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Commoning Times; or on the Ethical Potential of Urgency

Fabriques de temps communs ; ou le potentiel éthique de l'urgence.

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Abstract

Urgency is a ubiquitous feeling of our contemporary epoch and its incessant crises. Based on ethnographic work with place-based alternative social projects in Paris and London inspired by ideas of the commons, I question the feeling of urgency as something that solely freezes temporal experience through speed or efficiency for instance. I do so by approaching urgency as an atmosphere and explore how it is actually *practised*. Through three vignettes: making manifestos, crafting campaigns and caring in the meanwhile. These depict urgent atmospheres through relational practices that include multiple temporal relations, involving embodied experiences, socio-ecological histories and future transformations. The examples allow me to untangle three temporal dimensions that reveal urgency's ethical potential: sensing temporalities, engaging roots and thickening the "now". This attention to affective practices in relation to collective practices contributes both to making the temporal ethos of commoning more explicit and to (re)claiming urgency's ethical potential.

Keywords

urgency, commons, temporalities, affect, alternatives

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Résumé

Dans cet article, j'explore le ressenti de l'urgence, omniprésent dans l'expérience contemporaine du déploiement incessant de crises sociales et écologiques. Par un travail ethnographique avec des lieux alternatifs urbains inspirés des notions du commun à Paris et Londres, je déconstruits l'idée que l'urgence est un ressenti temporel unique qui fige, notamment, par la vitesse ou l'efficience. Pour ce faire, j'aborde l'urgence comme atmosphère et j'explore comment elle se traduit dans les *pratiques*. Au travers de trois vignettes: écrire des manifestes, façonner de campagnes et prendre soin dans l'entretemps. Ces récits décrivent des atmosphères urgentes qui intègrent différentes relations temporelles, et qui incluent les expériences corporelles, les histoires sociales et écologiques, ainsi que la perspective de transformations futures. Les exemples permettent de démêler trois dimensions temporelles qui révèlent le potentiel éthique de l'urgence : ressentir les temporalités, mobiliser les racines et épaissir le 'maintenant'. Cette attention aux pratiques affectives dans les projets de fabrique de commun peut contribuer à la fois à expliciter l'éthique temporelle du « faire commun » ainsi qu'à (ré)approprier le potentiel éthique de l'urgence.

Mots clés

urgence, communs, temporalités, affect, alternatives

Introduction

This paper explores the temporal dimensions of place-based initiatives in European cities that experiment with making common worlds, and in particular how everyday practices that respond to ongoing social and ecological urgencies can make manifest the ethics and politics of urgent responses. This work has its roots in deep learning with Common House in London and Les Grands Voisins in Paris and ongoing engagement with other alternative place-based projects.

Initial ethnographic work carried out between 2017 and 2020 involved paying attention to the affective dimensions of everyday practices at The Common House and Les Grands Voisins; that is, the not always visible expressions of how bodies are *of* the world. I focused particularly on uncomfortable affects, or ways in which individuals and collectives can *stay* or indeed *make with* "troubling times and places" (Haraway 2016). Both projects were inspired by notions of making commons as non-extractive social and ecological relations; so, I focused on acts of making, sharing, caring, building, cooking, learning, unlearning… that recognise the ubiquitous, often uneven, and sometimes impossible relations that exist between people, and with other living and non-living beings. Such acts are described in activist and scholarly literature as *commoning* (Kirwan et al. 2015) or labour of the common.[1]

Through a process of iterative and inductive analysis, I identified urgency as a troubling affect that permeates projects that seek to explore less extractive and violent ways of living in

[1] In francophone contexts, "*le travail*" (the labour) of the common is becoming increasingly popular, also inspired by Pascal Nicolas-Le Strat's (2016) work that draws on the Marxist-Spinozist writings of Michael Hardt and Toni Negri.

what I call concrete environments (Hoover 2021). As Anderson and Huron (2021) point out, forging projects in contexts of crises can have a profound influence on collectives' "operating ethos and forms of practice" (1012), sometimes leading to replicating forms of exclusion they seek to counter (Hoover 2022). Attending to urgencies affective qualities in commoning projects nevertheless highlights the connection between *temporalities* and *agency*; in other words, the motivation and ability to respond to ongoing crises.

In this paper, I examine practices of commoning that are attached to, emerge from, and even contribute to creating *atmospheres* of urgency. I argue that examining this atmospheric quality draws attention to relations with human and non-human others within commoning practices. I show how this attention can highlight temporal qualities of commoning *with* urgency that can help to untangle what Elizabeth Olson (2015) calls urgency's ethical potential. The paper thus enriches research on the temporalities of commoning, and contributes to scant literature on the affective qualities of urgency, acknowledging its ambivalent effects.

To do this work, I put ethnographic stories into resonance with writing on earthly temporal relations from Indigenous scholarship (Simpson 2017), critical studies (Povinelli 2011) and geography (Bissell 2010; Bastian 2011; Neimanis & Walker 2014; Olson 2015; Anderson 2017). I identify how practices of making and doing commons allow individuals and collectives to resist the violence of its imposition. My aim is not to put urgency on a pedestal, but to re-politicize a term that is so ubiquitously used in relation to contemporary crises and often experienced (especially by activists) as a discourse of enclosure and temporal brutality. Mindful that my research examines uncomfortable and potentially violent affective conditions "through the experience of those who try to resist them", I position myself as an engaged researcher, taking part in collective practices and continuing to be mindful not to grab knowledge, but learn *with* and *from* these experiences to explore "how to know differently" (Dadusc 2014, 49).

In the first section, I situate commoning in troubling times through the ethnographic work with The Common House and Les Grands Voisins. I then introduce the notion of urgency as an affective atmosphere that can be experienced through actual practices, illustrating this through three vignettes: making manifestos, crafting campaigns and caring in the meanwhile. In the third section, I weave these vignettes together with scholarship the materiality of relations, examining three kinds of temporal practices that gesture towards the ethical potential of urgency: sensing temporalities, engaging roots and thickening the "now".

Commoning and Troubling Times

Experiments in explicitly *practising* common worlds in the context of European cities were sparked in the early 2010s by troubling times: the 2008 financial crash and its aftermath, alongside decreasing confidence in EU institutions and national governments. The combined effects of the financial crisis, ongoing concerns with neoliberal policies, capitalist economies of exploitation, international migration, wars wielded at a distance, gendered structures and practices, increasing and uneven effects of climate change… acted – and continue to act – as calls to action. This led to the occupation of squares (Stavrides 2012; Flesher Fominaya 2015; Romanos 2016). In London, these movements inspired the setting up of The Common House, a collective and safe space based in a privately-rented apartment in East London – an area known for its working class, migrant and LGBTQi+ histories. It was voluntarily run by militant

groups rooted in radical left and feminist politics and part of a network of autonomous social centres. The Common House was grounded in a commitment to inclusion and non-sectarian activism that also contributed a feeling of openness for people new to such militant spheres.

The financial crisis was not met with strong and sustained social protest in France until 2016 when the *Nuit Debout* 'squares movement' was kick-started by the implementation of the European fiscal stability treaty (Chabanet & Royall 2015) and a refusal to let fear and individualism take over after terrorist attacks in November 2015 and the "*état d'urgence*" (state of emergency) declared in their wake. Les Grands Voisins was set up in the summer of 2015 as these actions came to their head. It became Europe's largest transition urbanism project at the time, with nearly two thousand people living and working on the site of the Saint-Vincent-de-Paul hospital in the 14th arrondissement of Paris – a neighbourhood known to be rather bourgeois. The project was created as a partnership between the local authority and a large state-funded charity who had a meanwhile lease, providing emergency social housing to over 800 people in what would have been empty buildings. The impetus was to open the site to the general public, in collaboration with an architects' collective and a cooperative specialised in the temporary use of vacant buildings to support activities in the social and solidarity economy. Those involved in setting up the project were deeply influenced by experiments in collective organising taking place across Europe, alter-globalisation movements, different militant and cultural actions in the run-up to COP21 in Paris.

At both The Common House and Les Grands Voisins, the notion of the commons was mobilised to describe ways of experimenting alternative socio-ecological responses to the multiple crises outlined above. The commons were explicitly understood as sets of *practices* and *experimentations* rather than solely as a resource to manage; as a commitment to trying things out; not an imposition of unity; as a notion that draws on multiple genealogies and "cannot be reduced to the stereotypes of commons theories" (De Angelis 2014, 302). This echoes urban scholars who argue that the notion of commons as a resource – such as land – that may be subject to over-exploitation is not appropriate in the context of cities, context where "the commons is an inherently relational phenomenon" (Borch & Kornberger 2015, 7).[2]

Troubling times motivate the making of alternative *spaces* that gather environmental, feminist, anti-austerity, solidarity, and anticolonial movements, re-localising concerns in Western Europe that had typically been attributed to a less "economically developed" elsewhere (Flesher Fominaya 2017). How do troubling times reverberate in the practices of such projects? What can we learn from an attention to the *temporal* dimensions of commoning practices that exist in response to urgencies and crises? Some scholarship on

[2] The notion of commoning, though popularised in anglophone literature with the work of Peter Linebaugh (2008), intertwines what might be seen as separate or even incompatible genealogies. Discussing these genealogies is beyond the scope of this paper, so I make use of this footnote to situate my work in the multitude that includes continental philosophies challenging the unity of the common/collective (e.g. Jean-Luc Nancy, Paolo Virno, Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, and Gilbert Simondon), scholarship in Science and Technology Studies (e.g. Bruno Latour, Isabelle Stengers and Donna Haraway), new materialisms (e.g. Jane Bennett), writing on aesthetics and attunement (e.g. Rancière, Arendt), feminist (e.g. Sylvia Federici) and eco-feminist (e.g. Deborah Bird Rose, Maria Puig de la Bellacasa) ethics of care. It is precisely this messiness that makes the notion fruitful, and in my work, I draw more heavily on material feminist and Spinozist genealogies that allow for what Métis scholar Zoe Todd (2016) calls respectful engagement with Indigenous and anti-colonial knowledges.

commoning investigates its temporal dimensions: in the act of "salvaging" public or common resources (such as community spaces, quality public education or social housing) from a not so distant future where these are "perceived as under threat or being lost" (Anderson & Huron 2021, 1006); in "occupying" near or distant futures as a form of commons (Brigstocke 2015); or in drawing on past "legacies of occupation to contest ownership rights and resource justice" (Berlant 2016, 397).

My research takes the lens of *affect* to examine the relational qualities of these temporal dimensions and their ethical potential. Urgency thus emerged as an omnipresent atmosphere; a messy affect that draws out the often-implicit ethos of temporal relations within alternative projects. Indeed, studying affect means paying attention not only to the presence of affective experiences but, importantly, to their *effects*.[3] The ethical dimensions of commoning are made apparent through examining "what is at work" in the ways in which relations are made material (Dawney 2011, 599). It implies asking questions such as: does affect increase the capacity of bodies to take action? And if so, which bodies? How do environments and affective conditions also shape bodies' capacities to form mutually emancipatory relations? In the following sections I thus turn urgency and the ways in which it is put to work when commoning in troubling times.

Urgent Atmospheres

In the multi-sited ethnographic work that I carried out between 2017 and 2019, and ongoing engagements with meanwhile spaces and urban commoning, the sense of urgency continues to permeate – not least with experiences of the COVID-19 pandemic and its aftermath or wars at the edges of Europe. The Common House had a horizon of about six months to be able to pay rent. A campaign to "Save The Common House" was launched a few months after I started my fieldwork, and the inability to use the space during the pandemic was one major factor leading to its permanent closure in 2022. Les Grands Voisins, on the other hand, was always intended as a temporary project, thus creating a heighted sensitivity to time for those involved. This was amplified by the presence of emergency social housing on site, where temporariness and transition were conditions of daily life, even though drawn-out over years.

Urgency is often described as a structural affective condition of contemporary living – and particularly urban living. Early critics propose that it can paralyse transformative actions through the violence of speed in a present that ignores the future (Laïdi 2001; Virilio 2005). More recently, urgency is recognised as more complex (Lynch & Veland 2018), yet often associated with discourses and modes of governance that are complicit in technocratic, undemocratic, anxiety-inducing and depoliticised responses to social and ecological crises (Le Mauff 2024), including to climate change (Stern 2015), violence against women (Mason 2013), housing (Pagès, Ponet & Puyuelo 2011), or social work (Bénévent 2009). However, critical scholars such as De Angelis (2007) or Berlant (2011) suggest that it can also motivate emancipatory imaginaries, and the term has gained increasing discursive presence in relation

[3] Cross-disciplinary interest in the study of affect is motivated by a Spinozist and Deleuzian interest in its ability to create a power to act, both individually and collectively (Simpson & Brigstocke 2019). Yet affects do not have a "natural" ethical orientation (Bargetz 2015) – for instance, discomfort is not inherently "good" (Hoover 2022).

to social movements, especially since the surge of Extinction Rebellion in autumn 2018 in the UK, or the *Gilets Jaunes* protests starting at a similar time in France.

Within The Common House and Les Grands Voisins, a sense of urgency infused everyday experiences through different shades, aromas and sounds; through the kinds of organisations that joined in; through events; in written materials calling for action; through activities that respond to longer-term struggles and structural issues such as 'Antiuniversity Now' against the privatisation of higher education and 'We Are Ready Now' a youth-led organisation that came out of COP21 in Paris; through the 'Save The Common House' campaign:

> Sent: 27 November 2017 19:57 | 28 November 2017 12:37 | 29 November 17 09:32; 10:25; 10:49; 10:54; 12:57; 14:41; 14:58; 16:12 | 30 November 2017 18:51 | 1 December 2017 14:16 | 2 December 2017 14:57; 18:24;18:41
> Subject: Re: URGENT: Fundraising ideas
> … the deadline is midday on Friday … Looking forward to seeing you all on Sunday. I'm gunna get my bake on … Yay cake!!!! I'm happy to come as soon as I've made a massive pile of hummus! :D … there was broad consensus at the last meeting that we would press on to save *The Common House* …

This example of commoning shows how urgency is not a unified temporal experience linked, for instance, solely to speed or efficiency. Saving the Common House also led to making food to share or taking time to welcome people who wanted to join at a challenging moment. While urgency is widely mobilised in the literature, there is little scholarship that theorises its *affective qualities*. In his work on emergency preparedness, Ben Anderson (2017) proposes that it is precisely the link between *time* (temporalities) and *call to action* (agency) that defines urgency: it can generate "sparks of hope" and create a sense that "the situation is transformable" or even that other situations are possible (2017, 474). Anderson articulates two temporalities of urgency: the "omnipresent Present" of the crisis which he argues can forestall any sense of deliberation or dissensus, and the "interval" between this now and the future event. While Anderson's articulation of urgency in relation to time and agency is extremely helpful to examine commoning, my analysis challenges this dual temporal dimensions. Let us return to The Common House:

> During a meeting on securing the future of the project, we discuss concerns from member groups: "they want more plants"; "they obviously didn't understand the urgency of the situation!"; the conversation continues as we come to the proposal of a new co-working model; "our aim is to crush capitalism, what happens here is not professional"; "but my organising work is my professional work"; "yeah, I mean, what is more ethical: renting out to rich hipsters with beards and getting their money, or getting money from our comrades and peers?"; "…and not all people looking for a co-working space are rich hipsters with beards"; "is what we are doing about exchanging services? or is it about creating a commons, where people feel part of something?"; "we can't continue to have people contribute absolutely nothing though"; "it's a big political question to judge who's 'in' and who's 'out'".

The passage above shows how taking urgent action in commoning projects also invites questions, discussions and deliberations: what are we responding to? who is we? whose call

is it? what kind of response does one give? This challenges Anderson's assertion that deliberation is forestalled, and echoes Elizabeth Olson's exploration of geographical biases that often characterise ways in which urgency is conceptualised: "the ethical work of urgency has been hijacked by a hierarchical organization of scales or moral deliberation" (2015, 520). Examining urgency as an affective quality of commoning not only contributes to destabilising hierarchies of scale, it also draws attention to the "ethical work" that urgency can do (Olson 2015, 521).

In this vein, I invite the reader to consider urgency not only as a structural condition but also as an *affective atmosphere*. This opens up the possibility of recognising the agency of human and non-human beings as they respond and tend relational worlds within and despite enclosing structural conditions.

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A note on atmospheres – While the evocation of atmospheres has been central to much ethnographic writing on the sensory, the concept has gathered theoretical attention in the multi-disciplinary fields of affect studies[4] and in dialogue with the more francophone area of ambiance studies (Gaudin 2022). I draw on Spinozist-Deleuzian scholarship converging in geography to describe atmospheres as something that can be sensed in everyday practices and material relations, as an affect that does not directly translate into an emotion, as a quality, as shifting shapes of collective feelings that "envelop and emanate from particular ensembles" at a given time and in a given space (Anderson 2014, 160-161), as clearly located in particular experiences (Bissell 2010), as a backdrop of feelings that is nevertheless forceful and made sensible in the ways in which bodies inhabits spaces and worlds.

. . .

'Atmosphere' best describes how I began to sense urgency after spending time with post-interview notes, listening back to field recordings, interviews, and revisiting what was difficult to capture in writing. Urgency as an atmosphere relates to a range of situations and various emotions: fear (of collapse), joy (cake, a party, meeting people, imagining projects), surprise (state of finances, perspectives on co-working), or calm (facilitating discussions, methodically addressing issues). I did not immediately use the word urgency, and indeed Anderson and Ash (2015) suggest that "proliferating names" (37) can also be a technique for writing about atmospheres, rather than seeking to refine a particular definition. Working between two languages also underlined the important of such lexical widening: in French, the word *urgence(s)* means both urgency and emergency, collapsing senses of persistence and speed that can be more easily untangled in English, whereas the French synonym *pressant* (pressing), for example, retains this multiplicity. Urgency holds an intensity, to urge, *exhorter*, *inciter*, *presser,* importance, *gravité*, force, persistence, insistence, response… These words also make its multiple temporal dimensions evident, whether with the notion of speed, ongoing-ness or necessary vision of what might come next.

[4] The German philosopher Gernot Böhme's 1993 paper *Atmosphere as the fundamental concept of a new aesthetics* is often cited as a reference in developing an articulation of atmospheres as having affective potential (see Anderson 2014).

Holding onto the notion of atmospheres, I now turn to three vignettes of commoning with urgency: making manifestos, crafting campaigns and caring in the meanwhile. These are commoning practices in that they contribute to creating and maintaining non-extractive attempts at living 'otherwise' in concrete environments. They are practices that allow individuals and collectives to consider the politics involved in urgent responses and an exploration of the ethics at work in urgent atmospheres.

Making Manifestos

Brouhaha fills the amphitheatre. We're approaching the last part of the first part of the exercise. "*S'il vous plait!*" one of the facilitators yells, and then continues less loudly "this is the idea, this is the work, first we're going to have a reading of both manifestos then each group will share their reactions". More ruckus. "Please! *Encore un peu de concentration!*". I sit with some sixty people in an old teaching auditorium used for medics at the Saint-Vincent-de-Paul hospital (I'm told the steep seating was built so that even those at the very top could see the live dissections). It's dark outside. An early evening in December, just a few weeks away from the end of the first phase of Les Grands Voisins and just eight days before the winter solstice. Not the best setup for a collaborative exercise. It works somehow. Two well-known members of the project facilitate the long-awaited collective manifesto-writing session. The desire for writing a common document had been brewing for a while. After nearly two and a half years, Les Grands Voisins was gathering attention, the project had started to influence the developers' plans for the future *écoquartier* that was going to be built on the site (including more social housing units than initially planned, less demolition and an effort to save and replant as much flora as possible), and was being a source of inspiration for new approaches to emergency social housing elsewhere.

On the other side of the channel, winter months also set the scene for manifesto writing. On a Sunday in late January, I join the Common House governance working group. I arrive after a long bus and train journey. The door opens to hugs, friendly faces and Indian flatbreads with spring onion. The aim is to write something short and clear; we need something "refreshing"; restating the political objectives of the project; including a statement on "zero tolerance towards oppressive behaviour". A laptop is open on the table and one of us edits as we talk, as we ask: How to make organising joyful? How can the manifesto generate a sense of shared purpose among existing members, inspire new groups to join, and maybe also give a sense of implicit exclusion? The manifesto leads us to thinking about radical activism more generally: we speak about the need for intimacy and friendship: that "the movement also needs professionals": that friendships can turn sour.

In both projects, writing manifestos created a burst of collective energy after a tiring autumn. Both manifestos were created with urgency, always in response to multiple ongoing crises of the contexts in which they existed rather than at the beginning of the project. The urgency of writing was related to a need to reflect, to make a mark at a moment in the collective experience: "it should be something that evolves, not static" was mentioned in the Common House working group notes, and in Les Grands Voisins this sense of ongoingness was captured in the words "*manifeste imparfait*" in the final draft. This sense of urgency is spread out in time and marks a moment of gathering intensity and collective meaning, something that is nevertheless "quite concrete" in the words of a Common House member.

The processes were not as participatory as desired. Shortcuts were made. Yet writing them had an effect beyond the moment of writing. I speak with Alix, a young staff member in Les Grands Voisins, a week after the collective writing session. She says it helped her to understand politics as everyday practice "that's real politics then!". These are what Laura Winkiel would call "activist texts" that seek to create action rather than "metaphorical manifestos "that indicate a strident intervention in a debate" (2008, 12).

Writing manifestos was done in and with urgency, yet also included time-spaces for deliberations on who to involve, what to keep, how to respond, what to remember… questions that point to issues of power and responsibility, and to the generative potential of urgency when linked to practices.

Crafting Campaigns

> Between March and end of June 2018, 2816 people in emergency housing in Paris will no longer have accommodation as no serious proposals for finding alternative accommodation arrangements have been made in light of the closure of both winter and longer-term shelters.

This is the first paragraph of a campaign flyer created by the SansToitPasSansNous[5] collective. April 2018, fifteen or so people meet in Les Grands Voisins in response to new national decrees affecting migrants and emergency social housing. The collective includes residents from the emergency housing units, volunteers, artists, advocacy workers, social workers, designers, and urban planners. Late March, I join the conversation as friends start to hear seriously-sourced rumours of a decree for cutting budget to shelters, cuts that would particularly affect the French capital. A few of us meet at the offices of a migrant solidarity organisation on site. They are preparing a protest against a motion for new migration legislation.[6]

These measures particularly impacted one of the three organisations involved in creating Les Grands Voisins, Association Aurore, a charitable organisation that operates emergency shelters through state funded mechanisms. Being part of a project meant that this impact was shared with individuals and organisations that would not have been in direct contact with such issues otherwise. For instance, during a project coordination meeting including architects, designers, bar staff, social workers and volunteers, a member of Association Aurore shares how the government is "shifting the makeup of emergency accommodation through presidential decrees", speaking of new *centres de tri* and the debasing language of 'sorting'. In Les Grands Voisins, those living in shelters included immigrants with varying administrative statuses, and if shelters closed without them being offered an alternative, they risked returning to the streets only to be sorted into migrant-only centres.[7]

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[5] SansToitPasSansNous translates to 'without a roof but not without us' but can also sound like 'without you but not without us' as it plays with *toît*[roof] and *toi*[you] being homophones.

[6] Refugee and Immigration legislation : *LOI n° 2018-778 du 10 septembre 2018 pour une immigration maîtrisée, un droit d'asile effectif et une intégration réussie*.

[7] Since it was ruled that organisations managing shelters could not redirect undocumented migrants once in their care, the only way to 'recruit' immigrants into the new sorting and retention centres was to have them back on the streets.

The SansToitPasSansNous collective made visible the connection between budget cuts for emergency social housing and the French government's rapid implementation of new types of shelters destined only for migrants.[8] The campaign was quickly crafted: a letter, an online petition, a flyer, a stand-on-wheels, connections with the internationally recognised Inside Out project, collective photography sessions, poster pasting, videos and testimonials. In only one month, the campaign mobilised over one hundred people, wood, wheels, Perspex sheets, paint, stencils, social media networks, high-profile people, cameras, mobile phones, glue, buckets and more.

After a first illegal pasting session on the walls of an empty building, an older member of the collective tells me she feels somewhat dismissed after proposing that the photos also be, legally, pasted on the outer walls of Les Grands Voisins. She feels that "times have changed" and that those doing campaigns now don't use "the same strategies as us *68-ards*"; in her sense, strategies that were less media-savvy and more intent on community-building. We share these concerns and the legal pasting takes place in the following months.

The need for *crafting* and *making* allowed for different ways of relating within what was an otherwise speedy response to an urgent public policy situation. The campaign managed to express a common position that migrants should not be corralled into increasingly separate and sorted facilities; that Les Grands Voisins could demonstrate how cohabitation between migrants, other disadvantaged people as well as social and solidarity economy activities was beneficial on all accounts and worth any "risks" taken.

Caring in the Meanwhile

In March 2016, seven chickens and a rooster join Les Grands Voisins. Their new home is along the north-facing wall of the old hospital site, a stretch of green space far from the main entrance. It is also home to three compost bins, wood chipping and wood storage areas. After my third day on the site, I finally meet the feathered fowl. From that moment, they are regular participants in my research. Several months later, Kim chuckles as she takes me past the chicken coop during our walking interview. She is a young intern at swop-shop and remembers how surprised she was when she first saw the coop: *"hehe, en plein Paris un poulailler!"*. She tells me about Diarra, the woman who cares for them, how they have fun watching passers-byes, intrigued as she soothes the chickens to the sound of a music box that she found at the swap-shop, how she became *référente* (responsible) for the chickens, and how she continues to care for them even after she left the site to housing elsewhere in Paris. We hear the chapel bells ring and Kim continues, telling me how quickly things change in the project, with a sense of ongoingness and urgency, "it's quite peculiar…but look at the chickens, they're super healthy now I mean because they were completely featherless for a while!". The bells keep ringing. "They had chicken lice, no chicken fleas, I don't know exactly, but anyway, insects that took over and so they had lost their feathers". They had needed urgent attention.

[8] The proposed new shelter typologies differed from emergency social housing that welcomed anyone in need or on the street, and included CRA (Administrative Detention Centre), CAO (Welcome and Orientation Centre), CADA (Centre for Asylum Seekers), or PrAHDA (Program for the welcome and accommodation of asylum seekers) (see Arnell & Morisset 2019).

In March 2018, a few of us gather in the cool afternoon sun. Parts of Les Grands Voisins are slowly turning into a construction site for the new *écoquartier*. Sage and Freddie start an earnest conversation about the future of the chickens: "we're the ones who insisted, *il faut qu'on s'en occupe*".[9] When not in Paris, I follow the chickens' journey through social media. In May, four chickens have made it to a permaculture project in the north-western banlieue of Nanterre. A month later, two chickens reappear on the internal message board. There is a lively exchange:

> 20.06.18 [10:46 AM] Apparently there's a chicken left in the coop?! Dissident? Abandoned? It's a bit sad no?
> 27.06.18 [1 :18PM] What's up *poupoule*?
> 9.07.18 [9:06 AM] WTF?
> 9.07.18 [10:31 AM] The afro chicken is back!

There is confusion. Did they all leave? And the "afro chicken" (with a feathery crest) was not part of the original seven… A member of the coordination team checks whether anyone is taking care of them. It turns out that residents living in the few shelters that remained open were bringing water and food to them every day, and collecting eggs. Those caring for the chickens included immigrants from West Africa where livestock (including chickens) are "a significant part of the […] urban population" (Hovorka 2008, 101), and for whom having an ideal environment for the chickens was not a precondition for care.

The urgent need for including non-human animals from the beginning of the project and rehousing them was a response to socio-ecological crises, contributed to rethinking ways of living well in cities, and questioned traditions of European modernity. It also required an attention to everyday practices of care, that can also be urgent, and that are done with different paces. Creating companionship with chickens requires a kind of presence: saying hello, telling jokes, observing their behaviours, listening to their cackling, noticing falling feathers, playing music; practices that are possible in the intense "now" that urgency requires but that at the same time *extend* the affective relations created in this timespace beyond it. This echoes Maria Puig de la Bellacasa's experiences with permaculture practices, suggesting that "even when care is compelled by urgency, there is a needed distance from feelings of emergency, fear and future projections in order to focus on caring well" (2015, 707).

Commoning Times: Practising Urgency

The three accounts above present examples of commoning with urgency that nevertheless allow individuals and collectives to question "what matters" while acting and responding to urgent demands. The ways in which urgency was practised at The Common House and Les Grands Voisins, illustrated in the three vignettes, leads me to identify three temporal relations that can contribute to untangling the ethical work that commoning *in* and *with urgency* can do. These are: sensing temporalities, engaging roots and thickening the now. This analysis emerges from a deep ethnographic engagement with questions of temporality and agency in relation to commoning practices. While a vignette might be more

[9] '*s'occuper de…*' is one of the many expressions in French that can translate to 'take care of…' or link to wide concept of 'care' in English. This meaning includes more a sense of taking responsibility, taking charge, making sure something is done.

closely connected to one of the temporal dimensions, there is not a neat one-to-one correspondence, and attempting this would disserve the ways in which these practices are interlaced.

Sensing Temporalities

Commoning in and with urgency shows how the multiple responses to ongoing crises call for different temporalities, rhythms, intensities and paces: the unexpected closure of a large number of emergency shelters or a funding crisis need immediate attention while experimenting with alternative ways of inhabiting cities, regions, and the Earth, requires a long-term yet pressing engagement. Some actions require intense and immediate actions (pasting posters, responding to a government decree or treating parasites in chicken) and others a slower pace and ongoing engagement (daily care for chickens or maintenance of common spaces).

In everyday practices, these temporalities are intimately linked to each other and this is all the more evident when doings occur in a common place. Indeed, place-based projects host multiple responses to urgency, allowing them to coexist but also weave in and out of each other. As a result, those involved often develop what philosophers Rossini and Toggweiler describe as a "heightened sensitivity" (2017, 7) to time and the relations of power that these are embedded in, a sensitivity which they are is essential for developing more inclusive and just socio-ecological relations.

Commoning practices create opportunities to reflect individually and collectively on affective atmospheres, such as urgency, that can sometimes overwhelm the senses. For instance, this is explicit in the feminist approaches to organising at The Common House, where the collective recognises different capacities and rhythms of involvement. Non-human participants also contribute to this: in Les Grands Voisins, people often mentioned the rooster's dawn call, and how for some it is received as a welcome to a new day while for others as an additional unsolicited interruption after often sleepless nights. Even with urgency, those involved in the projects create spaces of imperfect sharing and deliberation (manifestos, campaigns, a shared cup of tea or coffee).

The nurturing of these sensitivities and sensibilities echoes Michelle Bastian's (2011) work on time and community, inspired by the feminist Chicana writer Gloria Anzaldúa. Bastian argues for a collective attentiveness to "difference within the supposedly singular moment of time" and creating sites where different "accounts of temporality" are experienced and/or practised (164). Attending to the urgent atmospheres of commoning thus holds potential for exploring "the possibilities of sharing time and space with others […] in less exclusionary ways" (165). Projects such as Les Grands Voisins or The Common House are by no means ideal or exclusion-free. Yet, such projects provide contexts where individuals and collectives can nurture, practice and experience sensing multiple temporal relations with human and non-human others in troubling times. The temporal practice of commoning is thus to tend these multiple paces, rhythms and intensities, and the ethical questions that they raise.

Engaging Roots

Commoning times also reveal the importance of doing *with historical* and *present-day* urgencies; evident in the making of manifestos. At The Common House, its rather quick formulation was nourished by long-term reflections around feminist praxes, queer politics,

the nature of activism, cultural change, a deep understanding of structural injustices and histories of contestation in London. During one of my first stays in Bethnal Green, a member of the project told me to cycle by the Cable Street mural that commemorates the anti-fascist coalitions' march in 1936 (stopping fascism from entering British politics at that time). Both processes generated a rootedness in the present that brought past experiences to bear, including shared references such as experiments in autonomous organising at *la ZAD* in Notre Dame des Landes.[10] Everyday actions and decisions in short intervals of action (running a campaign or writing a manifesto) are not separated from histories of resistance against exclusion, privatisation or violence against women and minorities for instance.

This rooting of current urgencies is also evident in the story of the chickens (and the rooster). They were brought to Les Grands Voisins in a context of their increasingly popularity as city-dwellers in France, considered good for eating food waste, laying eggs, and providing approachable ways of (re)introducing nature into urban areas (Ferreira 2016). Yet, those responsible for keeping the fowl in Les Grands Voisins insisted that their presence was not just about education and being useful: it was part of the "spirit of the project": a project that is about shifting imaginaries of what it means to create more liveable environments in harsh and challenging times and places. Indeed, a sense of the interdependence of human and non-human relations was something that many people involved in setting up the project shared, often inspired by prior and ongoing involvement in alternative socio-ecological projects and networks (evident also in the ease with which the chickens were re-housed). The attention to chickens and rooster was also a way of engaging with "complex histories of animal-human entanglements" (Haraway 2008, 273) that extend beyond Paris or even France, opening up to different practices and habits of cohabitation in cities. Creating companionship with chickens in collective projects thus invoked different relational histories and positionalities.

The ethics at work in engaging roots is not so much about asking "what cannot wait?" but about "what must we maintain?", "what must be cared for?" or "how can we learn from different roots?" in relation to human and non-human others. This is an attention to what Nicolas-Le-Strat calls *antériorités* (2016), experiences that allow one to make meaningful decisions in urgent intervals, to guide the direction that action might take. It also requires an openness to different generational experiences, and for instance valuing the community-building potential of less media-savvy campaign actions. While ideas and discourses of making common spaces, commons and commoning do not imply a common experience or an imposition of sameness, they do offer ways of weaving together threads of hidden and subaltern her/hi/stories, mobilised through urgent actions and the nurturing everyday practices of care: engagements that keep putting roots to work.

The above analysis disrupts Anderson's (2017) theorising of urgency's two temporal dimensions: an omnipresent present and an interval of action looking to the future. I find helpful resonances in the writing of Nishnaabeg scholar Leanne Betasamosake Simpson (2017), for whom "making ethical, sustainable Indigenous worlds" (25) is grounded in traditional practices yet not fixed: it is imbued what she calls "kinetics" (19). The notion of

[10] ZAD stands for '*Zone à Défendre*' or 'Zone to Defend', a term that was popularised with the occupation of land in opposition to the building of an airport near Nantes in North-West France in the 2010s (Bulle 2022). It is now used to name practices of peaceful occupation in response to social and ecological injustices.

engaging roots theorises urgency as an affect that is grounded yet moving. What is ethical is thus constantly re-created and re-worked through everyday practices that seek to create common worlds, and in doing so must adapt responses and roots to shifting grounds. Engaging roots attempts to avoid separating urgency's affective quality into linear categories of time (past-present-future). The roots of commoning are not territorialising: they web across spaces *and* times with the decomposed matter of beings that once were.[11]

Thickening the "Now"

Urgent atmospheres do nevertheless draw attention to a 'here and now', one which can be drawn-out (housing crises) or more immediate (relocating chickens). The temporal practices mentioned above both require a relationship to the "now" of crisis, deliberation or necessary action. This "now" of commoning with urgency is neither Anderson's "omnipresent present" nor an ephemeral moment in time. It is *thick* and imbued with material relations, a thickness that resonates with Povinelli's durative present, a "nowish" that rejects the overwhelming preoccupation with crisis and spectacular events in what she calls late liberalism (2016, 21). A thickness that echoes the "broad and deep" quality of Neimanis and Walker's "weathering" (2014, 507), a manifestation of temporality that occurs in bodies (such as chickens) and materials (such as concrete). Sensing temporalities in commoning projects is a way of paying attention to the material manifestations of the thick "now". Engaging roots contributes to *broadening* the notion of the singular moment, echoing Michelle Bastian's writing on Gloria Anzaldúa, who argues that in the context of collective action "the wholeness that has traditionally been promised by the 'moment' or the 'instant' is categorically not available" (2011, 156).

The practise of thickening I theorise here includes a *layering* of different affective responses to urgency. While this image echoes Neimanis and Walker's 'deepening', it offers a more compositional gesture, one that is more mundane. Its spatial imaginary does not assume a surface from which to descend, and it engages critically with notions of scales by accommodating different intensities and rhythms. This layering is apparent in the different levels of intensity and paces of engagement that overlap during the short time of the SansToitPasSansNous campaign; in the presence of practices of everyday care – preparing food, tending plants, minding animals, organising collective building workshops and reusing materials… – even when responding to immediate crises and the violence resulting in the quick implementation of state decrees for instance.

Attention to everyday practices contributes to shattering hierarchies between different scales of urgency and challenges the urge to prioritise and hierarchise – "plants are not the priority". Indeed, experiencing and responding to urgency in a common space creates proximity to the embodied effects of crises. This material and relational "now" challenges the idea that there are separate "scales of urgency" and "the assumed priority to the large-scale future emergency [where] the urgent body becomes literally nonsense, a non sequitur within societies, states and worlds that will always be more urgent" (Olson 2015, 521). This also

[11] Anna Tsing's (2018) provocative response to reviews of her book *The Mushroom at the End of the World* orients this metaphor as she invites us to revisit the idea of fixity and movement implied in rootedness: "what an insulting misunderstanding of actually existing trees Deleuze and Guattari's 'arboreal' metaphor puts forward" (73).

relates to Simpson's (2017) writing on the urgency of rebuilding Indigenous existents "from within" (18) after the devastation of settler colonialism in North America. Drawing on *Nishnaabewin* knowledge systems, she argues that such rebuilding requires taking apart the temporal hierarchies between different scalar processes (such as hunting and governance), and treating "body sovereignty with the same urgency and importance as political sovereignty" (21).

Thickening the now might thus contribute to inclusive practices, that allow for more attentive listening in the face of ongoing crises. Crises that are not likely to subside. Such thickening highlights how our responses to urgency are imbricated in everyday practices. This echoes activism-scholarship practices of prefiguration,[12] feminist praxes (mentioned above) or intentional communities that "strive to reconfigure everyday life" in pursuit of alternatives (Adams 2016, 82).

Coda – With Urgency

So many things demand urgent attention in concrete environments – social exclusion, poverty, homelessness, pollution, toxicity, inequality, water shortages, climate change, flooding, the list goes on. How to nurture different capacities to respond to such an onslaught? How to not experience these as competing?

The illusion of competing social urgencies may also be a symptom of conflating urgency with emergency – which is particularly easy to do in a francophone environment where there is only one word to signify the two. Emergency is a state that arises from a crisis. easily fixed into decrees leading to potentially violent experience of urban living for less "desirable" bodies (Duplan et al. 2021). Urgency is an affective atmosphere or quality, that manifests unevenly.

Through an attention to urgent atmospheres in two urban commoning projects, illustrated through making manifestos, crafting campaigns and caring in the meanwhile, this paper offers three broad practices that bring together questions of temporalities and agency. In doing so, it reasserts the importance of considering time(s) in relation to commoning. Studying temporal practices with an attention to material relations also recognise the agency of human and non-human beings in such practices. What's more, they take strength in echoes with feminist, anticolonial and non-European knowledges. For instance, Simpson's (2017) writing on kinetics as a way of being rooted and always in movement when working on rebuilding Indigenous knowledge systems chimes with the notion of engaging roots in a non-essentialising way. Both her notion of shattering temporal hierarchies and Gloria Anzaldúa's writing on the impossibility of a unified present moment enrich the notion of a thick now.

Examining urgency as an atmosphere of commoning with these resonances in mind thus extends current theorising on its affective quality beyond the duality of the omnipresent present and the future-oriented interval of action (Anderson 2017). Indeed, I show how those commoning with urgency facilitate an engagement with multiple temporalities, weaving together past and future, not always in linear ways. This contributes to shifting from a notion of 'unified present' to a 'thick now' that is broad and layered with different intensities, rhythms

[12] There is a large body of literature on this topic, but briefly we can define prefiguration as "a folding of the future into the present" (Brigstocke 2015, 158).

and practices of care. Approaching urgency through atmospheres thus counters the absorption of urgency into emergency and its appropriation by globalised "institutions of preparedness and risk-avoidance" (Olson 2015, 521), enriching other accounts than those of large-scale urgencies of state security, economy, or climate.

All this is not to put urgency on a pedestal, indeed, is urgency a feeling that you, reader, or other individuals and collectives would want to claim, or to tame? Through *practices* that sense temporalities, engage roots and thicken the "now", I suggest urgency *can* have an ethical potential, one that can be (re)claimed from its association with unsurmountable crises and ongoing destruction. Yet: this must be a collective endeavour: atmospheres are not imposed, they emerge from commoning, from more than human relations located in specific sites. Attention to urgency through affective practices may be a way to create what Povinelli (2011) refers to as a 'care-full eventfulness' in times dominated by hyper-mediatised crises, narratives of catastrophe, the spectacular and their immanent violence and exclusion.

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