pipes are displaced, hidden, invisibilized. These overflowing urbanities are especially tackled as forms of undisciplined appropriation of space often explained socially because «homes are too small so people are outside» or culturally «in southern countries they are used to live outside». This kind of explanation, flirting with social or cultural over-determinism, are far from the thick and fine description of anthropologist Colette Petonnet that, back in the '60, affirmed the enlarged definition of home and its interaction with surrounding space as «familiar space» in sub-proletarian Parisian neighbourhoods¹⁰ (Petonnet, 1979). Similarly, contemporary analysis of architect and urban planner Silvana Segapeli are showing how, in Saint-Etienne as in Turin, social qualities such as sharing, solidarity and proximity originate from the practices of the working-class city. Public policies too often ignore that self-organization, collaborative economy and the dynamics of public-private percolation are reemerge in the ruins of the post-industrial city (Segapeli, 2022). Class conflicts are far to be edited by a post-political city and their visibility, even when is about public manifestation of different commoning practices, is more to be considered a sign of health than the one of illness...

10 Within this frame, she observed among the working class the habit of living not only in an apartment but in an entire neighborhood by weaving continuity between the apartments and the streets, cafes and other neighboring places. This way of living integrates the apartment into a network of places and paths within which it would be a permeable refuge. The richness of the surroundings is therefore fundamental to the constitution of a *milieu*, physical and existential, a fully lived daily life, which brings together the domestic and the public, the interior and the exterior, and compensates for the apparent discomfort of the housing itself.

Episode 3: Through the Belly of Corviale-Rome-Italy/Reworked fieldwork notes.

A house 1 km long. October 2015

Sun is shining and we are on our fifth visit of Corviale. Vincenzo¹¹, an active members of Community X association, an arts and craft laboratory occupying part of the empty spaces of what was supposed to be the public services hub, Corviale Centro, in the urban plan, gave us appointment to visit its home and the one of his mum. We follow Vincenzo and his determined pace towards the main building of Corviale, 1 km long, somewhere in between Largo Domenico Trentacoste and Emilio Quadrelli. Direction 4th floor Piano Libero. On the eastern facade, facing Via Poggioverde, the sun shines directly until midday, and rows of laundry lines alternate with a few potted plants, children's bicycles, and small outdoor cabinets. On the opposite side, along a continuous wall, the apartment entrances follow one another in identical succession, with only minor customizations of the door numbers. Lush plants grow everywhere: in pots placed directly on the floor, cleverly hung on the railing, or thriving in generous concrete planters. Plastic chairs and tables sometimes appear near apartment entrances, accompanied by other objects marking the threshold: doormats of all shapes and colors, including one cemented over to smooth the transition between the corridor and the apartment; small trash bins, gardening gloves, watering cans; various cleaning tools - things useful both inside and outside, which ultimately find a more fitting place outside the home. Other *ready-to-use* objects fill the surrounding spaces: folded table sets, barbecues, umbrellas, parasols, children's bicycles, and scooters. They suggest that the outside is also a space for pausing, meeting, and socializing, unfolding within the immediate two-meter width of the corridor, the wider landings on each floor, or even the areas surrounding the building, which are occupied on the more extended timescale of the weekend.

In 1993, during an interview while visiting with a group of high school students, Corviale architect Fiorentino declared:

«[...] The challenge lies in how Corviale will be managed. That is to say, this experience is both architectural and managerial, like everything in a city, which is not just about facades but also organization, services, transport, and so on. So, let's say, the political management of this building carries the same weight, or even more weight, than the architectural management, which is the small portion that architects have reserved for design. [...]. If the tenant of tomorrow

¹¹ Being impossible to anonymize the general location of the study, people identity has been preserved by alteration of some characteristics as name, age and address and irrelevant biographical details.

expects a paternalistic structure where everything is provided for them, yet nothing is actually given, then clearly, Corviale is doomed to fail spectacularly, because it is evident that it was not designed for a paternalistic model of management. If, on the other hand, the existence of common spaces is used by residents as an opportunity to create collective work initiatives, and if Corviale's management thus becomes a form of community governance, then the situation changes. This, of course, depends on a number of non-fatalist considerations and on the interventions of the municipality, the IACP [Social Housing Managing Institution], social workers, cultural promoters, and so on».

But from the very beginning, this endeavor was far from easy, particularly from a management perspective. The construction of Corviale was finally completed in 1984. However, it was only in 1988 that the bureaucratic process of assigning all the apartments was finalized. The spaces originally intended for commercial businesses, artisan workshops, and offices for independent professionals were rarely (and belatedly) activated due to the difficulty of managing *functional diversity* in a building funded exclusively for social housing. The spaces designed for social gatherings and the co-management of this community of neighbors were never fully appropriated, and a different dynamic eventually took hold on the 4th and 5th floors, where these 'community management' areas had been planned.

After some sporadic occupations that local residents remember as *the drug season*, the empty floors began to be occupied in a more state way around 1995, effectively transforming their intended function from commercial to residential. Modalities and reasons behind these occupations were varied: some residents had permanently lost access to other housing in the city and found themselves in an economic situation that prevented them from applying for social housing or purchasing a home; others were simply adjusting their existing household arrangements within Corviale – practical solutions to a separation that could be managed more smoothly without too much distance, or a young couple seeking independence from their family. For Vincenzo, in not such a stable financial situation, it was a good compromise: he wanted to go back to live in Corviale but did not want to stay with his mum, living at the upper floor. The empty floor was a good chance for him.

Choices of spaces to be occupied and their location within the building was made carefully: a single shop unit, or several small workshop spaces, or even the condominium meeting room (with its beautiful parquet flooring). The occupants made their decisions with restraint, as reconfiguring the spaces required a significant initial investment. The proximity of other family members ensured access to existing water and electricity networks. The modifications were carried out in

stages, with the units being occupied, annexed, and then transformed – either by professional builders or by family members over weekends and holidays. Successive adjustments became necessary, whether due to the arrival of a new neighbor requiring the redefinition of access routes, the need for an extra room, or new financial resources allowing for more substantial investments at a later stage. Internal configurations also change through the years following family evolutions. Twenty years after the first occupations, 120 families now live here. Today, the loggias and walkways, originally intended to ensure movement between apartments and commercial spaces, are sometimes inaccessible, reconfigured, or absorbed into private apartments. As a result, it is often unclear «where one is supposed to pass», both in reality and on the building's plans. The only possible guide is the familiarity gained from navigating Corviale daily – knowing which staircase to take, which elevator is best to reach home – within this rectilinear volume that was initially open but has now been restructured into a succession of private spaces. We follow Vincenzo through this labyrinth. «I was not easy to find a way to make home here. But it was such a chance to be able to install myself here that we are not going to complain. In fact, the fact of having the possibility to shape it the way I wanted, even though with the uncertainty of being able to stay, was a good thing for me».

Once inside, looking at the ceiling, we realize that the apartment was created beneath a staircase. We must be now in the loggia of one of the five former communal-meeting rooms originally planned by Architect Fiorentino for dwellers to gather and organize collective activities which were never activated as such. The floor has remained unchanged from the past, seamlessly extending from the landing into the living space. In fact, the black rubber-studded flooring underfoot hints at the original pedestrian nature of the Piano Libero, which was meant to be part corridor, part gallery, as much as the concrete benches now serving as support of some laundry baskets were supposed to propose resting and chatting moment among neighbors.

Vincenzo's apartment, like some others we visited later – is striking in its banality. Self-built in spaces that were originally intended not for housing, but for commerce and services. Over the years, through successive occupations, informal sales, and unofficial transfers, people have managed to 'make a home' according to their own tastes, needs, and means. What is truly astonishing is not so much what might seem unthinkable – the illegal self-construction within a publicly owned building managed by Italian social housing authorities – which, once lived in and experienced, feels remarkably 'normal'. Rather, it is the thirty years of stagnation and legal limbo in which these families have found themselves. Ultimately, the real risk they perceive is not that of living in an irregular home, but of being deprived of it.

Tomorrow is another day. October 2024

I have not paid a visit to Corviale since few years but I keep update by regular virtual stroll. While the global regeneration project Rigenereare Corviale seems to stay stalled, the remodeling of the *free-floor* is quite advanced. On Google Street View, the novelty is immediately apparent: on the northern half of the building, we no longer see the interruption in the facade created by the occupied floor – no more patchwork of heterogeneous materials, no more makeshift frames and improvised closures. Order has been restored through the standardized green metal sliding grids marking today the 4th floor of Corviale as a *green line*. The crane has moved on the southern part as well as orange plastic safety nets delimitating work in progress perimeter.

Laboratorio di Città¹², a research-action interdisciplinary team participating in the project management, has been continuing its work to support families in the relocation process. They have successfully managed to reintegrate some excluded households from the on-site relocation measure and they keep working on the other dimension of their mission: documenting the self-built apartments before their demolition and recording the stories of the 4th floor occupation. Between pictures showcasing the diversity of layouts and styles of the homes and interviews of households retracing when and how they happened to find themselves as illegal tenets of self-built appartements in the 4th floor of Corviale, one of the most infamous social housing buildings of Italy, the banality and exceptional nature of this situation collide.

Yet, another feeling takes over when running into the pictures of the brand-new delivered apartments: standardized in layout, materials, and colors – built, regulated, brought up to code. Certainly, households are for the most all relived of not being anymore the black sheep, the *abusivi*, squatters, which they have for some for over 30 years [...] but I truly wonder what is all this about: what is the true dimension of this act of destruction and replacement of material, eradication and displacement of peoples few blocks away?... Meanwhile we can acknowledge that the long listing victory of dwellers initiative is the change of use of this *free floor* originally thought to be a commercial street up in the air, finally officially converted into a residential floor like the others.

¹² The "Laboratorio di Città Corviale" is a project that was launched in 2018 with the aim of complementing the physical transformation of Corviale, particularly the Fourth Floor, with social actions and policies capable of supporting the individuals directly involved. Their intense local work can be followed here: <https://laboratoriocorviale.it/>



Fig. 5 Communal garden, Nuovo Corviale, October 2014
Source: © M. Palumbo



Fig. 6 Hallway appropriation, Building 2, Nuovo Corviale, October 2014
Source: © M. Palumbo

In between pre-fabs and empty spaces, traces and fragments of “another city”

Corviale is an example of a project where the initial planning envisioned a wide range of spaces for collective, communal use, but these were never completed or activated. It represents a sort of over-programming social-engineering of the community through an extremely generous, even excessive, spatial plan. Beyond the issues related to construction, maintenance, and the activation of commercial activities, it is clear that part of the failure of Fiorentino's project is due to the growing individualization of society. Yet, individuals have taken matters into their own hands regarding the project's shortcomings and its management; groups have organized themselves to activate spaces and provide the missing services. These spaces serve as supports for multiple forms of re-appropriation, extensions, and living areas produced by the inhabitants themselves. We observe how daily practices and community self-organization have hybridized and evolved the same architectural forms, reconfiguring them into new domestic spaces. These actions exemplify dwelling as a set of practices that manipulate the existing, transforming it into a place capable of hosting the multiple dimensions of daily life. The habitability of Corviale empty spaces have been made possible by adapting, mending, and reshaping available spaces, blurring conventional divisions between private and public, formal and informal and reaffirm dwelling as a practice of material reworking of an industrial pre-fab space. These spaces embody forms of commoning where traces of negotiation, conflict, and shared knowledge manifest in the material and symbolic reworking. They contradict the alienating separation of functions central to modernist urbanism, producing instead a relational fabric that reclaims agency and belonging. Here again, echoing the principles of Southern urbanism (Robinson, 2006; Roy, 2009), this process reveals how marginalized communities disrupt imposed orders to invent their own urban futures. Following Ivan Illich (1984) we could say that here practices embody resisting alienation and reclaiming the right to make-city by recuperating the *art of dwelling*. The in-between spaces of these housing estates are tangible evidence of popular resistance against dispossession (Boucheron and Palumbo, 2023). They are spaces of mending, adjusting, and recovering failures and ruins of the capitalist and

post-capitalist well-fair, asserting the capacity of people to shape and take care of their environments.

Yet, this commoning practice, producing insurgent spaces (Hou, 2010) and performing a territoriality of resistance (Stavrvides, 2016) have become target of discrimination, labeled as *slummification*. If we de-zoom and move from Corviale to a larger scoop Europe, the interstitial spaces of Corviale, echoes the one of La Courneuve, Hanoi, Ulaanbaatar, Dakar, Poznań, Naples, Cairo: a global landscape produced by urban communities in peripheral areas worldwide emerges as a global commoning fabric of infrapolitics confrontations. Here as often, the on-going renewal project erase and rewind, ignoring the emancipatory dimension of these spatial inventions of inhabitants, dismissing them as disorder. *Déjà vu*: communing and its material production results into an aesthetic of space that is institutionally and formally unbearable. As in Barbès, the normative gaze – preoccupied with the aesthetics of *order* and rehabilitation – overlooks the dynamic processes of making-city (Agier, 2015) and planners fail to recognize the productive potential of informal and hybridized spaces.

Second short note for the next space revolution: Domesticity/private agency beyond homes?

In these global in-between slabs landscape, the act of dwelling emerges as a technique still visible as opposed to a dominant condition of contemporary individuals as consumers and residents of a ready-made, provided space who have lost their art of dwelling. To follow once more Ivan Illich, if the dominant vision of a resident is that of an individual renting an apartment or owning a home whose capacity for interacting with the domestic space is limited to furnishing it, cleaning it, and occasionally seeking a larger space or lower rent, in the abandoned Corviale, the built environment is still a common for dwelling, and the vernacular space has been reclaimed against *the homogeneous space of the garage* (Illich, 1984). These multiple transformations of standard forms make visible a technique of dwelling that manipulates the existing *prefabricated space* to make it a better fit for domestic life. They also reveal the multiple relationships of the domestic sphere with the outside, a connection that has been severed in modernist mass housing architecture. While the forgotten, uninhabitable, and undesirable gaps in the functional grid of the planned city

are made habitable and sometimes desirable through the self-building efforts of communities, the narratives of a unique way of making a home and leading domestic *decent lives* are interrupted, and slums, camps, and transitional refugee settlements emerge as city drafts (Agier, 1999). Resident actions, oppose well-being as a holistic condition gained through socio-spatial self-production to comfort achieved through the accumulation of domestic equipment to cater to never-ending new needs. Here domesticity is at work in activating spaces, from home to the square. This urban collective productivity makes the city without urban planners and produces architecture without architects. Such impertinent practices are addressed as problematic and provoke suspiciousness, marginalization or censoring. We might ask: how come domestication of public spaces appears as an overflow, an exceeding substance, an inappropriate appropriation? On the paths of Henri Lefebvre and its invitation to analyze space genesis, it is interesting to follow François Beguin study of the first *housing modernisation* in Paris at the end of XIX century.

«What undoes the city is undoubtedly this increasingly sensitive privatization of inhabiting practices through all the operators of domestication, the rupture one after another of all the links which ensured communication from outside and inside. (...) the city continues to become more foreign since nothing essential is going on out there» (Beguin, 1977: 324).

Beguin outlines a double phenomenon: while *bringing comfort to home*, public spaces lost their function as places of common and commoning. That is to say that installations of primary network (such as water as running and waste liquid) produced the death of the street as a functional and social gathering space, offering services that were central to the dynamics of collective life. This is not without echoing another part of Ivan Illich famous conference delivered in front of the Royal Institute of British Architects, July 1984 where not only Illich formulate its concept of *dwelling as an art*, but also mentions the degree of common destruction as the measure of our world inhabitability:

«A generation ago, Jane Jacobs effectively argued that in traditional cities the art of dwelling and the aliveness of the commons increase both as cities expand and also as people move closer together. And yet during

the last thirty years almost everywhere in the world, powerful means have been employed to rape the local community's art of dwelling and thereby create an increasingly acute sense of scarce living space. This housing rape of the commons is no less brutal than the poisoning of water. The invasion of the last enclaves of dwelling space by housing programs is no less obnoxious than the creation of smog».

Episode 4 Parc Ouest, Brussel, spring sunny days 11 Avril 2024

It is a very beautiful and warm day for an April in Brussels. Men, women, and children of all ages are strolling around, engaged in various activities – some chatting while sitting on a bench, others taking a short walk in the sun. Kids play on a slide attached to a boat placed on a dry sea of wood chips. Some dig for small treasures in a mound of earth a hundred meters away, in the center of this temporarily repurposed vacant lot. A foosball table, missing several pieces, attracts a few players. Nearby, a chess game is set up on multiple Oktoberfest-style wooden tables. People ride all sorts of different bicycles. A few basketball hoops are mounted at the far end on a remaining strip of concrete. There is even a 'water play area' with a big plastic tube running between the roof of the central pavilion – home to the association managing this temporary park – and the small pond with a fake duck but real fish, created by repurposing the concrete foundations of a long-gone building.

Yet, what catches visitors' attention the most – besides the scattered objects that look like recently landed UFOs and the strange orange boat, seemingly the last trace of a dried-up lake – is the large chicken coop standing right in front of the temporary parc entrance. Even more striking, the chickens and roosters roam freely, as the coop's door remains wide open.

The air is beginning to fill with the mouthwatering scent of grilled meat. This early summer-like afternoon sees several groups – families, friends – gradually settling in with picnic blankets and coolers, ready to enjoy an outdoor meal. Some grill chicken, other sardines, pork, or vegetables. The charcoal is shared, though not necessarily the grills. There's a mutual understanding of how to space things out, ensuring that everyone feels comfortable. Children, like little plate-pickers, wander from table to table, sampling food at every station.

Outside the fence that marks the boundaries of this evolving park, a family watches the scene. The father waves at me, signaling to come closer.

«What is this, madam?»

«It happens once a week when the weather is nice. You can come and have a barbecue here in the park. You bring whatever you want, and here you'll find the charcoal and the grills».

«It's free?» «Yes, it's free».

«Okay, thanks!»

The smoke and the irresistible aroma of grilled food, however, are the freest of all, spreading in every direction.

Near the pavilion, a man arrives carrying a cardboard box with small holes in it. The box reads Nova Pain Kebab Bread.

«Is that for the BBQ?» a child from the park asks.

«In your dreams», the man replies.

Inside, there's no kebab bread – just chicks. He is a local resident who has already contributed a few of his own hens to the park's small farm. Originally from rural Romania, he once dismissed his father's farming lifestyle. But now, he finds himself longing for that connection to agriculture, plants, and animals. When he saw that the park had a place for chickens, he did not hesitate. Since then, he has taken care of the coop, regularly checking on the hens and paying special attention to fertilized eggs and newly hatched chicks.

Half an hour later, I see the family from earlier returning, now carrying groceries for their BBQ. They find an available table and start their own lunch. The mother looks around, searching for me, trying to catch my eye. Finally, she walks over.

«Madam, come taste our spicy sauce – it's the best!»

People invite and get invited, offering tastes of their grilled meat, letting others try their sauces, and sharing tea or beer, depending on their preferences and religious beliefs.



Fig 7. Parc Ouest, BBQ Day
Source: © B. Robles Hidalgo



Fig 8. Parc Ouest, Wellcoming Device, Brussel Mai 2025
Source: © M. Palumbo

The subtle power of temporary: some (planning) hope in time of global ruins.

The last episode of our journey brings us in the transitional urban planning project of an *in fieri* public park in the working class and migrant area of Molenbeek, in Brussel Region (Belgium). Here since 2021 the NGO Toestand¹³ has been charged to organize a temporary park in a west-land owned by Bruxelles Environment, the Green Spaces City Department, to open the west-land to the public and at the same time help urban planners and architects to design the future parc. The NGOs' ethic and politic, rooted in its original path as urban activist reclaiming the vacant spaces of the neo-liberal city, is still alive and well synthesized by the slogan «Parc Ouest, by everybody for everybody» welcoming people at the entrance. Even though their originally presence is planned for a long *trial* period of five years, it is striking to remark that the temporal dimension of the present parc management seems to establish a state of exception that allow to install a moral areas working by its own rules: allowing some daily practice illegals in other city park and public spaces, to take legally, all-dough exceptionally, place in Parc Ouest. This reversed social world have quickly become a popular centrality for neighbors and users at the scale of the city feeling here at home as nowhere else in Brussel. This *feeling at home* surprise the users at three different level: as an unexpected possibility of appropriate public space in a familiar way; as the place of unhierarchiesed way of socializing and interacting among people and with local authority and finally the place for a possible construction of identification and collective belonging as a community of users beyond other community belonging. In the scene reconstructed above the domestic conviviality is present as a transversal factor in all this commoning practices as a main ingredient of social and cultural bridging: not without negotiation, adjustment and misunderstanding, the power of domestic practices in public appears to have a sort of equalizer effect, ensuring everyone is welcome under this cosmopolitan canopy (Anderson, 2011). As Stavrides stated defying the openness as one of the main characteristics of commoning as emancipatory practices, «institutions of expanding commoning do not simply define modes of collective practices but also, importantly, forms of

13 Literally translated in English as «allowing» <https://www.toestand.be/fr>

social relations through which collective subjects of commoning are being shaped. Compatibility, translatability, power sharing and gift offering are indeed forms of relations between subjects of commoning that encourage commoning to expand beyond the limits of any closed community» (Stavrides, 2016: 49)

Ending notes: For the domestic communality revolution yet to come.

Toward a reconsideration of Commoning through Domesticity

The urban situations presented throughout this work, despite their differences, testify to the capacity of certain communities and urban dwellers to reclaim control over what directly concerns them. These actions not only shape spatial practices but also produce landscapes imbued with the embodied traces of social relations, conflicts, hierarchies, and negotiations. Where public spaces seem to function as arenas of radical democracy (Esteva, 2012), we observe a plurality of lives and a diversity of beings whose interactions are inscribed into space. In such contexts, commoning appears to be an ongoing process – inhabitants learn to navigate frictions, transforming public spaces into sites of everyday negotiation and shared life.

A key insight emerging from these ethnographic accounts is the shifting boundary between the public and the private. The domestic sphere is not confined to the intimacy of the family apartment; it extends into collective, social, and public life. These practices of public domesticity respond to the contemporary need to inhabit an inherited modernity, where housing remains monofunctional and planned for an idealized, often unrealized form of collective life. In such contexts, communities re-associate sidelined dimensions of space, bringing forth counter-powers and autonomous organizing in conditions of forced cohabitation and social fragmentation.

This conclusion proposes a theoretical redefinition of commoning by emphasizing its domestic dimension. If common spaces are, by definition, those that exceed the binary of public and private, then a de-functionalized, decolonial, and ecofeminist reading offers a heuristic superposition with domestic practices. This perspective highlights the double emancipatory potential of domestic commoning: liberation from the rigid spatial grid of functionalist urbanism, and from the capitalist system that

reduces both citizens and dwellers to passive consumers. In contrast, the examples explored here show how collective agency overflows, reasserting a capacity to do otherwise, even as these movements toward autonomy are often silenced, reabsorbed, or criminalized.

The variety of urban episodes discussed in this research further reveals how domesticity functions as a key vector of commoning. In the first episode, we saw how everyday acts of care in public space – cleaning, tending, maintaining – assert a form of *direct agency*, an *embodied ethics* of responsibility toward the commons. These practices contrast with more institutionalized logics of care, in which public authorities manage the maintenance and appearance of public space from a distance. In Barbès case, we examined how informal and minority-based uses of the street produce relational commons, resisting dominant visions of public order and community. These vernacular practices illustrate a continuum between home and exterior space found in popular cultures, challenging hegemonic definitions of *being together* in public.

In the remnants of a large-scale housing complex as Corviale, designed to support collective living but never fully activated as such, we encountered practices of reappropriation – either through individual gestures or collective action – that turned ruins into resources for alternative welfare. Here, commoning emerges not as ideology but as a necessity: the creation of shared space, housing, and systems of care unfolds within and against the backdrop of bureaucratic inertia and social marginalization. Finally, in a temporary and experimental context of Brussel public parc project, we observed how exceptionality become a fertile terrain for domesticity in public. These moments, porous and precarious, produced encounters that became the grounds for mutual hospitality and reimagined citizenship—proving that *another urbanism* is possible, and that alternative planning can indeed take shape.

Across these cases, conflict does not signal dysfunction but rather the presence of political life. A subtle line of resistance emerges – not always through ideological engagement, but as a practical rationality that resists the anesthetization of public space. These situated actions reconnect with a domestic mode of inhabiting and caring for space – generating forms of hospitable

publicness that can sustain disagreement, negotiation, and transformation. This is a vision of public space that affirms distance and difference as conditions for democratic life, rather than smoothing them over into anonymity and erasure.

Ultimately, this is a call for a re-domestication of public space – not to privatize it, but to render it livable, relational and open to plural forms of life. We advocate for an urban planning and architecture of domestic hospitality – a practice attentive not only to infrastructure or design, but to the politics of care, dwelling, and commoning in the everyday city. If planning clarifies and organizes space, it must also confront the ethical and political implications of such ordering – particularly when it contributes to standardizing, hierarchizing, and reaffirming the capitalist city as the only viable urban form. Planning and design professions must ask themselves: Are their interventions enabling or constraining the proliferation of alternative spatial agencies? How are they promoting or erasing the possibility for public space domestication? How might they contribute – wittingly or not – to the ongoing redefinition of public space? It is thus imperative that designers, planners, and researchers alike remain attuned to the multiple ways people live, care for, and claim space – often against the grain of institutional intention. To support commoning is not simply to design better public spaces – it is to take sides in the opening of new spatial and political possibilities.

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