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Artistic Educational Commoning as a Laboratory for the Real

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Abstract

This article presents and discusses an extracurricular, co-constructed programme: "The Catalyst Club" as a form of Artistic Educational Commoning (AEC). Having been developed as part of a PhD research at Minerva Art Academy (Groningen, The Netherlands), The Catalyst Club (TCC) explored new perspectives on the education of artists and designers in a globalized world and created alternative modes of operating in higher art education. It brought together students, alumni, teachers from a range of disciplines, and external participants. During developing TCC, the author occupied a dual role as researcher and participant, working together with others in an artistic co-creative process. TCC drew on and developed the methods relating to Collaborative Autoethnography, Participatory Action Research and Artistic Research. This study presents AEC as a communal effort to build spaces for learning and experimentation. They are created through interaction and cooperation, based on social relations and the production of shared values. As such it can offer a counterbalance to the extensive individualisation, instrumentalization, and commodification of communities in higher art education. The article formulates some recommendations on how AEC can re-connect the education of artists and designers with the role of the arts in wider techno-logical, societal, and political contexts.

Keywords: *Higher art education, neo-liberalism, commoning, learning through difference.*

Artistic Educational Commoning as a Laboratory for the Real

Frederiek Bennema[1]

Introduction

This article is part of my PhD research into a participatory and dialogic approach to higher art education, carried out at the art history department (University of Groningen) and Minerva Art Academy in the same city. From my role as a lecturer and researcher at Minerva Art Academy and working against a sense of restriction exercised through existing structures, I developed an extracurricular and co-constructed programme called The Catalyst Club at the Art Academy. Initiated in 2019, The Catalyst Club explored new perspectives on educating artists and designers in a globalized world and created alternative modes of operating in a higher art education that is increasingly shaped by the neo-liberalization of educational systems.[2] TCC brought together students, alumni, tutors from a range of disciplines, and other participants, like a musician, a writer, or a bookstore owner. In weekly meetings with discussions,

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2   The Dutch system in higher education is based on student amounts, consequently there is an incentive to attract students and grow endlessly, which puts a lot of pressure on the system.

reading groups and other activities, such as cooking, gaming or collective writing, the club generated spaces for sharing knowledge outside any institutional settings or restrictions common to the academy (i.e., the division between fine art and design) and developing actions using participatory practices. One member defined the core values of the club as: 'The shared responsibility to take care of the club' in 'an open and informal dynamics; we all try to look after each other.' Another participant stated that: 'Participants can be empowered to take charge of the curriculum or even the rest of their lives.'

The Catalyst Club developed into an experimental educational practice I eventually came to describe as Artistic Educational Commoning. AEC entails a communal effort to build spaces for learning and experimentation, created through interaction and cooperation, based on social relations and the production of shared values. As a blend between socially engaged art and pedagogical commoning, Artistic Educational Commoning offers spaces to rethink and to learn how to work with(in) the educational context and in relation to the many systems within and outside the academy. Commoning here transforms the academy from within as an artistic, co-creative process allowing members of the educational institute to shape the academy through both collective and individual artistic processes. This practice emerged from and intervened with higher art education, within the scope of its wider socio-economical context.

In this article I will firstly elaborate on the methods AEC drew on and developed, which are relate to Collaborative Autoethnography, Participatory Action Research and Artistic Research. The article subsequently outlines a framework for educational commoning and the relation between commoning and higher art education. In a next step, I sketch the neo-liberal context to which the developed practice responds and elaborate on how The Catalyst Club developed

and offered a counterbalance to the extensive individualisation, instrumentalization, and commodification of communities in higher art education. I conclude with recommendations on how Artistic Educational Commoning can re-connect the education of artists and designers with the role of the arts as critical actor in technological, societal, and political contexts.

Method

My PhD research centres on educational practices at the Art Academy, where I work myself as a teacher (Bennema, Lehmann 2019, Bennema 2019). I therefore define my way of operating as autoethnographic: 'a form of self-narrative that places the self within a social context' (Reed-Danahay 1997, 9). In order to reflect the dual role as researcher and participant in developing The Catalyst Club, I employed autoethnography (Chang, Ngunjiri, Hernandez 2012, 18). Continuously drawing on and re-assessing my experiences as a teacher and researcher, I investigated the needs of students, staff-members, and alumni. I then facilitated situations that enabled participants to make new connections beyond the apparently open but in effect rigid academy structure and redefine their roles. It was central to my approach that students who were interested in my research, would be drawn in as co-investigators and co-creators. The name, The Catalyst Club, originated from a brainstorming session with core group members early in the programme's development. The club aimed to catalyse its members as well as the educational context, that incites students from a position of care to take responsibility for developing their role in and with the context of which they are part. In all phases, I was transparent about my research objectives, from the first TCC meeting to the publication of texts, participants were continuously informed about the progress and were asked consent for publishing names and pictures. Thus, my research was evolving as collaborative autoethnography

(CAE), which 'still focuses on self-interrogation but does so collectively and cooperatively....' While each participant contributes 'to the collective work in his or her distinct and independent voice.' (Chang, Ngunjiri, Hernandez 2012, 21-24). The club was now a multivocal research project without requiring members to contribute to the academic side of the research. My approach in which the research and actions were done 'with' people and not 'on' or 'for' people, also resonates with Participatory Action Research, which 'calls for engagement with people in collaborative relationships, opening new 'communicative spaces' in which dialogue and development can flourish' (Reason & Bradbury 2008, 3).

In developing The Catalyst Club, I knowingly embraced the uncertainties of seeking unforeseen outcomes, inspired by Graeme Sullivan who states that: 'Instead of framing questions and issues according to what might be probable or plausible, the question is to ponder the possible' (Sullivan 2006, 28). The CC's open-endedness grew into a form of artistic research. The development of the club had an inherently transformative quality. I engaged with the participants in the iterative, reflexive process of actively shaping the programme. Real needs were addressed both physically and dialogically with immediate impact. My research was now becoming performative, aiming 'to discover something in the process', which aligns with how socially engaged art projects relate to arts-based research (Helguera 2011, 34). Imagined situations were transforming into the experience of and experimentation with conditions underlying the social, educational, and institutional fabric of Minerva Art Academy. Subsequently the programme developed with visual and material output from actions and exercises, and forms of presenting and reflecting. Even daily functional objects like a teapot, crockery, food, a tiny table on wheels refurbished as a toolbox, posters, and flyers, not to mention digital media and archives, shaped the club visually and physically and were tools within the project and research (Figure 1, 2, 3).
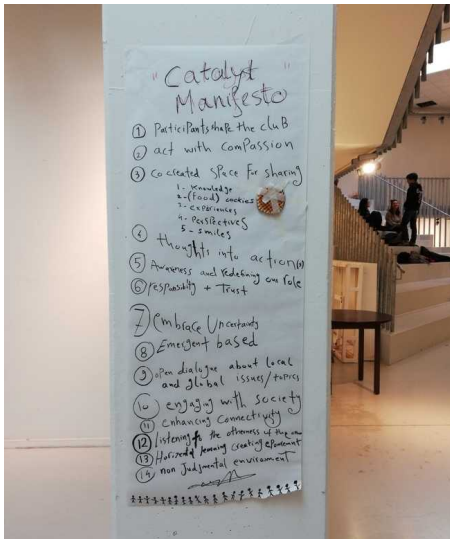
Figure 1

Figure 2

Figure 3

Also, I asked one of the members to film the activities of the club, which resulted in a video documentary. To sum up, as in artistic research, The Catalyst Club revolved around 'the creation of new opportunities to see beyond what is known that has the potential to lead to the creation of new knowledge' (Sullivan 2006, 32).

Framing commoning within education and the art school

What can commoning bring to the apparently open and free space of the art academy? In general, the concept of the commons and commoning refer to a resource shared by a group of people (Hess, Ostrom 2006, 4). The discourse and research of the commons is rooted in the interdisciplinary study of shared natural resources (Hess, Ostrom 2006, 4). Apart from these natural, mostly subtractive resources, like water, forests or wildlife, commons also entail shared non-subtractive resources of for instance scientific knowledge or the Internet. Some of these resources are endangered by depletion, while other resources like knowledge and institutions like health care and education are threatened by enclosure, as our globalized world is increasingly characterized by individualization and exploitation (Hardt, Negri 2009). Commons are often prompted as antidote or invoked as an alternative paradigm to the predominant capitalist worldview. David Bollier and Silke Helfrich underline that commons are rather a social system for meeting shared needs, than an economic system based on the ownership of goods. Commons can offer as such an alternative value paradigm based on care ethics, mutual responsibility, reciprocity, and interdependence. Because commons are: 'living systems that evolve, adapt over time and surprise us with their creativity and scope', or as Charlotte Hess and Elinor Ostrom describe them as complex ecosystems, it is hard to generalize or boil down a blueprint of commoning (Bollier, Helfrich 2019, 25) (Hess, Ostrom 2006, 3).

In recent years, the debate around the relation between commons and education, is prompted by the enclosure of education as a result of privatization and standardization (ie. Bologna Act 1999). This debate is shaped by Noah De Lissovoy, Alexander J. Means, Morten Timmermann Korsgaard, Alexander Kioupkiolis in their writings about pedagogy in common, pedagogical commons or educational commons. Within a pedagogical context, from primary to higher education, commoning is explored as an alternative to current education in a struggle against neo-liberal thought. In his article 'Education and the concept of commons. A pedagogical reinterpretation', Korsgaard proposes to approach commoning from a pedagogical vantage point, and not from a point of resistance towards the present political status quo (Korsgaard 2019, 541). Educational commoning is focussed on exploring things together, 'not in order to own it or be able to sell it, but in order to understand it and become acquainted with its particular form and history' (Korsgaard 2019, 453). From this perspective, commoning can work productively as a framework to make the school 'a common space where things are made common and studying can be conceived as a process of commoning where knowledge and understanding is sought and shared' (Korsgaard 2019, 453). Following Tim Ingold, an educational community is rooted in the Latin term com-munus, meaning "giving together". Ingold continues: 'in the community we all have things to contribute because we are all different' (Ingold 2020, 56). Alexandros Kioupkiolis further stresses in his article 'The Commons and Music Education for Social Change' that 'commoning aspires mainly to the enactment of a set of values -collective autonomy, equal freedom, sharing, creativity, diversity and participation- through practices of collaboration whose specific forms will vary according to contexts and intentions' (Kioupkiolis 2019, 137). The implementation of these values, resulting in commoning of music education would imply: 'an opening of music, and education in music, to any and all; a blurring of the frontiers between professionals and amateurs, elites and mobs, teachers and students, produ-

cers and consumers, specialists in one music genre and specialists in another' (Kioupkiolis 2019, 139).

As reactions to the fixed educational institutions, the Bologna Process and M.F.A. programmes, a variety of alternative academies, side-programmes of exhibitions, educational art projects, appeared around 2000 (Madoff 2009, ix). From these often self-organized projects, that challenge hierarchical educational relations and the commercialization of culture, sprang the debate around the relation between the art academy and commoning. In parallel there are projects that merge commoning and art projects. Mostly community-based projects, often related to social innovation, urban planning, and cultural production within neighbourhoods. In this field of commoning, there is a variety of artistic research projects and projects instigated by art academies and universities, merging (educational) art with commoning. In Belgium for instance, an interdisciplinary research community of artists, activists, academics, and commoners The Culture Commons Quest Office (CCQO), operates within the Antwerp Research of the Arts (ARIA Antwerp University). Here, cultural sociologist Pascal Gielen conducts research on commoning art and the relation between community art and commoning. Another example is the research project of the Academy of Fine Arts of Vienna, Spaces of Commoning, resulting in a publication 'Spaces of Commoning: Artistic Research and the Utopia of the Everyday'. In this research project an international group of artistic researchers was brought together who developed case studies as tools for research into the question of "commoning". As part of the research project 'Creating Commons' (2017-2020), initiated by Zürcher Hochschule der Künste, Laurence Rassel, director of Brussels-based art school École de recherche graphique (e.r.g.), participated in one of the research meetings. Since 2016 Rassel had worked on making the art school: 'a site for collective instituting' (Sollfrank 2019, 50). Although Rassel herself did not view her project as commoning, 'Creating Commons' explored how 'e.r.g. has become an experimental

zone in which processes of commoning and alternative ways of dealing with resources take place within a traditional institution' (Sollfrank 2019, 50).

Despite the increasing interest in educational commoning within the art academy, it is still in its infancy and mostly takes place outside the institution. Furthermore, Kioupkiolis investigated commoning within conservatories, which have slightly different dynamics, issues, and histories than art schools. Therefore, it is important to sketch the specific context of the art academy first, before elaborating on The Catalyst Club and 'Artistic Educational Commoning'.

Context: Fragmentation, instrumentalization of communities & individualization

Like most art academies, Minerva is characterized by organizational fragmentation and fragmentation on the level of the educational programme. Although united within a higher educational institute and housed under one roof, each department has a culture of its own. The departments are split into majors, disciplines, modules, courses and more. The various units are shaped by lines of control, functioning as separate entities, from which the overarching approach is aimed towards educating individual students. This can be seen from the perspective of the context in which art education is embedded, defined by neo-liberalization, shows that individualization is sustained within a forcefield of various communities that are mainly categorized by sameness. Zygmunt Bauman offers a helpful perspective on the relation between individuality and homogenous non-sustainable communities. He states that within the consumer mass, people 'are alike in being, all of them and each one of them, individuals who individually face up to individual problems.' (Bauman 2001, 111) As consumers of consumer society people seek for like-mindedness as reassurance of being together in their state of individuality. Bauman introduces 'peg communities' as fix-

tures that provide people with connecting through what they have in common. Pegs can be shaped by any common interest like a cat-lovers cafe, a soccer team, or a Game of Thrones fan club: creating disposable and relatively fluid formations (Bauman 2001, 112).

Because the ubiquitous fleeting peg communities cut society in various ways and connect people from different backgrounds, pegs do not stop at the walls of the academy; they also run through the educational system. Students are simultaneously part of various online and physical communities. All of them are more or less fluid: based on a common interest or role. This way a multi-layered amount of peg communities is always present in the educational environment, brought in by its various inhabitants, students, tutors, and other staff members. They mainly shape the individual learning and teaching experiences and influence the institute in a more indirect way. From a broader societal perspective, members of the educational environment are used to select or to be part of communities based on their personal preferences and interests. This attitude unconsciously shapes how students and teachers function in an environment that is categorized by sameness. They deal with a certain randomness with peg communities within their teaching and learning journeys. Individual students may incorporate pegs into their practices as a source of inspiration or may keep them private matter. Also, pegs can play a role as themes or subjects within courses. Communities are instrumentally used to shape the development of individuals, both by individuals and the institute. This makes the learning experience often one of solitude. Most communities that run through the academy do not provide counterbalance to individualization, they confirm and consolidate the individuality and the fragmented categorized character of the educational system.

The educational system is exemplary for the many systems that shape the world in which the future artists and designers live. But have been designed to address individuals from the reduction of personal complexity. I call these stripped identities.

This effectively means that the people within the institute are addressed from a specifically prescribed role: teacher, student, mechanic, or manager. Everyone performs their roles based on this supposed stripped identity, though it may involve additional responsibilities. This can be acted out online or physical spaces and various fleeting communities. This resonates with the approach of neo-liberalism as governmentality, developed by Michel Foucault in *The Birth of Biopolitics*, which describes that institutions determine individuals to govern themselves (Trifan 2016, 50). Individualization in this sense means isolation, which is in our neo-liberal society as Isabel Lorey describes it, 'primarily a matter of constituting oneself by way of imaginary relationships, constituting one's 'own' inner being, and only secondly and to a lesser extent by way of connections with others' (Lorey 2015, 3). Individuals, both inside as well as outside the walls of the educational institute, are thus responsible for performing the various versions of themselves. They are forced to be flexible and to make continuous judgments on how to interpret their role in each situation. Instead of building on relations with others, students tap their inner potential, acting from a position of inwardly held self-discipline and self-control (Lorey 2015, 3). Students need to adapt constantly to the existing and changing roles that are imposed upon them. In this way students are free as well as obliged to constitute the self and perform accordingly.

The ghost of the romantic artist-as-a-genius attitude preserves the emphasis on the individual development of future artists and designers. On top of this Foucault's governmentality permeates higher art education according to which the individual 'has to learn to develop a relation to himself that is creative and productive' (Lorey 2015, 26). Artist and educator Liam Gillick notes, that all too often the teacher's role 'offers a perverse message to students about the potential of the artistic position within society that prefers to view artists as singular, context-free creators who survive or transcend a circumstance, rather than working within one' (Gillick 2010, 94). Many teachers devote themselves to helping students shape the individual identities.

Students are asked by various teachers and in different situations to perform the best version of their artistic self. This can result in an inward existential soul-search, questioning the 'real' identity of the student. What kind of artist am I? What kind of artist should I become? But what is being overlooked while the students perform their roles, looking inside for answers, is that this identity is in itself a construct. It is shaped through multiple caring relations by being and working within a context, in relation to others like peers or friends and subsequently their tutors. Bolllier and Helfrich underline: 'We are not only embedded in relationships; our very identities are created through relationships' (Bollier, Helfrich 2019, 18). Consequently, many students act as if they are in a glass case together with likeminded people who also perform their student roles. Alienated from their citizenship too with a role to play in society at large.

Intervention: The Catalyst Club

As a response to the complexity of the above-described context I developed a project that intervened in the forcefield of the art academy. Through this project, I wanted to stimulate engaged-with attitudes from which students and teachers would gain more agency over their learning and teaching processes, while at the same time questioning the notion of solitude. Also, to allow students and other members of the art academy, to participate in the critical discourse of the institution. When I started thinking about setting up such a project, I had several ideas but not figured out yet what the exact needs are, who to work with nor an opportunity to start developing from. I explored the possibilities of developing a project by first creating conditions for myself, to approach the art academy as a pool of different possibilities to act upon. I combined a tiny desk on wheels with a small led ticker tape on top of it displaying the text: 'Move the world, share your thoughts', a reinterpretation of the Hanze HEI slogan: 'Share your talent. Move the world'. With it I rolled through the

academy's spaces, mostly in common areas like a landing or main hall and took it into the classroom. (Figure 4) The small moveable office and open invitation for a talk and a cup of tea, allowed me to distance myself from my role as a teacher and to have different conversations with people in the academy than I would normally have. As a researcher I started observing what was going on in the academy. I listened to how students, workshop specialists, alumni, teachers, and cleaners experience working, making, teaching, and learning in Minerva. Also, I tested my ideas about developing my actions into a project that would later become The Catalyst Club.

While I was redefining my role as a teacher with a moveable office, another important step in my research took place: I taught a course about the educational turn in the

Figure 4

beginning weeks of that academic year 2018-2019. Instead of teaching it as a lecture series, I shaped it into reading group sessions, removing myself from the traditional professor sending channel and discussing with students as equals at a roundtable format. Every week I facilitated a space that was open for everyone to share their experiences, inspiration, and knowledge, hereby creating a communal learning experience. The content and format of the course attracted new students and alumni who

started attending the meetings voluntarily. After the official ending, some parti-cipants requested to continue the meetings. I recognized that with this energetic group I could combine the reading sessions, with my table talk meetings and trans-form them into an extra-curricular programme. I realized that the intensity of meet-ing once a month and the type of activity, reading group sessions, would not be

enough to create this programme. The most effective and ethical way of activating people to engage in the develop-ment of an extra-cur-ricular programme, was to offer them literally a seat at the table. This way I opened the pos-sibility for students, alumni, and colleagues to express and share

Figure 5

their ideas and needs. Thus, I began assembling people who I made complicit in the further development and realization. The project had to cease being 'mine' and be-come everyone's. The seven people[3] who gathered for the first crucial meeting were all somehow already involved in my research or the programme. The foundation of trust I had built with this core group was necessary for me to encounter the uncer-tainties that came along with opening-up the project for others to interact with my ideas and add theirs. Especially because I was not able yet to pinpoint what the exact

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3   The editorial board: Katie Ceekay, Gabriela Milyanova, Lola Diaz Cantoni, Jorien Ketelaar, Vilius Vaitiekūnas, Jan van Egmond, Milica Janković.

outcome of the project would be, it was important that the core group members trusted me so that they would become equally excited for embarking on this journey voluntarily.

In order for other people to take the steering wheel, I needed to be susceptible to the ideas that were beneficial to the group as well as its individual members. I embraced the suggestion of a core group member to have dinners at each other's places. During one of the first dinners, I learned that there was a need for having more reading group sessions. We decided to meet once a week, alternating reading group sessions with action labs and a meet and greet sessions. A brainstorm resulted in a suitable name for the programme: The Catalyst Club. We began programming with a few ideas for texts, guests, and an activity I proposed. Most texts came from my research and revolved around (art) education, participation, and the embeddedness in neo-liberal society. We did an exercise in making psychogeographic maps of the building, using observations, senses, and memories. For a meet and greet a technician who builds floats for a locally famous flower parade and head of department were invited to exchange views on how other qualities of staff members can be useful to the art school. Next to the programme we made posters to spread in the academy and created a Facebook group to announce the meetings and to make the sessions available to people outside the bubble of the art academy. The participants were committed to the project and found mutual benefits through their involvement and investments. The way they cooperated and cared for the club was fuelled by my role to inspire and embody care for coming together and exchanging ideas: to be open and acknowledge the value of what the other has to offer.

Throughout the process I had to be patient and let go of the teacher-organizer role to allow others to act and take responsibilities. As I did for example at the beginning when the editorial board met in the canteen of Minerva to discuss how to continue because there was only one scheduled meeting left. Concerning the busy lives of

everyone, I offered the group the option to develop the programme together or leaving this responsibility to me. Everyone agreed that they wanted to organise the programme together by teaming up and dividing the tasks. We built the programme for

Figure 6

the coming three months on the spot. The programme was flexible and open, with different hosts and moderators bringing in texts and activities they found valuable to share with the club. The sessions varied widely, from reading a text about space, gender and knowledge to a meet and greet at the Prince Claus Conservatory with students and teachers. Subsequently the programme started running with every week a small group of people who gathered in the main hall of Academy Minerva. Meeting in such a public environment raised curiosity, thus attracting new people (Figure 6, 7). The sessions started casual with tea and sharing food, catching up with friends or meeting new people. Each time the formation was slightly different: a few regular participants from the core group, attendees from a

Figure 7

wider group of participants or newcomers. Also, the backgrounds of the participants varied widely; students from all disciplines and years, alumni, tutors and even students from the university of Groningen were drawn to the club voluntarily. This was when I realized that the club functioned as a commons, a collectively shared production, experience, and activity, connecting people from different communities (De Lissovoy 2011, 1121). I brought the concept of commoning into the club. Through dialogue we explored the affordances of commoning, and how it offers counterbalance to the individualized character of the institute and wider societal context. This raised awareness to the club as a commons and opened the possibility to make the programme more explicitly an act of commoning. During the following months I was attentively present so that - as in a commons - everyone would have the chance to take the responsibility of hosting a meeting, putting up the posters or preparing a session. It made participants come together out of curiosity because they learned from each other's views, ideas, and knowledge and from people they would not meet otherwise. This ensured that at the end of the first months, the participants - not just the core group members - continued programming.[4]

Sometimes the circumstances forced me to use unexpected events or obstacles as opportunities to act upon. Such an obstacle occurred after the summer holidays when the core group had fallen apart and only two people were left who wanted to develop the club further. I took this obstacle as an opportunity to make the programme more of a self-organized club, without an editorial board and less dependable on me. I decided to transfer most of the organizational aspects to the meetings. Thus, I arranged a student to design a format for the poster and banner. After each meeting the participants could decide what to do next week, make the announcement and poster, and spread it in the Academy. (Figure 8, 9) In addition, I reintro-

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4   Participants reinforcing the core group 2018-2019: Barakat Alsaleh, Jildau Nijboer, Odeta Putkyte, Oscar de Boer, Anouk Messin, Plamena Chemshirova.
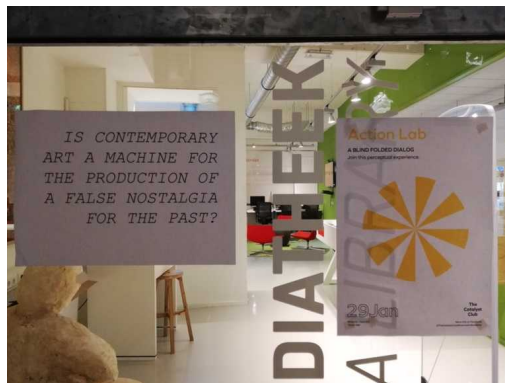
Figure 9

Figure 8

duced the tiny desk on wheels with the led ticker tape so we could make visible what kind of session was going on. I turned the table into a catalyst club toolbox: I added a Polaroid camera so we could build a flexible analogue archive of photos and statements of what participants want to bring in or appreciate about being in the club, a teapot and crockery, writing materials and things we would make during the sessions. (Figure 10) By introducing the changes subtly and always in dialogue with the participants, I ensured that participants had the opportunity to either adapt or refute the ideas. Although it took time to implement the new elements, they worked. The

visual, tangible, and organisational additions established more firmly the sharing and caring activity that makes the club a commons matching Pascal Gielen's definition 'a space or arena that can be both physical and symbolic, both material and mental and may serve as a resource for all'

Figure 10

(Gielen 2018, 103). The participants continued programming events and texts that mattered to them, attracting new members and a new less tightknit core group started to emerge.[5]

To make the club a self-functioning non-hierarchical system, I initially thought that the programme should not depend on me as the founder of the club. However, after two academic years I was still the initiator and kick-starter. I realized that it was not a problem that I took on a different role than the rest; everyone had different responsibilities due to which we could cocreate the programme while at the same time being equals. Due to the alterations, the backside - the organisation, communication, and planning - met and fused with the frontside - the meetings. This made the club more transparent and open. Together with the physical additions it became more explicit that the continuation of the programme relied on what the participants brought in: an idea for an action, a home baked cake, a text, to just listen or to spread word that the club is an inspiring place to be in. Being creators, the participants explored through the embodiment of the process, dialogue and exchange, their roles as artists and designers and accompanying value system. They not only learned from the activities, texts, and each other's views, but also how to co-create and facilitate sessions, and moderate them. Next to the agency that is spread equally among the participants, it is important to note that the presence of people from 'outside' the bubble made the experience of being part of the club as an actual act more explicit. The alumni, university students and invited guests offered a fresh pair of eyes to discover the new out of the ordinary. At the same time, the members who came from outside the educational institute carved out time from their daily routines to gain inspiration and new insights. Furthermore, operating mostly inside the academy and reflecting

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5   The core group members 2019-2020: Jens Huls, Lola Diaz Cantoni, Ilenia Trevisin, Feije Duim, Oscar de Boer, Douwe Zijlstra, Claudia Steenstra, Odeta Putkyte, Mathieu Keuter van Lewenborg.

and acting on matters concerning the educational institute and how they relate to global and local issues, laid bare that the club, the academy, its inhabitants are all part of a wider world.

What does The Catalyst Club have to offer higher art education?

The programme resonated within the educational environment. Alumni, students, and teachers started making, acting, learning, and teaching from the values that this programme espouses. Participants talked about the programme in classes or meetings and spread the principles of the club. The programme developed into an experimental educational practice I call Artistic Educational Commoning. This practice as an act of commoning, a collectively shared production, experience, and activity, where knowledge and understanding are sought and shared (De Lissovoy 2011, 1121) (Korsgaard 2019, 453), incorporates a key aspect of socially engaged art practices, which is 'to create (a) space[s] for difference and alterity, bringing those whose voices have not been heard into an open space designed to reflect their concerns and issues' (Gautreaux 2017, 261). These spaces are actively created by members of the educational institute. The gaze turns outward rather than inward. Learning journey and development of artistic processes is vibrantly connected to the wider world we share. Within Artistic Educational Commoning students explore their position as artists and designers through the embodiment of the process, dialogue, and exchange, and accompanying value systems. From an artistic point of view, commoning is a reciprocal co-creation process. It allows students to engage, through their artistic practices in the educational structure. Those engagements fuel back into the system.

The Catalyst Club functioned productively within the current structure. However, the principles underlying Artistic Educational Commoning on which the The

Catalyst Club is built can be incorporated in various ways within the curriculum and higher art education in general. The principles are similar to the core values: co-operation, responsibility, care, trust, practicing alertness, postponing judgements and freedom. AEC as a value creation process begins with recognizing the values already present in the academy or bringing them in. More precisely: implementing these values or principles starts from working with the affordances of the educational institute and its embeddedness in a wider societal and political context and not breaking down the existing infrastructures. Thus building on Korsgaard who stressed that educational commoning should not be approached 'as a political project or struggle against capital, but as an attempt to reclaim the school as a common space for studying and making things (in) common'(Korsgaard 2019, 450). It is important here to acknowledge that the backgrounds of members of the educational institute resonate in their presence and actions; they are representatives of a wider world and 'future inhabitants of the common' (Korsgaard 2019, 450). As such, students, teachers, and other staff-members, bring in their knowledge, skills, experiences and constantly changing engagements in various contexts like digital commons and peg-communities. Learning and teaching through difference is at the heart of Artistic Educational Commoning as it is founded in a differentiated relational ontology. Bollier and Helfrich describe this ontology as: 'one that recognizes the inherent diversity and differentiation of living systems within the whole' (Bollier, Helfrich 2019, 37). Individuals manifest in their different, situational ways, while not needing to act according to their stripped identities (Bollier, Helfrich 2019, 37). Actively engaging with different ways of being and understanding makes one aware of the unknown and triggers the curiosity to learn from it. Because of its dependency on what everyone involved has to offer the art academy, this pedagogical approach reverts the focus on being served by the school and taking what one needs for the individual development.

Based on the act of giving together as described by Tim Ingold, it is essential to Artistic Educational Commoning that students and teachers are co-responsible co-creators and co-operators. As in Hess and Ostroms approach of knowledge commons, the art academy as a commons is a self-governed system with rules matched to the needs and conditions of art education, and the right of community members to devise their own rules (Hess, Ostrom 2006, 7). This means that next to the existing colloquia, student council and other places of participatory decision-making, students and teachers have equal opportunity to be complicit in curriculum development on various levels. This can vary from bringing in a guest teacher, contributing to a course description, sharing a text, to co-writing the mission statement of a department. In addition to co-creating the curriculum, students and teachers also take care of the physical learning environment. As The Catalyst Club demonstrated, using the seemingly insignificant physical elements to build the spaces for learning, sharing, and acting, creates real engagement and increases responsibilities. The care for the physical context can be extended in several ways, like tidying the workshops, maintenance of the building or preparing and sharing food. These responsibilities are taken out of necessity and urgency because they are recognized as an inextricable part of the learning and teaching processes. These caring actions can equally well be fitted into individual or collective artistic practices. Within this form of education, it is not an exception to break through the usual structures, but the aim to structurally build a culture in which using the academy as a pool of resources is the norm. This way the existing collaborations and moments of sharing and exchanging outside as well as inside the usual curricular learning routes are not just tolerated; they are fully acknowledged and weaved into the educational context.

Underlying the co-constructive modes of Artistic Educational Commoning is the basic principle for individuals to present a complex inner being by making real connections with others rather than constituting the self by representing supposed roles

and imaginary relationships (Lorey 2015, 3). Within this pedagogical approach it is important for the institute to not determine individuals to govern themselves and address them according to their stripped identities, but to facilitate and support its members to use the given agency in a constructive way. Providing equal opportunities to take responsibility does not necessarily mean having the same responsibilities. Based on practicing alertness for what is needed and what is brought in, the school needs to set the parameters for its members to become co-creators of the educational environment. The teacher as facilitator and collaborator needs to assemble and create a framework out of the knowledge, skills and activities that are not within the reach of the students yet, in relation to the needs, interests and backgrounds of the students. Kioupkiolis brings to the fore that within educational commoning the teacher: 'treats students as equally capable actors who bear singular capacities and creative energies' (Kioupkiolis 2019, 136). Both teachers and students bring in their artistic practice as well as research. The different phases of each individual research and practice are valuable resources to learn from for all parties within the educational environment: from management, administration, teachers to students. When students recognize the value of what they have to offer, the learning environment becomes rich and multivocal, not relying on the teacher alone. Thus within Artistic Educational Commoning, 'learning becomes a self-assessed and peer-assessed engagement' (Kioupkiolis 2019, 133). Following De Lissovoy's vision on a pedagogy in common it is important here 'to urge teachers in their own contexts to a greater sensitivity to social and political shifts already taking place on the ground and among students, and to an awareness of the possibilities of a pedagogy built on the basis of these organic processes' (De Lissovoy 2011, 1127).

The approach of Artistic Educational Commoning does not run-on control and efficiency turning students into customers, but on trust and freedom allowing students to become autonomous beings while recognizing interdependencies as caring

relations. As Tim Ingold puts it: 'We care for others, and for the world, because we depend on them for our own existence our own freedom' (Ingold 2020, 51). Within Artistic Educational Commoning care for others goes hand in hand with the two grounding conditions of trust: practicing alertness for the needs, interests, capabilities of the other and postponing judgements. Bringing these principles to the fore is necessary for working with the mechanisms of enclosing education as well as enclosure in other parts of society. Commoning here is approached as a continuous process where making, knowledge and understanding is sought and shared, instead of an act of resistance against reduction of freedom. Resistance creates oppositions and distrust in what is different while in Artistic Educational Commoning trust and freedom are interdependent. Following Ingold: 'There can be no freedom without trust, and no trust without freedom' (Ingold 2020, 51). Through trust and care, competition is minimized, therefore making it possible to embrace uncertainty and encounter the unknown to learn from.

Conclusion

Some elements of Artistic Educational Commoning are already present within the current higher art education. They may be tucked away in coincidental encounters, student initiatives, extra-curricular activities, projects, parts of the curriculum, or in people who take on more roles than fits their job description. However, these elements can be fleeting. They are often too reliant on certain events or people. In order to lay the foundations for effective Artistic Educational Commoning, institutions must first recognize the value of these elements. The next step is to cultivate and nurture these principles and values of learning and teaching through difference; co-operation, responsibility, care, trust, practicing alertness, postponing judgements and freedom. It is most effective when the core values are embraced by layers of management and not seen as a short-term project led by a pre-established committee. Fur-

thermore, it is counterproductive to impose desired outcomes of this implementation process on the educational context, because of its dependency on the students, teachers, other staff-members and embeddedness in the city, history, culture. It is imperative to acknowledge the art academy and its inhabitants as both a product and co-producer of the context it is part of. Artistic Educational Commoning as a value and co-creation process can thus transform the art academy through the transformative power of art itself. Artistic Educational Commoning provides students with the tools to navigate local and global challenges. The educational system becomes a laboratory of the real; providing students with time and space to connect their artistic practices with a wider world. The academy and the peg communities stand on safe grounds facilitating stepping outside the comfort zone of a role or community. Artists and designers can thrive through embracing the unknown and learning to relish the unfamiliar.

My research not only had an immediate impact on the participants of The Catalyst Club and resonated within the art school and beyond. Through the methods I employed, I enriched theory of educational commoning to rethink the art academy as a social system, in which the process of learning, and through learning caring for personal and artistic development is interwoven with the participant's shared social reality. Artistic Educational Commoning emphasizes learning and teaching through difference as peer-based ways of production, and as a value creation process. As one of TCC members remarked: "As an assembly, The Catalyst Club creates a non-hierarchical conceptual laboratory for free speech and exchange of opinions, as well as experiential learning and unexpected encounters. In that sense, The Catalyst Club embodies something that I would see essential as part of my dream educational institution."

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