

As a way to provide a concrete example of our discussion of non-monetary relations of commoning and possible alternatives models to the money form, this Monday's discussion began with a presentation from [. . .] on an Argentinian initiative called "bioecon" (bioecon.net), which had comprised a portion of David H.'s seminar at CUNY this spring (though attempts to adopt the platform by members of that seminar as a viable instrument of experimentation hadn't caught root). Cecilia Hecht who is one of the organizers of the platform joined us via Skype and fielded questions as we walked through the site's technical aspects.

As introduced briefly last week, the bioecon website is designed to facilitate different forms of barter, exchange through the assignation of a point system to items ranging from oregano, to shoes, to film tickets and collective meals. The points "oxidize" or disappear according to a set schedule so that accumulation is discouraged if not completely prevented: points are designed for use, and the individual offering goods and services is given responsibility/agency in ascribing a point value to each item. You decide the point allocation of any good or service, although some guidance exists online. Local spaces or "markets" are designated [do materialize?] to provide a physical location for those involved with the platform to meet up and exchange. Moreover, the platform also facilitates sharing with no exchange of points, though that aspect of the platform was not thoroughly explored.

The site is used for food or meals in 43% of its exchanges, and many of the initial questions were related to this: where does the food come from? (grocery stores, including an effort to provide seconded and free surpluses); in what physical spaces do the meals take place (mostly private homes, though some in partnering commercial restaurants); how is this organized in real-time and what are the systems of redress when an exchange "goes wrong" etc.?

Silvia F. and George C. and others expressed reservations as to whether or not the bioecon system (and its online interface, akin in some ways to a social media platform) fundamentally disturb the pre-existing value system of

consumption of its users; whether individual agency to assign points, to measure value according to a metric wasn't merely symmetrical or parallel to the system of value of capital as a whole, or in fact reproducing it a different level. i.e. does an instrument like this transform social relations really?

Luis and Rene proposed that the bioecon system, while clearly not a replacement for the material practices of our commoning, does offer one alternative to monetized exchanges and the isolation in which we normally carry out our reproduction; that the colonization of our lives by capital is total enough so that with enough pre-awareness and intention the platform could possibly be used as an effective instrument to systematize different forms of exchange, outside the circuits of money, as well as possibly help us organize in some manner our commoning practices, and that concrete issues with the system would emerge only through an experimentation with it.

Rene also pointed out that it was the rich interplay between the material and the immaterial dimensions of the Movement of the Squares and the Occupy experiences that made it exciting and productive.

(i.e. Can we conduct our inquiry not simply through reading, but also testing different platforms for withdrawing from the community of money? Does a system like bioecon allow us to experience and practice creating non-monetary spaces of relation, is it something viable for us to try as a group, keeping in mind that there are and should be a proliferation of techniques, infrastructures and other ways of doing it?)

This encounter with Cecilia led to a general discussion with the group on the intentions and larger issues involved with commoning, urban commoning, and the group engaged in a highly productive discussion.

Silvia pointed out that only through the process of transforming social relations does another system of production emerge, citing examples in the favelas of Brazil where local women organize the cooking of meals for the community out of necessity.

George gave a concise theoretical overview of the history and logic of enclosure, stating that only as recently as the middle ages did the logic of private enclosure -- necessary for the functioning of capitalism -- begin to assert itself; before this, the world was largely a "world of the commons". This originary mode -- of enclosure to sequester common resources into private use and "protection" to safeguard it from what the conservative ecologist G. Hardin famously called the "tragedy of the commons" -- is the fundamental logic of capitalism, and new enclosures and strategies of enclosure are always emerging. Reference was made to Nobel-prize winning economist E. Ostrom's rebuttal to Hardin's arguments, where a vast field of historical examples are provided in which commoning does not lead to resource depletion but rather its reverse: an enhancement of the comparative reproduction of common resources through cooperation and collaboration. But George also expressed reservations for Ostrom's approach, because it reduced commons and commoning to only technical processes or solutions to "resource management".

[. . .] gave an interesting assessment of the eventual tensions and cooptation within her OWS group: the prevalent seductions to receive "compensation" for labor led many to seek paid work as activists and academics, and the groups were subsequently driven by competition.

However, the Zuccotti occupation did offer a moment when the a space of common(s) was created and could facilitate other kinds of social relations. It was not only made visible but possible materially.

Noemi also pointed to the discrepancy between micro and macro scales, between occupation as a commoning practice and our daily lives, between desire and materialization: there is the danger of a prevalence to go for capitalist modes, we are coopted back into competitive social relations based on (prestige?) compensation for their labor -- i.e. a new value needs to be produced for that labor. Is this the 'system' that is needed? An 'aesthetic' of the commons perhaps? The common(s) project gives us to a space to close this gap or explore these questions collectively.

Yates offered that the language of the commons is a good translator between different initiatives.

Babak pointed out that this language doesn't necessarily help those excluded in the occupy movement: the mentally ill, and that a care horizon for this must be formed in the future and integrated into the movement. Silvia agreed that our resistance to commoning might stem from this sort of resistance to inclusion.

Nicolas offered that one of original topoi which was used to organize and excite our imaginaries was democracy, and that perhaps the notion of common(s) or common(s) as a topoi may not provide that kind of horizon or excitation of an imaginary. We need new topoi, or at least strategies or techniques, to organize commoning impulses and create new excitement. i.e. If democracy has been a topos to inspire our imaginary, what other topoi could we construct or deploy to change the imaginary of exclusionary capital relations?

Rene offered that possibly, wherever one sees struggle, there is a common and commoning. That the common is produced through struggle, and so it does not need to be mobilized per se. But at the same time, it is a horizon or a perspective and the task of conjoining the horizon with the existing practices may be another way or relating to Nicolas's question.