Sweaty Commons

On Resistance to Global Warming and Gendered Inequality

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Sweaty Commons draws on feminist theory, new materialism, and ethnographic research to develop a novel account of how bodies live and resist the contemporary political conditions of global warming and social, gendered inequality. The dissertation is grounded in fieldwork with the French *gilets jaunes* (yellow vests) who respond to these crises by enacting alternative ways of living together – what they refer to as "the commons", by which they mean a collective, democratic, and inclusive mode of self-organization that cares for common goods, such as nature and food. *Sweaty Commons* explores the *gilets jaunes*' world-making practices with a particular focus on self-organization, gender politics, and care for the more-than-human, materialized in three configurations: the general assembly, the community kitchen, and the peach trees. The lived experiences of notably the *gilets jaunes* women: Louise, Fatima, and Alice inform the concept of sweaty commons on three levels. Politically as a mode of innovative organization, methodologically as an approach to study precarious, gendered, and more-than-human bodies, and ontologically as a way to think with the feminist and ecological lessons that sweat embodies.

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For my father,

Henrik Dichman,

(1960-2023).

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Between 2020 and 2021, I visited the Department of Philosophy at École Normale Supérieure in Paris (ENS d'Ulm) while I was conducting fieldwork with the *gilets jaunes*. At this time, the Covid-19 pandemic was at one of its peaks; however, since the *gilets jaunes* continued their resistance, I wanted to track their work. Jean-Claude Monod ensured my enrolment at ENS, which I am very grateful for. Another professor at ENS, Dominique Lestel, was also very hospitable when he invited me to join his research group, *"Le Laboratoire Pirate."* This acquaintance turned out to be very fruitful (Brugidou et al. 2023) and I want to thank Julie Beauté in particular, as well as Gregorio Paz, Jeremie Brudidou, Jeanne Ételain, and Dai Li. Outside of ENS but inside of Paris, my best French companion, Marianne Martin, and my other good friend, Lis Haugaard, have been indispensable for my well-being in France. I thank you wholeheartedly for your invaluable lessons on French ways of living.

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So, I repacked my suitcases and went to the University of California Santa Cruz (UCSC) in the fall and winter of 2022. At the UCSC Department of Anthropology, I found an environment full of stimulating and inspiring people. One of these was Anna Tsing, whose graduate course taught me so much about the discipline of anthropology and advanced my ways of combining ethnography and political theory. Let me also express my gratitude to the UCSC graduate students who also attended the course and, in particular, Agata Kowalewska, with whom I spent much time hiking and discussing anthropology and philosophy. I also want to mention Mayanthi Fernando, who served as my formal host during the stay and who provided

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Along with the *gilets jaunes* and my colleagues at UCPH, ENS, and UCSC, let me add a third (overlapping) cluster of collaborators, which is the books of my favorite feminist and new materialist thinkers. To mention a couple of them, I want to highlight Sara Ahmed (and thus Judith Butler) and Astrida Neimanis (and thus Elizabeth Grosz).

From the institutions and people who have supported my PhD journey in various ways, I now turn to a few singular persons who have served a unique role for me to accomplish the project.

The first I want to (re)mention is my supervisor, Lars. Thank you for our countless meetings, for guiding me through the wonderful worlds of feminist theory and new materialism, and for your thorough readings of numerous chapter and article drafts. Not only am I grateful for your excellent supervision, but I also feel indebted for the initial encouragement that you provided me as I considered whether to apply to the PhD program. By doing so, you opened the door into an academic world where I find meaning and purpose. The past years have formed me in

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At last, I want to bring attention to those in my family who have partaken in the journey in special ways. Thanks to my partner in life, Rasmus, for always believing in me and thinking so highly of my skills. I also thank you for the photos you have taken when assisting me in the *gilets jaunes*' Saturday demonstrations in Paris (e.g. Photo 2).

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Paris, October 2023

Part I

Heated Crises of Sweaty Commons

Prologue

Bee Orchid Sweat

“Of course orchids sweat” (Wallis and Echard 2022, 101). These are the words of the French artist Mimosa Echard in an interview on her exposition *Sporal* at the art museum *Palais de Tokyo* in Paris. The phrase may appear quirky, for is sweat not primarily a human mode of embodiment? (Everts 2022). Or, perhaps if stretched, sweat might also be associated with some other mammals (Baker 2019). But plants? What does Echard mean when she talks about orchid sweat?

*

Astrida Neimanis – a key thinker for both Echard and I – writes that art is an amplifier, by which she means that art sensitizes and makes people attune to the world in new ways (Neimanis 2017, 55). That is how *Sporal* affected me: it made me explore a novel world of sweaty bodies.

The first time I saw the exhibition in June 2022, the artwork on the cover of the dissertation captivated me – an orange glass drop sliding through long rows of multicolored pearls. As I looked at the installation, I imagined the piece of glass to be a huge sweat drop capable of cooling down the entire surface of a heated body on that warm summer day.

The drop made me think about the current era of global warming, which makes human bodies sweat more, while nonhumans, such as orchids, bee orchids, and other plants and species "sweat" less because they dry out and die. According to the American National Aeronautics and Space Administration, NASA, we must learn about plant sweat because it is a threatened liquid that conditions life on earth (NASA 2018). In a video, in which NASA advertises a new research program on plant sweat, a voiceover says, "Did you ever notice how the air can seem cooler when you enter a forest? Humans aren't the only living things that sweat to cool off. When trees and plants "sweat," they cool themselves and the surrounding air" (NASA 2018). Thus, we may now better understand what Echard means with plant sweat. Orchids sweat when they draw water up through their roots, which then exits again through their leave pores (stomata). This sweat evaporates, which cools down their leaves.

But increasing temperatures prevent this sweaty process, because the stomata close if there is not enough water (NASA 2022). Scientists refer to this as the "wet bulb temperature," which is the limit for adaptability to extreme heat – a phenomenon with mortal implications for both humans and nonhumans (Coccia 2018; NASA 2022; Simard 2021; Szilágyi 2011).

I do not know if Echard is familiar with NASA's program, but in *Sporal* she imagines a conversation between a bee orchid and a bee that makes me think that she might.

"Can't you see I'm sweating?" says the orchid before it continues, "here have some, it's the only thing I've got left" (Wallis and Echard 2022, 61).

Does the plant offer its last drops of nourishing sweat so the bee and the ecosystem can continue a bit longer? In my view, this is the more-than-human aspect of sweat that Echard's artwork amplifies.

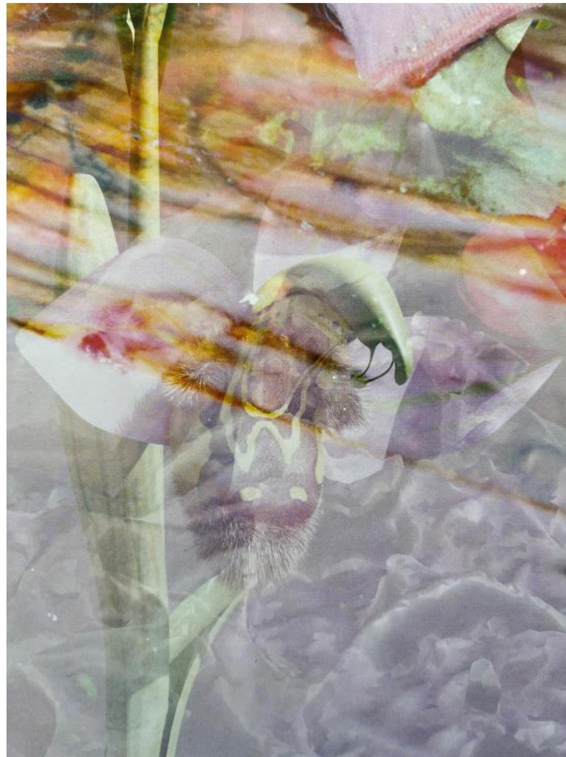

Photo 1. The sweaty bee orchid and the bee

The second time I went to the exhibition, I returned to the sweat drop. The artwork now affected me in another way. It did not make me think so much of sweat as a more-than-human thermoregulatory liquid that cools down bodies. This time, I became more concerned with the heat of sweaty embodiments. My experience at a demonstration in the Parisian streets moments before going to the museum likely sparked this new way of thinking with the artwork.

So, my thoughts wandered. Not only do bodies sweat (or are prevented from sweating) due to global warming. Bodies also sweat due to social inequality, which was what made French people occupy the streets on this day: to protest the precariousness of their lives.

These heated modes of sweat is the way Sara Ahmed – another pivotal thinker in this dissertation – works with it (Ahmed 2014a, 2017). In Ahmed's account, sweat is associated with anxiety and discomfort. Minority-, working class-, and colored bodies, they write, sweat more than majority-, upper class, and white bodies due to discrimination, sweatshop working conditions, and worries about what to put on the table at the end of the month (Ahmed 2014a).

But these precarious modes of sweat also embody empowerment when people collectively resist the conditions. The bodies that demonstrated the day I went to see *Sporal* for the second time sweated in these dual ways: due to increasing social inequality in France (Amable and Palombarini 2021; Piketty 2022), but also in more life-giving ways.

In the pages to come, I tell a story about these precarious-powerful people, notably the *gilets jaunes* (yellow vests) who participated in the demonstration on that day. Their collective resistance has changed many of their lives by experimenting with new ways of living together (Dondeyne and Levain 2021; Gaillard 2021; Jeanpierre 2019). I will describe and discuss those lifeforms in a tale that will be sweaty in both discomforting-joyful and human-nonhuman ways. Hence, I return to the bee orchid to give it the final words of this prologue.

Bee orchid (to the bee): “Your sweat is my sweat. Here, have some. Take some drops of my sweat, it might come in handy… you’ll understand why later.” (Wallis and Echard 2022, 62).

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Sweaty Commons

Scene 1

This scene goes back to the beginning of my fieldwork in 2020, a couple of years before the demonstration I mentioned in the Prologue.

On a warm Saturday afternoon in the early autumn, thousands of people enter the Parisian avenues. They gather to demonstrate against the French government led by President Emmanuel Macron. I walk side-by-side with Louise, a *gilet jaune* from Montreuil, Île-de-France. We make our way forward slowly, but the sluggishness of our movements does not prevent my body from sweating intensively. Not yet familiar with demonstrating in the French way, which involves teargas and being squeezed together by the police, I feel stressed.

As we walk, Louise tells me about her *gilets jaunes* group on the eastern outskirts of Paris. She mentions the different activities of their political resistance; in their general assembly, their community kitchen, and at their fruit orchards, they experiment with new ways of living. This group, Louise continues, is inspired by the politics of the commons (*le commun*) as an alternative way of organizing and building a community.

Photo 2. Louise and I at the demonstration, while it is still peaceful

I enjoy Louise's company and want to learn more about her group of political activists, but I also keep thinking about the potential dangers of walking here. As I reflect upon my fear of being part of the *gilets jaunes* demonstration today, I wonder how Louise – a woman in her mid-70s – can smile, chat, and even sing, while I – in my late-20s – am so worried that I am unable to join the melody Louise now sings with her activist companions:

On est là, on est là
Même si Macron le veut pas, nous on est là
Pour l'honneur des travailleurs
Pour un monde meilleur
Même si Macron le veut pas, nous on est là[1]

The moment arrives suddenly; tear gas fills the air, my throat, and my nostrils. I want to escape the crowd moving irregularly back and forth. The police block the way, and we cannot go any further. Some activists in the front set fire to a car. All I want to do is leave the demonstration.

1
(We are here, we are here.
Although Macron does not want it, we are here.
To honor the workers, to fight for a better future.
Although Macron does not want it, we are here.)

I look at Louise again, and she asks me if I am all right. I am a bit embarrassed as I tell her that I want to leave.

I attempt to leave but realize that police vans occupy the first two side roads. An officer tells me I am not allowed to exit here, weapons hanging from the belt of his uniform. I see people – and a dog – in yellow vests, some with more anxious looks than others. Many of us seek an escape route from the teargassed crowd. I look at the dog wearing a yellow vest with the saying: "dog's life" (*vie de chien*). It seems confused, but I cannot tell if it shares my state of bodily discomfort.

Photo 3. A dog at the demonstration

In my body, the heat rises as the turbulence continues. A man suddenly approaches me. He asks if my eyes hurt. He has eye drops, he says. I thank him.

With clearer sight, I finally manage to find an exit road from the demonstration. I feel relieved, but I also think about how Louise – a retired grandmother – is doing in the crowds I just left behind.

With each step I take, the distance to the demonstration becomes longer, and my body lets go of the sweaty intensity.

As I enter my Parisian apartment half an hour later, I feel tired and calm but determined to learn more about the *gilets jaunes* in Montreuil.

Scene 2

The next scene is not something I experienced myself but a reconstruction of an episode Fatima – another *gilet jaune* from Montreuil – described during my first meeting with her in May 2021.

On a much colder Saturday afternoon in the winter of 2018, another crowd gathers on a square in Montreuil. Although it is already getting dark, their bodies are visible due to the yellow vests they are all wearing. The powerful color of it attracts passengers to the event.

Inside the mass, there is an atmosphere of excitement and a feeling of uncertainty. What is this? Some people know each other, others do not. Yet, none of them know that they are partaking in what will become an influential new social movement in France: *Les gilets jaunes*.

In the middle of the crowd is Fatima, a small woman in her late 50s. Tall people in front of her prevent her from identifying whether a friend of hers has joined the crowd. "Democracy = Social Justice" is written on the back of her vest. As the crowd starts walking, two men pass Fatima. They are talking vividly, and she overhears a fragment of the conversation. "Our democracy is for real French people," says one of them. The second man affirms the other, "Yes, that is why immigrants and refugees should be sent back home."

Fatima begins to feel uncomfortable as she stands beside the two *gilets jaunes* with whom she disagrees. Has she come to the right place? An all too well-known feeling of

distress emerges in her body, a sweaty feeling of anger if not rage. Fatima has become familiar with these comments, having lived as a brown skinned, Muslim woman with Algerian roots in France since she was a child. Still, her body reacts with a sticky feeling of discomfort. While she wonders whether she should return to her home in Northern Montreuil, one of the two men sees her, smiles, and says, "But you, you are all right. You are not like the others!"

Scene 3

This third scene moves from the sweaty politics of the street to the organization of the *gilets jaunes'* community kitchen in Montreuil. Originally, some women *gilets jaunes* started the kitchen in 2019. Every Monday, a couple of them glean vegetables at *Rungis* – the biggest fresh produce market in the world, situated south of Paris – before they cook the food on Wednesdays in a community hall in Montreuil. Before the dumpster dive, the produce undertakes a long journey to arrive at *Rungis*. Anthropologist and geographer Susanne Friedberg explains how notably green beans (*haricots verts*) arrive in France from the former colony Burkina Faso (Freidberg 2004a). She takes her reader back to Ouagadougou, the capital of

Burkina Faso, when she accounts for the journey of the *haricots verts*. She describes the procedure as follows.

The green bean pack house is situated in the International Airport of Ouagadougou. The manager arrives before dawn, and she rarely sleeps until after midnight. The reason for this is that she is responsible for the 15-ton shipment of green beans that travel from Ouagadougou to France every day. Before the manager was hired, her Parisian boss had staffed a nightclubbing French man who did not do the job well, and he figured that a hardworking Burkinabe woman would be a better choice. The manager keeps a close eye on the 100-some women who inspect and repack the beans that arrive in cardboard cartons each morning from Burkinabe villages. This is an important job because green beans that go to France must not be wrinkled, fat, or otherwise imperfect. In the words of one of Friedberg's interlocutors: "Only the perfect may go to Paris" (Freidberg 2004, 3).

Back to the scene in Île-de-France, it is early morning, and Alice – a third *gilet jaune* from Montreuil – and I walk around in *Rungis*. We glean vegetables that can be used for the community kitchen. I am overwhelmed by the abundance of food: the market consists of 11 warehouses

with more than 300 different kinds of fruits and vegetables (Freidberg 2004, 150). Today, the green beans from Burkina Faso become our main catch.

Alice is one of the *gilets jaunes* who go to *Rungis* regularly. She knows the drill and begins to fill the van with boxes full of green beans. As I help her stack them in the car, I imagine the beans' long travel that Friedberg accounts for. From their cultivation in the countryside in Burkina Faso, the beans are transported to Ouagadougou, before they enter the plane and finally arrive in France the morning after. And here I am at *Rungis*, loading the car with the beans that we will now bring to Montreuil.

*

Two days later, I meet up with Fatima, Alice, and some other *gilets jaunes* to cook the beans for the community kitchen. (I return to this situation in Scene 7, Chapter 5).

The Politics of Sweat

"Sweat is bodily; we might sweat more during strenuous and muscular activity."

Sara Ahmed (2017, 13)

"…I reimagine embodiment from the perspective of our bodies' wet constitution, as inseparable from…ecological questions."

Astrida Neimanis (2017, 1)

We all sweat. When eating, drinking, walking, or even standing still. Human beings require sweat (Everts 2022, 9). In some situations, we may feel the sweat more than in others: on a summer vacation while sunbathing on the beach, before an examination or a romantic date, while having a fever, when working out, in the heat of an erotic act, when cleaning or cooking, or, perhaps, when being bullied or discriminated. We all resonate with one or several of these scenarios associated with sweat and sweating.

Michael Stolberg, a historian of medicine, writes that "sweating ranks among the most basic, elementary bodily experiences" (Stolberg 2012, 503). And chemist Sarah Everts adds that given the contemporary reality of global warming, we are going to sweat more (Everts 2022, 6). Since sweat is a vital but ordinary mode of human embodiment, scholars like Stolberg and Everts find it relevant to account for the cultural images that have existed of the sweating body, some of which

continue to exist today. They find that sweat, on the one hand, is perceived as a liberating liquid. By sweating, the body gets rid of waste. It is cleansed, detoxified, and cooled down. Sweat, thus, preserves bodily health (Archambault 2022, 338; Stolberg 2012, 503). On the other hand, sweat is also perceived as shameful, if not disgusting (Everts 2022, 5). In the 17th and 18th centuries, sweat was associated with fluids such as urine and menstrual blood, and they were all seen as harmful and polluting liquids (Stolberg 2012, 511-12).

From a physiological perspective, sweat is a fundamental organic process. We sweat to survive. Sweat works by transferring bodily heat to water, which makes drops of a salty liquid excrete onto the skin's surface. The skin thus transports sweat from inside corporeal processes to an outside fluid product (Baker 2019, 215). While different kinds of sweat glands exist, eccrine glands are distributed across almost the entire human body surface area (Baker 2019, 212; 218). Eccrine glands respond to thermal stimuli, which is the increased body core temperature (Baker 2019, 215).

Sweat concerns all human bodies within and across sexes, genders, and other identity markers, but bodies sweat in different modes. Some might feel the sweat when they work, others when they are exposed to hot environments or respond to emotional stimuli (Baker 2019, 211-212; 231). The point is that sweat affects all humans, but it does so in differentiated ways and with varying intensities. To put it bluntly, sweat is a corporeal liquid that connects us, while it at the same time differentiates us. It matters if your body performs sweatshop work, if you live in a heated and exposed area to climate change, or if you

inhabit a minority body that experiences sweat from being harassed (Ahmed 2017, 12-13).

As discussed in the Prologue, we also know that sweat is a more-than-human liquid. Apart from humans, other mammal species have sweat glands, especially the sebaceous glands in hairy skin (fur). Sweat plays a role for cattle, buffalos, horses, goats, dogs, and pigs when adapting to heat stress (Raghav, Uppal, and Gupta 2021, 1). Dogs, for example, have clusters of glands around their paw pads, which makes it possible to identify sweat on them on a hot day.[2]

On top of this, we can also use sweat in a more playful, but serious, metaphorical way to approach ecological matters more broadly. Temperatures are certainly rising in troublesome ways. As I write this chapter, a drought has hit the city of Copenhagen, which makes the final process of my PhD even sweatier than it would have been in the first place. Due to extreme temperatures in Denmark and elsewhere, plants close their leaf pores and risk drying out (NASA 2022; Szilágyi 2011). When plants die, humans die too (Coccia 2021; Simard 2021). In sum, if the rising temperatures continue, earthly inhabitants, including humans, will not be able to sweat anymore. The metaphorical aspect of plant sweat thus turns out to be quite literal: the fact that plant sweat conditions human sweat demonstrates the relational ontology sweat entails. I return to this shortly.

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[2] The high degree of human reliance on sweat to regulate temperature, however, is special. Dogs, for example, pant as another way to cool down their bodies (Everts 2022, 10).

For now, I bear all of these different cultural, physiological, and more-than-human dimensions of sweat in mind when I turn my attention to the *gilets jaunes* in France. In the next chapter, I shall say more about how the social movement sparked my sweaty thinking. But first, I give a short introduction to the *gilets jaunes* here.

Les Gilets Jaunes

Rage. Yellow vests. Roundabouts. You might remember to have seen photos of angry people in yellow vests on a countryside roundabout or in the streets of a larger city in France in 2018 and 2019. You might also recall that the reason for the remarkable revolt was a fuel tax proposal. Even in a Danish context (I turn to the French perspective in Chapter 2), the movement has had a huge impact. Today (in June 2023), almost five years after the rise of the *gilets jaunes*, the social movement was mentioned in the radio broadcast I listened to this morning. "Let us be careful not to tax lower class people with a CO_2 fee," an interviewee said before he continued, "We don't want yellow vests in Denmark".

There is so much to say about the *gilets jaunes,* but let me start by giving a short recap of the situation in France at the end of 2018. First, it may be helpful to know that the revolt happened shortly after Emmanuel Macron was elected as President. Since his presidential campaign, Macron has presented himself as a green politician (Macron 2017, 95-107). The gasoline tax was his first attempt to implement this policy agenda. The critique that followed from the proposal was that

the tax did not target big companies, nor city-dwellers in wealthy places with short distances and public transportation. It affected precarious people who were already living sweaty lives, struggling to support their households (Levavasseur and Anizon 2019). It is this situation that inspired the *gilets jaunes'* slogan: *La fin du mois, la fin du monde; c'est le même combat*.[3]

Social theorist Bruno Latour interpreted this motto generously by suggesting that the *gilets jaunes* had articulated the political frame of the next centuries of politics (Latour and Kempf 2019). I agree with Latour that the *gilets jaunes* express the need to "reconcile issues of social justice with the Earth," but I want to specify the issue of social (in)justice as a gendered matter. Women are the most precarious gender of the *gilets jaunes*, with the lowest levels of income and most mouths to feed (Dagnaud 2019; Fillieule 2019; Piketty 2022). Despite outnumbering men on the roundabouts and at the demonstrations (Flipo 2021, 15), there has been little attention on gender in the studies of the *gilets jaunes* (Bendali and Rubert 2021, 185; Fillieule and Dafflon 2022; Gaillard 2021). My wager is that the *gilets jaunes* not only articulate the need for uniting Earth politics with issues of social inequality but they can also, more specifically, help us turn our attention to the "reconciliation of *gender* justice with the Earth," to paraphrase Latour. Exploring whether this may be the case, we must approach the *gilets jaunes* with an awareness of the politics of gender at play in the social movement. I aim to do this by asking the question:

[3] (The end of the month, the end of the world: the same fight).

how does political resistance to global warming and social inequality empower new ways of living together within and across gender identities?

Sweaty Commons: Why and What?

Inspired by recent interventions in new materialist feminist theory, including decolonial and indigenous thinking, I search for an answer to this question by turning to bodies – human and nonhuman – as contributors to a series of shared but also internally differentiated "sweaty commons." I develop this concept on three levels: an ontological, political, and methodological.

At the ontological level, sweaty commons track Astrida Neimanis' discussion of water and her notion of "hydrocommons" (Neimanis 2017, 2). By hydrocommons, Neimanis suggests that human and nonhuman bodies relate through the medium of water, and this proposal seeks to challenge anthropocentric ontologies that privilege human embodiment. I say more about this thinking later in the chapter. Expanding on Neimanis' idea of a relational wet ontology, I turn to sweat as an interpermeate flow that not only makes bodies relate to one another at a general level but also situates them in a specific contemporary political setting of global warming and social inequality. In line with my interest in gender politics, my main purpose is to show that even though sweat is a commonly shared condition, it is distributed on a continuum of multiple bodies from which it flows with varying degrees of intensity and in different directions. In this sense, internally

embedded differences are at play in the relations engendered by sweat. Sweaty commons open up to some gendered and otherwise stratified bodies in some specific situations and to a different set of bodies in others.

At the political level, I use the term sweaty commons to characterize the specific counter-practices to global warming and social inequality that the *gilets jaunes* enact under the term "commons". During the last couple of years, I have learned that the *gilets jaunes* – men and women – not only criticize the gasoline tax and the French government; they also invoke the critique in innovative and sometimes surprising ways. Due to the heterogeneity of the movement, the *gilets jaunes* have responded to the crises in different ways in different parts of France. For the particular group of *gilets jaunes* in this dissertation, the commons provide such an innovative response as an alternative way of living and organizing democratically with ideas and practices of gender inclusion and of becoming more ecologically attached in collective forms of self-organization. Through hard work, uneasy frictions, as well as moments of joy, the *gilets jaunes* carry out the commons at three main sites: the general assembly, the community kitchen, and with the peach trees.

Methodologically, sweaty commons highlight how any analysis partakes in its own subject matter. As the author of this dissertation, I take part in the sweaty commons in Montreuil, which means that the collective sweat of the *gilets jaunes* in this place runs through my body, and my sweat flows through theirs. By turning to the lived experiences of the three women – Louise, Fatima, and Alice, without ignoring the

men in the group – I show how the distribution of sweat empowers both differences and a sense of collective belonging within women and across genders in the *gilets jaunes*. The study of sweaty commons thus serves to generate embodied, feminist, ethnographic-theoretical knowledge of how to live with rising temperatures and social inequality, as well as how to resist these challenges in new ways of living together.

To demonstrate how the threefold concept of sweaty commons has emerged with the *gilets jaunes*, let us now turn to how it unfolds in the three scenes that opened this chapter. The first scene exemplifies an instance of an ontological-methodological sweaty commons formation of high intensity. When Louise and I demonstrate, we sweat because the September day is extremely hot, which is not abnormal anymore, but we also sweat intensively due to the heavy attendance of police forces. We feel the "heat of politics," as we realize the potential dangers of being here. At the same time, we do not experience the same degree of sweaty intensity. It is my impression that I feel a higher intensity of sweat than Louise, who, unlike me, knows how to demonstrate and how to negotiate a politics filled with teargas, noise, and brutal encounters. Whether the dog – who also partakes in the sweaty commons in the Parisian streets (Photo 3) – embodies an intense sweaty experience is difficult to tell. But it looks confused, which might suggest that it senses the intense atmosphere without knowing what is going on.

Turning to Scene 2, Fatima also experiences a high intensity of sweat as she stands in the crowd next to the two men who denigrate

immigrant people. As I see it, the sweat in this situation feels different. I do not suggest that the men do not sweat. They demonstrate because they, like Fatima, fight for social justice and they probably live precarious lives. Still, they seem more relaxed than Fatima, as they laugh, drink beers, and sing along to the political songs that the crowd collectively sings. The sweaty commons configuration at this moment thus closes down to Fatima. Different from the men, she does not know if she belongs there, which makes her feel an intense feeling of sweaty discomfort. Even on a cold winter day.

In Scene 3, I do not recall the temperature that morning at the *Rungis* market. Still, Alice and I sweat as we witness the immense amount of food waste. Alice – who like Louise and Fatima has attended demonstrations and even been arrested during one of these – sweats in other ways when at *Rungis*. There, she does not fear the police but worries about CO_2 emissions from international trade and the surplus of food (IPCC 2022). The food causes the sweaty commons at *Rungis* to become global, as it flows across continents, forming a complex set of relations. Through the green beans, who also partake in the commons, sweat traces back to the Burkinabé women who work at the airport pack house in Ouagadougou.

The main point we learn from looking at the three scenes in this way is that sweaty commons consist of multiple assemblages, instances, gatherings, and groupings that uniquely resist global warming and/or social inequality. The collective sweat that flows from the skin membranes of each of the *gilets jaunes* is distributed in different

intensities and directions and embodied in singular ways. This is true even though it is collective too.

Sweat: Feminist Theory and New Materialism

How do sweat and sweaty commons relate to the discipline of political theory? To study sweat, we must study bodies; however, bodies are not a typical subject matter in political theory. Influential subfields view abstract and intellectual modes of thinking as superior to embodied modes, which – in their view – makes the body less relevant (for example, Habermas 2001; Rawls 2003). Yet, as a reaction to this, feminist theory, as another subfield of political theory, has put much effort into revalorizing the body as an intellectual mode of political thinking.

Elizabeth Grosz's early book *Volatile Bodies – Toward a Corporeal Feminism* (1994) is a good place to begin this bodily endeavor. In the book, Grosz writes that her main aim is to bring the body from the periphery to the center of analysis (Grosz 1994, vii). Grosz writes that philosophy and political theory are concerned with ideas, concepts, reason, and judgement, and that these endeavors marginalize the body. In short, the mind has been elevated as a disembodied term, and this somatophobia of political theory, as Grosz puts it, has resulted in various unproductive views of the body as being an object, a possession, or nothing more than a medium for signification (Grosz 1994, 4-6).

To account for the thinking that generally neglects the body – one that goes back to Ancient Greek philosophers such as Plato and Aristotle – Grosz begins with the Cartesian dualist thinking that separates the body from the mind in hierarchal ways. In short, the problem in Descartes, writes Grosz, is that the mind is viewed as being superior to the body, and the body is left to be nothing but a mechanical device to the mind (Grosz 1994, 6-10). This makes Grosz move toward the Spinozist approach to the body. She writes that Spinoza's view on the body is productive because it stems from a monistic view that makes the body enter the same hierarchical level as the mind. Thus, there is no hierarchy or separation between body and mind, which is a crucial starting point for theorizing embodied politics.

Grosz links Spinozist philosophy to a feminist way of thinking by identifying a connection between the devaluation of the body and the suppression of women. On a general level, feminist theorists make us aware that the exclusion of embodiment is a gendered matter, which means that the mind historically has been associated with a masculine attribute while the body has belonged to women (Ahmed 2017; Beauvoir 1988; Butler 2006; Haraway 1988; Plumwood 2003; Mcnay 2013; Braidotti 1994). Following this observation, Grosz – together with Judith Butler, Sara Ahmed, and others – argues that political theory has for too long been associated with a masculine activity (Ahmed, 2010; Braidotti, 2011; Butler, 2011, iix). Women have been – and continue to be – associated with the body, which makes the study of embodied politics a feminist endeavor. Or put differently: Grosz identifies the revaluation of the body with the women's liberation

project, which, I would say, also includes other minority groups – a matter I return to.

Although we can say that feminist theory in general turns to the body, feminist theories enact this turn in very different ways. Grosz divides feminist thinking into three main traditions: an egalitarian, a social constructivist, and a sexual difference feminism (Grosz 1994, 15-19). These sub-traditions theorize the body in each their particular way. Grosz's sexual difference feminism departs from the two other traditions by approaching the body as vibrant matter and as an active site of political contestation. The body is neither inferior to nor decoupled from the mind. The body and mind are enmeshed with each other, and from this theoretical lens – inspired by Spinoza's radical immanence – the body is powerful, with the capacity to affect and to be affected (Grosz 1994, 63).

In this way of thinking, the body – the flesh itself – becomes an intellectual mode that contributes to the production of embodied knowledge (Grosz 1994, 19), which also opens up for more-than-human bodies. In line with new materialist scholars, such as Jane Bennett (2010), Donna Haraway (1991), Rosi Braidotti (1994), and Astrida Neimanis (2017), this approach to bodies transgresses the boundaries of human and nonhuman bodies, which makes it relevant to study a broad range of bodies. As such, bodies become a feminist and an ecological concern.

Thus, the particular genealogy I trace here articulates a line of thinking that starts from Spinoza, passes on to Grosz's sexual difference feminism, and "ends" at what we might call new materialism (Coole

and Frost 2010). That said, the abovementioned new materialist thinkers do not all adhere to sexual difference feminism, although they share a vital view of bodies. Some strands of new materialism are associated with sexual difference feminism; others have different trajectories. Bennett, for example, situates herself within a Spinozist, rather than a feminist, tradition (Bennett 2010; Dichman 2023b), and Haraway draws more heavily on queer theory than sexual difference theory (Butler and Braidotti 1994, 44; Haraway 1988, 2016, 1991).

While my thinking with sweat is heavily indebted to how Grosz and Neimanis work with the vitality of bodies and, notably, bodily liquids, I also take sweat a step away from the tradition of sexual difference. For example, whereas Grosz and Neimanis' works on the fluids of menstruation blood (Grosz 1994, 185) and watery breastmilk (and feminine tears) (Neimanis 2017, 32) mark sexual difference, I think of sweat as a liquid that destabilizes, opens up, and pluralizes bodies, because all sexed and gendered bodies sweat. Sweat crosses sexual differences and has to do with rising temperatures as well as social inequality, such as with sweatshop work and the sticky embodiments of discrimination (Ahmed 2014a, 2017).

As an illustration of these sweaty attributes, the short story *Sweat* (1997), written by anthropologist and author, Zora Neale Hurston, links sweat to the lives of black washerwomen in Florida in the 1920s. The point is that women of color in factories – and we can add men in hardworking industries to this – sweat differently from the bourgeois male and female bodies that do not have to do these kinds of jobs. Based on this, I think of sweat as not being associated with one

particular sexed embodiment but with an all-genders experience that has to do with issues of social inequality and global warming. I hope to show that sweat can work as a way of pluralizing bodies across sexes, genders, and even species. Thus, to clarify the composition of my theoretical toolbox: Grosz and Neimanis help me to think with sweat as a vital corporeal liquid, but the queer thinking of Judith Butler, Donna Haraway, and Sara Ahmed pushes me in directions beyond the categories of masculinity-femininity.

Sweat: Reconfiguring Hydrofeminism

Combining queer theory with Grosz and Neimanis' sexual difference feminisms, I thus conceptualize sweat as a vital liquid experienced across genders and species. Within this conceptualization, Neimanis' (and Grosz') "hydrofeminism" is pivotal and I want to say more about how sweaty commons relate to her way of thinking about hydrocommons. Leaving sexual difference theory aside for now, I explain how Neimanis' ontological thinking of bodies of water has inspired me to propose the concept of sweaty commons.

The ontology of hydrocommons emerges from turning to the human body as essentially more-than-human. Neimanis argues that the human body is open, permeable, permeated, and entangled with a variety of nonhuman flows and bodies, rather than a bounded totality, separated and whole (Neimanis 2017, 48). Water exemplifies this conception of bodies. Water runs through human bodies and connects us to many other hydrogeological bodies, such as watersheds, cisterns, seas, and

oceans, not to mention the tap water we drink and the urine we let go off (Neimanis 2017, 46). The point is that, for example when we urinate, the liquid goes somewhere and when we drink, the water comes from somewhere. These flows make bodies of water relate in planetary ways.

By turning to the specific embodied watery mode of sweat, I go beyond the centering of the human body in line with Neimanis' wet bodies. Sweat is human and nonhuman and works as an entry to our more-than-human world. Another way to put it is to say that sweaty bodies are transcorporeal (Alaimo 2010), naturalcultural (Haraway 1988), dividuals (Bennett 2020), biocultural (Frost 2016), and intra-active (Barad 2007), which means that the bodies are never rigidly enclosed but vulnerable to the substances and flows of its environments. Sweat demonstrates that our bodies do not stop at the end of our skin; it pops out of a membrane and connects us to the more-than-human world. Sweat thus expresses the co-labor of the body and the world. A drop of sweat is caused by something – a heated environment perhaps – and the drop lands somewhere – maybe on the skin of another body.

In sum, sweaty commons offer a profound disruption of the understanding of the body from the Western, dominant, metaphysical tradition – whether found in the Ancient Greeks, Cartesian thinkers, or egalitarian and social constructivist feminist philosophers. On top of this, thinking with sweaty commons in the specific case of the *gilets jaunes* (the methodological level) enables me to show how socio-ecological challenges are lived in collective but singularized ways (the

ontological level), while it also turns my attention to how the *gilets jaunes* resist this by enacting (the political level) of sweaty commons.

Why Sweat and Not...?

I have run into this question multiple times.[4] While I hope the ontological, political, and methodological dimensions of sweaty commons clarify some of the analytical advantages of sweat, I add to this here by asking how sweaty bodies differ from precarious ones. To answer that question, I turn to the concept of precariousness as Judith Butler develops it, notably in the book *Precarious Life* (Butler 2006b).

Before turning to the differences between sweat and precariousness, let me begin by saying that sweaty commons and precariousness share several qualities, of which their common relational ontology is key. Butler writes that we – humans – are social and interdependent beings who share the condition of precariousness (Butler 2006b, 22; 26). Exemplifying this most recently, Butler turns to contemporary events of Covid-19 and global warming, showing that nobody escapes the virus nor the climate changes (Butler 2020, 2022). Due to existing inequalities, some bodies suffer less than others, but we are all in this together.

The dripping, damping, spongey bodies that make up the ontology of sweaty commons still differ from precarious bodies in numerous ways. First, sweaty bodies are more dynamic and vital than precarious bodies.

[4] I want to thank Lois McNay for pushing my argument further by encouraging me to consider how sweat adds analytical value to the concept of suffering. I also want to thank Anna Tsing for a similar comment on how sweat differs from precariousness.

Political theorist Bonnie Honig has already argued that Butler’s concept of precariousness risks ending up in lamentation, thus preventing political action and resistance from taking place (Honig 2013, 44-45). Different from precariousness, sweat demonstrates vitality (on top of vulnerability): When bodies sweat, they live and when sweaty bodies resist, the resistance embodies an affirmative mode of being on top of the more precarious modes. As I understand it, sweat *moves* bodies while precariousness brings a state of more stillness.

Secondly, sweat also offers a more corporeal-material account of bodies. As we have learned, sweat is a bodily liquid and a physiological process. Whereas it may be challenging to locate a specific embodiment of precariousness, sweat inherently points to particular modes of heated environments, social inequalities, and collective political resistance to these conditions.

A third crucial aspect of sweat is its more-than-humanness. Even though the concept of precariousness revolves around human modes of being and relating, Butler includes nonhuman bodies in later works, especially in *The Force of Nonviolence* (2020). In this book, they write that the bodies of trees, lakes, and glaciers are also vulnerable (Butler 2020, 76). From this, the argument goes, humans and nonhumans relate to each other in precarious ways both within and across species. When nonhumans suffer, humans will suffer too because we are imbricated in each other’s lives (Butler 2020, 141). Butler thus expands their view on precariousness to include nonhuman bodies, but without emphasizing the agency or resistance of nonhuman bodies (Dichman 2023b). Differently, the sweating bee orchid – if we go back to the Prologue –

acts by offering its last drops of sweat to the bee. And the dog in Scene 1 also reacts to the heated moment by looking disoriented. In the remainder of the dissertation, my new materialist conception of sweaty commons turns to nonhuman bodies as agents that partake in the world we live in, including in acts of political resistance. In sum, in these three ways – and more, such as the pivotal temperature aspect – sweat adds to the concept of precariousness.

My Sweaty Becoming

Bodies *become* when they sweat because they enter new modes of being. In both joyful and stressful ways, sweat affects bodily processes, transforming them. My own sweaty becoming can be illustrated by exploring the trajectory of this dissertation and how it came into being. As a trained political theorist, I have sweated a lot from engaging with the *gilets jaunes*. But going even further back in time might provide a better understanding of how my relationship with French politics took a sweaty turn with this Phd-project.

Before enrolling in the Ph.D.-school at the University of Copenhagen, I was already interested in French politics. I went on exchange at Sciences Po in Paris and extended my stay with an internship at the Danish Embassy in France. This not only allowed me to advance my French language skills but also made me learn about French politics, in particular the neoliberal politics of Emmanuel Macron, who had just begun his first presidential term (Dichman 2018).

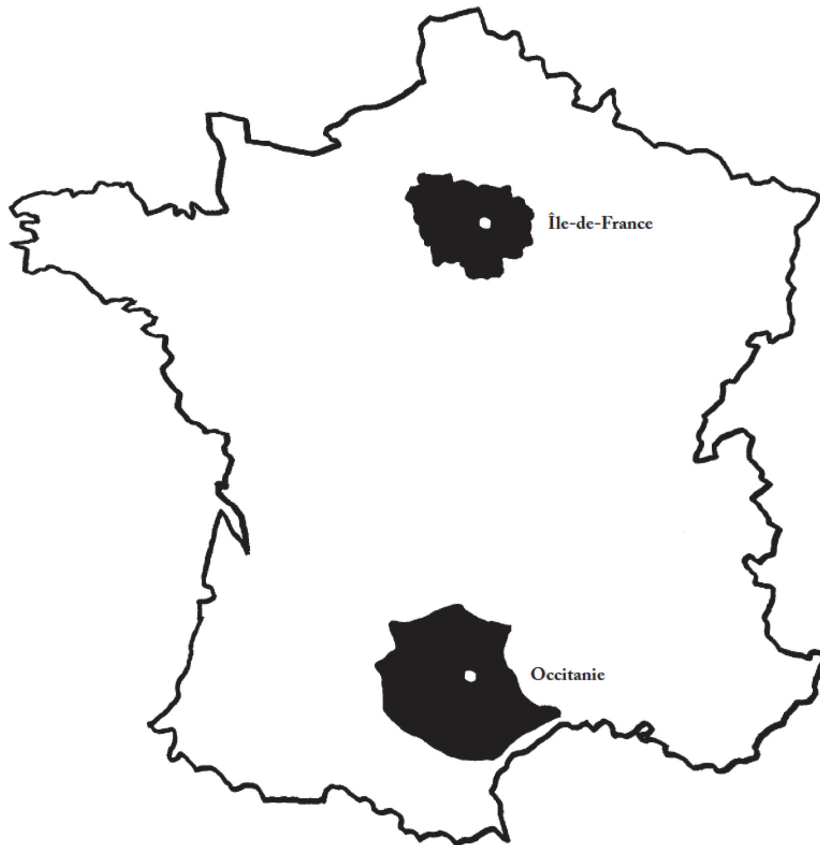
I refer to this period as my more "smooth" engagement with French politics. This should, however, not be mistaken as a time of easiness. Studying at the French University and working for the Danish Ministry of Foreign Affairs was far from a calm experience, but my meeting attendance at *Quai d'Orsay* (The Ministry of Foreign Affairs) and *Bercy* (The Ministry of Finance) in majestic, air-conditioned buildings did not make sweat run from my armpits. While I was sitting in a fancy meeting room, massive protests took place out on the streets, as people demonstrated against Macron's labor market reform. I became eager to learn about the sweatier backsides of the polished modes of politics. Or, in the words of sociologist Erving Goffman, I wanted to move to the backstages of politics and social phenomena (Goffman 1986).

Later, after starting my Ph.D., I moved to back to Paris to initiate my fieldwork with the *gilets jaunes*. I started attending the Saturday demonstrations that were still taking place when, only one month after I arrived, the government ordered a Covid-19 lockdown. Before this happened, I had planned to conduct fieldwork with the *gilets jaunes* in different parts of France. Thanks to a Danish contact,[5] I was already in touch with groups of *gilets jaunes* in Southern France. While I managed to visit these people twice during my year in France, I quickly decided to focus on the *gilets jaunes* in Montreuil. During my stay in France and on numerous trips to Paris between 2021 and 2023, I ended up spending enough time with them to tell their story properly.

[5] I want to thank sociologist Mads Christoffersen for including me into his network. See also (Christoffersen 2020).

Covid-19 was not the only reason for spending most of my time with the *gilets jaunes* in Montreuil. In conversations with sociologist Édith Gaillard, I learned that French ethnographers tended to travel to rural sites to engage with the *gilets jaunes* (Coquard 2019; Dondeyne and Levain 2021; Jeanpierre 2019), which resulted in surprisingly few studies on urban *gilets jaunes*, especially in Paris and Île-de-France.[6] In this dissertation, I want to show that the *gilets jaunes* is also an Île-de-France movement. However, telling the story of the *gilets jaunes* in Montreuil, does not mean that I am discarding my meetings with the *gilets jaunes* in Southern France. For example, when I discuss the practices of the commons in Montreuil, I bring in ideas from the south on how they envision and fight for a more inclusive democracy. In this way, the knowledge I have gained from my engagement with the *gilets jaunes* in Occitanie (region in Southern France) also plays a role in situating the practices specific to Montreuil, and it thus helps me point out the particularities of this activist group. For example, we will see that Montreuil is what we may call a hub for politics of the commons and a place of left-wing politics and multiculturalism, which gives this group conditions that differ from many other groups. Moreover, I use this reflection to underscore that the *gilets jaunes* in Montreuil do not represent the *gilets jaunes* as a whole. Yet, this does not prevent them from teaching important lessons relevant in other contexts within and beyond France.

[6] Sociologist Eli Ramsvik Melby has conducted fieldwork with the *gilets jaunes* in Pantin next to Montreuil and worked with *gilets jaunes* in Marseille too. Moreover, philosopher Barbara Stiegler and political scientist Magali Della Sudda have studied *gilets jaunes* in Bordeaux as another crucial urban zone for the *gilets jaunes* (Della Sudda and Gaborit 2022; Stiegler 2020).



Map 1. France: the black spots mark the regions, where I have conducted fieldwork

How to Tell the Story

One thing is to tell a story, another is to tell it well. According to anthropologist Sophie Chao, an ethnography is good when it tells its story in a responsible way (Chao 2022, 24).[7] So, inspired by Chao's enactment of responsible storytelling in *In the Shadow of the Palms: More-Than-Human Becomings in West Papua* (2022), I bear especially five points in mind as I tell the story of the *gilets jaunes*: differences, omissions, positionality, the interlocutors' interests, and their anonymity.

The first point consists of fleshing out the differences at play in the field. I have already mentioned that differences exist within the *gilets jaunes* (Kipfer 2019). No study can account for the *gilets jaunes* as a whole, and the story I tell differs from other stories that focus on issues such as populism and electoral party politics (Bendali and Rubert 2021; Bergem 2022; Della Sudda and Gaborit 2022; Guerra, Alexandre, and Gonthier 2019). Although attention to the role of gender and women in the movement has been part of public debate (Bienaimé; Fillieule 2019), few studies turn to this subject matter (Dagnaud 2019; Gallot 2019). And only Gaillard turns to gender in conjunction with matters of ecology (Gaillard 2021). Noticing gender differences matters. As the few studies on gender show – and as we will see in this dissertation – a gendered division of labor takes place within the *gilets jaunes*. In the case of Montreuil, most men attend the general assembly, while a plurality of women cooks in the community kitchen. Had we not

[7] Chao draws on Tuhiwai Smith's book *Decolonizing methodologies: research and indigenous peoples* (2012).

approached the group with a focus on gender and other differences, we might have missed this point, and, in turn, we may have excluded crucial perspectives in the story. The reading for differences does not stop here. Within each gendered practice, a new set of differences emerges, which unfolds new modes of heterogeneity and hierarchies. I tell three singular stories of Louise, Fatima, and Alice as part of the collective story of the *gilets jaunes* in Montreuil to stress the importance of singular differences.

The next point of responsible storytelling is an awareness of the many omissions that are part of a story even though it focuses on differences. Looking for differences generates a complex picture of the *gilets jaunes* but it does not result in an all-encompassing analysis. Instead of accounting for what story I will tell, we can also put it this way: which stories have I chosen not to tell? Those are many. I have already mentioned that I do not tell the stories from Occitanie, and even within the context of Montreuil, I exclude a number of experiences. During the fieldwork, I met many *gilets jaunes* whose trajectories could have been helpful to include in the story. For example, a transwoman whom I met in the very last parts of my fieldwork told me about her transformation while being *gilet jaune*. I also interviewed Manon, who, with her life partner, Margaux, took part in the *gilets jaunes.* She told me about her experiences belonging to the group as a homosexual woman. At a certain point, however, a pattern emerged. Louise, Fatima, and Alice, who differ in age, class, skin color, and political priorities, were the women with whom I established the most enduring relationships. And even within these three women, I omit numerous experiences. One of

these is a trip to eastern France, where I followed Alice with her ecofeminist group *Les bombes atomiques* as they fought for a common land free from radioactivity by occupying a territory chosen to become a garbage can for nuclear waste.

The third aspect of responsible storytelling regards positionality. That is, how do I affect the field and the knowledge production in the story? To use the words of the political scientist and ethnographer, Timothy Pachirat, this is a way to confront the question of how I am implicated in the social world I study (Pachirat 2009, 43). Pachirat writes that "the ethnographer is always situated at the intersection of multiple identities and these impact not only how people in the field interpret and therefore respond to her but also how she herself filters her observations" (Pachirat 2009, 43). As an initial step to unfold the specific conditions I have had for conducting my fieldwork, I have described my relationship with France. Moreover, as a non-native person of Danish descent, I have had both advantages and disadvantages during the fieldwork. My Scandinavian physique brought about diverse reactions among the *gilets jaunes,* ranging from curiosity to shyness. At times, I felt exoticized; according to many of the *gilets jaunes*, I was the young, Danish woman who had grown up in a welfare state with a high level of social equality. I might bring useful perspectives, they said. Some even seemed proud to have me in the group. I felt the advantage of being a Nordic foreigner most profoundly when I experienced the skepticism among the *gilets jaunes* towards French researchers. The *gilets jaunes* did not show much interest in these scholars, and, in turn, they stopped showing up. Ethnographer

Roni Berger argues that there is an advantage in studying the unfamiliar because the respondents become experts, which can bring modes of empowerment (Berger 2015, 227). I think this may explain the difference in reception between the French academics and myself.

It was, however, not only an advantage to be a foreigner. Berger writes that an outsider-positioned researcher is more challenged in fully comprehending the field (Berger 2015, 227). For me, the main obstacle at the beginning of the fieldwork was the language barrier. Sometimes, I was unsure whether I had understood all of what was said, and I was always nervous when the *gilets jaunes* asked me questions in plenum. Moreover, my one-to-one contact with especially the younger *gilets jaunes* – Alice in particular – brought about a lot of frustration because I could not speak with her as she spoke with her *"potes"* ("lads"). Thus, even though we were the same age, I felt like I spoke as her grandmother. When cooking for the community kitchen, I also struggled because my French vocabulary of kitchen equipment was limited; however, good things also came out of these language frustrations. As none of the *gilets jaunes* speaks English, they were impressed, and they did not seem to doubt my ability to comprehend what was going on, which gave me more confidence. In hindsight, I think the initial language barrier might have worked as an advantage. By not speaking flawless French, I may have appeared less intimidating than my French colleagues (Berger 2015, 224). With my Danish accent and my continuous attendance, I quickly felt an acceptance and even an appreciation of my presence.

My gender and age also impact the study. From the outset, I was interested in the women in the group, and it was also easier for me to engage with the women. Louise and Fatima treated me in loving and caring ways as if I was a relative, and I think (and hope) that Alice came to see me as a comrade. In contrast to the women, most of the men in the group – except for Samuel and Paul – were shy (or perhaps I was shy toward them?). In any case, there was another distance between us, and I did not access their lives to the same extent as I did with the women *gilets jaunes*. It was doubtlessly easier for me to get to know the women, being invited to their homes and into their life stories. According to Berger, it is common for women to feel more comfortable discussing gender politics with other women, which also seems to be the case here (Berger 2015, 220).

I want to end these reflections on positionality by saying that – in line with Berger – I see it more as a matter of fluidity than a static state (Berger 2015, 231). During my time with the group, I developed a semi-insider perspective. The more time I spent with the *gilets jaunes,* the more I came to comprehend their lifeworlds. During the fieldwork, I tried to wear a yellow vest at a demonstration, embodying how it was to be part of a *gilets jaunes* crowd "as a seemingly *gilet jaune.*" Yet seeking to strike the right balance, I refused to act as a spokesperson for the group to their national general assembly (*l'assemblée des assemblées, l'ADA).*

The last two points related to the technique of responsible storytelling concern the foregrounding of the interlocutors' main interests and the invention of pseudonyms, as well as other tools of anonymization to

protect identities. First, I hope it is clear that I combine my interest in feminist theory and new materialism with the agendas of the *gilets jaunes.* Respecting their interests in the commons as a political alternative to representative democracy, I dive into the concept in curious and expansive ways, taking it to new places, such as adding the ontological and methodological dimensions. But even at the political level, I enter the concept in dialogues beyond the *gilets jaunes'* own applications. Chao refers to these movements between ethnographic description and conceptual abstraction as a way to theorize ethnography and ethnographize theory (Chao 2022, 7).

The last step of anonymizing my interlocutors serves as a transition to introduce my three main protagonists, who bear the pseudonyms Louise, Fatima, and Alice. Before I say more about each of them, I want to address a possible friction between my sweaty figuration and the choice of women interlocutors. One may ask, when I turn to sweat as a queer corporeal liquid that crosses gender differences, why do I then choose to tell the story of three women?

Three Women

To answer this question, I briefly return to sexual difference theory and queer theory. First, Astrida Neimanis who draws on Rosi Braidotti, writes that "…differences [between genders] still matter in our current social, political, economic, and cultural contexts, so to disembed any theory…from such considerations is absurd" (Neimanis 2017, 91). Moreover, Judith Butler, who, for more than three decades, has

contributed to the destabilization of binary gender identities, also – in both early and late work – turns to women because we continue to live in a world of gender inequality with women as the most precarious gender (Butler 2006a, 2018a).

Inspired by Butler's way of thinking about gender identities, my starting point is to turn to three different women *gilets jaunes* due to gendered – but also racialized – forms of existing inequalities. Yet I do this with a pluralizing aim beyond the scope of the woman gender. For example in Chapter 5, when I turn to the community kitchen showing how a gendered hierarchical division of labor takes place there, I do this to rethink the space as all-genders inclusive beyond binaries of men-women and masculine-feminine. We can also put it in sweaty terms: sweat is not a corporeal liquid that ties to women's embodiment (unlike menstruation blood) or a feminine embodiment (unlike watery tears). Sweat is a more-than-binary liquid, and it serves as a tool to undertake a queer journey. Now, before I offer an outline of the dissertation, I introduce how I came to meet Louise, Fatima, and Alice and how our relationships have evolved and taken on new forms today. We begin with Louise.

Louise. I have been in contact with Louise from the beginning to the end of this Phd-project. During my last trip to Montreuil in April 2023, we met up for dinner and have been texting since. I have spent time with her at demonstrations, at the general assembly, in the community kitchen, and in her living room. In the general assembly, Louise is one of the few women who speak a lot. In the community kitchen, I have never seen her cook. Louise transgresses the gendered division of labor

in the movement: she acts "like a man" or as "leader of the group," as Alice puts it.

Fatima. Thanks to Louise, I met Fatima halfway into the fieldwork. Louise made me aware that I had only heard testimonies from white women living in Southern Montreuil. "You should hear what Fatima has to say," she said and wrote Fatima's phone number to me on a notepad. I clearly remember my first phone call with Fatima. Not being able to see her, I paid much attention to her voice; I listened to its softness and slowness. Fatima wanted me to listen to her story without taking notes. She did not want to be recorded. With these precautions in place, she spoke for more than an hour about her fight for social justice in the union and as *gilet jaune*. She said she was too busy to come down to Southern Montreuil, but she promised to join the community kitchen at least once while I was there. She also invited me to her home.

Today, I have lost my contact with Fatima. So has Louise, who told me that Fatima's family has moved to Northern France to stay at her father's place. During my time with the *gilets jaunes* in Montreuil, I managed to visit Fatima a few times. We cooked together one time in the community kitchen, and we spoke on the phone and wrote e-mails to each other. After I left France, Fatima's husband lost his job. As a social worker, it became mandatory to get the Covid-19 vaccination, but Fatima and her life partner did not trust the governmental guidelines. Her spouse lost his job, which added more precariousness to their situation. In *What World Is This? A Pandemic Phenomenology* (2022), Judith Butler encapsulates Fatima's situation when they write,

"Yes, many who have died under Omicron are unvaccinated, but antivax sentiment is only partially responsible for those deaths. There are good reasons why many would distrust the missives that come from necropolitical governments, and some have little access to vaccine education" (Butler 2022, 87-88).

Alice also moved from Montreuil. Different from Fatima, she has relocated to follow her dream of living self-sufficiently by cultivating food on a shared countryside farm with activist friends. During my year in Montreuil, I saw Alice on a weekly basis. We gleaned at *Rungis* and cooked together. I recorded several interviews with her.

It may seem as if the group – this dissertation studies – is dissolving before we even get properly started, but this point is crucial: People come and go as they move to and from Montreuil, but the group remains a group. It is in a continuous state of becoming, in which new bodies substitute former activists. Thus, the group is differently constituted today than when I took part in it with Louise, Fatima, and Alice. This dynamism – despite its challenges – makes the activism travel and grow across different people and places.

How the Sweaty Story Proceeds

During a visit to Copenhagen in May 2023, the French Noble Prize awarded author and publicly known sympathizer of the *gilets jaunes,* Annie Ernaux, said: "We must tell stories that have not yet been told – in forms not yet formed" (Bégaudeau, Artus, and Ernaux 2019; Daumas 2018; Kaprièlian 2019). In this dissertation, I aim to follow

Ernaux's epigraph by telling a sweaty story of the *gilets jaunes* that forms two parts, six chapters, nine ethnographic scenes, three interludes, and a prologue and epilogue. The reason for dividing the dissertation into two parts is that each of them does a specific kind of work; Part I prepares the ethnographic story, which I then tell in Part II.

In Chapter 2, I contextualize the political situation of the *gilets jaunes* by narrowing down the general scope of sweaty commons to focus on the political challenges and modes of resisting these in France. Turning to some of the existing ethnographic studies of the *gilets jaunes*, I show how the French activists resist the conditions of sweaty commons by gathering in assembly meetings, establishing new everyday practices of gleaning food and cooking, and reclaiming natural resources as common goods. I end the chapter by describing the city of Montreuil, where the remainder of the dissertation takes place.

Before I turn to the *gilets jaunes'* world-making practices in Montreuil, I develop a particular ethnographic-theoretical conceptual approach in Chapter 3, where I take Sara Ahmed's "sweaty concepts" and Astrida Neimanis' Deleuzian conceptual approach as a collective starting point. I negotiate these approaches and add on a set of ethnographic methods that treat the *gilets jaunes* as co-conceptualizers, which makes me argue for political theory to become an ethnographic enterprise of sweaty concepts.

In Part II, I then turn to how the *gilets jaunes* enact the commons as a political mode of (1) self-organization that is (2) socially inclusive and (3) cares for the more-than-human. This threefold definition – defined by the *gilets jaunes* themselves – provides the structure of Chapter 4,

Chapter 5, and Chapter 6, with each of the chapters turning to one of the tenets. Beginning in Chapter 4, I dive into the subject matter of self-organization in the *gilets jaunes'* weekly general assembly in a community hall in Montreuil. I show that the anarcho-Marxist thinking the assembly draws on prevents a more democratic commons to take shape, which makes me pluralize the strategy in the general assembly. Political theorist Bonnie Honig enables me to undertake this move.

In Chapter 5, I continue onward by studying how the (women) *gilets jaunes* enact a politics of social inclusion in the community kitchen – still in the same community hall as in Chapter 4. The central role of women and food in this practice makes me argue that the most fruitful way to study social inclusion requires a queer incorporation of both gendered and more-than-human bodies. The work of philosopher and biologist Donna Haraway empowers this argument.

I then leave the community hall and move to the northern area of Montreuil in Chapter 6. At *murs à pêches* (the so-called "peach walls"), I learn about how to become more ecologically attached from the more-than-human becomings that take place in the peach groves. I use this knowledge to develop an approach for building communities that care for the more-than-human. Environmental anthropologist Sophie Chao is a crucial co-thinker for cultivating such ecological sensibilities. Finally, the Epilogue closes the dissertation as a whole, as I return to the ontological level of sweaty commons, which I have developed in this chapter. In the Epilogue, I argue that sweat reconfigures hydrofeminism in a new – and arguably more appropriate – way than

its former two versions of blood (formulated by Grosz and others) and tears (developed by Neimanis in particular).

Interlude I

Louise

Age: 73, profession: Retired schoolteacher, home: Southern Montreuil

Louise sits on a chair in a circle of seats that forms the meeting of the general assembly. She wears a yellow vest and smokes an e-cigarette. With each suck of smoke she takes, a set of wrinkles forms around the contours of her mouth and some of her pink lipstick comes off. She starts to speak and smoke blows out with her words.

Fatima

Age: 59, profession: Worker, home: Northern Montreuil

Fatima exits her apartment. She pours leftover food into a bowl she has placed in front of the building. The food is for homeless cats. She slowly reenters the flat and walks into the kitchen, where a pot simmers. On the kitchen table, empty aluminum boxes are arranged side-by-side to be filled with the food Fatima prepares for people in the neighborhood.

Alice

Age: 26, profession: Activist, home: Southern Montreuil

Alice looks small in front of the big silver-gray truck. She has dark hair and wears a white *sweat*shirt. Big silver earrings hang from each of her ear flips moving back and forth, as she steps out of the van. She brings multiple boxes of green beans into the courtyard.

2

Sweaty Commons in France

From Chapter 1, we know that sweaty commons describe a set of embodied sensations of living in a world of global warming and social inequality. We also know that the concept offers an orientation for us to move beyond these conditions: learning about the ontological interconnectedness of our more-than-human sweaty bodies sparks a potential for us to enact new social and ecological ways of thinking and embodying the world.

So far, I have only briefly introduced the *gilets jaunes* by offering a short genealogy of how the movement emerged as a response to Macron's gasoline tax proposal in 2018 (Chapter 1). The policy proposal – that Macron had to withdraw due to the massive resistance from the *gilets jaunes* – embodied a green transition that did not bear in mind the effects of social inequality. Had the proposal been adopted, the argument goes, the already precarious life-situations of the *gilets jaunes* would have become even more sweaty, in the sense of adding yet another layer of marginalization and inequality to the current living conditions in France (Piketty 2022; Stiegler 2020).

In this chapter, I will say more about the *gilets jaunes* by narrowing down the general scope of sweaty commons to focus on a set of

specifically situated embodied modes of living and resisting in France. With Louise, Fatima, and Alice as the three main protagonists, the instantiations of sweaty commons that take center stage in this dissertation relate to the subject matter of food. As I briefly discussed in Chapter 1, these women fight for food as a common (social and ecological) good by gleaning leftover greens at *Rungis* and cooking it for precarious people in Montreuil.

In France – as well as in many other countries – the political issue of food autonomy has become urgent. In July 2023, the World Bank wrote, in a report on global food insecurity, that hunger levels have risen sharply in Europe – as well as in the rest of the world (World Bank 2023). This is a matter of social inequality, but it is also more specifically a gendered matter, because women have the most mouths to feed, whilst also having the lowest income (Gaillard 2021; Piketty 2022). On top of being a matter of social-gendered (and racialized) injustice, it is also an ecological issue, as predominant human-food relations – such as the agribusiness systems and global supply chains that *Rungis* embodies (Scene 3, Chapter 1) – cause 40% of the total amount of greenhouse gas emissions today (Shiva 2016, xiii; 106). Turning to the subject of food autonomy thus takes us to the politics of both social and ecological challenges.

So, one way to begin the journey in this chapter is to account for these ecological-social challenges of human-food relations that take place in France. Going back to the French President Charles de Gaulle's politics of modernization during the three glorious decades of the 1950's-1980's, I trace the emergence of hypermarkets and

describe how they came to shape a new set of distanced human-food relations. From the so-called *trentes glorieuses* to the 1980's neoliberalism and further to the 21st century with President Macron, I show how de Gaulle's politics have become even more prominent (and problematic). With neoliberalism today, the ecological crisis of detachment to food not only speeds up; a crisis of social inequality also begins to challenge the community and social fabric. As we have seen, the *gilets jaunes* work to resist these crises, and they do so with demands of organizing the French democracy differently. To explore how they carry out such alternative democratic practices themselves, I turn to ethnographic studies of the *gilets jaunes* in Lorraine and Bretagne (Dondeyne and Levain 2021; Gaillard 2021; Jeanpierre 2019), before I close the chapter by introducing the city of Montreuil, which is where my ethnographic study takes place.

Ecological Crises and Food

The ways we – in the western world – cultivate and relate to food play a crucial factor for the increased levels of CO_2 emissions and global warming (Shiva 2016). Scholars such as Donna Haraway, Anna Tsing, and Sophie Chao write that the historical forces of modernity and colonialism are important to bear in mind to understand the unsustainable human-food relations of today, which they refer to as the "plantationocene" – a concept to which we return in Chapter 6 (Chao 2022; Haraway and Tsing 2019). These relations are both unsustainable and unsocial as people around the world not

only starve; many cultivators of modern food also work under sweatshop like conditions (e.g. Guthman 2019).

The fight for food autonomy and sustainable human-food relations is pivotal for the group of *gilets jaunes* we follow in this dissertation. Consider Scene 3 in Chapter 1 at the *Rungis* market. The origin story of *Rungis*, which is situated under de Gaulle's presidency, illuminates the radical detachment to food the new market brought with it. Or, human-food relations changed radically in France with the globalized economy and mechanized food production systems that followed from the aftermath of World War II (Freidberg 2004).

The first of De Gaulle's modernization initiatives that made a new set of less ecological human-food relations emerge in France was his decision to open the hypermarket chain, *Carrefour*, in the beginning of the 1960s (Freidberg 2004, 137). Following that decision, French people gradually became used to shop in supermarkets, which made their own household food production decrease. This entailed a significant shift in human-food relations. According to anthropologist Cecilie Rubow, supermarkets obscure or hide knowledge of the relations and trajectories that are embedded in each food product (Rubow 2022, 237). Prior to the emergence of supermarkets, almost half of all French households kept their own vegetable gardens and fruit trees, and they were thus familiar with the massive labor of cultivating food. This made food waste an impossibility (Freidberg 2004, 132). Yet with the emergence of supermarkets, French people (mostly women) could now spend less time on producing food and instead earn their own money, which means that on the one hand,

hyper- and supermarkets created a more distant relationship to food, while they, on the other hand, were part of French women's liberation movement, including their entrance into the job market.

Five years after the first *Carrefour* hypermarket opened in France, *Rungis* was built to substitute *Les Halles* – a food market in Paris with medieval roots. *Les Halles* played a key role for food provision during the French monarchy but also after the French revolution, where it was liberalized, so more people could gain access to its produce. One of the things that was particular to this market was the level of specialization. Each seller had a few products he was specialized in but with the arrival of *Rungis*, this intimate seller-food relationship changed. We see this as *Rungis* has 11 warehouses only for fruits and vegetables, and these are filled with more than 300 different kinds of greens. The expansion of products is what modernization terminology refers to as "rationalized adaptation", which was part of de Gaulle's political strategy. The flipside to this acceleration is that *Rungis* sellers are less specialized in the products, because the supply has expanded so significantly, which again makes the relation to food become more distant. Whereas *Les Halles* was called "the belly of Paris", *Rungis*' nickname has become "the market in search of a soul" (Freidberg 2004, 150).

We can synthesize this story of food modernization into at least two main points. First, we can trace the origins of the current human-food relations of supermarkets and international trade back to the 1960-1970's, which means that current human-food relations are quite novel, emphasizing how human-food relations are changeable.

Secondly, contemporary human-food relations are complex and ambiguous; they embody a more alienated and un-ecological relationship at the same time as they have contributed to women's liberation.

Social-Gendered Crises and Food

The entry of supermarkets did however not solve gender inequalities. In fact, social inequalities more generally have increased since this period (Garbinti and Goupille-Lebret 2020, 69; Piketty 2017). Between 1983 and 2015, the average income of the richest 1% people in France rose by 100% and that of the 0.1% richest by 150%, as compared with barely 25% for the rest of the French population (Piketty 2017). Moreover, numbers from the French National Institute of Statistics and Economics (Insee) show that the poverty rate in 2018 – the same year the *gilets jaunes* emerged – was the highest in 20 years with 14,8 million French people living for less than 1063 euros per month (Insee 2020; Piketty 2022). The pattern is clear: while the richest people get richer, many ordinary French people cannot afford basic needs such as housing and food. This increasing inequality is particularly challenging for women, but also more specifically for people of color[8] and women of color in particular (Gaillard 2021, 86-87; Piketty 2023). French women

[8] Economist Thomas Piketty writes that racialized inequality in France anno 2023 – especially with regard to the Muslim population (7-8% of the French population) – is the most serious in terms of lack of access to basic needs, such as housing and food (Piketty 2023, 5; 9).

represent 75% of people with the lowest-paid jobs and at the same time, they are in charge of 85% of single-parent households – an increasingly common family form in France (Gaillard 2021, 86). There is thus a severe social problem, in which primarily women – in all of their differences – have many mouths to feed while their purchase power cannot meet this demand.

The political issue of food autonomy in France is so central that more than a third of the population suggest that the most efficient way to help people today is to give them access to good nutrition (Ifop 2022). Half of what we may refer to as “working class people” (with an income lower than 900 euros per month) are particularly worried about feeding their family. It is also worth mentioning that the situation has only become worse with the Covid-19 pandemic, making inequality, poverty, and hunger rise to new levels in France, again with a clear gendered and racialized pattern (Garbinti and Goupille-Lebret 2020, 73). The war in Ukraine has further reduced the purchase power for already precarious people in France.

The Ecological-Social Crises as a Neoliberal Democratic Crisis

Let us briefly return to the trajectory of the *gilets jaunes* that has to do with the fuel tax to understand why ecological-social crises, such as the lack of food autonomy in France, can be understood as a profound democratic crisis too. With the level of social inequality in France, we now know that the gasoline tax proposal was out of touch with the lives of many precarious people. The proposal was also

unjust on another level; precarious people in France emit a small amount of carbon dioxide compared to the emission rates from bourgeois populations (Mélenchon 2021, 60; Piketty 2022). The government did not tax the pollution emitted by big companies (and the wealthy CEO's of these firms) but instead the – assumedly – silent majority of people who live in rural areas without access to public transportation and a purchase power that barely makes it to the end of the month. Put differently, the fuel tax as a solution to the ecological crisis was beyond any inclusion of ordinary people. (And so are contemporary human-food relations governed by multinational firms beyond democratic control (Shiva 2016)). The ecological-social crises in France are thus also a democratic crisis in the sense of privileging the few over the many. Specifically, together with a number of French intellectuals, we might refer to it as a neoliberal democratic crisis (Dardot et al. 2021; Monod 2019a; Stiegler 2019, 2020).

The most obvious place to look in order to explore the democratic crisis of neoliberalism – defined as a democracy for the few (Stiegler 2019) – may be in contemporary decreasing voter turnouts. Philosopher Barbara Stiegler writes that neoliberalism is undemocratic, because it enacts a political imperative of adaption to global markets and competition instead of including ordinary citizens in political decision-making processes. This imperative (and its associated institutions of competition and financial austerity) makes people become detached from democratic life, such as from the act of voting (Stiegler 2020, 31).

This political situation characterized France in 2017 when Macron was elected as president with his new political party *En Marche* – later known as *La Republique En Marche* (LREM) and today renamed *Renaissance.* At the election, 25,5% of the French people did not vote in the second round of the election. Moreover, 9% of the people who voted handed in a blank vote. In sum, every third French citizen did not choose between Macron and Marine Le Pen, the highest such number since 1969 (Statista 2023).[9] To understand this development, which effectively made Macron win the election with a minority vote, the economists Bruno Amable and Stefano Palombarini suggest that we trace the political developments in France back to the neoliberal period that followed from de Gaulle in the late 1970s and early 1980s (Amable and Palombarini 2021, 121).[10]

One crucial event took place in 1983 when the socialist President François Mitterand was confronted with a profound political dilemma. In the two preceding years, Mitterand had experienced a failure of his expansionist financial policies, and he saw two options for transforming the failure into a success. He could continue the expansionist course and keep the unemployment rate low while disappointing the European Monetary System (EMS), or he could

[9] The abstention rate was even higher (28,01%) in the 2022 presidential election.
[10] The analysis of neoliberalism in France by Amable and Palombarini resonates with other studies of the democratic deficits of neoliberalism presented by Pierre Dardot, Jean-Claude Monod, and Barbara Stiegler. Yet Amable and Palombarini add a specific concern for how neoliberalism has ruined the former leftwing bloc in France embodied in the Socialist Party, which is crucial for us to bear in mind, engaging with the leftwing group of *gilets jaunes* in Montreuil.

adopt a deflationary policy required by the EMS, with rising unemployment as the outcome. Mitterand went for the second option and according to Amable and Palombarini, this was the beginning of the high abstention rates among notably French blue-collar workers (Amable and Palombarini 2021, 38). The reason for this is that Mitterand's choice resulted in a political "austerity turn" that contradicted the expectations of the working class people in France – and the socialists' EMS-friendliness has haunted the party since (Amable and Palombarini 2021, 38). We see that in the 1970s (before the EMS-integration and neoliberalism), a large majority of blue-collar workers voted for the socialist party. Today, it is only a very small minority (Amable and Palombarini 2021, 124; Marthaler 2020, 49).[11]

Similarly important to understand the democratic crisis in France is another socialist President, François Hollande, who also played a key role in the neoliberal transformation of the socialist party and thus in the rise of the abstention rate. It is important to remember that Macron was Minister in Hollande's socialist government before he created *En Marche*. Hollande – with the supervision from his Economy Minister Macron – continued a further integration process in the European Union (EU), of which the labor reform from 2016 is a clear example. The reform was backed by the European Constitutional Council in its aim at creating a flexible job market in France. The implications, however, again according to Amable and

[11] The Socialist Party obtained the worst result in the 2022 presidential election with only 1,75% of the votes (Pouzadoux 2022).

Palombarini, were a weakening of unionist influence, more precarious situations for low-skilled workers, and a general falloff in social services (Amable and Palombarini 2021, 40). In Amable and Palombarini's view, Hollande sought to please the bourgeois population during his term, which once again plays a role in the current poor state of the party (Amable and Palombarini 2021, 123).

From Mitterand to Hollande, Macron is the final main figure to which we turn. Macron was well aware of the decay of the left bloc, when he launched his party. In 2016, he argued that the left could be divided into two parts, of which the first was "conservative" and stuck in its old alliances, while a new "realist" left, to which Macron belonged, was open to establishing new types of alliances. The new alliance Macron talked about was another word for the bourgeois bloc that has become his core voter bloc. Amable and Palombarini define the bourgeois bloc as an alliance between European integration and neoliberal reforms, together with attempts of defending certain parts of the French social model (Amable and Palombarini 2021, 5). They refer to the transformation of the socialist party from the 1980's to today as a neoliberal modernization project that adapted the logics of EU. The transformation has become most radically enacted during Macron's presidency.

The analysis, suggested by Amable and Palombarini, shows that the collapse of the Socialist party is caused by the neglect of disadvantaged groups, which has made Macron rule with the support from a minority bourgeois bloc (Amable and Palombarini 2021, 158-159). His political project is based on neoliberalism, which his

rightwing shift on behalf of rising inequality and pauperization of a part of the lower middle classes demonstrates (Amable and Palombarini 2021, 163; Piketty 2023, 8).

The democratic implication of this political development in France is that many French people do not feel represented by the politicians, which became obvious when the *gilets jaunes* emerged with demands of not only social justice (and ecological justice among many of the groups (Flipo 2021)), but also of a new radical, popular, and participatory democracy. Blue-collar voters have become excluded from the Socialist party – and many of them (including *gilets jaunes*) chose mass abstention, which became Macron's way into the presidential *Élysée Palais*.[12]

From this analysis, it is not surprising that observers of the *gilets jaunes* share the view that the revolt is a rejection of France's current form of representative democracy – more specifically of neoliberal representative democracy (Bendali et al. 2019; Fillieule and Dafflon 2022; Hayat 2022).[13] Neoliberalism, if we go back to Stiegler, figures

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[12] During the French presidential election campaign in 2022, I experienced the mobilization for abstention among the *gilets jaunes*. According to the majority of the group in Montreuil, abstention was the best strategy to demonstrate democratic contestation of representative democracy. Yet within the group, disagreement also existed. Some *gilets jaunes* wanted to vote blank, and a few wanted to vote for the leftwing candidate Jean-Luc Mélenchon (*La France Insoumise*).

[13] We may also add that de Gaulle's institutional design of the fifth republic has a role to play in the critique of French democracy. Not only do the *gilets jaunes* contest the social and ecological injustices of neoliberalism, they also resist the institutional structure of the fifth republic, in which the president can exercise a high level of power independent of both the parliament and thus of the people (Kopstein 2014, 101).

the demos as too incompetent to take part in political decisions, and it thereby dismisses the concerns of ordinary people. We see that this may explain why people feel detached from the veneer of democracy (Stiegler 2020, 32). Another French philosopher, Jean-Claude Monod, adds to the analysis of neoliberalism by comparing Macron with the British Prime Minister from the 1980s, Margaret Thatcher (Monod 2019b, 260). Inspired by Thatcher, writes Monod, Macron has become the "leader of the free market," which has made him conduct an aggressive economic liberalism, resulting in reforms that dismantle the social base in France. Monod even writes that Macron embodies an authoritarian version of neoliberalism, as he enacts austerity reforms while avoiding parliamentary debate (Monod 2019a, 101) – which the pension reform in 2023 most recently exemplifies.[14]

Let me end this section by underscoring how neoliberalism plays part in the ecological and social degradation on top of the democratic crisis. Beginning with green transition politics, Stiegler calls this the "Achilles heel of neoliberalism" by which she means that there is a profound paradox within the neoliberal attempt of trying to manage

[14] Monod also mentions the particular reform of the solidarity tax on wealth (ISF), which was one of the first initiatives Macron implemented. In Monod's view, the reform became part of the neoliberal governmentality crisis that triggered the *gilets jaunes* (Monod 2019b, 232). In Macron's first budget, the IFS tax cut concentrated on capital gains and together with a fall in public spending (social housing and healthcare), Macron favored already well-off French households (Amable and Palombarini 2021, 137;141). The privatization reform of the French railway SNCF is another initiative that indicates Macron's neoliberal politics (Amable and Palombarini 2021, 143).

the climate crisis: the neoliberal government fights climate change while it also protects the global markets that destroy the ecosystems (Stiegler 2020, 36). The unsatisfying answer, manifest in the fuel tax, left it to the individual consumer to be responsible for managing the ecological crisis. And in terms of social inequality, which has increased with neoliberalism, Stiegler continues, this is also a story of an individual failure. The neoliberal explanation of social inequality is that poor people – who are mainly women and people of color – have been inadaptable to the globalized world and that the elite has not been good enough in nudging these people in the right direction (Stiegler 2020, 42).

From Freezing Neoliberalism to Sweaty Bodies in Resistance

We now better understand the political context of the *gilets jaunes*, as it is interpreted by numerous scholars in France. Amable and Palombarini, Stiegler, Monod, and Pierre Dardot[15] agree that neoliberalism poses a challenge to the French democracy.[16] As we

[15] We return to Dardot in Chapter 4.

[16] In 2021, the sociologists Zakaria Bendali and Aldo Rubert counted 112 studies of the *gilets jaunes* (Bendali and Rubert 2021). Surveying these studies, Bendali and Rubert identified the main themes of the analyses as urban/rural schisms, class, rightwing/leftwing political orientation, and the subjects of populism and democracy (Bendali and Rubert 2021, 181-84). To mention some of the specific work, historical studies have approached the *gilets jaunes* in a temporal perspective, drawing lines back to the French revolution, the Parisian Commune, and the 1968-movement (Abélès 2020; Bantigny 2021; Bantigny and Hayat 2019; Wahnich 2020a, 2020b). Lines have also been drawn to more recent social movements, such as *Nuit Debout* (2016) and the movements of *Zones À Défendre* (ZAD) (Jeanpierre 2019, 105-111). And yet other comparative perspectives connect the *gilets jaunes* to the *Zapatistas* in Mexico, to the Kurdish Rojava, and to

shall see, the *gilets jaunes* in Montreuil also adhere to this diagnosis. There is, however, something in these analyses of neoliberalism that makes the *gilets jaunes'* resistance come into the picture rather unexpectedly.

On the one hand, Stiegler and Monod almost depict neoliberalism as a totalizing economic governmentality that colonizes all sorts of societal aspects. As such, their analyses leave us with a picture of neoliberalism as an economic force that puts a freeze on how bodies can act and think.[17] For, how is it possible to locate everyday instances of sweaty resistance when we learn to view neoliberalism as an abstract and all-encompassing penetrating structural logic?

On the other hand, however, Stiegler and Monod point to the *gilets jaunes* as a movement that resists neoliberalism in new and creative ways. They both approach the movement as a disruption of neoliberalism that turned into a governmentality crisis.[18] The *gilets jaunes* exemplify a form of Foucauldian *contre-conduites* that works against dominant governmentalities (Monod 2019b, 14). The very title of Monod's book, *L'art de ne pas être trop gouverné*[19] underscores the point that there *are* ways out of neoliberal governance. Demonstrating on roundabouts and elsewhere, the *gilets*

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the Israeli social justice movement (Shultziner and Kornblit 2020). Moreover, quantitative studies map the *gilets jaunes* and define them in either anarchist, populist, or rightwing/leftwing terms (Bendali et al. 2019; Collectif d'enquête sur les Gilets jaunes 2019; Guerra, Alexandre and Gonthier 2019).

[17] See also Wendy Brown's "freezing" critique of neoliberalism (Brown 2003, 2017).
[18] Stiegler even joined the *gilets jaunes* in Bordeaux (Stiegler 2020).
[19] (The art of not being governed too much).

jaunes resisted being disciplined and in the words of Monod – who draws on Foucault – they were not willing to be governed too much (Foucault 1995).

Yet from these philosophical analyses, we do not gain sufficient information about the tangible attempts of contesting neoliberalism that the *gilets jaunes* carry out.[20] For example, Monod's work does not take us to the *gilets jaunes'* alternative practices as they fight for food autonomy, gender equality, and/or sustainable ecosystems. Whereas he turns to empirical matters – the specific inequality raising policies – when showing the harm caused by Macron's neoliberal politics, Monod does not draw on empirical counter-practices the *gilets jaunes* creatively invent. Thus, even though this bunch of philosophers share the aim of supporting ordinary people in resisting neoliberalism, they may come to downplay and overlook crucial events that are arguably important places to learn from with this democratizing endeavor in mind.

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I am not the only one who finds the philosophical texts insufficient.[21] The feminist economist J.K. Gibson-Graham argues for an approach

[20] Stiegler's 11 theses on how to strike (and fight neoliberalism) is an exception to this, without providing thick descriptions of these counter-practices (Stiegler 2020, 120-30).

[21] For example, political theorist David Schlosberg (together with Luke Craven) says that, "We should focus our attention not on neo-liberalism's 'flank of vulnerability', but on how it is possible to bring into being radical transmutations of its core" (Schlosberg and Craven 2019, 153). Moreover, political theorist William Connolly further shakes the fragility of neoliberalism by framing it as an important concern for the more-than-human, which makes him argue for a cultivation of a

to the economy that turns away from the main focus on large issues, such as the penetration of market forces or capitalist relations, in order to turn to everyday practices (Gibson-Graham 2014, 149). They write that engaging with social movement activists – as we do in this dissertation – enables more accurate theorizations of the transformative possibilities beyond neoliberalism, which gives us a more full-fledged understanding of the political dynamics at stake (Gibson-Graham 2014, 156).

Adding Gibson-Graham's practice-oriented approach to Stiegler and Monod's (and Dardot's) more philosophical analyses gets us closer to the kind of knowledge our sweaty commons figuration can help us generate. Recall that sweaty commons describe how to live with global warming and social inequality – in a neoliberal era we may now add – before turning to the practices of resisting these very conditions. To put it bluntly, sweaty commons bring our attention to the bodies that sweat, which allows us to capture how they struggle against the very forces that seek to freeze them in time and space. The overall lesson we learn is that sweaty commons turn our attention to the aspects of contemporary politics that are too easily overseen in many critiques of neoliberalism. These analyses are either abstract, disembodied, and/or anthropocentric, which makes them ignore that neoliberalism has uncertain trajectories and loose ends, because it is imbricated with a variety of agencies, such as the

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sensibility toward many bodies, human and nonhuman, that all play a role in the destabilization of neoliberalism (Connolly 2008, 2013; Connolly and Macdonald 2015, 264).

ones in social movements. Becoming attentive to all this, we see that bodies push back throughout the hard work of social resistance. In the remainder of the dissertation, we turn to these dimensions of politics without neglecting the many barriers neoliberal logics install to hinder democratic activism.

The *Gilets Jaunes'* Alternative World-Makings

Following Gibson-Graham, a good way to explore such politics in the making is through ethnographic studies that turn to actual resistance practices. We thus now move on to some of the more anthropological studies of the *gilets jaunes.* Akin to what Gibson-Graham has already said, anthropologist Anna Tsing writes that we should turn to the "practical activities of making lives" that interrupt common sense and show that "other worlds are possible" (Tsing 2015, 21-22; 292). I use the language of Tsing to describe the *gilets jaunes'* democratic activism, which then becomes a matter of "making worlds" far from the world of neoliberalism.[22]

In the book, *In Girum – les lecons politiques des ronds-points* (2019),[23] political scientist Laurent Jeanpierre takes us to the roundabout and to its world-makings of collective life (Jeanpierre 2019, 97).[24] The *gilets jaunes*, Jeanpierre writes, have innovatively

[22] I say more about what I mean by world-makings in Chapter 3.

[23] (Lessons from the roundabouts).

[24] Many French intellectuals have turned to the roundabout. For other examples, see (Ravelli 2020, Pelletier 2019, Darras 2020, Clément 2020, Challier 2019, Raymond and Bordiec 2020, Bonin and Liochon 2020).

managed to fill an unrealized potential of the public place of the roundabout by experimenting with democratic practices and new ways of living together in small communities (*microsociétés*) (Jeanpierre 2019, 15; 139). Jeanpierre attends to one specific roundabout in the small French village, La Meuse, in Lorraine in northeastern France (Jeanpierre 2019, 100). During the autumn/winter of 2018 and 2019, this roundabout became such a place of unexpected alliances. A group of different people, all sharing a precarious life situation, met on the roundabout, each wearing a yellow vest, pulled from their car equipment. Citizens from the village, organizations, and different restaurants supported the group by donating food, which made the democratic experiment sustain for a longer while. In sum, the group of disfavored people, together with their co-citizens, made a lost collective cohesion emerge (Jeanpierre 2019, 100-01).[25]

The *gilets jaunes* did not only share meals on the roundabout, they also built caravans, and both food and the shed were seen as common goods not owned by anyone. Moreover, on the roundabouts the *gilets jaunes* invented democratic decision making processes that were rooted in either logics of citizens' referenda, the so-called RIC system (*referendum d'initiative citoyenne*), or in more anarchic ideas

[25] In Bagnols-sur-Cèze in Occitanie, I witnessed a similar system of collaboration. On Saturdays, people gathered on *Le rond-point de l'Europe* with their camping chair, lunch in a Tupperware, a thermos of coffee, and banners with different sayings, while those circulating the roundabout in their cars were waving, yelling "bravos", and some even parked their cars to join the *gilets jaunes* or to hand them a cake or some other edible offering.

developed around the idea of the commons (Jeanpierre 2019, 137) – which we return to in Part II. While RIC is most concerned with the act of voting and inspired by "the Suisse democratic model" (as one of my interlocutors in Southern France puts it), the commons is more about anarchic collective decision-making processes. It may also be helpful to say that these different democratic ways of organizing demonstrate the heterogeneity of the *gilets jaunes* that stretches from the "far right" to the "radical left". Jeanpierre writes that the commons is most associated with leftwing groups of *gilets jaunes*, while RIC is closer linked with rightwing politics (Fillieule and Dafflon 2022; Jeanpierre 2019, 138, 2021).[26] The reason for mentioning RIC here – even though both Jeanpierre and I are most interested in the democratic ideas and practices of the commons – is to emphasize the differences that exist within the *gilets jaunes* and to underscore that different groups propose different ways of reorganizing democracy (and governing ecological and social politics).

Yet we can say that both logics emphasize a more participatory democracy with the organization of assembly meetings. On the roundabouts, such gatherings took place in the form of presumably leaderless and inclusive meetings where everybody was allowed to participate. Aside from discussing new democratic models, the main

[26] I recognize this pattern in my fieldwork. We will soon learn that the *gilets jaunes* in Montreuil – a former communist city and a left-wing municipality today – hosts various initiatives of the commons. Differently in Occitanie – a region with a high percentage of voters of the extreme right-wing party *Rassemblement Nationale* (RN) (Insee 2022) – the *gilets jaunes* opt for RIC as *the* democratic alternative in line with RN's idea of a more popular democracy (Pezet 2019).

aim of the meetings was to solve urgent local challenges, such as food scarcity (Jeanpierre 2019, 142). From this, we can say that the occupation of roundabouts embodies a democratic innovation that re-appropriates public space, transforms it into a place of solidarity, and into a place of common resistance and political debate and action.

On many roundabouts all over France, meals have been shared, friendships have developed, local challenges have been addressed, and small communities have emerged. The descriptions of the daily organization on the roundabout show that re-appropriating public space has taken on many forms in various assembly practices (for example, practices of both RIC and the commons), and these contest established forms of liberal democracy, notably the idea of vertical representation (Hayat 2022).

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From Jeanpierre's work new questions arise. For example, is the allegedly horizontal organization of the general assembly on the roundabouts experienced as such by everyone or may some bodies feel excluded? As I have already mentioned, sweaty commons encapsulate different modes and intensities of sweat, which is a matter of class, gender, and race. So, how do people sweat in the general assembly, I wonder? Another way of putting it is that Jeanpierre does not focus on the politics of gender, but social movement studies show that organizational structures in movements

are not gender neutral (Acker 1990; Dichman 2023a).[27] This means that not all bodies may experience the general assembly on the roundabouts (and elsewhere) as horizontal. For example, one of my *gilets jaunes* collaborators from Occitanie described the roundabout as a masculine place,[28] and we will also see that a differentiated set of experiences takes place in the general assembly in Montreuil.

So, in the search for how gender is lived and experienced, we now turn to the sociologist Édith Gaillard's study *Les femmes Gilets jaunes: un écologisme des pauvres?* (2021).[29] In the essay, Gaillard explores the tasks women *gilets jaunes* undertake in the movement (Gaillard 2021, 85). Rather than focusing on roundabouts, Gaillard turns to the less public and more invisible places of private homes (Gaillard 2021, 91). In and between households, women *gilets jaunes* create different forms of social and ecological practices: they exchange garments, cultivate kitchen gardens, and glean (like the women *gilets jaunes* in Montreuil). The women thus experiment with living, working, and resisting in new ways detached from capitalist and neoliberal domination by changing consumption patterns and seeking self-provision and food autonomy from their common

[27] For example, women often carry out the work that is disregarded as "femininized tasks" or "shitwork" such as cleaning, organizing rallies and meetings, running the daily operations, and making people feel good (Blee 2003; Robnett 1999; Thorne 1975). In short, in social movements (and in society as a whole) women fill positions without prestige (Goffman 1977).
[28] Danielle, a woman *gilet jaune* in Bagnols-sur-Cèze, told me that the roundabout became an exclusive place for men with alcoholic and destructive modes of behavior.

[29] (Women gilets jaunes: an ecology of the poor?)

kitchen gardens. Some of the women have even begun to mix their own toothpaste and detergent (Gaillard 2021, 91). Gaillard argues that the practices of the women *gilets jaunes* demonstrate the need to revalorize different forms of care work, such as cultivation of food and cooking, and she thus adds an important (eco)gender perspective to the body of work on the *gilets jaunes.*[30]

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We now turn to a third and final study of the resistance among the *gilets jaunes* to add an ecological aspect to the discussion of the commons that Jeanpierre introduced, which will be helpful for us later in Part II. In *La place est-elle prise?* (2021),[31] sociologist Christèle Dondeyne and anthropologist Alix Levain present their study of *gilets jaunes* who fight against ecological damages of an intensive conventional agriculture in the Finistère department of Bretagne. The agriculture has degraded the local ecosystems by polluting the coastal seas so severely that a swimming ban now exists due to the high amount of pesticides. As a response to this, the *gilets jaunes* have initiated protest actions on the beach *plage du Ris* by occupying the beach and performing "beach funerals" to publicly mourn the ecological disaster (Dondeyne and Levain 2021, 76).[32] Moreover, the *gilets jaunes* in Finistère – together with other activist

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[30] Other scholars have studied ecological practices within the *gilets jaunes*, but Gaillard is the only one who has turned to the intersection of gender and ecology within the *gilets jaunes*.

[31] (Has the place been taken?)

[32] Similar events take place at a neighboring beach, *plage de la Torche*, where problems with fertilizers and pesticides also destroy the coastal environments.

groups such as *Extinction Rebellion* – have created systems that support local organic farmers whose land is threatened by the conventional agriculture firms.

In line with Jeanpierre, as well as with our own interest of the commons, Dondeyne and Levain turn to the *gilets jaunes'* ecological activism as a fight for the commons. The *gilets jaunes* in Bretagne do not accept that agribusiness firms continue to pollute the soil and water and thus poison basic living conditions (Dondeyne and Levain 2021, 79). The alternative practice these *gilets jaunes* enact seek to establish the Breton ecosystems – the land and the sea – as common goods (*biens communs*) different from the un-ecological management that is currently undertaken by both public and private actors (Dondeyne and Levain 2021, 79; 81).

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Together, these three studies show that the *gilets jaunes* have invented a variety of different resistance practices to neoliberalism; they have made alternative worlds emerge (Tsing 2015). We have seen that both Jeanpierre, Dondeyne, and Levain emphasize the innovative democratic-ecological practices of the commons, and Gaillard points to the gendered division of labor we need to attend to in order to generate knowledge that is inclusive and pluralistic. Without a gender perspective, we learn that the commons instantiates on public roundabouts and on beaches in France, but we do not learn to turn to less public spaces where other bodies resist and enact the commons in different ways.

I take these studies of the *gilets jaunes* as a starting point for my own inquiry, where I turn to the group in Montreuil who gathers in a community hall and in a fruit orchard, where they perform different instantiations of sweaty commons resistance practices. The knowledge I aim to generate shows how Louise, Fatima, Alice, and other *gilets jaunes* in Montreuil sweat in resistance to ecological-social-democratic challenges, and it highlights how their common sweat is distributed differently and in various intensities depending on class, gender, species, and other markers of identity. Markers I aim to negotiate in order to create more life-giving ways of sweating together.

Arriving to Montreuil

From *gilets jaunes* in Lorraine and Bretagne, we (re)turn to Louise, Fatima, Alice, and the rest of the *gilets jaunes* in Montreuil to introduce the main field sites where the remainder of the dissertation takes place. We first arrive to Montreuil from the north where Fatima lives, before Alice – who inhabits Southern Montreuil – gives another description of the place. At last, I tell my own arrival story, as I walk from Paris to Montreuil and further to the community hall, where the *gilets jaunes* gather to act upon the sweaty conditions of their lives.

Map 2. Montreuil (the black spot) located on the eastern outskirts of Paris (the bigger white field), situated in the region, Île-de-France (the outline)

Fatima

“Montreuil has changed a lot since I arrived 30 years ago. Today, the city is divided into two parts. The upper part is the poor side of the city, where I live. Southern Montreuil has become *bobo* (*bourgeois-bohème*) – some even call it the 21st arrondissement of Paris. With a SMIC-revenue [minimum wage], I can only afford to live in Northern Montreuil.”

Alice

“Montreuil is a city where many political and associative things happen. A wide range of people live in Montreuil under very different conditions: social housing, big collectives, student housing, housing for working immigrants, but also gentrified housing for more wealthy people. There is a multitude of self-governed places and squats and a strong bond exists between people in these environments. During the first lockdown in the beginning of the Covid-19 pandemic, people quickly organized to help people in need. It was beautiful to experience! Fabrication of textile facemasks and food assistance were something the social movements efficiently managed to organize.”

Anne-Sofie

“I stand in front of a roundabout with numerous exit roads. Each of them leads in a different direction away from the border of the 20th arrondissement of Paris. The diagonal way leads in the direction of Montreuil. Standing here feels rough, with polluted air, noise from scooters and trucks, and trash alongside the roads. I traverses the roundabout and find it pleasant to arrive in Montreuil. The further I get from the borders of Paris, the more I like the place. Now, I see small houses with gardens. Most of them with wild growing lawns. In between the houses, large apartment blocks appear. I pass one of these and observe five pre-teen girls playing with a ball. They throw it against a wall. A woman – carrying a child on her back with

several bags of groceries in her hands – enters the building. She says something to the girls in a language I do not understand.

Continuing my way along the street, small shops come into sight. There are a few bazar stores with spices for discount prices, five-kilo bags of rice and couscous arranged on the sidewalk in front of them. The atmosphere is slow and calm. Some men are chatting in front of the bazars but apart from their voices and the noise from passing buses, it is quiet here. On the street, newly constructed bike lanes are marked with a blue color. The street is made for public transportation and bicycles. Passing some cyclists, I see a big grey metal gate. On the other side of it is the community hall where the *gilets jaunes* host their general assembly and the community kitchen. From the street, I see a colorful courtyard with red-clothed tables. Behind the tables, a fig tree is covered with light green leaves. This tree – I come to learn – feeds birds and squirrels, while people gather in the courtyard to eat during the *gilets jaunes*' kitchen.

The main entrance to the hall is open and a yellow vest hangs on the doorframe. I enter and on my right-hand side is a big open kitchen space. This is where the *gilets jaunes* cook food on Wednesday mornings. Yellow vests made out of cardboard decorate the room with different sayings. On one of them are the following words:

Ils crèvent les yeux à ceux qui les ouvrent. Sois jaune et ouvre-la ! Macron tu as la montre, Nous on a le temps ![33]

[33] (They destroy the eyes of those who dare to open them. Be yellow and open them! Macron you have the watch, but we have the time.)

In this community hall, local initiatives such as community kitchens, theater classes, and political meetings take place, but one needs no purpose to come here: to many people, this hall is a common space. Yet from Fatima's testimony, we know that the community hall may not be as accessible for people who inhabit the northern part of the city, as the hall is located in *Bas Montreuil* (the southern part of the city). The division of Montreuil into two parts – with Fatima living in *Haut Montreuil* – implies that the community hall is spatially but also socio-economically most accessible to citizens who live in the south.

Sociologist Anaïs Collet echoes Fatima's description of Montreuil, when she writes that the city has changed significantly during the last decades (Collet 2012). From being a communist city inhabited mostly by workers in the 1970-80's, a wave of newcomers arrived to Southern Montreuil from the mid 1980's. They arrived in two sets; the first wave took place from 1985-1992, while the second group of newcomers arrived between the end of the 1990's and the first years of the millennium (Collet 2012, 19). These demographic changes have transformed the southern part of Montreuil from a red suburb to an extension of Paris, which has given it its current nickname: Paris' Brooklyn (Collet 2012, 13).

In 1999, 40% of the inhabitants of Montreuil were newcomers and their majority professions were creative and intellectual jobs. We can also put it this way: by 2000, Montreuil was gentrified. The resourceful newcomers renovated and extended apartments and houses in the city and rents and prices rose with an augmentation of 30% in 2003 (Collet 2012, 14). Between 1990 and 2006, the

percentage of people with management positions or long academic educations rose from 16% to 27% in Southern Montreuil (Collet 2012, 16)**.** While these people arrived from Paris, former inhabitants became newcomers in *Haut Montreuil*, and this process continues to take place today. Collet refers to it as a development of "micro-segregation" (Collet 2012, 36).

Even within the group of *gilets jaunes* in Montreuil, the pattern is clear. Louise lives in a big apartment in the south, Alice lives in a collective apartment also located in the south, and Fatima lives in a smaller apartment up in the north. The "segregation" is also powerful in the way that, had I not met Fatima through Louise, I would probably not have gone to the northern parts of Montreuil until very late into my fieldwork, when I discovered the peach orchards that grow next to Fatima's apartment block. This is also due to the fact that the metro line from Paris runs directly to the southern part of Montreuil but in order to to go the northern part, one must transfer to other means of public transportation.

It is certain that the newcomers – or gentrifiers if you will – have had a huge impact on the sociodemographic picture of Montreuil, but they have also changed the cultural life more broadly. With their arrival, new places, such as the community hall, have institutionalized and new traditions have emerged. Organic food stores and shared gardens now rehabilitate old industrial districts and in Southern Montreuil, bazar stores – as the one I passed before entering the hall – are located next to organic stores, just as farmers' markets are situated next to the market that is mainly used by people

of color (Collet 2012, 32; 37). Montreuil has thus become an even more heterogeneous place but with it, new hierarchies have emerged.

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We will spend much time in the community hall (Chapter 4 and Chapter 5), which is a place we now have a better sense of, but in Chapter 6, we also move to the northern part of Montreuil. Specifically, we turn to the fruit orchards next to Fatima and I want to put some words on this place too, before concluding the chapter. The chapter thus circles back to where it started with its opening on food. Turning to the area of the peach orchards in Northern Montreuil (*murs à pêches*), we situate the story of modernization and neoliberalism some more by learning about human-food relations before these periods, as well as about the emerging counter-practices the *gilets jaunes* enact that draw on local ancient knowledge of fruit cultivation.

We begin in the 16th century where an impressive fruit production was initiated in Northern Montreuil (Schabol and Aubin 2014, 59). At that time, the soil on the heights of Montreuil was humid, clayey, and ideal for peach cultivation (Schabol and Aubin 2014, 51). It is estimated that Montreuil by the time of the 17th century produced 17 millions peaches per year. On top of the soil quality, the peach farmers' particular technique made Montreuil's peaches thrive to this magnificent extent. The farmers built 300 hectares of maze walls, in which agricultural plots provided a unique and unlikely microclimate for the fruit. This peculiar architecture protected the peach trees that

were planted to grow alongside the three-meter high walls coated in locally sourced limestone plaster. The plaster gave the walls a high thermal inertia and the ability to store heat: solar energy was stored in the walls during the day and transmitted to the trees during the night. The peaches were sold at *Les Halles* until, as we know, the market was replaced by *Rungis* in 1968 (Freidberg 2004).

Photo 4. *Murs-à-pêches* before modernization

Today, 30 hectares (10% of the original area) remain of *murs à pêches*, which – after many struggles between the municipality and the citizens – has become a protected area in Montreuil. The peach production diminished so drastically due to multiple reasons. First, the invention of greenhouses challenged the technique of the walls, and the cheaper prices of fresh produce posed a second challenge to the local peach production. Thirdly, de Gaulle's urbanization plan as part of the process of modernization made Montreuil build housing

on the area of *murs à pêches*. And fourthly, in the 1970's, the periphery (the highway infrastructure that circles around Paris) was constructed as another element of the modernization, which took up even more of the former peach production area.

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From this description of Montreuil, both its northern and southern part, we are now able to situate the sweaty commons situation in the city. Social inequality is most notably a challenge in Northern Montreuil but there is a general need for food autonomy in the city as a whole. To resist this development, the *gilets jaunes* meet up in their weekly general assembly to discuss the challenges on top of cooking leftover vegetables from *Rungis* in their community kitchen. Moreover, they experiment with creating more attached human-food relations at *murs à pêches*.

Map 3. Field sites in Montreuil and the homes of the protagonists

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have contextualized the *gilets jaunes* by turning to the ecological, social, and democratic crises of neoliberalism in France. I have also introduced some of their counter practices to these challenges, such as in their assembly meetings, their new collective everyday practices of gleaning food and cooking, and their reclamations of natural resources as common goods. For the particular group of *gilets jaunes* in Montreuil, we have yet to see how they resist their local conditions of sweaty commons. So far, I have provided a description of the places of their democratic engagement.

As I write these words, almost five years have passed since the rise of the social movement, which makes me want to end with a note on the state of the *gilets jaunes* anno 2023. We could also put it this way: where are the *gilets jaunes* today? There are at least two different ways of answering this question. First, we may say that the most visible period for the *gilets jaunes* was during the end of 2018 and early 2019. In this period, hundreds of thousands of activists gathered every Saturday in the *beaux quartiers* in Paris and on roundabouts all over the country. The *gilets jaunes* had a profound impact in French politics at that time. We know that the French government to some extent accommodated the movement with the withdrawal of the fuel tax. It also raised the minimum wage with 100 euros per month. Moreover, President Macron initiated *Le grand débat* and *La convention citoyenne pour le climat*[34] as attempts at including French citizens in the process of political decision-making. In civil society, the influence was manifest in public debate in the media in the beginning of the revolt (Sebbah et al. 2018). For example, well-known French writers, such as Édouard Louis and the already mentioned Annie Ernaux, wrote about and sympathized with the revolt (Bégaudeau, Artus, and Ernaux 2019; Daumas 2018; Louis 2018). Furthermore, documentarists covered the police violence during demonstrations, but they also portrayed the more ordinary life situations of the *gilets jaunes* in several documentary films.[35] Today, the picture of the *gilets jaunes* has changed. The brutal encounters

[34] (Citizens' assemblies and specifically the climate citizens' assembly.)
[35] For example, *Un pays qui se tient sage* (David Dufresne 2020), *J'veux du soleil* (Gilles Perret 2019), and *Femmes en jaunes* (Anne Gintzburger 2019).

with the police and the ban of wearing a yellow vest in public in some parts of France, amongst other initiatives, made many *gilets jaunes* stay at home after a while (BBC 2019). According to this story, the first answer may be that the *gilets jaunes* seem to be nowhere today.

Yet as this dissertation shows, these obstacles did not prevent the *gilets jaunes* from becoming *gilets jaunes* in new ways. Although they may seem more subtle than before – even though demonstrations do continue to take place – (some of) the *gilets jaunes* continue to fight for social and ecological justice and for a new democracy. The group of active *gilets jaunes* in Montreuil is smaller today than in 2019, but activists – with and without yellow vests – continue to fight. For example, even though Fatima and Alice have moved from Montreuil, newcomers have formed the group in novel ways and both Fatima and Alice fight in other places in France. From her father's place, Fatima continues to fight for better working conditions in the union, while Alice still works for food autonomy and for turning landscapes into common places, now as a member of the ecofeminist movement *Les Bombes Atomiques*. Put differently, the *gilets jaunes* become all the time: the movement continuously takes on new forms. When one group dissolves, its energy transfers to another.

In the ethnographic studies I have accounted for, we have seen how the *gilets jaunes* form alliances with other social movements. In Jeanpierre's study, *gilets jaunes* draw on the strategies of Occupy movements, and Gaillard's women *gilets jaunes* learn from other

ecofeminist social movements. The *gilets jaunes* in Dondeyne and Levain's study collaborate most explicitly with *Extinction Rebellion*, and these partial connections do not even come close to showing the diversity of the *gilets jaunes*. More generally, the *gilets jaunes* mobilize and crisscross with bodies in purple (feminist), red (union worker), green (climate activist), and black (*Black Lives Matter*) vests (Della Porta 2020; Shultziner and Kornblit 2020), as well as with "brown-shirts" (Klein 2014; Malm 2021). More or less visible, these bodies are still here, and many of them will continue to sweat and presumably resist until the conditions of sweaty commons cool down. This is the second way of answering the question, which is the one I prefer. Thus, the *gilets jaunes* are still here. In the next chapter, I develop a conceptual approach and methodologic toolbox that enable us to encapsulate these both visible and more subtle sweaty bodies of the *gilets jaunes.*

3

Sweaty Concepts and their Becomings

"A "sweaty concept"…comes out of a bodily experience that is difficult, one that is "trying", and where the aim is to keep exploring and exposing this difficulty."

Sara Ahmed (2014a)

"Concepts…help us make sense of the world. Concepts open for us ways of ethically and justly living with the…problems…"

Astrida Neimanis (2017, 168)

Combining what we have learned in Chapter 1 and Chapter 2, we now know that when Louise demonstrates (Scene 1), when Fatima overhears racist utterances at another demonstration (Scene 2), and when Alice gleans food (Scene 3), their bodies sweat. Being squeezed together with other bodies in the streets, experiencing affective distress, and carrying kilos of food in boxes, these women's body temperatures rise and cooling sweat glands release on their skin. This is the cycle of sweat. While sweat is a product of both joyful *and* stressful bodily activities (the heating up process can be caused by good and bad experiences), we must not forget that sweat first and foremost makes our bodies sustain and live (the cooling down process).

With the risk of echoing what I have already said in Chapter 1, let me briefly repeat that one reason for exploring the life-giving function of sweat is that it is under severe duress due to global warming. Wet-bulb temperatures, which is the limit for human adaptability to extreme heat (31.5-40 degrees Celsius with a humidity of 75%), is already a current threat in the Arabian golf and in coastal subtropical locations (Bolleter et al. 2021; Casanueva et al. 2020).

With the urgency of this ecological crisis but also with the democratic and social crises in France (and elsewhere) in mind (Chapter 2), I hope to show in this chapter that the methodological dimension of sweaty commons provides an important analytical grip for us to describe the sweaty situations, as well as finding ways out of them. The sweaty conceptual approach I develop enables stories of bodies that experience both the heat stress and the more cooled ways of living when they resist global warming and social, gendered inequality.

I begin the chapter with Sara Ahmed (2017, 2019) who draws on Audre Lorde when they propose "sweaty concepts" as a way to show how minority bodies experience discrimination and social inequalities. As such, Ahmed provides an intriguing starting point. But in line with the insufficiencies of what I have referred to as the "freezing" analyses of neoliberalism in Chapter 2, I want to add a more affirmative dimension to their negative ways of working with concepts. Searching for such cooling, life-giving attributes of sweat that point to openings and possibilities, I turn to Astrida Neimanis (2017) who – together with Anna Tsing (2015) – provides me with

some “critical-creative” methodological tools (Neimanis 2017, 63). Yet different from both Ahmed’s sweaty literary figures and Neimanis’ artistic-speculative way of conceptualizing, sweaty commons involve a particular set of ethnographic methods that treat the *gilets jaunes* as “co-conceptualizers”, which may be akin to what political theorist Romand Coles refers to as “proto-theorists” (Coles 2016, 12). So, I end the chapter with Karen Barad (2007, 2014), Donna Haraway (1988, 1997, 2016), and Anna Tsing again (2005, 2015), who enable me to propose three steps that lay the foundation for producing theoretical-ethnographic sweaty concepts.

Sweat as Critique

In modern Western cultures, we do what we can to hide sweat, because we have learned that it connotes disgust and bodily discomfort (Everts 2022, 75; Stolberg 2012). Using deodorant, installing air conditioning, and taking showers are actions that help us prevent sweat and smell. The distressing and negative sides of sweat are what Sara Ahmed turns to with the idea of sweaty concepts (Ahmed 2014a, 2017). Sweaty concepts describe the uncomfortable modes of sweat that some bodies, especially marginalized bodies, experience. You sweat more when you are assigned to live a minority life, writes Ahmed. On a general level, this means that sweat becomes a witness of a political struggle (Ahmed 2010, 39). Sweaty concepts generate knowledge on how it feels to inhabit a body in a

world made for other bodies, such as being a woman[36] in a society that values and prioritizes men (Ahmed 2017, 14). In other words, sweaty concepts direct us toward less articulated, hidden, and silenced bodies.

To more fully understand Ahmed's use of sweaty concepts, let us briefly turn to each of the three books that constitute their (sweaty) trilogy: *The Promise of Happiness* (2010), *Willful Subjects* (2014), and *What's the Use: On the Uses of Use* (2019). In these books, Ahmed follows the ways political concepts have been developed in the history of ideas, but also how they are exercised, used, and lived in sweaty everyday lives, such as in literary novels (Ahmed 2019, 3).

Beginning with *The Promise of Happiness*, Ahmed studies how the concept of happiness justifies oppression of non-conforming lives. They argue that happiness is associated with living a heterosexual life organized around the nuclear family structure of a husband, wife, and children, and this promise of happiness makes non-adhering lives become judged as unhappy (Ahmed 2010, 2). By following the exclusionary effects of the concept of happiness, Ahmed takes on the hidden perspectives, which – when their stories are put at the forefront – come to contest the less sweaty notion of happiness: the "easy" life with less resistance, less harassment, and less being put into question (Ahmed 2010, 17). The way Ahmed more concretely engages with the sweaty history of the concept of happiness is by

[36] Including women of color, homosexual women, disabled women, transwomen, and so on.

turning to “unhappy figures”, such as feminist killjoys, queers, and migrants that appear in literature (Ahmed 2010, Chapter 2-4). Ahmed takes Radclyffe Hall’s novel *The Well of Loneliness* as an illuminative example. In this story, Stephen Gordon and Mary Lewellyn are partners but their relationship is more burdensome than others. One passage of the book explains it in a clear way when Stephen and Mary do not receive an invitation for the family Christmas party. They are not welcome because the family wants to protect its happiness and reputation. The lesbian couple is, in other words, causing unhappiness because queerness is regarded as something wretched in society. In the end, Stephen gives up on Mary due to the burdens of their love, which – in Ahmed’s words – makes the story become yet another story about miserable queer love (Ahmed 2010, 96).

Later on, in *Willful Subjects,* Ahmed develops the argument further by showing how the concept of will designates some bodies in pejorative ways. An example of being willful in the wrong way is when girls are disobedient. Here, willfulness becomes a diagnosis. Ahmed draws this example from a literary figure in the Grimm story *The Willful Child* as a point of reference (Ahmed 2014b, 1). In the story, a girl does not do as her mother wishes and God lets her become so ill that she dies. When buried, the girl’s arm nevertheless keeps stretching upwards from the ground, demonstrating her will even after her death. This continues until her mother finally strikes the girl’s arm with a rod. From this dramatic story, Ahmed suggests that the willful child might not be pathological but incapable of

conforming to the exclusionary norms in society that her mother upholds. This, then, points to another understanding of the concept of will, in which it becomes clear how will is lived in sweaty ways (with mortal implications!). The point is that tracing how the concept of will has developed in the history of ideas, without also turning to the lived experiences of queer bodies, would not make the sweaty backsides of the concept appear. Thus, adding on descriptions of how bodies (either in literature or in fieldwork) willfully disobey straight norms informs sweaty concepts in crucial ways by showing how deviation is experienced violently.

In *What's the Use: On the Uses of Use* – the last part of the trilogy published nearly a decade since the first book – Ahmed illuminates the exclusionary sides of the concept of "use". They do this by looking for what is regarded as useless, which they exemplify with the case of a staircase that is useless for a person in wheelchair. Thus, what is useful to some is useless to others (Ahmed 2019, 67). Use can also reach a tipping-point and become overuse. A natural environment can be overused; it can be used all up. In short, the sweaty concept of use helps us to see that use, overuse, and unuse may have ecological impacts on top of its social implications. In my reading, we thus see that Ahmed in more recent work gives an account of sweat that also becomes more-than-human (a landscape sweats when it is overused), corresponding to the fact that sweat is a multispecies concern – even if they do not develop sweaty concepts to the same ecological extent I find appropriate.

Whereas Ahmed's recent broadening of sweaty concepts is productive, because it expands sweaty bodies to become a more-than-human concern, I want to contest their sole focus on critique and negativity. Ahmed writes that an environment "sweats" when it is used up but I want to argue that this way of using sweat may run the risk of dismissing the more generative attributes of sweat. Put differently, Ahmed seems to forget that when plants sweat, they thrive! The problem, as I see it, is that they leave us in an affective situation that focuses on lacks and injustices rather than also highlighting the possibilities of challenging this state of affairs. Could there be more ambivalence at stake in their readings, I want to ask. Some openings or perhaps even a tiny hope? For example *In The Well of Loneliness*, the relationship between Stephen and Mary may not only embody a miserable queer love but perhaps a more empowering reading as well? Or the girl in *The Willful Child* may not be completely doomed to fight the norms of society; does she manage to shake something after all? And could we also turn to alternative – more ecological – uses of natural environments rather than only turning to instances of overuse? In my view, Ahmed comes to tell a one-sided story of grief and mourning that excludes the many creative world-making side stories, that activists, such as the *gilets jaunes*, create all the time.[37]

[37] In "A Killjoy manifesto" in *Living a Feminist Life* (2017, 235-250), Ahmed emphasizes the transformative potentials of killing the exclusionary joy of majority bodies. Thus, I am not saying that Ahmed does not adhere to an emancipation project. Rather, I am questioning the way in which they do this.

To tell a multifaceted story of the *gilets jaunes*, one must thus arguably expand Ahmed's focus on sweat as negative critique to also illuminate the affirmative modes we know sweat entails (without forgetting the pain and suffering of contemporary politics). That is why I add "world making" elements to Ahmed's "world-breaking"/"kill-joy" meanings of sweat (Ahmed 2010b, 50; 2017, 235-68).[38] The way in which I think of sweat offers a possibility for creating a certain space of maneuver between these orientations of negative (breaking) and affirmative (making) critiques. I turn to the latter mode now.

Sweat as Affirmative Critique

Before I say more (than I have already said in Chapter 2) about what I mean by world-making, it might be helpful and fun (!) to explore the joyful dimensions of sweat as part of our endeavor to think of sweat in affirmative ways too. In *The Joy of Sweat* (2022) – a book I also drew on in Chapter 1 – Sarah Everts studies how some humans find pleasure in the uncanny liquid of sweat.[39] Everts argues that sweat is a bodily fluid that in some cultures ties together societies, such as in pre-modern communities where the smell of sweat was comforting and good, because it meant sociality and safety. When we

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[38] Again, see Honig's discussion of Butler's "lamenting" implications in their later works, as Butler is an important source of inspiration to Ahmed (Ahmed 2015, 2016; Honig 2013, 2021, 10-11). Moreover, see Rosi Braidotti's implicit critique of Ahmed in her discussion of "feminisms of joy" versus "feminisms of kill-joy" (Braidotti and Hlavajova 2018, 221-24).
[39] Everts focuses mostly on human sweat but she also writes about animal sweat (Everts 2022, Chapter 2).

smell each other, we know that we are not alone – something humans and animals share (Everts 2022, 74). Everts suggests that the animalism of sweat – the sweaty connections across species – makes the fluid become negatively valued in Western modern societies. The associations of sweat, argues Everts, such as "to sweat like a pig," make us – in Western contexts – view sweat as something vulgar and backward. Evert's venture is to upend these meanings so we can begin to appreciate sweat as an embodied form of enlightenment that teaches politics such as of society formations (Everts 2022, 75). With the concrete cases of Finnish sauna cultures where community bonds take place by means of collective sweat séances, and popular sweat dating events where people match by means of their sweat odors, Everts shows how sweat in some Western places also brings joy today (Everts 2022, 90-93; 113-14).

The joyful elements of sweat that relate to community formations are relevant for the affirmative world-making forces of sweaty commons. As we shall see in Part II, the *gilets jaunes* sweat joyfully – in various intensities – when they build counter-communities to neoliberalism. By joyful, I do not mean a naïve optimism or a worriless sense of happiness. Rather, I understand joyfulness as a collective energy – such as the social bond of cohesion Jeanpierre mentions takes place on the roundabouts (Chapter 2) – among the *gilets jaunes* that makes them continue to resist. A sense of belonging (to a new world) they do not want to give up on. Yet this energetic level of resistance varies: sometimes the *gilets jaunes* are exhausted; at other times, they feel a high level of energy to fight for a better world. Thinking about

sweaty joyfulness in this communal way corresponds with both Donna Haraway and Anna Tsing's way of thinking about critical theory as an enterprise of collective critical-affirmative world-making.

According to Haraway, critical thinking must try to provide new ways of imagining sustainable worlds going forward, and Tsing's definition – which I have already introduced in Chapter 2 – describes world making thinking as drawing on "practical activities of making lives" that interrupt common sense and show that "other worlds are possible" (Haraway 2016; Tsing 2015, 21-22; 292). Such worldlings, Tsing continues, consider livability as the possibility of common life on a human-disturbed earth (Tsing 2015, 163). By "human-disturbed earth", Tsing refers to the same crises we are interested in here: global warming and social, gendered inequality. The disturbed earth of these heated ecological and social disasters – or the "damaged planet" as she refers to it elsewhere[40] – should not prevent us from carrying on with developing theories that provide possibilities for humans and nonhumans to live, thrive, – and sweat we may want to add. Turning to human-nonhuman relations, such as human-butterfly and human-mushroom kinship, without overseeing the (social, gendered) injustices that exist within species, both Haraway and Tsing show that world making theories tell stories of human and nonhuman entanglements that enlarge what we thought was possible (Haraway 2016; Tsing 2015).

[40] (Tsing et al. 2017).

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Such more-than-human stories are not easy to tell but speculative modes of thinking can help us provoke attachments to nonhumans in new ways. In the Prologue for example, Mimosa Echard amplified a more-than-human sweaty world by inventing a conversation between an orchard and a bee. Like Echard's speaking animal and plant creatures, Tsing plays with the world-making potentials of anthropomorphized worm critters (Tsing 2015, 156). Her specific puzzle for enacting this grip is a severe mushroom degrowth in Japan. Tsing wonders how to disseminate the knowledge of this challenge in affective-mobilizing ways and imagining a nematode to be a speaking creature becomes one such way. The critter says, "Call me *Bursaphelenchus xylophilus*. I'm a tiny, wormlike creature, a nematode, and I spend most of my time crunching the insides of pine trees." (Tsing 2015, 156).

Tsing does not invent this parodic scene "for fun".[41] In vivid anthropomorphizing ways – that make us remember and care for the agency of worms, and trees – Tsing shows that nonhuman knowledge is key to ecological insights in social sciences. Turning to nonhumans as protagonists in our stories brings about important world making components, as we come to think about how more-than-human lives entangle and enlarge the scope for alternative worlds. Nematodes kill pine trees and without these trees, matsutake cannot live. In sum, the

[41] See also (Bennett 2010; Dichman 2023b; Tønder 2014).

trees and the mushrooms live in a symbiotic, interspecies relationship, in which humans take part too.[42]

Nonhumans with human attributes is only one creative tool among many others in order to think about contemporary political challenges as well as of new ways of living (Alaimo 2010; Bennett 2010; Haraway 2016; Neimanis 2017; Skiveren 2020).[43] For example, Neimanis invents the grip of proxy-stories that sensitize multispecies connections (Neimanis 2017, 55). Drawing on Grosz and Deleuze's approaches to concepts, Neimanis uses proxy-stories as a tool to conceptualize hydrocommons in a way that points to more-than-human possibilities for radical new ways of being. A concept, such as hydrocommons – which I have already introduced in Chapter 1 – is a matter of becoming because it amplifies new worldlings (Neimanis 2017, 168). Or, in Deleuze's (and Guattari's) own words: "…[N]ew concepts must relate to our problems, to our history, and, above all, to our becomings" (Deleuze and Guattari 1994, 27).[44]

In line with this thinking, Neimanis turns to the imaginary forces of art. She writes, "I can engage artworks and allow my own bodily uptake of them to open glimpses into other kinds of imaginaries" (Neimanis 2017, 171).[45] Specifically, Neimanis draws on a piece of

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[42] Tsing also shows how different people – classed, gendered, racialized, and colonized – are involved in the journey of the mushrooms.
[43] These tools are not "new". For example in the 1990's, Bruno Latour experimented with living train wagons and speaking motors in *Aramis* (Latour 1996, 59; 81-82).
[44] See also (Deleuze and Guattari 2013).
[45] This does not mean that Neimanis not also turns to scientific facts. For example, in her conceptualization of "bodies of water", she draws on the chemical composition of water and the ecological hydrological cycles (Neimanis 2017, 59).

artwork created by the Anishinaabe performance artist Rebecca Belmore. In Belmore's video-installation *Fountain* (2005),[46] an Indigenous woman stands in the ocean in her all-soaked garments. Neimanis writes that *Fountain* asks questions about situated, precarious, and colonialized embodiment that is inseparable from water. The woman's body is embedded in water and according to Neimanis, this water symbolizes the violent history of colonial Canada (Neimanis 2017, 153). As such, art can make us sense injustices in new registers and proxy-stories, because it can extend our thinking with creative modes of grasping the world in new, enlarged ways.

Similar to Neimanis, I turn to the world-making and "proxy-storying" forces of art as a means to provoke new sweaty becomings. We have already seen this in the Prologue and I continue to explore the tool, notably in Chapter 6. Sweaty commons is thus a concept that is constituted by insights from artistic proxy-stories, science and physiology, as well as cultural and political theory. This is how I develop the concept of sweaty commons in parallel to Neimanis' concept of hydrocommons (and bodies of water). Yet Neimanis does not work ethnographically and sweaty commons therefore add crucial tangible lived experiences of political resistance to the more artistic ways of conceptualizing. Those include the political practices of assembling in alternative ways (Chapter 4) and cultivating, cooking,

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As we have seen in Chapter 1, biologists and chemists also inform the way I think of sweat. In my view, this is a new materialist way of thinking.

[46] *Fountain* was originally shown at the Venice Art Biennale in 2005.

and eating more sustainably with care for the more-than-human (Chapter 5 and Chapter 6). In a world of decreasing support for liberal democracy due to increasing social inequality and ecological crises, we must arguably attend to how actual bodies sweat in both critical/negative and affirmative/joyful ways. In sum, the goal of sweaty commons is to create the best conditions for precarious bodies to sweat in less painful and more heat releasing ways. In my view, we must include as many disciplines and tools as possible to do this. Ethnography is one I find particularly important for this task.

Political Theory as an Ethnographic Enterprise of Sweaty Concepts

With tools of anthropomorphization and proxy-stories, the ethnographic work I undertake does not belong to classical anthropological political theory (Herzog and Zacka 2019; Longo and Zacka 2019). Exploring the state of more conventional ethnographic works in political theory nonetheless serves as a stepping-stone for considering my alternative more-than-human ethnographic enterprise.

In a letter in the *American Political Science Review* (2019), political scientists Matthew Longo and Bernardo Zacka argue that ethnography improves the discipline of political theory in three crucial ways: ethnography can uncover new topics, it can advance concepts, and it can attune to hidden forms of harms (Longo and Zacka 2019). Based on this, Longo and Zacka write that ethnography

can bring "[N]ew life to political phenomena that have been thinned out by our existing analytic frameworks" (Longo and Zacka 2019, 1067; 1070).[47] To do this, they argue, we must turn to the marginalized strands of political theory, such as feminist and decolonial theories, that already draw on ethnography to form their complex social critiques (Longo and Zacka 2019, 1067; Stoler 1995). In this way, an ethnographic turn is a democratic turn: our political theories become products of collective and heterogeneous thinking, which makes them better equipped for saying something meaningful about how a plurality of bodies experience the political world we live in.[48]

With our specific case of the *gilets jaunes* in France, we can say that, in a time of rising social inequalities and democratic crises, we must include the voices and bodies of those who experience these challenges the most (such as the *gilets jaunes*). We see that the concept of sweaty commons enacts all of the three advantages Longo and Zacka point to: I turn to the *gilets jaunes'* resistance practices to advance the current philosophical concepts of the commons by

[47] Longo and Zacka do not pretend to be *the* frontrunners of an ethnographic turn in political theory (Longo and Zacka 2019, 1066). A number of political theory studies have used ethnographic methods before (e.g. Coles 2016; Herzog and Zacka 2019; Mahmood 2012; Pachirat 2009, 2013, 2018). In more traditional methodological political science terms, we may also frame this endeavor as a revalorization of case studies (Flyvbjerg 1988; 2006).
[48] In philosopher Isabelle Stengers' paradigm of collective sense making, she emphasizes how activists provide knowledge that differs from specialists and intellectual thinkers because activists per definition are engaged with politics in embodied ways. She even mentions the *gilets jaunes* as activists who are important to include (Stengers 2020b, 2020a).

including actual gendered and racialized experiences of how to live together in new ways.

Yet sweaty commons do more than that. From the general point of the democratizing potential of ethnography, let us turn to how the particular ethnographic approach in this dissertation addresses ecological crises too.[49] First, we may say that more-than-human ethnographic approaches are even rarer than classical ethnographies in political theory, but some political theorist have articulated the need for these kinds of analyses. For example Romand Coles writes that, "…[political theorists] need a collaborative effort that cares…for the ecology of bodily movements…as a condition of possibility for political theory…to contribute to intensifications of democracy that can journey beyond enclosures, insane inequalities, and ecological catastrophe to cocreate commonwealth" (Coles 2016, 14).[50] And Anna Tsing – who, however, is not a trained political theorist – adds a crucial point to Coles' argument as she, among others, identifies a lack of ethnographic knowledge in much contemporary new materialist and posthumanist theory.[51] She writes, "[P]osthumanists [such as Neimanis]…tell us that philosophy is transformed [due to climate change]—but too rarely move beyond

[49] Within anthropology, I am mostly inspired by the sub-discipline of environmental anthropology, which is also referred to as more-than-human/multispecies anthropology. This tradition foregrounds the role of nonhumans as communicative, sentient, and world-making actors (Chao 2022, 8-9). Scholars such as Anna Tsing (2015), Eduardo Kohn (2013), Thom van Dooren (2023), and Vinciane Despret (2019) belong to this tradition (Chao 2022).
[50] See also (Ejsing 2021; Tønder 2020).
[51] See also anthropologists Eduardo Kohn and Sophie Chao's (similar) critiques (Chao 2022; Kohn 2015).

philosophy. To study invasive species, for example, they describe metaphors of invasiveness (e.g. Chew and Hamilton 2011). Interspecies encounters don't seem to matter… They tell of changing concepts, but rarely of the landscapes in which we are forced to live (see Castree 2014)" (Tsing, in press, 261).[52]

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So far, I have mentioned numerous political theorists who draw on classical or more-than-human ethnography but as we know, they remain a minority group within the field of political theory as a whole. This makes me want to ask what the ethnographic turn moves away from. Or put differently: how do central majority sub-fields within contemporary political theory develop political concepts if not through ethnographic encounters? It would certainly be reductive to claim that central political theory traditions, such as neo-Kantian thinking (Rawls 2003), discursive communication theory (Habermas 2001), and poststructuralist thinking (Butler 2011; Foucault 1995), do not engage with the empirical world when they develop concepts of justice, deliberative democracy, and docile and precarious bodies. Yet in my view, they do so in ways that are too abstract, disembodied, simplified, discursive, and/or universalistic.

It is clearly the case that Rawls and Habermas do not allow any embodied experience to play an active role in their democratic theories. And even though the theories of Foucault and Butler entail some elements of ethnography, they do not enact an ethnographic

[52] *Field Guide to the More-than-human Anthropocene*, Stanford University Press.

turn to the extent I find appropriate. Foucault's use of historical archives and thick descriptions make his theoretical works grounded and situated, but his lack of first-hand ethnographic encounters and his emphasis on discourse arguably prevent him from reaching the more embodied accounts that ethnographically grounded theories provide (Foucault 1990, 1995). In the words of anthropologist Ann Stoler, "Our [anthropologists'] ethnographic sensibilities have pushed us to challenge the limits of Foucault's discursive emphasis…to flesh out the localized, quotidian practices of people…" (Stoler 1995, 2). The same goes for Butler, who turns to letters, films, and interviews but still does not formulate ethnographically rich theories (Butler 2016, 2011; 2010). The fact that Foucault and Butler do not engage with ethnography themselves does not, however, imply that they oppose political theories that are ethnographically grounded. Rather, we may say that their works share the democratic objective Longo and Zacka mention as being crucial for ethnography, when they write that (feminist and decolonial) ethnography includes marginalized perspectives by attuning to hidden forms of harm (Longo and Zacka 2019, 1067). Turning to abject bodies, such as prisoners, disabled bodies, bodies of color, and queers, both Foucault and Butler follow some of the democratizing aim of ethnographic political theory – without them being ethnographers themselves.

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We now move from the subject matter of ethnographic political theory to the methodological procedures of conceptualizing sweatily, which is, again, an unconventional way to conceptualize in political

theory. To see how this is the case, we begin with Walter Bryce Gallie's definition of concepts from the 1950's, which has become a common conceptual ground in the discipline (Adcock and Collier 2001; Connolly 1983; Freeden 1996a, 1994; Woods 1984).[53] In the paper, "Essentially Contestable Concepts," Gallie introduces a conceptual approach that stresses the various applications and interpretations of political concepts (Gallie 1956). To capture the unstable character of concepts and to stress that there is no stable definition of a concept, Gallie defines concepts as being essentially contestable, by which he means that the meaning of concepts depends on the internal morphological structure as well as on the external context of application (Gallie 1956, 169-70).[54]

William Connolly and Michael Freeden have subsequently expanded and refined Gallie's understanding of concepts. In *The Terms of Political Discourse* (1983), Connolly refers to Gallie when he writes that there is a dispute about the proper use of political concepts, and he takes the concept of democracy as an example to show the complexity of its internal structure and of its disputable operationalism. To encapsulate the contestable character of the concept of democracy, Connolly defines it as a "cluster concept." A cluster concept has a broad range of criteria for application, which makes its definition open (Connolly 1983, 14). To make the concept of democracy become operational, one must point to the complex

[53] Note that both Rawls and Habermas disagree with Gallie's approach to concepts.
[54] The role of the empirical context is particularly interesting for the development of political theory as an ethnographic enterprise of sweaty concepts.

connections of a host of other concepts that makes democracy have a particular meaning in a specific composition (Connolly 1983, 16).

This approach to concepts is intuitively easy to grasp. It is not surprising that what is referred to as democracy in France means something different in another country. This is also called the "travelling problem" of concepts (Sartori 1970, 1034). Yet within France, different meanings of democracy also exist. In Chapter 2, we have seen that while it for some people means presidential elections (such as Macron and his supporters' understanding), it means popular power and extraparliamentary participation to others, including to the *gilets jaunes* and their idea of the commons. To use Connolly's terms, we may say that the cluster concept of democracy points to an internal composition with other concepts such as liberalism and representation for the former understanding of democracy, while it, for the latter, points to concepts such as popular sovereignty and participation.

Freeden takes Connolly's idea of cluster concepts in a morphological direction by developing an analytical framework where concepts make up political ideologies (Freeden 1994, 15). For example, we see that democracy, freedom, and individualism form a liberal ideology, while democracy, equality, and collectivism form a socialist ideology (Freeden 1996b, Part II; IV). Freeden clarifies the internal structures of political ideologies by categorizing their concepts as either core-, adjacent-, or peripheral concepts, collectively forming a semantic field of a political ideology (Freeden 1996b, Part I, Chapter 2). For our sweaty conceptual concern, the peripheral concepts are most

important, as they connect the core- and adjacent concepts to the empirical contexts (Freeden 1994, 157-161; 2015). Important events – such as the *gilets jaunes* – thus renegotiate political concepts and change the composition of ideologies. It is clear that the *gilets jaunes* have affected the discussion of democracy in France, even at some point making Macron's liberal idea of democracy take a step toward a participatory understanding with the initiatives of the citizens' assembly on democratic challenges (*Le grand débat*) and the climate citizens' assembly (*La convention citoyenne pour le climat*).

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We can now say that political concepts are relational and changeable depending on other concepts and on how they apply in the political world. While political theorists have developed the internal contestability of conceptual configurations thoroughly, the external contestability – that is relevant for sweaty concepts informed by ethnographic knowledge – is less evolved. In the remainder of the chapter, I present my attempt to fill this gap by constructing a conceptual procedure that is – somehow amusingly – inspired by the physiological stages of sweat. In the first step, I suggest that the political theorist enters the field and turns to the heated politics that takes place in actual bodies. In the second step, while being in the field, I argue that it is important to look for sweaty frictions and differences rather than "smooth situations", before the political theorist finally exists the field and returns to her desk in the third step to finish the process of conceptualization, which makes her body temperature decrease yet again.

Step 1: **the Heated Process of Entering the Field**

As a political theorist, it was a heated affair for me to enter the field. For example in Scene 1 (Chapter 1), when I demonstrated with Louise in the beginning of my fieldwork, the situation was not only sweaty due to the effects of teargas and potential police violence. It was also heated in the sense that I was outside of my comfort zone: I was in the process of getting to know Louise and it felt as if I had put myself in an uneasy (yet stimulating) position with many questions and uncertainties. How was I to engage with the *gilets jaunes*? How was I to become part of this activist group in Montreuil, learning from their lived experiences in a political theory Phd-project?

The reason for rephrasing these questions (that I have already addressed in Chapter 1) is to stress the fact that entering the field is a sticky experience, from which numerous methodic considerations follow (Chadwick 2021). Expanding on Sophie Chao's rules of thumb for undertaking responsible ethnographic research (again, Chapter 1), I find it fruitful to add Donna Haraway and Karen Barad's points about diffractive and response-able research. Diffraction, which Haraway in general terms defines as an approach for heterogeneous history making (Haraway 1997), looks for complexity when entering the field. A diffractive approach to the world (and to the field) consists of opening up, breaking apart in different directions, and identifying differences within bodies (but also similarities across bodies) (Barad 2014, 168-170). As already mentioned, my focus on Louise, Fatima, and Alice is an attempt to show the differences within the *gilets jaunes*. These three women

demonstrate the variegated trajectories of multiple ethnicities, generations, and social-economic conditions that play out among the women (but also men) in the movement. Despite their differences, they sweat together, as they resist the sweaty commons conditions.

Diffraction also sees research as a performative enterprise that creates partial and situated knowledge, in which the researcher is part of the reality she studies and in the stories she tells (Barad 2007, 89; Haraway 1988; Schadler 2019). One way to describe how I practically seek to implement the idea of diffraction is by complying to Haraway's second notion of "response-able" scientific conduct (which is close to Chao's responsible research). This means that I commit myself to study relations from a perspective of radical curiosity and openness toward the phenomenon without forgetting my own impact on the field (Haraway 2016, 34-35).[55] As an example of a response-able researcher, Haraway takes Anna Tsing, who – different from both Barad and Haraway – is a trained ethnographer. According to Haraway, Tsing navigates her fields response-ably (and diffractively I want to add) by curiously searching for different forms of agencies, unexpected liveliness, and unfinished practices of living (Haraway 2016, 37). In other words, we may say that she looks for critical-affirmative world-makings.

[55] Haraway also refers to this as a "caring" scientific practice (Haraway 2016, 37). For more on this see also (María Puig de la Bellacasa 2017).

Step 2: Looking for Sweaty Bodies in the Field

Tsing enacts this when she looks for movements and assemblages beyond human agency in the field (Tsing 2015, 14). With her own term, this is a practice of "arts of noticing" that turns to even the smallest things we typically do not notice, such as a mushroom (or sweat) that may turn out to be an important story-teller (Tsing 2015, 17). One thing I would like to add – or perhaps just make more explicit – is that the arts of noticing, I practice, looks for *sweaty* movements and assemblages. This may be close to what Tsing refers to as "friction" (Tsing 2005). Friction, Tsing writes, is a grip of worldly encounter with a sticky materiality (Tsing 2005, 2-4). By sticky materiality,[56] She refers to awkward, unequal, unstable, yet creative interactions (Tsing 2015, 242; 248; 254; 2005, 205).

The point for me is that a too "smooth" fieldwork without frictions and surprises remains unsatisfying, as it risks overlooking conflicts, disagreement, and other forms of heterogeneity that are at stake in all political situations. To avoid this, I argue that we have to reach beyond the world of words, as many such sticky things are not verbally articulated, which sweat shows (and further comes to demonstrate in Chapter 4, Chapter 5, and Chapter 6). This speaks to Tsing's way of thinking when she, for example, studies the practice of cooking while enacting arts of noticing. "The trick of cooking is in the bodily performance which isn't easy to explain… Here, it is about

[56] Sara Ahmed also refers to a sticky materiality when they write about sweat (Ahmed 2014a, 2017).

detecting the traces of the not-yet articulated common agendas" (Tsing 2015, 248; 254). In Chapter 5, I will dive further into the seemingly unnoticeable practice of cooking and show how it says a lot about contemporary politics (crises as well as ways out of them) without using many words.

Step 3: the Cooling Process of Exiting the Field

Now, the final stage for political theory to become an ethnographic enterprise of sweaty concepts is the cooling phase. Here, the fieldwork is processed and the political theorist returns to her desk to read and write (while probably continuing a correspondence with the informants by phone, email, or on shorter trips back to the field). At this stage but also before, concepts come up. During fieldwork, concepts can come up explicitly in conversations with collaborators, but they can also emerge more implicitly.

In my plus-one year in the field with the *gilets jaunes*, I learned that the concept of the commons is key to their democratic engagement – explicitly articulated in the general assembly (Chapter 4), implicitly enacted in the community kitchen (Chapter 5), as well as in the peach orchards (Chapter 6). With this concept at hand, I can now consult different political theories on the commons. This process of moving back and forth between embodied encounters and more abstract political theory becomes productive, as political theory evaluates "blind spots" in the ethnographic material, while ethnographic knowledge simultaneously corrects the world of political theory.

Conclusion

We can conclude by saying that the concept of sweaty commons differs from Ahmed's literary concepts, such as happiness, willfulness, and use, as well as from Neimanis' artistic-speculative concept of hydro-commons (on top of Rawls, Habermas, Foucault, and Butler's conceptual work and Gallie, Connolly, and Freeden's ways of conceptualizing). Enacting a more-than-human ethnographic turn grounded in the actual practices of the *gilets jaunes*, sweaty commons inform of global warming, of social, gendered inequality, and of neoliberal democracy, as these issues are experienced and resisted in critical-affirmative ways. Sweaty commons – and hopefully more new sweaty concepts to come – emerge in processes that move through hot and cool stages, in which theory and ethnography interchange, inform, and improve each other.

I opened the chapter with Sara Ahmed and I return to them here as a closure that underscores the feminist becomings of sweaty concepts. From Chapter 1, we know that the turn to bodies in political theory is a feminist endeavor (Grosz 1994). Grosz and others made us aware that, whereas the mind has been associated with a masculine attribute, the body has belonged to women (Ahmed, 2017; Beauvoir, 1988; Grosz, 1994; Haraway, 1988; Plumwood, 2003). As political theory is a concept-generating enterprise, this also goes for conceptualization, which has been seen as a masculine activity, in which matters of embodiment, women, and the politics of gender have been much excluded (Ahmed 2010; Braidotti 2011; Butler 2011, iix).

As a response to these lacks and dismissals, the development of sweaty concepts is a feminist enterprise that turns to bodies, as they come in classed, gendered, racialized, and more-than-human forms and movements. As such, sweaty concepts, including the concept of sweaty commons, describe how it is to experience political challenges (stages of heat) and how we can address those by creating more sustainable and inclusive societies (stages of heat releasing).

It is now time to more thoroughly turn to the *gilets jaunes'* sweaty political world makings of the commons to add affirmative layers to the critical sweaty commons conditions we have developed hitherto (Chapter 1 and Chapter 2). This is the task for the next three chapters, where each opens with ethnographic scenes from my fieldwork. Putting an end to this chapter, and to Part I, thus means that we now turn our gaze toward new sweaty stories of alternative world-makings (Part II).

Part II

Cooling World-Makings of the Commons

"From Devastation to Wonder"[57]

Allow me to remind the reader that the dissertation is divided into two parts, each doing a specific kind of work. In Part I, I established the overall theoretical (Chapter 1) and conceptual (Chapter 3) framework of sweaty commons. On top of this, I discussed the social, ecological, and democratic crises the *gilets jaunes* mobilize against in France (Chapter 2). According to sociologist, Immanuel Wallerstein, a period of transition always follows from such crises (Wallerstein 2004), and the *gilets jaunes* offer useful knowledge on how such a transition may look like.

In Part II, which we transition into now, we explore this potential by turning to three world-making practices. The identification of the crises in Part I thus works as a steppingstone for turning to the practices of rebuilding democracy in the next three chapters. Doing so, we fill out the concept of sweaty commons with a combination of lived experiences and theoretical ideas. The practices we turn to are: the general assembly (Scene 4, Scene 5, and Scene 6 in Chapter 4), the community kitchen (Scene 7 in

[57] Tsing et al. (2023) refer to themselves as *Slough Sayers* (a writer collective of women of color). "Wonder" should not be mistaken with miracles but suggests the meaning of surprise and curiosity, which may be similar to how Jane Bennett uses the term (Bennett 2016).

Chapter 5), and the cultivation of peach trees (Scene 8 and Scene 9 in Chapter 6).

In each of the three forthcoming chapters in Part II, I pose a main question: how can the commons be understood as a pluralist democratic form of self-organization (Chapter 4)? How can it become socially inclusive with various genders and species as its members (Chapter 5)? And how can it inspire an ecologically attached community of not “only” human and nonhumans, but of more-than-human bodies (Chapter 6)? Thus, the collective task of the chapters is to reconfigure the commons as a democratic, socially inclusive, and ecological way of resisting the sweaty commons conditions. Therefore, we now move from “matters of devastation” (Part I) to “matters of wonder” (Part II).

4

The General Assembly

Scene 4

This scene takes place in the community hall in Montreuil the first time I participate in the *gilets jaunes'* general assembly.

Seven people sit around an oval table in one of the rooms on the first floor in the community hall. All are wearing coats. It is cold, the hall has leaky windows. On the table is an open bottle of red wine, a half-full plastic jar of orange juice, a bag of peanuts, and a piece of cheese on a cutting board. Everyone has a glass filled with either wine or juice and the bag of peanuts now circulates. The room is messy with different things laying around: textile patches, posters, outdoor equipment, used coffee thermos, pencils, and pieces of papers. These various objects tell the story of a room with multiple functionalities: it is a place for sewing, painting, and preparing outdoor activities. Tonight, the

room hosts the *gilets jaunes'* weekly general assembly (*l'assemblée générale*).

The general assembly does not always take place in the community hall – and it also shifts between taking place on Mondays and Tuesdays to attract as many different people as possible – but the *gilets jaunes* feel particularly at home in the community hall. It is the same place that hosts their community kitchen on Wednesdays. Other places, such as squads in the neighborhood, are less familiar to the group but there they meet new people from other social movements, such as "The Association of Paper-less People", *Extinction Rebellion*, and the ecofeminist collective *Les Bombes Atomiques*.

*

Samuel, Paul, François, Gregorio, Laurent, Anne, and I are the ones present tonight. Louise is absent, she looks after her grandchildren this evening but she normally attends the general assembly. Some of the *gilets jaunes* describe her as the "boss", because she often takes the lead in discussions.

The meeting tonight is unusual due to my presence. Without asking me too many questions (it may be obvious that I feel uncomfortable with too much attention), they introduce me to the main ideas of their general assembly.

During weekly meetings, they discuss how they can transform Montreuil – but also France more generally – to become more democratic, socially inclusive, and ecological.

Paul asks me if I have heard of the French philosopher Pierre Dardot. He will send me a document, he says, where I can learn about the most important ideas of the commons (*le commun*),[58] as Dardot – and now also the *gilets jaunes* – conceptualizes it. "Dardot's ideas of the commons shape how we organize in the general assembly," says Paul.

Anne supplements Paul and tells me that the *gilets jaunes* also arrange seminars with Dardot. During these meetings, they develop and share knowledge on the intellectual and practical concerns of the commons. The next meeting with Dardot, Anne says, takes place the last Sunday this month (Saturdays are reserved for demonstrations) – "you should come!"

---

[58] Dardot refers to "*le commun*" in singular: the common and not the common*s*. The reason for this is, according to another commons scholar, Alexandros Kioupkiolis, to signal that Dardot's contemporary use of the concept is not a return to the past (the commons) but to a new alternative future (Kioupkiois 2020, 90). I choose to follow the feminist commons scholars – whom we turn to in Chapter 5 – by referring to the democratic model as the common*s* (without suggesting a return to the past) (Federici 2018; Gibson-Graham 2016; Shiva 2016).

“Speaking of Sundays”, Paul continues, “on this day we normally meet up at the city hall square for our *point fixe.* Some of us meet at the community hall before to make coffee and to bring chairs, a table, and our brochures. We then spend some hours chatting with the people who stop by. We tell them about our group, about the commons, and we invite them to join us.”

*

The next point on the agenda is the 150 anniversary of the Paris Commune.[59] Samuel – a mid-twenty years old *gilet jaune* from Jura whom I had met through Alice – mentions that he wants to arrange a workshop to prepare posters. Paul says they should occupy the same roundabout as they did in the beginning of the revolt, and Anne wants to discuss what food they should serve during the event. They talk vividly about how people one and a half century ago managed to reclaim power by creating a temporary self-organized commune. Even though it did not last long, the event showed that it is possible to challenge the dominant order. I

[59] According to commons thinker Murray Bookchin, the commons (the word of communalism) originates from the Paris Commune in 1871 (Bookchin 2002, 11).

am captured by the enthusiastic atmosphere and write in my notebook with capital letters: March 18, SAVE THE DATE.

Now, Samuel looks at me. “It’s time for us to go”, he says, “to do *la récup*”. We have signed up to pass by the bakery stores in Montreuil to see if they have left overs for the community kitchen on Wednesday. Normally, bakeries provide the dessert. At *Rungis*, we only get produce and with the donations from the bakeries, it is possible to cook a real French meal with three courses.

As we walk to the first bakery store, Samuel explains that the ideas of the commons also inspire the organization of the community kitchen, yet more implicitly. I ask him different questions about the kitchen and the dumpster dived food that nourishes it. Was it difficult to convince the bakery shops to donate food? What about supermarkets or other kinds of shops? Does it happen that there are no leftovers? I notice that when I ask “how do you (*vous*)” do this and that, Samuel corrects me: “We (*nous*)”. I realize that he regards me as part of the group.

*

20 minutes later, we return to the community hall with a box full of pastries. Samuel takes a photo with his phone

and uploads it on the chat, as he gladly lets the others know that there is desert for this week's community kitchen. (It is not until I experience a dumpster-dive with no leftovers that I come to understand the joy Samuel feels in this very moment.)

Photo 5. Gleaned pastries for the community kitchen

I cannot hear if the general assembly is still going on upstairs but Samuel says that he is heading home, and I really want to do the same. I feel exhausted, filled up with information and impressions.

During my way back in the metro, I tensely count the stops. I am impatient. Seven stations remain before I arrive at "*Voltaire*". The curfew (due to the Covid-19 pandemic) is starting, and I am worried about meeting a police officer on my way home.

I avoid any unpleasant encounters and as soon as I enter my apartment, I turn on my laptop and open the document Paul has sent me. As I read, I note three crucial points that define the commons according to Dardot and the *gilets jaunes*.

1. The commons is about participation in local democracy. Everyone is responsible for taking part in the collective **self-organization** of one's place/city/*commune*. Both the State and the market create social- and ecological injustices: through horizontal organization, commoners are more apt to address these crises democratically.

2. Commons democracy is open to everyone who supports the rule of openness. The commons is about creativity and experimentation, which is done best when a plurality of people gather. The commons is a **socially inclusive** "assembly of many worlds".

3. The commons consist of people commoners (*communards*) but also of places and things (*territoires, milieus de vie*). *Communards* care about these places and things. To them, **ecological attachment** is a condition for communities to thrive and sustain.

Scene 5

The next scene takes place some weeks after Scene 4.

It is Sunday afternoon and I am on my way to the community hall – a five-kilometer walk that clears my head and prepares me for engaging with the *gilets jaunes*.

On this day when I arrive, an excited atmosphere tells me that something special is going to take place. Pierre Dardot spends his Sunday travelling from Bourgogne to Île-de-France and the *gilets jaunes* show their gratitude with punctuality, home baked cakes and other sweets, coffee, and a formally set table. The meeting is about to begin, I "say hi" to Louise with a facial gesticulation, she smiles and points me to an empty seat next to her. I notice that Samuel is not here. In fact, I am the only young person and one of three women (out of a dozen people).

I cite the others' behavior by grabbing a fresh page in my field notebook, and I scratch some words down while I try to keep up with Dardot's fast talk. He begins by distinguishing the commons from a more general form of municipialism. "It is important to understand," Dardot says, "that the commons is a form of resistance (*contre-pouvoir*) to neoliberalism. *Communards* fight for self-governance in a political world of state and market neoliberalism."

*

After a while, Laurent, who sometimes takes part in the general assembly, raises a hand. "It is challenging", he says, "to create such self-governed places in Montreuil. We cannot even be sure this community hall will remain accessible to us as a collectively self-organized place. A while ago, the municipality tried to buy the hall to transform it into a fitness center". Now Paul interferes: "But Laurent, don't forget we managed to fight against the sale of the community hall. And our self-governed community kitchen runs successfully, not to mention our resistance at *murs-à-pêches*. We're turning that place into a common territory too."

*

Some hours pass as we discuss various subjects of the commons. Dardot announces that his train leaves in half an hour. We thank him, wrap up, and after having helped with the dishes, I feel exhausted. Although I know it would be good for me to return by walk, my feet take me to the metro stop and I am home 15 minutes later.

At home, I reflect upon the atmosphere of the seminar compared to the general assembly meetings I have attended so far. Whereas the assembly meetings are full of disagreements (and often conflicts too), the *gilets jaunes* did not question Dardot much. Did their fascination of him make the content become less sticky than it normally is? Paradoxically, a more vertical way of organizing seemed to characterize the meeting, even though Dardot and the *gilets jaunes* emphasize horizontality as the model for democratic engagement. For example, why did Samuel not attend?

Scene 6

Scene 6 occurs shortly after Scene 5.

I have now attended more than a handful of general assembly meetings and participated in the special general assembly with Dardot. From these group activities, I feel an urge for a more intimate one-on-one conversation about the *gilets jaunes'* fight for the commons. I decide to reach out to Louise; she is one of the few active women who engage in the general assembly and she is one of the first *gilets jaunes* I encountered (Scene 1, Chapter 1). I text her, and she invites me to her home the following day.

*

The day after I find myself in an apartment on the eighth floor with a splendid view of Paris. Louise lives at the very heights of Montreuil, not to mistake her neighborhood with Northern Montreuil, where Fatima lives. I am stunned by the surroundings, and I quickly feel comfortable as I sit in her soft couch with her cat lying next to me. We small talk and I set up my iPad to record our conversation.

Louise is used to being interviewed. Despite her proletarian heritage, she has climbed the social ladder to become an

elementary school teacher, now on retirement. She is one of the most privileged persons in the group of *gilets jaunes* in Montreuil and due to her educational level and resources more generally, she is often the one who speaks with journalists and researchers. Louise is also the only one who proudly wears her yellow vest everywhere. “The police don’t touch an old white lady”, she says. “They do, however, touch women of color such as Fatima and young queer activists like Alice.”

I ask Louise if she can help me to better understand the politics of the commons the way the *gilets jaunes* practice it in the general assembly. She sits in front of me, smoking her e-cigarette, while she answers with her rusty, warm, and decisive voice. “First of all, we meet up in the general assembly because we share the vision of making Montreuil a better and more democratic place to live, which demands another way of doing politics. It’s important that the meetings are as open and accessible as possible. We have no leader who decides who or how to participate.”

Louise continues, “The horizontal organization of the general assembly is a way to experiment with more democratic decision-making processes. In the assembly, ordinary people shape the places where they live and spend

their time. By governing the community hall collectively and taking these practices to other places in Montreuil, we fight for common self-governance, not only on a local level, also nationally and internationally."

"Speaking of the international," Louise keeps on going, "have you heard that the Mexican *Zapatistas*, who are also commoners, are visiting us in Montreuil this summer?"

*

Later in our conversation, Louise emphasizes that she does not reject formal politics and the need for representation altogether. "Representation on a national scale is necessary to some extent but it must draw on locally anchored democratic practices. Every French city should set up a city council where inhabitants are obliged to participate on shifts. Democratic engagement should be mandatory because it takes work to build democratic communities: it's simply insufficient to vote for representatives and then put all the power in their hands." She adds in a more pessimistic tone that, "The scenario is far from realistic with Macron as president and as head of the current neoliberal government. We need an entire new set of democratic institutions that are oriented toward more participation. Right now the opposite takes place."

*

After an hour and a half, I stop recording and we eat the lemon cake I brought. As I put my empty plate on the table, I notice an unknown bill, which is clearly not a Euro. It says, *“locale • solidaire • écologique • citoyenne”*.

Photo 6. Louise’s 5-peach bill

“It’s a bill of the alternative currency, *La Pêche* (The Peach)”, says Louise, before I get to comment on it myself. She tells that the peach-currency was developed in 2014 before the *gilets jaunes*, but many *gilets jaunes* use it as their counter-currency to the Euro. Different from the Euro, *La Pêche* does not take part in the globalized economy.

"The peach works against current financial logics of both the market and the State. Did you know that it is now payable in more than 100 shops in Île-de-France?"[60]

*

On my way home, I walk down the hill in *Parc Jean-Moulin* toward Paris. Saturated with insights, I pause in the park. In the lecture *The Courage of the Truth* (1984), Michel Foucault tells the story of the ancient Cynic Diogenes who alters the hegemonic currency – an act that becomes a fundamental Cynic principle (Caraus 2022; Foucault 2011). This principle, Foucault argues, not only criticizes the established currency; it also adopts a critical standpoint to a plurality of other conventions in society. Altering the currency is a way of replacing a larger set of habits of existence (Foucault 2011, 211).

Does *La Pêche*, I wonder, also embody new habits of living together? If so, can the concept of the commons help us to better understand these alternative ways of living? My sense is that answering this latter question may bring us closer to a strategy of fighting the sweaty commons condition, which, we know, is an urgent task today.

[60] See also (Marnette 2019).

Pluralist Commons

"…when there is no revolution in the offing…just the average barbarism of capital grinding…places of wildness still hint at the possibility of life beyond capital."

Andreas Malm (2018)

"…heterotopias[61] valuably serve as spaces of times of *rehearsal* where alternative forms of life can be tried out and explored."

Bonnie Honig (2021a, 71, my emphasis)

Scene 4, Scene 5, and Scene 6 introduce the democratic engagement that the *gilets jaunes* carry out in their general assembly meetings. There, they develop and practice the commons as (1) a collective mode of self-organization that is (2) socially inclusive and (3) ecologically attached to common natural places and things.[62] In this chapter, we dive into the democratic potentials of the commons in the self-organized general assembly, before Chapter 5 explores the

[61] With the term "heterotopia," Honig draws on Foucault's lecture *Of other spaces* (1986), where he conceptualizes heterotopia as counter-sites to society (Foucault 1986, 24). For example, Foucault takes the Oriental/Persian garden as a heterotopian microcosm that differs from the rest of society (Foucault 1986, 25-26).

[62] In my view, each tenet addresses one of the three crises in France we have studied in Chapter 2. The collective mode of self-organization in the general assembly corrects the crisis of representation by making citizens become active participants in French communities and thereby challenging the institutional design of liberal democracy. Horizontality and openness address the rising social, gendered, and racialized inequality, and the aim of becoming more ecologically attached to a common place/thing points to the ecological crises.

second tenet of social inclusion, and Chapter 6 turns to the third tenet of ecological attachment. Common for the chapters, as we explore the *gilets jaunes'* worldlings of each three tenets of the commons, is that the practices are incomplete. By incomplete, I mean that living and performing the commons is a continuous process of trying to reach the tenets, without ever fully accomplishing such task. This makes me approach the general assembly as a valuable – yet imperfect – counter-image to the predominant ways of doing liberal democracy with an emphasis on resisting vertical representation in political decision-making processes.

In the scenes, we have seen that the *gilets jaunes'* self-organization is a sweaty affair in the sense that their bodies sweat together, as they meet up in the general assembly to constitute new ways of enacting democratic life. For example, Scene 4 is sweaty due to the tensions and grievances, but also due to the more joyful moments. In the assembly, the group mourns the sweaty commons conditions of what they see as a French democracy in disrepair, but they also sweat in their eager to find ways out of these conditions, experimenting with the commons as a locally anchored, bottom-up way of practicing democratic engagement.

Compared to Scene 1, Scene 2, and Scene 3 (Chapter 1), in which the *gilets jaunes* occupied different public spaces, we may say that the scenes in this chapter embody a more "inward directed" mode of sweat, because they take place in the *gilets jaunes'* own places, such as the community hall and Louise's apartment. Different from Chapter 1, these scenes describe bodies that mostly sweat together

without the broader public as witness to their democratic engagement. But to be clear: when I speak about inward-directed movements of sweat in the general assembly, I am not saying that these flows do not also turn outward. Indeed, sweaty flows of inwardness move outward, as well as outward flows in some ways also move in inward directions: sweaty flows are complex. For example in the general assembly, the *gilets jaunes* prepare political events to take place on public places, such as on the roundabout or at the city hall square. Engaging on these outward-oriented places, however, does not ensure that the *gilets jaunes* embody a pluralist identity. We will see this when some of them exclude people from the commons if they are members of a political party. Thus, outward-seeking movements (engaging the public and thus a plurality of different actors)[63] may still create closed identities. I associate this process with an inward-oriented sweaty form of resistance.

Let us take another example. In Scene 6, Louise mentions the forthcoming visit of the Mexican *Zapatistas* who define themselves as commoners. By attending the *gilets jaunes'* general assembly – an event I did not describe in the scene – the *Zapatistas* inspired the *gilets jaunes* in ways that expanded their commons identity internationally. The point is that this exchange, in which a plurality of activists sweated as they shared their resistance strategies and political visions, embodies both outward and inward movements. On the one hand, the *gilets jaunes* opened up their community to the

[63] For instance, the demonstrations in Scene 1 (Louise and I) and Scene 2 (Fatima).

foreigner *Zapatistas*, while the meeting, on the other hand, affirmed rather than challenged and contested the politics of the commons. From this, the commons identity of the *gilets jaunes* became more international but not necessarily pluralistic, by which I mean incorporating differences and tensions that negotiate and potentially open up the identity of the commons.

The paradox, as I see it (and choose to put in sweaty terms), is that a social movement that advocates horizontality (the *gilets jaunes*), risks repeating the verticality it criticizes liberal democracy for practicing, if its own sweaty flows of resistance and alternative democratic practices become too inward-directed. As such, it may negate its own aim of engaging democratically in horizontal ways, because a strong commons identity risks excluding too many people. Based on this, my aim in this chapter is to cultivate more pluralist and democratic outward flows that open up the commons identity of the *gilets jaunes* as much as possible by negotiating this ambivalent sweatiness of their resistance practices. Put bluntly, the stake is, in my view, to further democratize the *gilets jaunes'* political activism so that it can configure as an inclusive coalition politics that is capacious of pluralist, split identities.[64]

In other words: the question I found especially puzzling when researching this chapter is whether or not the commons may be apt for inaugurating a broad politics (or whether it serves better as a

[64] I take the notion of "split identities" from Donna Haraway, by which I mean that identities are unstable and composed of myriad forces, which, in turn, has the potential of blurring assumingly stable identities (1988).

strategy for the few who seek a radical escape from state-politics). Another way to put the question is if the general assembly does (or can come to) configure open and pluralist as a practice, in which bodies sweat together in democratic, conflictual flows. Or, whether it undertakes a more enclosed and unitarian form, in which the flows of sweaty resistance are directed inwardly with unintended exclusionary effects? Hoping to find democratic ways out of the sweaty commons conditions, the chapter aims to reconfigure the commons as a mode of self-organization in line with the first approach.

The text proceeds as follows. I begin by situating the commons within the tradition of radical democratic theory, before I turn to political scientist Elinor Ostrom (2015) to see how the commons is originally understood as a self-governed alternative to both state and market regulation. Since the practices and thinking of the *gilets jaunes* in Montreuil draw particularly on the so-called anarcho-Marxist trajectory of the commons, I then turn to Pierre Dardot, Christian Laval (2015), Murray Bookchin (2002), and Andreas Malm (2018, 2021). Attempting to negotiate the flows of this anarcho-Marxist world of theory and practice in more outward – democratic – directions, I finally engage with the decidedly pluralistic-agonistic approaches of Bonnie Honig (2017; 2021a) and William Connolly (1995, 2005, 2017). This final step enables me to reconfigure the general assembly as a practice that can undertake novel sweaty flows with renewed democratic potentials.

Radical Democracy

To contextualize commons theory is not an easy task because the tradition forms an extensive field with varying ideas of how democratic communities should look like (Bookchin 2002; Caffentzis and Federici 2014; Dardot and Laval 2015; Federici 2011, 2018; Gibson-Graham 2014, 2016; Hardt and Negri 2005, 2011, 2019; Kioupkiolis 2020; Kioupkiolis and Karyotis 2016; Ostrom 2015; Pruvost 2021). Moreover, the commons is situated within an even wider tradition of radical democratic theory (Butler 2018a; 2018b; 2018c; Rancière 2016; 2013; Laclau 2007; Laclau and Mouffe 2002; Mouffe 2018; Tønder and Thomassen 2005; Honig 2013; Bennett 2010; Coles 2016; Connolly 2017) and the possibilities of democratic designs thus expand even more, when we take this into account.

On a general level, we can nonetheless say that commons theories share the idea that democracy revolves around active participation. Another feature is that activists are seen as proto-theorists (Dardot and Laval 2015).[65] Together, these two traits make commons scholars turn to empirical examples of activists to theorize the commons, and social movements have thus been crucial informants for the development of this branch of democratic theory. A great variety of social movements beyond the *gilets jaunes* has been influential. From indigenous people's fights for land against state expropriation in especially Latin American and African countries (Federici 2018;

[65] This is similar to other branches of radical democratic theory (Butler 2018a; Coles 2016; Connolly 2005, 2017; Honig 2021a, 2021b).

Goldman and Legura 1998) to more recent, Western social movements, such as Spanish *Indignados*, American *Occupy Wall Street*, Turkish *Gezi* and *Taksim*, and French *Nuit Debout* (Dardot and Laval 2015).

We see that this initial characterization, which stresses the commons as a participatory and activism-based tradition of democratic thinking, conflicts with the current organization of French democracy. The commons seek to upend the liberal democratic power flows of an individualized top-down organization, currently embodied in Emmanuel Macron's presidency, by substituting this state of affairs with bottom-up flows from social movements and other democratic actors who channel their knowledge and collective experiences into political decision-making processes.

Liberal Commons

Let us continue by fleshing out the reasons for substituting – or maybe "just" expanding – liberal democracy with these more horizontal ways of doing democracy. Commons scholar, Elinor Ostrom, helpfully provides a starting point for this in *Governing the Commons* (2015), where she raises the question of how to govern the natural places in our societies as democratically and ecologically as possible. The problem with current public and private ways of governing, writes Ostrom, is that they convert natural places into public goods and private property through detached top-down management. This arguably results in undemocratic accesses to the

goods as well as in ecological disasters (Ostrom 2015, 1). To prove her point that commons governance provides a better – democratic and ecological – alternative, Ostrom takes Garrett Hardin's "tragedy of the commons" as a critical starting point to explain why current regulation often happens through the State or the market (or through hybrid forms) instead of through commons governance. In Hardin's tragedy, a collective of herds shares a meadow, and they have not made any rules for how to manage the meadow. The problem appears as the individual heard keeps expanding the grassing until the entire meadow is used up. Hardin argues that it is rational for each individual herd to let his animals grass as much as possible; without rules, they will compete over the land until it is fully exploited.

Ostrom is not convinced by this scenario. In fact, she contests the very assumptions of Hardin's "tragedy" that is based on rational choice game theory, including the so-called "prisoners' dilemma theorem" (Ostrom 2015, 14). Ostrom writes that the idea that individuals act fully rationally, with complete information, and with no rules, may work in theory but not in practice. This makes her argue that Hardin's model gets trapped in its lack of capacity to assume any forms of communication or changes of rules among the herds (Ostrom 2015, 182-84). Turning to empirical cases and not only abstract theoretical models, Ostrom shows that many people act differently than Hardin's model prescribes (Ostrom 2015, 7). Drawing on examples, such as the mountain commons in Switzerland and Japan and the irrigational commons in Spain and the Philippine Islands (Ostrom 2015, Chapter 3), Ostrom shows that, under the right

circumstances, commons regulation provides a more democratic and ecological alternative to contemporary public-private forms of governance. Why? Because it is a more popular, attached, collective, and collaborative way of governing.[66]

In sum, people, herds, and the *gilets jaunes* we may add, possess information of – and are attached to – the places they live and use (such as the community hall, the roundabout, and *murs à pêches*).[67] According to Ostrom, this brings a sense of responsibility rather than a desire for exploitation, even destruction, which makes her insist that the commons can improve the ways we govern resources and act democratically (Ostrom 2015, 18). In a neoliberal time of accelerated destruction of natural- and public resources, we may even say that the commons is now more relevant for democratic theorists to reconsider than ever.[68]

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[66] This does not make Ostrom neglect the challenges of the commons. For example, she stresses that exploitations of natural resources also happen in some commons governance (Ostrom 2015, 178-181).

[67] We turn to *murs à pêches* in Chapter 6.

[68] In the current neoliberal context, the State and the market intersect in such a way that state governance has become a matter of market governance too (Ostrom 2015, 15). With neoliberalism, Dardot adds, the State and the market have become so entangled, that it is impossible for us to separate them from each other (Dardot 2015, 666). Recall from Chapter 2, Macron's wish to develop France as a start-up nation; to run the country and its public sector as if it was a matter of business (Amable and Palombarini 2021). This is a development Pierre Bourdieu already identified 30 years ago, when he wrote that the people who run France are educated from SciencesPo and École Nationale d'Administration, where they learn to become business men (Bourdieu 1993). The public and the private thus collapse into each other, making public goods diminish. This is also known as the neoliberalization of democracy (Brown 2017; 2003; Foucault 2010; Connolly 2013; 2017; Coles 2016; Honig 2017).

Now, with a better understanding of what the commons is all about, we may explore the general assembly anew. First, let me say that urban locations are as relevant for the commons as the natural environments Ostrom turns to.[69] As such, we may treat the meadow and the community hall in similar ways. With this in mind, governing the community hall collectively, the *gilets jaunes* show – in line with Ostrom's argument – that they care for their neighborhood, which they seek to democratize by resisting the neoliberal governance. We see how the precariousness of neoliberalism manifests in rising social inequality, such as food scarcity and homelessness, and in escalating global warming (droughts, heat, and species extinction) and other ecological crises (pollution and toxicity). The aim of the general assembly is to transform this precariousness into collective forms of resistance and care. Once a week, the *gilets jaunes* meet to address the specific challenges (on top of developing their commons thinking and practice more generally). They possess much information about what goes on in their neighborhood and through collective resistance, some of which is organized in the general assembly, they develop alternative coping strategies. Sometimes, a squad can accommodate some of the paperless people. Moreover, the *gilets jaunes* provide food for people (Chapter 5) and they cultivate fruit trees that grow in a toxic soil, seeking to prevent it from becoming further toxified (Chapter 6).

[69] Commons scholars, such as Hardt and Negri, also turn to other sites than natural places – for example, they turn to the digital as a matter of the commons (Hardt and Negri 2003).

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From this, we can say that Ostrom takes us some of the way to grasp the *gilets jaunes'* commons engagement. This is an important starting point in order to understand the character of their resistance, including its democratic prospects. But from the book *Governing the Commons*, which bears the subtitle, *The Evolution of Institutions for Collective Action* (2015), we now turn to *Common: On Revolution in the 21st Century* (Dardot and Laval 2015), as this latter book influences the general assembly the most. We see that its very title suggests a clear shift from Ostrom's approach. Whereas Ostrom emphasizes "evolution" (see subtitle), Dardot prefers "revolution" to name the transition into a world of the commons. Dardot's[70] book thus takes us from ideas of liberal commons[71] to an anarcho-Marxist approach.

Anarcho-Marxist Commons

In Scene 5 – and in the document I received from Paul in Scene 4 – it becomes clear that the goal for the *gilets jaunes* is to turn Montreuil into an autonomous *commune*. More generally, their objective is to make France a confederal republic that consists of self-governed communes. In this vision, the *gilets jaunes* describe the commons as

[70] Laval is also author of the book but Dardot is the person the *gilets jaunes* know and refer to, which is why I emphasize his name here.
[71] By liberal commons, I not only refer to Ostrom's evolutionary strategy but also to her naturalized assumptions of rational, economic subjects that makes her common-pool resources theory work within a liberal perspective of individuals. For more on this, see (Bresnihan 2016, 93).

a matter of anti-statist politics, because the State can never serve the interests of working class people in France. The State is by definition bourgeois, which means that attempts to reclaim it amount to appropriating the bourgeoisie and use it for the commoners' own goals (Dardot and Laval 2015, 112-115). Thus, they develop a so-called anarcho-Marxist approach to the commons that fights against the State (anarcho) and bourgeois capitalism (Marxism).[72]

Anarcho-Marxism, that draws on experiences from the Paris Commune in 1871, is not only a French way of conceptualizing the commons. In *The Communalist Project* (2002), American commons scholar Murray Bookchin, writes in a way that clarifies the strategy of the *gilets jaunes* in Montreuil: either we follow the path toward the grim "end of history", which is the current path of neoliberal disaster. Or, we move toward "the *true* making of history", that is, the commons as a joined confederation of democratized municipalities (*communes*) that collectively challenge the legitimacy of the State (Bookchin 2002). Anything less sinks "into a morass of compromises that absorb it back into the social order that it once sought to change" (Bookchin 2002).

In my view, the thinking of eco-Marxist theorist, Andreas Malm, serves as an illustrative example of the undemocratic implications of the anarcho-Marxist strategy. This, we may also describe as a tactic that sweats inward in the sense that it comes to exclude a plurality of citizens. Let us see how this is the case. In the essay "In Wildness Is

[72] See also (Cossart and Sauvêtre 2020).

the Liberation of the World: On Maroon Ecology and Partisan Nature" (2018),[73] Malm argues for living in enclosed communities in the wildness[74] away from the State/city, because this may hold liberating potentials. He turns to the experiences of Maroon people who live in places such as Barbados, Jamaica, and Haiti, all apart from the State. Under colonial rule, Malm writes, these people were enslaved, but some of them sought refuge from the plantation work in the wildness. Theorizing with the Maroons, Malm is aware that he draws on "extreme cases," but these cases, he writes, can be useful in other less extreme contexts too (Malm 2018).[75] I argue that one of these political contexts is the one of the *gilets jaunes.* Following Malm's way of thinking, we can approach the practices of the general assembly as being "wild" in the sense that it aims at setting aside State and market logics as much as possible. In the assembly, the *gilets jaunes* flee from State and market logics as they build a community of democratic support systems that experiments with alternative communal ways of living in contrast to capitalized and individualized norms and habits of today.

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[73] Malm may be more known for his "blowing up pipelines" arguments (Malm 2021), which can be a bit confusing for our reading here. For more on the split character of Malm's arguments, see (Rübner Hansen 2021).
[74] Malm refers to wildness as places ranging from precapitalist agriculture to small natural areas close to a city. The important thing is that wildness works as a contrast to the State/city the commoners flee. We will turn to the "wildness" of precapitalist agriculture in Chapter 6 when we move to *murs à pêches*. (For more on theorizing with "the wild", see also (Halberstam 2020)).
[75] On top of the Maroons, Malm takes the "extreme case" of Jews fleeing to the woods during Holocaust.

According to Malm, the emancipatory potential of living in such wildness consists of two steps. First, he argues, the Maroon slaves' withdrawal from work destabilizes the political regimes, as the slave owners cannot carry on their business without workers. Next, alternative imaginations and new ways of living derive from the withdrawal. These imaginations can be useful for a future revolution, but Malm argues for withdrawing into the wild regardless of whether a revolution is carried out (Malm 2018, 2021).

Noteworthy for our discussion on the democratic potentials of the commons is the fact that Malm writes, that social bonds may be broken when people detach from the State and move away from their co-citizens (Malm 2018). Here, Malm seems to point directly to the democratic risk that is embedded in the anarcho-Marxist commons strategy of withdrawing from the rest of society (or only accepting revolutionary change as a transition into the commons). We can also say that pursuing onward with this strategy, the sweaty flows of resistance undertake an inward direction that closes down rather than opens up to different people and political projects (apart from those who live in the "wild"). By raising this crucial concern, Malm's essay – even better than Dardot's book and Bookchin's manifest – helps us consider if the *gilets jaunes'* general assembly works as a way of fleeing neoliberalism and trying to resist the sweaty commons conditions in isolation from other co-citizens. Or, whether it aims at opening up the identity of the commons to incorporate a plurality of people within and beyond the general assembly.

A third approach – in line with the fact that sweaty flows are complex – may be that the general assembly moves in-between these two directions. Let me highlight a few examples of how the first approach is present in the general assembly. First, we may recall from Chapter 2 the increasing abstention rate in French elections. A majority of the *gilets jaunes* in Montreuil see the act of voting as a support of a political system that revolves around hierarchies and exclusions. If you are *communard*, the argument goes, voting for a representative in the state apparatus contrasts the idea of active, horizontal participation, such as the democratic organization of the general assembly. Or, in Paul's words during the general assembly prior to the presidential election in spring 2022, "The presidential election is a pestilence election."[76]

However, my meetings with different fractions of the *gilets jaunes* leave me with another impression. In Occitanie, we may remember (again from Chapter 2) how one group ran with a collective *gilet jaune* candidate in the municipal election in 2020. Another group consisted of *gilets jaunes* who were politically active in the left-wing party *La France Insoumise* (LFI). These people told me about the numerous resemblances that exist between the political visions of LFI – that almost passed to the second round of the presidential election in 2022[77] – and the ideas of the *gilets jaunes*, ranging from the

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[76] *L'élection présidentielle, c'est une élection péstilentielle*. The discussion of abstention is not part of the scenes, but the topic was crucial when I visited the *gilets jaunes* in 2022.

[77] LFI gained 21,95% of the votes (*Rassemblement National* won 23,15%) (Ministère de l'intérieur et des outre-mer 2022).

commons to the logics of citizens' referenda, the so-called RIC system (*referendum d'initiative citoyenne*). In the book *L'Avenir en commun* (2021),[78] Jean-Luc Mélenchon – the president of LFI – writes about the commons in almost the same words as Dardot and the *gilets jaunes*. For example, Mélenchon suggests to construct a general assembly that takes parts in designing a new French constitution (Mélenchon 2021, 23). This sixth republic, he continues, should be decentralized by distributing more power to people in local *communes*. Moreover, common goods, such as water, air, food, and energy ought to be collectivized (in contrast to the current development of privatization). Mélenchon even mentions the *gilets jaunes* as sources of inspiration for this political vision (Mélenchon 2021, 28; 59).

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These initiatives, that are situated within the so-called state apparatus, may suggest a productive shift: from a strict way of thinking anarcho-Marxist commons to expanding its tactics in a more pluralist direction, in which the politics of commons and state politics are not seen as being in opposition to each other. We have seen that Dardot, Laval, Bookchin, and Malm – together with *gilets jaunes* such as Paul – often times put it as a matter of *either* the State *or* a confederation; *either* neoliberal barbarism *or* revolution/withdrawal. Yet in my view, these strategies make the commons become less

[78] The book, which may be translated into "A Common Future", was published as part of Mélenchon's election campaign in 2022.

capable of undertaking a democratic transformation toward gradually more commons politics. Therefore, let us imagine that the *gilets jaunes* in Montreuil instead do pave the way for party political engagements in the general assembly. We may even pretend that some of the *gilets jaunes* would vote for commons-sympathetic parties, such as LFI, which would make the French leftwing more influential. Would their conviction of parties becoming bourgeois (when they gain power) be confirmed? That is possible – perhaps even probable – but would a more powerful leftwing in France not also enhance the chances for cooling down the sweaty commons conditions better than what is the case today?

Pluralizing the General Assembly

My wager is that political theorist Bonnie Honig provides a new possibility for reconfiguring such a collective self-organization that sweats in more outward directions, as it engages with state politics. The reason for turning to Honig now is thus that she sees political engagement with the broader public as the most pluralist and democratic path to pursue (Honig 2017, 2021a). From this, I wonder how far we – in the company of Honig – can take the sweaty openness of the *gilets jaunes'* politics in the general assembly?

Let us begin with the book *Public Things: Democracy in Disrepair* (2017). Here, Honig engages with commons scholars with whom she shares several viewpoints: one is the diagnosis of neoliberalism as a severe democratic challenge. When it comes to the question of how

to resist this, however, Honig suggests that we must fight for negotiating the scope and priorities of the State rather than abandoning state politics altogether (Honig 2017, 4-5). Even despite the bourgeois trajectory and the exclusionary effects of the State,[79] Honig argues that state politics, such as the fights for public goods, embodies a democratic potential, because it gathers people and constitutes a broader "us". In this way, and despite the "ideological fictions" that cover the gendered, racialized, and classed conflicts of public goods, state politics has the potential to provide the condition for democratic life (Honig 2017, 24; 90). With a few exceptions,[80] Honig wants to reverse the commoners' withdrawal strategy, because the goal of living in autonomous communities – according to her – risks leaving too many citizens to themselves (Honig 2017, 90).

So far, we see that Honig and Malm's strategies of resistance differ. And yet as we turn to Honig's *A Feminist Theory of Refusal* (2021), this becomes even more obvious, because the book illuminates the democratic prospects of refusing to stay in the wild. In the book, Honig reads Euripides' Greek tragedy *The Bacchae* – a play that begins with Agave and her sisters being expelled from Thebes into the wildness at Cithaeron due to improper behavior. Beyond the reach and control of King Pentheus (the political regime of the city),

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[79] For example, the State and the public constitute masculine domains that exclude women and queer bodies (Honig 2013; 2021a; 2021b). Honig also turns to the racialized and segregating implications associated with the public (Honig 2017, 24).

[80] Honig refers to such exceptions in her later book (Honig 2021a, 1-2), where she acknowledges the arguments some Indigenous and Black Studies scholars advocate.

the women have spent their time dancing instead of working (Honig 2021a, xi). It turns out, the expulsion is not a bad thing for the women. In fact, the time in the wild liberates them from the male gaze, and this freedom makes them develop new practices and ways of living; it enables them to form collective power constellations (Honig 2021a, xiii). Outside the city in Cithaeron, the women build a heterotopia – a space with the potential of disturbing the political order in transformative ways (Honig 2021a; Foucault 1986) – in which collective forms of organizing substitute state politics, such as the (gendered) public and private organization of the city. In this wildness, norms of care replace those of patriarchy (Honig 2021a, 8, 58). Summarizing the play so far, the women develop a set of collective and self-organized practices in the wild that refuse the existing order. Recall that this is where Malm's strategy ends (if it does not culminate with revolution).

The Bacchae, however, continues. Honig writes that, for the heterotopia of the wildness to become democratic, the women must return to the city with their alternative ways of living (Honig 2021a, 95). Their freedom, the argument goes, may become more permanent in the city, where it can be secured and implemented broadly to the benefit for others too. Had the women refused to return, they would remain abject bodies with deviant behavior living in the wildness. Toward the end of the tragedy, we see that the women do return to Thebes and bring with them alternative ways of living to the broader public.

Yet *The Bacchae is* a tragedy, which we see when the city does not want to receive Agave, her sisters, and their feminist ways of living. As they return, Dionysus orders them into yet another exile, but Honig argues that their attempt is important nonetheless (Honig 2021a, 71, 94). She puts it in these words, "[T]he return to the city, I claim, is fundamental to a feminist theory of refusal that aims to transform the city, not abandon it" (Honig 2021a, 1).[81] If we do not return to the city, we "leave verticality aside and…leave verticality empowered to do its work" (Honig 2021a, 71).

We can now recapitulate Honig's feminist theory of refusal as follows. Honig constructs an "arc of refusal" that is constituted of three stages. Inoperativity – the women's dance (which may correspond to Malm's reading of the Maroon's escape from slave work) – constitutes the first step, before the creation of communal bonds in the wildness establishes the second (again in line with Malm's case of the Maroons).[82] Finally (and unlike the Maroons and Malm's strategy), the women return to the city to contest the dominant ways of living.[83] The third step is what distinguishes Honig's argument, because it commands us to stick with the social bonds. Instead of continuing to live in an enclosed community, the women try to influence the whole city; they want to enlarge the scope

[81] Note that feminist theory equals democratic theory in the sense that feminism "means being truly democratic", that is, to share power and institute equality (Browning and Honig 2012, 128-129). Bear also in mind that we may interpret Honig's figure of the "city" as a (nation)state or as a municipality. What is important is that it is a site of public remembrance, in which a broad democratic politics is inaugurated (Honig 2021a, 95-97).
[82] Honig refers to this as inclination (2021a, Chapter 2).
[83] Honig refers to this as fabulation (2021a, Chapter 3).

and possibility for their norms to flourish, but also to discuss them with other citizens, since no norms are uncontestable. Thinking with Honig in this way, let us ask whether the *gilets jaunes* also fulfill the arc of refusal by returning to Paris. And, if they do so, is Paris then ready to accommodate their ideas and practices? Addressing these questions arguably enables us to move the commons in a more democratic direction.

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First, we may approach the *gilets jaunes'* general assembly as Honig's "inoperation" of (neo)liberal democracy, because this instantiation of self-organization does other things than the *gilets jaunes* are expected to do as citizens. Instead of accepting that democracy is a matter of voting every five year, they, in the general assembly, constitute a heterotopia in the sense that they unlearn old norms, such as representation, individualism, and precarity, in order to ground new communal ones (of participation, collectivity, and care). But to what extent do the *gilets jaunes* take this democratic engagement from the community hall to the city? Do they direct their sweaty resistance outward (toward the city and the broader public), when they experiment with alternative ways of living in the general assembly?

We know that the ethnographic scenes take us in both directions: the *gilets jaunes* embody both the inward- and outward-directed sweaty modes that Malm and Honig have helped us to identify. Let us now dive into the resistance that flows from the general assembly to the

city. I find three examples particularly illuminative: first, the preparation of the *points fixes* (Scene 4), then the demonstrations in Paris (Scene 1 and Scene 2 (Chapter 1) and Scene 4), and at last the use of the counter-currency *La Pêche* (Scene 6).

In Scene 4, the *gilets jaunes* introduced me to their weekly *points fixes*. I learned that on Sundays, they go to the city hall square to publicly share their ideas of the commons. Occupying this public place, they invite newcomers to join their group. Another example of this type of democratic engagement is the 150 years anniversary of the Paris Commune. On March 18 2021, the *gilets jaunes* transformed many hours during numerous general assembly meetings, writing songs, preparing banners, and cooking food, bringing all of this to the roundabout they had occupied two and a half years earlier. This event celebrated the commons with other inhabitants of Montreuil but also with people from Île-de-France, counting journalists and researchers, myself included.

We may also remember the Saturday demonstrations in Paris. During my fieldwork, I have participated in these numerous times (Scene 1 is only one example). The last demonstration I went to with the *gilets jaunes* took place in spring 2022. At that time, President Macron had not only passed a controversial pension reform; he had also done it by decree, which made the reform even more controversial. In the general assembly that week, the *gilets jaunes* prepared to participate in the national demonstration against the reform. Together with union members, climate activists, leftwing politicians, and their voters, the *gilets jaunes* went to the Parisian streets to fight for a decent pension

as a public good. The photo below makes me think of this initiative as similar to the women's return to Thebes.

Photo 7. The *gilets jaunes'* return to the city to refuse the reform

The photograph is shot by a *gilet jaune* during the demonstration on *Place de la Concorde*.[84] On it, we see a statue on the square that represents a city that protects France against intruders. The specific statue on the photo depicts a woman who holds a sign saying, *"49-3*

[84] *Place de la Concorde* is the public square in Paris where the royal family was executed during the French revolution. *"Populaire"* refers here to "working class" in the sense that these people want to have more power in the political decision-making processes.

Populaire." 49-3 is the constitutional article Macron applied to adopt the pension reform beyond parliamentary vote. Placing the sign in the arm of the woman, the activists transform the woman into a protector of the precarious parts of the French population against the intruders of the French government that overturns popular democracy with decree.[85] Or paraphrasing Honig, the *gilets jaunes* add a layer of new meaning to the statute, fabulating a collective story that energizes and binds citizens together in their resistance to the reform and to the French government (Honig 2021a, 105-107). Participating in the demonstration, the *gilets jaunes* take part in a social cohesion among a plurality of people who gather in their collective resistance to a precarization of the retirement system. Moreover, as they act in concert with other people across different identities, we may say that their chances to be heard increase, thus enabling them to become more influential.

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Before we move to the third ethnographic example of *La Pêche*, let me echo what I have already said in the beginning of the chapter: sweaty flows of resistance crisscross and appear in varying forms and degrees of inwardness and outwardness. For example, I find that the *points fixes* turn more inward (than the national demonstrations against the pension reform). This is so because, on the city hall square the *gilets jaunes* inform the wider public in Montreuil of the

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[85] Even though the article is part of the constitution and is often used, it is controversial to apply on a subject matter as the pension reform.

commons by communicating its anarcho-Marxist trajectory: either revolution, withdrawal, or neoliberal barbarism. This is similar to the *gilets jaunes'* celebration of the Paris Commune, which articulates the message: join us to build an autonomous commune in Montreuil free from political parties and other kinds of state politics. Following Honig's way of thinking, an implication of this becomes a reinstallment of the very verticality the *gilets jaunes* set up to fight; vertical in the way that the engagement risks excluding the citizens and people in Montreuil who also worry about the sweaty commons condition, but who do not identify as revolutionary or anarchist commoners.

Different from this, the *gilets jaunes* form alliances with those non-commoners when they participate in national demonstrations, such as the ones against the pension reform.[86] By engaging with co-citizens and learning about their experiences and fights, an emerging potential for expanding and pluralizing the general assembly – and thus the ideas, practices, members, and identity formations of the *gilets jaunes* – materializes. On *Place de la Concorde*, the *gilets jaunes* become part of a collective of French citizens, who reclaim their public good. Their "commoner" identities split: they multiply, pluralize, and arguably, democratize.

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[86] Recall also that the *gilets jaunes* change location of the general assembly and that they invited me – a researcher – into their group. These facts add two more flows of sweaty outwardness.

Now returning to the alternative currency, *La Pêche*, in Scene 6 as a final example of a more pluralist politics of the commons, we know that this currency was not the *gilets jaunes'* own invention. It was used by people and social movements to oppose financial speculation and fiscal paradises (among other things). By using *La Pêche*, money flows directly from buyer to seller with no involvement of banks or the international economy. Echoing what Foucault argued in his lecture *The Courage of Truth* (Scene 6), we may say that *La Pêche* has become a refusal strategy that contests not only the norms of the Euro but also other conventional norms in society, such as the verticality, distance, and elitism of the globalized economy (Foucault 2011, 211).[87] More than 100 shops in Île-de-France have adopted this currency: *La Pêche* infiltrates Paris by making more and more people learn about it and use it in different ways beyond the anarcho-Marxist approach. The alternative currency connects a plurality of identities who together-but-apart try to resist the contemporary political conditions of sweaty commons.

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Before concluding the chapter, let us take one last step toward a pluralist commons. At this point, we know that, while some parts of the *gilets jaunes'* self-organization embody a pluralist politics, other aspects risk becoming unintendedly vertical and inward-oriented – thus negating the *gilets jaunes'* own aim of building horizontal

[87] In Chapter 5, I elaborate on this point and provide concrete examples of how the globalized economy brings about undemocratic and un-ecological human-food relationships.

communities. To diminish such undemocratic implications, I suggest we end with political theorist William Connolly who conceptualizes pluralism in a way that most clearly bridges the Marxist-liberal initiatives we have encountered so far. This enables us to configure the commons as a broad (parliamentary and extra-parliamentary)[88] tactic of democratic transformation (Connolly 1995, 2005, 2017).

The unproductive alternative to a pluralist politics is, writes Connolly, a "unitarianism" that suppresses differences (Connolly 1995, xx; 2005, 5). In my view, Connolly's unitarianist politics corresponds with the flows of sweaty inwardness that hinder collective, conflictual, and diverse sets of social relations in interdependent constituencies of different governing assemblages (Connolly 1995, xii; xx). Important to our interest in the commons, a pluralist politics would differently imply that the general assembly includes anarchists, Marxists, *and* other activists who may also work within state-politics, such as members and supporters of political parties. Connolly writes that, "[P]luralists…honor the politics of disturbance of social movements" without "depreciat[ing] the politics of governance through a state apparatus" (Connolly 1995, xix). Later, he puts it in these words: pluralist politics do not reject "electoral engagements" (Connolly 2017, 125).

The essence of Connolly's pluralism, which he later develops as a "politics of swarming" (Connolly 2017, 125),[89] is that it takes place

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[88] Here, I draw on Judith Butler's notion of extra-parliamentary politics (2018a).
[89] See also (Coles 2016). I turn to the more-than-human dimension of Connolly's thinking in Chapter 6.

in multiple sites. Together, these different modes of formal democratic engagement (party-politics) and informal democratic engagement (the general assembly) form the best potential for democratic, large-scale systemic changes, though it may be slower and more incremental than the revolution/withdrawal anarcho-Marxist commoners advocate (Bookchin 2002; Dardot and Laval 2015; Malm 2021).[90] Could we reimagine the commons within this kind of pluralism, in which the general assembly in Montreuil is one of countless self-organizing sites in a larger network that – from different angles and spheres – fights for a more democratic, social, and ecological future in ways that keep expanding the commons, making it sweat more outward?

The *gilets jaunes* already enact much of this thinking, as they form alliances with squatters and other activists in Montreuil (locally), as well as with other groups of *gilets jaunes* (nationally),[91] and even with *gilets jaunes* from Belgium and the Mexican Zapatistas (internationally). The challenge with some of these openings is – which I have already mentioned several times by now – that many of them revolve around the same anarcho-Marxist line of thinking of the commons. But often, pluralism does occur. For example, in Scene 6, Louise underscores that governmental initiatives of citizens' councils

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[90] In *The Common and Counter-Hegemonic Politics* (2020), commons scholar Alexandros Kioupkiolis also advocates a strategy (of counter-hegemony) that gives way to a *gradually* "commons-based society" (Kioupkiolis 2020, 3, my emphasis).

[91] *Gilets jaunes* groups meet in annual national meetings; the so-called *l'Assemblée des Assemblées (l'ADA).*

are important in the fight for the commons. Add to this Samuel (from Scene 4), who eagerly engages with the group of *gilets jaunes* I met in Occitanie, even though these people in Southern France do not identify as commoners. In phone meetings, they have exchanged experiences beyond the paradigm of anarcho-Marxist commons, such as inspiring the *gilets jaunes* in Occitanie to initiate a similar community kitchen, as the one the *gilets jaunes* in Montreuil has established, which we dive into in the next chapter.

Conclusion

In August 2022, I attended a lecture by Andreas Malm in Copenhagen. Malm's talk revolved around sweaty commons in the sense that he spoke of global warming, social inequality, and of ways to resist these challenges. He argued passionately for "blowing up pipelines" and occupying the sites of petrol companies, such as the French *TotalEnergies*, as *the* way to fight the sweaty commons.

In some aspects, the argument in Malm's lecture – together with his essay on the Maroons – resonates with Pierre Dardot and some of the *gilets jaunes*' commons strategy: either revolution (as with the French Paris Commune) or withdrawal from state politics (Malm 2018, 2021). As the scenes from my fieldwork show, such strategy seems difficult to uphold. Moreover from a pluralist perspective, the strategy also embodies a set of undemocratic implications. Either by withdrawing from the city and leaving co-citizens to themselves or

by revolutionizing and excluding reformist co-citizens. Both options arguably shape a too unitarianist commons.

The conceptual task in this chapter has been to reconfigure the anarcho-Marxist commons more pluralistically. In my view, this exercise follows the very DNA of the *gilets jaunes*, which is a pluralist social movement that consists of many groups with different strategies, fighting the conditions of sweaty commons in heterogeneous ways. We know from Chapter 2 that some *gilets jaunes* advocate the RIC model as a participatory extension of representative democracy. The primary objective here is referendums as a way to include ordinary citizens into the decision-making processes on issues, such as global warming and social inequality. Others propose the commons, and yet other groups see party-political affiliation as the right course.

So, a strict anarcho-Marxist commons contradicts the identity and form of the *gilets jaunes*. Instead, a more pluralist commons follows the line of thinking in the movement by opening up the possibilities between Marxist and liberal politics. Here, it may be crucial to add that a pluralist commons is not relativist. For example, nationalism works against pluralism because it drains pluralism of its most attractive qualities (Connolly 2005, 4). In our case, we may say that inclusion of anti-feminist and fascist groups also contradicts the pluralist project of the commons we seek to develop and advance.

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This enables us to conclude that the *gilets jaunes'* role-experimentation in the self-organized general assembly may bring cooling effects by making citizens become decision-makers in local politics (in this case, primarily in the community hall). Perhaps even more so, if we approach the general assembly as part of a broader politics of swarming that reaches beyond groups who already affiliate with the commons, yet still fight for a cooler future. Such pluralist commons would consist of citizens (and other bodies) in myriad places and of different forms of agencies, which would eventually make the general assembly flow more outward, connecting with other bodies than what is the case today. It is also important to conclude that the sweaty resistance of the *gilets jaunes* is not only a matter of collectivity, in which the group sweats in different degrees of inwardness and outwardness. On top of this, the *gilets jaunes* sweat singularly. For example, we may say that Paul (Scene 4) – an eager reader of Dardot (Scene 5) – fights for a more enclosed commons, which makes his sweat flow inwardly to a larger degree than Louise (Scene 6) who welcomes reformist initiatives, such as state initiated citizens' councils.

And yet these sweaty modes of the self-organized general assembly do not even encapsulate the multiple forms of sweat the *gilets jaunes* in Montreuil experience. As we shall see in the next chapter, many (women) *gilets jaunes* do not participate in the general assembly, which underscores the broader point in the chapter that the general assembly risks shutting down (externally) to co-citizens but also (internally) to fellow *gilets jaunes* in the group. This is another matter

of unitarianism and verticality, which we know contradicts the *gilets jaunes'* own intentions of pluralism and horizontality.

So, what is cooling for some bodies – such as joyful discussions in the general assembly – is a heated affair for others. As thinkers of sweaty bodies, we must engage with the gendered, classed, racialized, and anthropocentric connotations that are associated with the (mostly discursive) work in the general assembly. Thus, what happens when we turn to more "numb" commons-practices that are located in unexpected political arenas, such as in a community kitchen – where the act of chopping vegetables replaces the deliberation process in the general assembly? From the assembly, we turn to the sweaty work that takes place when the stove is on, when bodies cut and stir vegetables, and when food is cooked. To explore this, we stay in the community hall but from the meeting room on the first floor, we take the staircase to the ground level to find ourselves among pots and pans rather than paper and pens. In this room, we shall reconvene with Fatima, Alice, and the green bean (*haricot vert*).

Virginia Woolf wrote many years ago, "They [male authors] seldom spare a word for what was eaten. It is part of the novelist's convention not to mention soup and salmon and ducklings, as if soup and salmon and ducklings were of no importance whatsoever" (Woolf 1992, 12). Now, join me in the kitchen where we shall explore how the politics of gender and food bring insights to the subject matter of social inclusion, which is the second tenet of the commons. Following Woolf, I will spare loads of words on the women who cook and on what is eaten in the community kitchen.

Interlude II

Louise

“Everybody is welcome in the general assembly. Take François, he’s shy and almost never speaks, he’s there. And Fatima, she also participated a while ago. She even brought a friend who wanted to learn more about the *gilets jaunes*.”

Fatima

“I went to an assembly meeting one time. They spoke a language I didn’t understand. I brought my neighbor, apologized to her afterwards. We didn’t belong there.
In the union, I make a bigger difference than discussing philosophical ideas of the commons in the general assembly.”

Alice

“I want to *do* something, I don’t want to sit and discuss politics. That’s why, we were a handful of women who started the community kitchen. Can you believe it? In the 21st century, men discuss and women cook. We do actually also have a “community kitchen general assembly”, where we address occurring problems that are associated with running the kitchen; how can we get a new refrigerator, who can help us fix the van, can we rethink the dishwashing system?

From Paper and Pens to Pots and Pans

In Chapter 5, which we move to now, we stay in the community hall, where Chapter 4 took place. But from the general assembly on the first floor, we take the staircase down to the kitchen. Before we enter Scene 7, let me briefly recall one of the previous related ethnographic descriptions. In Scene 3 (Chapter 1), we followed the *gilets jaunes* glean vegetables at *Rungis* on an early Monday morning. Now, Scene 7 extends the story from *Rungis* by turning to the cooking of the dumpster-dived greens. The scene teaches us new lessons on how the commons work, notably on how the second tenet – social inclusion – is (and can be further) enacted.

Turning the gaze to the kitchen, we add to the previous chapter by including a gendered, racialized, and more-than-human perspective to our discussion of the commons. Another way to put it is that the two sets of practices (in the general assembly and in the community kitchen) consist of different modes of sweaty work, where some bodies connect with each other in the kitchen and others do so in the meeting room. In Chapter 4, we saw that the group of *gilets jaunes* sweated in different modes, as they gathered in the general assembly, fighting for a radical democracy of

self-organization (tenet 1 of the commons). We also saw that the sweaty resistance moved ambiguously in inward- and outward directions, closing down and opening up the identity of the *gilets jaunes* to the broader public in different ways. We now turn to the sweaty flows within the group rather than those that connect the group with their co-citizens. Doing so demands that we pay close attention to the gendered divisions of labor and other internal hierarchies within the group.

As this chapter focuses on how social inclusion plays out in the community kitchen, we replace the desk in the meeting room with the kitchen table – a rearrangement that enables an inclusion of more bodies than in Chapter 4, including those of Fatima and Alice.[92] As we shall see, we even find seats for nonhuman bodies who do not normally occupy a chair, when the green beans turn out as a main protagonist. Together, Fatima, Alice, and the green beans expand the story of the commons, inviting us to reconsider who can (and should) be considered as members in the commons, but also more generally in our democratic communities.

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[92] Yet, some bodies, such as Louise and Samuel, are present both places.

5

The Community Kitchen

Scene 7

This scene takes place on a Wednesday morning in the community hall.

A cloud of steam moves from a big industrial cooking pot upward in the direction of the ceiling. On its way, it meets Fatima's facial skin, as she stands right above the stove. She adds spices and stirs them around, the damp intensifies and covers more of her face. Her skin begins to shine, as tiny sweat drops pop out on her forehead.

I observe Fatima from the other side of the counter that divides the kitchen from the dining hall. On "my" side, I cannot feel the damp, but I see it. I also hear the sound of the spices and onions that fry in the pot, and I smell the oil mixing with the other ingredients. Fatima is the only person

in the kitchen; she is cooking couscous as a side dish to the green bean stew.

In the dining hall, Alice, Emma, Samuel, and I chop vegetables. We sit around a table, each of us with a cutting board, a knife, and different vegetables in front of us. I am in charge of the beans.

It is easy to tell that the day has just begun; we are all quiet as if we were still in the process of waking up. I do not know what goes through the others' minds and bodies, but I find the atmosphere pleasant: We are occupied with our individual task, which, when taken together, will result in a common meal.

*

I think about the beans that lay in front of me in the bowl. They look almost identical with the same shape, length, and color. I reach my hand toward them and grab a handful. They are still wet from the rinse, so I put them on a kitchen towel to dry. Then, one at a time, I put the beans on the cutting board and chop off their ends. Otherwise, I leave them as they are, not slicing them into smaller pieces. I continue the work until all the beans have had their ends removed, so that they are ready to be cooked with the potatoes, tomatoes, and carrots that Alice, Emma, and

Samuel (each) prepare(s). The rhythm of the four of us sitting around the table preparing food has become a habit for me by now. Alice, Emma, and Samuel constitute the core of the community kitchen. It is rarer that Fatima is here but when she joins, she makes couscous and works in the kitchen at the stove. Fatima is used to this kind of work. In her day-job, she works as a cook in a big canteen and at home, she cooks too. I come to think of the conversations Fatima and I have had throughout my fieldwork.

The first time I spoke with her was on the phone. The second time, she invited me to her apartment. I remember that we talked about the community kitchen, while we were drinking hot chocolate in her living room. She told me that for her, it does not make sense that the kitchen only serves organic and vegetarian or vegan food. "People got to eat", she said, "they cannot be picky of what they put into their mouths." Hard working people (those with sweatshop jobs as many do who live in Fatima's apartment block) need food that fills their stomachs when they return from work. "Meat fills you", she said. The most important fight for Fatima as a *gilet jaune* is the fight for social justice, which for her means better working conditions and food autonomy.

*

Back in the kitchen, Fatima lets her couscous sauce simmer, and a north-African aroma of the spices starts to fill the room we are sitting in. The smell makes me think of the political debate food gives rise to in France. For example, different politicians comment on what they believe is a real French meal. In a tweet, Valérie Pécresse (from the Conservative Party, *Les Républicains*) wrote that to her, a steak with a good wine is *the* French food. Fabien Roussel from the Communist Party differently suggested that meat and cheese are typically French. And according to Sandrine Rousseau from the Green Party, vegetarian couscous constitutes a great French meal.

Food is clearly about more than filling our bellies; it is about religion, political ideology, class, gender, and national identity (Counihan 1999). Anthropologist Arjun Appadurai refers to this as a matter of "gastro-politics", which means that food choices are imbued with cultural values (Appadurai 1981). Food opens up discussions about social relations and issues of inclusion and exclusion.

We may even use this knowledge to interpret Fatima's emphasis on meat and couscous as an expression of her socio-economic position in France, as it embodies a mix of

Roussel and Rousseau's food politics. In a nutshell, this means that Fatima's preferred food constitutes a combination of "working class food" and a French postcolonial food culture from the Maghreb countries. Differently, we see that the three young white *gilets jaunes* Alice, Emma, and Samuel identify the community kitchen as a vegetarian initiative, which lies more univocally in line with Rousseau's ecofeminist profile.

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Now, Fatima brings a pot of couscous grains to our table. She wants to show how to prepare them as delicately as possible. "The best result", she says, "occurs when we massage the grains gently in our hands. They then loosen up and become soft". She demonstrates it by putting her hand into the pot of couscous grains lumped together in big chunks – a form they have taken when they were rinsed. With her hand, Fatima massages the grains; they run up and down between her fingers. "They'll feel like silk in your mouth", she says, before returning to the stove.

I take a handful of the grains in my palm, and I imagine that they appreciate my touch, as I move them softly in my hand. It feels more awkward than it looked when Fatima did it. Then, I make eye contact with Alice, who smiles and

seems more at ease. We take our time experimenting with the texture, while Fatima continues her work in the kitchen. Emma has now joined her at the stove to cook the bean stew with the vegetables we have finished chopping. Samuel takes a break in the patio, and Alice and I are now the only ones in the dining hall. I know that she recently returned to Montreuil after spending a month in Bretagne – the French region where she was born – and I ask her about her stay.

Throughout my months in Paris, I have learned that Alice is torn between fighting in Montreuil and living on the countryside with a better chance of being food autonomous. One time, she formulated it this way, “We’re a group of people in Montreuil who talk about saving money to buy a piece of land outside the city where we can cultivate our own food. Then we could provide the community kitchen with French vegetables and fruits.” This is not an unrealistic scenario because Alice knows how to grow produce. Her father – a passionate ecologist – taught her how to work with vegetables and fruits when she was a child and in her childhood home, the family has a kitchen garden.

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I then leave Alice to go to the restroom, and when I look at the sign on the door, I think about how the politics of gender is another factor of differentiation on top of the gastro-politics in the community kitchen.

Photo 8. The edited all-genders restroom sign

Alice, on the one hand, is frustrated with the fact that it is women who primarily work in the kitchen. Fatima, on the other hand, does not think of it as a problem: “We women are good at cooking”, Fatima said, when I asked her, and she added, “We have way more serious problems to handle than that”. But for Alice, reworking gender norms is just as important, which is why she has edited the sign on the door to the restroom. Alice hopes it will serve as a signal for more genders to join the community kitchen.

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I return to the dining hall where Alice has finished preparing the couscous grains. We each grab a bowl and carry them to the kitchen. Fatima and Emma still work at the stove. Fatima says that the food is almost ready; she just needs to add some lemon juice before it can be served.

For the community kitchen to open properly, however, some practical tasks remain: writing the menu on the blackboard, setting the tables, and decorating them with flowers. It is almost noon, more volunteers have joined, and these final tasks can be done rather quickly. I begin to write the menu in the patio in front of the dining hall, where Alice places the sign that describes the economic principles of flexible prices in the community kitchen. As with the peach currency (*La Pêche* in Scene 6, Chapter 4), the *gilets jaunes* have not invented the flexible price system. The alternative system is common to many activist groups who want to challenge the capitalist logics. I read the sign: "Flexible prices is a political, anticapitalistic tool that stands in opposition to fixed prices. Fixed prices are insensitive to differences in socioeconomic positions. A system of flexible prices urges people to pay what they find appropriate, and the system wants to make people reflect on the work that is embedded in preparing the meal. Equality,

responsibility, and solidarity are three key words of the flexible price system."

I finish writing the menu and bring the blackboard to the street in front of the dining hall. We place it here to attract passersby to join the community kitchen in an attempt to open up the space as much as possible to the broader public and to a plurality of precarious people beyond the members of the *gilets jaunes*. Besides the blackboard, we hang posters on bus stops and in other public places to promote the initiative. I then begin to stack our leftover vegetables in boxes and add another sign, "*légumes gratuits"* (free vegetables). Leaving the boxes of vegetables in front of the community hall, I enter the hall again, and Alice now suggests that I write additional signs saying "salt" and "pepper". She assists Emma in finishing the *ragout haricots verts*, I write the signs and put them on the table. Now, the community kitchen is ready to open.

Photo 9. The green bean stew

As I welcome the first person who arrives for an early lunch, I hear Alice laughing behind me. I turn around and see that she points at the sign I have written, while continuing to chuckle. “You’ve written pear (*poire*) and not pepper (*poivre*), she says.” I also start laughing and now Fatima joins in with her laughter too. I am used to these types of situations due to either my pronunciation- or spelling errors. But the shared laughter does something

good for the atmosphere in the room; I feel a sense of intimacy and companionship.

In the middle of our giggle, Louise arrives with two big bags of bread, one in each hand. She has been lucky to get numerous baguettes from the anarchist bakery in Montreuil. *"Salut, les gilets jaunes"*, she says as she enters the door, wearing her vest. She approaches Fatima and they hug each other. Louise has told me many stories of Fatima's strength and temper, of her impressive work in the union, and of her wonderful cooking. I know that they are close to each other.

I observe that Louise does not give much attention to Alice, and I recall that some of the *gilets jaunes* think that Louise is too dominant in the group. Alice once put it in these words: "Louise just got all the attention she needs. She chats with people in her visible yellow vest while the rest of us work behind the scenes". This seems to be a rather accurate description of the situation as it unfolds now: Louise welcomes the people who arrive, as if she had cooked the whole morning and could now finally act as the host. In the meantime, I slice the bread she has brought. But I appreciate our division of labor. Louise is a great host; she makes the arriving people smile, gives them attention, and shows that she cares about them.

Queer Commons

"Most farmers in the world are women, and most girls are future farmers: they learn the skills and knowledge of farming in fields and in farms. Women-centered food systems are based on sharing and caring."

Vandana Shiva (2016, 111)

"In Terrapolis, shed of masculinist universals and their politics of inclusion, guman[93] are full of inderterminate genders and genres, full of kinds-in-the-making."

Donna Haraway (2016, 12)

In Scene 7, we reencounter Fatima, Alice, and the green beans – humans and nonhumans I have introduced in Scene 2 and Scene 3 (Chapter 1). This chapter turns to how these bodies enact a politics of social inclusion as they work and sweat in the community kitchen. The central role of women – and food (no food, no community kitchen) – makes me argue that the most fruitful way to study social inclusion (in the community kitchen and in other practices and communities too) requires an incorporation of gendered and more-than-human bodies (Dichman 2023a).[94] I see these two steps as

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[93] Donna Haraway reconfigures the human as "transmogrified…into guman, that worker of and in the soil…[Gumans are] beings of the mud more than the sky…" (Haraway 2016, 11-12).

[94] Please notice that I do not want to reduce the differences between the general assembly and the community kitchen into a binary matter of men participating in the assembly and women cooking in the community kitchen. As the ethnographic material suggests, a complex division of labor in the *gilets jaunes* takes place. For

extensions rather than replacements of the more typical approaches to social inequality that primarily emphasize the politics of class, such as the ones in Chapter 4 (Dardot and Laval 2015; Malm 2018).

So far, we have studied the *gilets jaunes* in Montreuil as a group of bodies who collectively, but still in very different ways, fight for the commons, and thus for social- and ecological justice. In this chapter, we continue to bear in mind the different situations of the *gilets jaunes.* Recall that within women *gilets jaunes*, which our three main protagonists – Louise, Fatima, and Alice – exemplify, different life situations exist when it comes to class, age, ethnicity, religion, and so on. We can also put it this way: the political challenge of social, gendered inequality is a complex matter of intersectionality (Ahmed 2007; Brewer 1999; Crenshaw 2022; Collins 1998; Lorde 2007; Smith 1998). Moreover, nonhumans, such as food, become relevant in the discussion of an intersectional social inclusion in the community kitchen, by which I mean that the life situations of the green beans also have something to say about what we may call a more-than-human politics of social inequality.[95] We may better appreciate this when we echo the point that sweaty commons describe our contemporary world of social, gendered inequality and global warming. The essence is that in order to resist this heated affair – fighting for a cooler earth of more social equality – both

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example, Louise participates in the assembly and Samuel cooks in the kitchen. Alice participates in the community kitchen more often than Fatima, and they undertake different kinds of jobs when they are there.

[95] For more on this, see also (Petitt 2023) on "multispecies intersectionality" and (Fejzic 2020) on "more-than-human intersectionality".

humans and nonhumans must thrive. Or, the argument goes, if the politics of social inclusion remains anthropocentric – and in that sense neglects the lives of nonhumans – the earth will probably become even warmer, because we continue to act in the same ways that contradict the life conditions on earth. Thus, without also including nonhumans into our communities – communities that depend on those nonhuman lives – we cannot successfully resist the sweaty commons condition. Based on this, I argue that women (and more genders) but also vegetables (and more nonhumans) ought to be seen as members of the commons in the community kitchen and elsewhere. To enact this two-step reconfiguration of social inclusion, the chapter turns to the relations of food and gender performativities in the community kitchen as a more-than-human concern.

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In terms of sweat, I continue the thinking of sweaty flows of resistance in the general assembly (Chapter 4) by suggesting that the community kitchen instantiates new modes of sweaty politics. Instead of speaking about sweaty flows that undertake complex inward- and outward movements when the *gilets jaunes* exclude and include the broader public and their co-citizens, the resistance work in the kitchen embodies other modes of inward- and outward sweaty flows. For example in Scene 7, we may say that we see inward sweaty movements in the sense that the kitchen sometimes embodies a "woman place". The reason for referring to this as a mode of inward directed sweat is that it risks forming a binary nexus of women-cooking in the community kitchen that substitutes the pair of men-

discussing in the general assembly. However, the sweaty work of gleaning vegetables and cooking in the community kitchen does not only project inward. As with the general assembly, the practices in the kitchen are complex: they embody crisscrossing modes of sweaty flows of resistance that go in different and overlapping directions. For example, the queer sign on the restroom door plays with transgressing binary gender identities. This, arguably, points in the direction of making the community kitchen inclusive to a more pluralized set of gendered bodies, which makes me refer to it as a case of outward moving sweaty resistance. That is, one that seeks to transform the community kitchen into a "queer place". Aiming to cultivate these outward flows, we dive into the sweaty ambiguities and expand them even more – and in more-than-human directions too.

To undertake this task, I begin the chapter with a brief introduction to feminist commons theory. This subfield adds to the commons theories of Chapter 4 by turning to women as the gender that is most dependent on access to communal natural resources in order to provide food (Federici 2010; Shiva 1988, 2016). Particularly, Vandana Shiva (1988, 2016) – a key feminist commons theorist – helps me to unpack some of the relations that exist between women and food in the community kitchen. As such, Shiva brings important insights to the discussion of gender politics in the kitchen, but she also risks reversing the existing gendered hierarchies by arguing for a woman-centered commons. This limitation – which may be excusable when taking into account the specific context of her

writings – directs me toward the queer theories of notably Sara Ahmed (2019), Donna Haraway (1988; 1991; 2016), and Catriona Sandilands (and Bruce Erickson (2010)). Together, these thinkers enable me to reconfigure social inclusion to become a matter of "indeterminate genders" and "genres"/species (Haraway 2016, 12). Anna Tsing (2014) provides the last step in expanding social inclusion to form a more-than-human politics. This, we will see, is decisive for responding to the sweaty commons conditions of today.

Feminist Commons

We begin with why and how feminist theory and commons theory are two closely related traditions. The main reason, according to feminist commons scholar Silvia Federici, is that women are the primary subjects of reproductive work, which makes them more dependent on access to communal natural resources, including food (Federici 2010). With this gendered division as a starting point, Federici approaches the commons in a way that differs from the ones we have worked with so far. In Chapter 4, we saw that Pierre Dardot and some of the *gilets jaunes* theorize the commons in "big terms", writing documents, defining the concept, and comparing the commons in Montreuil with the commons in other political contexts (such as in the Paris Commune and in the Zapatist occupations in Mexico).

Federici – in line with what Gibson-Graham argued in Chapter 2 – suggests that a feminist approach to the commons should turn to matters of everyday life, which means that the theorization of the

commons in more abstract articulations must also be formed by the material practices that condition and transform our lives. In the words of another commons scholar, Alexandros Kioupkiolis: Federici "put[s] flesh to the bones of [e.g. Dardot's] abstract idea of the commons" (Kioupkiolis 2020, 5). According to both Federici and Kioupkiolis, commons scholars such as Dardot[96] do not show much interest in such material practices, and their theorizations thus risk dismissing important perspectives, such as what goes on in the community kitchen (Federici 2011, 2021; Kioupkiolis 2020).

While the general assembly is also a materialization of an everyday practice, these political meetings often revolve around discussions of ideas such as the commons and the preparations of big events. This, we have seen, makes the practice of the general assembly exclude other *gilets jaunes*, such as Fatima and Alice, who either feel too unintellectual to participate (Fatima) or see the assembly as bringing too few practical, world-changing outcomes (Fatima and Alice). The initiative of the community kitchen clearly contrasts this, as it feeds precarious people once a week and thus changes the lives of these people in very basic and tangible ways.

Federici is far from being the only core feminist commons scholar. Maria Mies (1999) and Vandana Shiva (2016) also belong to the tradition of classical feminist commons theory. In the book, *Quotidien politique – Féminisme, écologie, subsistance* (2021),

[96] But also Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri (2004, 2011, 2019) (Kioupkiolis 2020).

French sociologist, Génèvieve Pruvost, writes that Federici, Mies, and Shiva together contribute to what she defines as feminist theories on ecological subsistence, which may be another way of defining feminist commons thinking.[97] With both different and similar anarchist, Marxist, socialist, ecologist, and eco-feminist backgrounds, Federici, Mies, and Shiva share a profound interest in relations between women, commons, and food (Federici 2010; Pruvost 2021). Together, their overall starting point is that patriarchal power structures have placed – and continue to place – women in the undervalued, reproductive, and domestic sphere, which makes women become associated with nature, cooking, and food in inferior ways (Federici 2018; Mies and Shiva 2014; Shiva 2016).[98] From this problematic construction of the relationship between women and nature, the main task becomes to unravel and rework the assumptions that construct women and food (land, nature) in subordinate ways. The hope is to make both women and nature become regarded as socially equal to all other bodies, which would then result in formations of more feminist and ecological societies.

[97] Pruvost adds the ecofeminist thinker Francoise d'Eaubonne to this cluster of thinking. I return to d'Eaubonne in the Epilogue.
[98] See also (Bourdieu 2001; Plumwood 2003). Add to this Bonnie Thornton Dill's argument that black women historically have worked outside of the domestic sphere (Dill 1979).

Woman Commons

From this general introduction, let us turn more specifically to the work of Vandana Shiva, as she – for decades – most notably has analyzed the connections between women and the commons in relation to food. In *Who really Feeds the World?* (2016), Shiva argues that in places of the Global South, such as Nigeria, sub-Saharan Africa, and India, women have historically managed the land collectively as common places and resources (Shiva 2016, 120). With imperialism, however, Shiva writes, Western colonizers stole and privatized the women's lands (and seeds) and turned these places into monoculture and GMO ruled by agribusiness companies.[99] The problem with these firms is, according to Shiva, that they apply short-term goals of profit as the most prominent success criterion for cultivating the land (Shiva 2016, 117-120).

Shiva turns to a specific case that showcases this development in *Staying Alive: Women, Ecology, and Survival in India*, (1988) – a book written almost 30 years before *Who really Feeds the World?*. Here, Shiva writes about the Indian Chipko women commoners. In pre-colonial India, before the arrival of the British Empire, at least 80% of the natural resources were governed by women as commons goods (Shiva 1988).[100] The common forests and sites of agriculture were cultivated by women who developed methods for growing sustainable ecosystems, in which the soil and the trees could live,

[99] Because the colonizers regarded the indigenous women's ways of farming the land as "primitive" and disposable (Shiva 2016, 124).
[100] The remaining approximately 20% of the land was privately owned.

thrive, and thus bring long-term food supplies (Shiva 1988, Chapter 5). Yet with colonization, the right to use the forests – in this case in the areas around the Himalaya Mountains – were transferred to the British East India Company. This meant that the forests were transformed into trade goods, which made the trees become producers of paper (to non-local people) instead of food (to local people).[101] As colonizers – but also indigenous men who were hired by the British East India Company – cut the trees, the life conditions of many of the women were threatened. Or, put differently: with the commercialization of the forests, the women's produce disappeared.

This is how the Chipko resistance movement emerged. The women, who became precarious with colonialism, gathered in various resistance acts[102] to reclaim what Shiva refers to as "the feminine principle" of forestry, that is, their cultivation of the land in ways that nurture a range of human and nonhuman lives. To paraphrase Shiva: the Chipko movement fought for the feminine principle of foresting that sustains both women and "Mother Earth" (Shiva 1988, Chapter 5).

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We are now better equipped to explore Shiva's advocacy for replacing the colonial, "masculine", mechanic, and reductive approach to nature with "feminine" ways of caring for natural goods as a way to open up the politics of gender and food in the community

[101] The banj trees were replaced with pine trees (Shiva 2021, 28).
[102] Such as performing "tree hugging" ceremonies and occupying territories (Shiva 1988).

kitchen. We know that the argument in favor of “the feminine” draws on the critique of colonialism and capitalism that suppress both women and nature. Thus, Shiva proposes a woman-centered commons as a response.

Even though my aim in this chapter is to configure social inclusion and communal membership in ways that go beyond the inclusion of women and food, Shiva provides an important first step by historicizing the strong link that exists between women, food, and the commons. Her analysis is not only relevant in the contexts of Asian, African, and Latin American countries: as we have seen in Chapter 2, French women too have been – and are still – the ones most responsible for food provision and cooking in the households. Bringing this in conversation with the gender performativities that play out in the community kitchen, I argue that we can gain new insights on how the issue of social inclusion works – and may be reworked – in company of both Shiva and the group of *gilets jaunes* in Montreuil. [103]

Let us begin with Fatima who is the first woman we meet in Scene 7. During the whole preparation of the community kitchen, she works at the stove. We know that it is quite rare that Fatima joins the community kitchen: normally, she is busy with her daytime job,

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[103] I do not suggest that feminist commons theory does not bring any attention to queer feminism. Federici, for example, defines her feminism as a standpoint shaped by the struggle against sexual discrimination. This, in my reading, includes queer people too (Federici 2010). She also refers to the Zapatista movement in Mexico, which is a commons movement that turns to genders as matters of non-binary identities.

where she (also) cooks in a big firm canteen – a sort of sweatshop job with a minimum wage as remuneration. Thus, Fatima cooks at home, at her professional work, and as *gilet jaune*. We may even say that her cooking skills constitute her way of belonging to the *gilets jaunes.*[104] Fatima thinks it is "natural" that women cook. Instead of wanting to dismantle the bond between women, food, and cooking, she fights for better working conditions for sweatshop worker women who cook. Thus from her situation, in which the link between women and food sediments, the struggle consists of acknowledging cooking as an important kind of feminine work instead of de-gendering the relation.[105] When Fatima proudly stirs in the pots and pans and says, "Women are good at cooking", she performs a woman gender identity that links with food and cooking. This, in turn, partakes in the constitution of the community kitchen as a woman place.

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[104] Recall Fatima's alienation of the "intellectual" resistance work in the general assembly in Interlude II. Moreover, Audre Lorde has shown how the kitchen can be a place of social inclusion for women of color. Lorde even founded the so-called "Kitchen Table Press" that was made up by women of color who developed ideas, while they were working in the kitchen (Ahmed 2019, 220).

[105] We may also add that as a working-class woman in urban France, Fatima does not dream of sharing a common land or cultivating her own food. She does not mind buying her groceries in the supermarket. To her, cheap prices matter the most. Or, social justice is, in her view, prior to issues of ecological justice. Fatima is preoccupied with getting food on the table. Meat or not, organic, or not – as long as she can fill the bellies of her family members and of her fellow people in Montreuil. Add to this the story I told in Chapter 2 about the immigration to France under De Gaulle that followed from the independence of former French colonies. The event of decolonization is interesting for us to consider here, because it is part of Fatima's trajectory, and it is also part of her relation to food. Fatima arrived in France from Algeria in the 1960s after the country became independent in 1962. In other words, she arrived simultaneously with Carrefour and with the new food culture of supermarkets, it brought with it.

So, the situatedness of Fatima's lived experiences (and thinking) – as well as of Shiva's thinking (and lived experiences) – generate a set of strong links between women and food. Scene 7 however is too ambiguous for us to be satisfied with this conclusion. With our focus on differences within the *gilets jaunes*, and the differences within women *gilets jaunes* too, it is clear that Fatima and Alice perform diverse sets of gender identities, both in relation to food and to what kind of place the community kitchen should be. A shift to Alice's perspective may thus help us to explore another strategy for creating a more socially inclusive kitchen. For, if we end up replacing the "masculine general assembly" with "a feminine community kitchen" as a way to think of social inclusion in new ways, does the community kitchen not then embody the same kind of unitarianism that the general assembly, in some ways, came to materialize – just now with another (woman) gender? Can we not pluralize the membership of the commons without turning around the homogeneous gender compositions?

In sweaty terms, we may say that the social inclusion of women in particular risks making the kitchen become a place of inward-projected resistance work. But again, let me add and stress that the picture is more complex than saying that Fatima's work only directs inward. Indeed, Fatima performs a pluralized, split woman identity, as a *gilet jaune* working-class woman of color. For example, she participates in the pluralization – and thus in a sweaty outward flow – of the majority of white women in the community kitchen. This means that Shiva does help us to explore some of the sweaty outward

flows of the kitchen too, when she points to communities of women, and notably women of color. With all this in mind, my wager is that we can take the social inclusion even further given that our aim is to include a plurality of different bodies and identities beyond the woman gender. Thus, following the sweaty flows of gender politics beyond women, we may also begin to queer the place of the community kitchen.

Queering the Community Kitchen

Shifting to Alice, we encounter such a queer way of relating gender and food to each other in the community kitchen. Alice sees the woman-food/nature nexus as a problem that should be solved by destabilizing the norms of gender identities and of feminized conceptions of nature ("Mother Earth"). When Alice co-founded the community kitchen, she experienced the rigidity of this binary scheme: only women participated in the practices of gleaning and cooking. Her solution is not to upend the hierarchy but to dissolve the very structure that created the problem to begin with. Her placing of queer gender signs on the restroom doors is one attempt to do this.

Photo 10. The queer gender sign on the restroom door

Let us dwell on Alice's queer signs to unfold how objects and nonhumans, such as doors and food, partake in the (gendered) identity of the community kitchen. In *What's the Use?* (2019), Sara Ahmed also turns to restroom doors as queer objects. Looking at a sign similar to the one above (Photo 10), before it was queered, Ahmed argues that the signified door partakes in the constitution of human gender identities in the way that the act of entering the door co-constitutes the performativity of a specific gender (Ahmed 2019, 202-3). Another way to put it is that the sign on the door – male or female – instructs persons to use one door or the other and the entanglement of the toilet user and the door makes the door become a material-semiotic actor with the capacity of reassigning gender identities in binary (the original sign) or in pluralizing (Alice's sign) ways (Ahmed 2019, 202). Alice's erasure of "*dames*" on the sign and her addition of an all genders symbol makes the door become a queer entrance to a toilet that can be used by a plurality of users beyond the

binary scheme. Ahmed puts it in these words: "A queer door can be the effect of unexpected arrivals: openings intended for some things to pass through can end up providing an access point for others" (Ahmed 2019, 203). Could we say that Alice opens the restroom doors for others? And can we do a similar job with the entrance to the kitchen, allowing more genders to participate in cooking for the community kitchen?

Ahmed moves from the specificity of doors to a more general concern of showing how objects of many sorts partake in the queering of identities. To do this, they draw on Donna Haraway's hybrid entities, of which the most legendary may be the cyborg: a non-binary identity constituted by entangled human and technological forces (Ahmed 2019, 203; Haraway 1991). Haraway's cyborg figure contests the "natural" limits and boundaries of identities and bodies, which is why Ahmed refers to it as a queer figure. The coyote – another queer figure Haraway developed before the cyborg – does a similar job. As Haraway puts it: "Perhaps the world resists being reduced to mere resource because it is-not mother/matter/mutter-but *coyote*, a figure of the always problematic, always potent tie between meaning and bodies" (Haraway 1988, 596, my emphasis).

The point of mentioning the cyborg and the coyote here is that they take us one step closer to reconsidering the gendered human-food relationship in more pluralizing ways. Different from Shiva's conception of nature as "Mother Earth" – the idea that the earth and the soil is a "she" – Haraway suggests that nature is a problematic

coyote. It is neither mother (female), nor matter (dull and inert) but an essentially contestable material-semiotic figure. Following this line of thinking, we get to consider the earthly matter of food as enabling renegotiated meanings and bodies. Or: Ahmed and Haraway make me wonder what happens when we contest the “natural” limits of the “woman identity” that is tangled up with food. Could this decoupling provide a way to make a more pluralized assemblage of bodies participate in the community kitchen?

To answer this question – or perhaps to formulate it more precisely – I add a third example of Haraway’s queer creatures, the guman, which is a feminist more-than-human conception of humans, who “stay with the trouble” in the mud rather than flee to the sky (Haraway 2016, 11-12). Gumans are entangled creatures of human and non-human bodies and they – or we? – are not binary gendered, but gender- and genre crossing. “Guman are full of inderterminate genders and genres, full of kinds-in-the-making.” (Haraway 2016, 12) – as Haraway also puts it in the opening of the chapter. This enables us to rephrase the question: can we configure the community kitchen to be a place of “gumans” (instead of humans)?

The introduction to *Queer ecologies: sex, nature, politics, desire* (2010) enables an affirmative answer to this question, as Catriona Sandilands and Bruce Erickson interrogate the heterosexual productions of bodies and nature (Sandilands and Bell 2010, 5). Sandilands and Erickson (want to) show that it is possible to think of

the human-nature nexus in alternative queer ways.[106] Translated into our endeavor in this chapter, this means that they inspire us to further pluralize the social inclusion in the kitchen.

To substantiate how queer and environmental politics intersect in specific entanglements of human bodies and nature, let us briefly look at how they engage with and analyze the American Oscar winning movie *Brokeback Mountain* (2005). In the film, the two men Ennis and Jack meet each other in the mountains of eastern South Dakota and Wyoming, where they work as shepherds in the grassing seasons. In these mountains, Ennis and Jack – who both perform a "rural-masculine", "cowboy" gender – develop a sexual relationship, while they assure each other of their heterosexuality: "I ain't queer" (Ennis). "Me, neither" (Jack) (Sandilands and Erickson 2010, 1-2). When Jack and Ennis are not in the Big Horn Mountains, they live in different cities, each with a wife and child(ren), which is the only possible family structure available for living in these places. One of Sandilands' and Erickson's points is that it is the nature – the mountains – far away from Ennis and Jack's heterosexual lives – that enables them to outlive their homoerotic desires. The remote spot, the wildness of the mountains, becomes a homosexual safe space.[107] The overall point I suggest we take from this analysis of *Brokeback*

[106] See also (Gaard 1997; Hird 2004).
[107] Sandilands' and Erickson's analysis of *Brokeback Mountain* makes me think of Andreas Malm's advocacy of the wildness as a place of liberation (Chapter 4). We can now say that the wildness may also serve as a queer refuge. The wildness affirms the sex acts that are otherwise considered taboo in human society (Bell 2010, 136). In the mountains, the natural setting for sexual desires outlaws the norms of "human civilization" (Bell 2010, 143).

Mountain is that nature, landscapes, – and even food – can play unexpected, pluralizing roles in forming both human sexual behavior and gender identities.

Now, let us summarize the queering movements undertaken so far. We began with Alice who invited more queer people to participate in the community kitchen (by reconfiguring the signs on the restroom doors), before we moved to the queering forces of nature (and food) by linking queer theory more explicitly to environmental thinking. This thinking is, in fact, also part of the resistance work, Alice conducts elsewhere as member of the eco-queer social movement *Les Bombes Atomiques* (LBA 2021). With fellow *LBA* activists, Alice occupies territories the French government has decided to use for storing nuclear waste. The *LBA* activists perform these occupations with queer signs – wearing gender crossing garments (Holmegaard 2020) – that emphasize what they see as a suitable conjunction of ecological and queer activism. Their aim is to pluralize the lives of both humans and nonhumans as much as possible. Without going further into the resistance work of *LBA*, we can bring these eco-queer thoughts to the kitchen in Montreuil. In my view, the poster below nurtures a provocative vision of a pluralized relationship between genders and food in the *gilets jaunes'* community kitchen.

Photo 11. The *gilets jaunes'* poster

The poster was made to promote a special community kitchen during the Covid-pandemic, in which people were invited to take part in a discussion of the political situation, while sharing a meal. To further contextualize the poster, it is important to know that Alice's "group" of younger, queer *gilets jaunes* articulates a link between meat, masculinity, and global warming. These people associate vegetarianism with queerness and diversity; to them, vegetables gather people across genders, religions, and traditions, while consuming greens is also a way of caring for the planet by diminishing CO_2-emissions. This is why the community kitchen is vegetarian. On top of this, we already know that Alice is skeptical of

the gender (im)balance that takes place in the practices of gleaning and cooking: one way she expresses this is by reworking the restroom signs. Another is to advertise the community kitchen with the poster that, in a similar vein as the restroom signs, may work as an attempt to queer the community kitchen.

Thus, I propose a reading of the poster that explores a queer identity of the community kitchen. On it, we see a person with a gender crossing appearance: short hair, red lips, a flat chest, and a yellow vest. This person may be queer, but what is even queerer is the way the vegetables are drawn. The lettuce and the tomato do more than communicate the fact that vegetarian food is served. The *gilet jaune* who painted the poster has placed the vegetables so they cover the person's genitals. What does this mean? What do the vegetables hide? I want to suggest that it is an attempt to disturb the hegemonic relations that continue to tie women to food in unproductive ways. In my reading, the poster expresses a hope for more social inclusion in the community kitchen (but also elsewhere), as it experiments with renegotiating the links between genders and food in creative and novel ways.

Queering Even More

From the poster, we take a final step in our journey toward configuring social inclusion as inclusively as possible. I argue that this entails regarding food itself as a member of the commons and thus also as a member of the community kitchen. Or, said differently,

I want to end the chapter by thinking of social inclusion not only gender-pluralistically but also as something that resists anthropocentrism, which, we know, is necessary in order to fruitfully address the sweaty commons conditions (of social, gendered inequality and global warming). Thus, I suggest that a more-than-human understanding of social inclusion works as a way out of the numerous unecological practices that continue to cause global warming, such as the unsustainable human-food relations at *Rungis* (and in the community kitchen that relies on produce from *Rungis*). If we come to regard food as members of our communities, would we not treat it differently?

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We have already established that human and nonhuman bodies entangle in material-semiotic ways: the restroom door-gender nexus (Ahmed), the technology-body-nature crisscross of the cyborg, the coyote, and the guman (Haraway), and the mountains-sexuality tie (Sandilands and Erickson) all demonstrate that nonhumans affect our bodies and lives. Besides, this is how we think about sweaty bodies. Recall that sweat runs across human-nonhuman bodily boundaries. The sweat drop that appears on our human – or guman – skin expresses our body's continuous embodiment in a more-than-world. We sweat when we eat, when we carry things, when we feel distressed, but also "just" when we live and breathe. By thinking with sweat, we have learned that our (human) bodies are affected and formed by the (nonhuman) world, while our (human) bodies also affect and form the (nonhuman) world. In sum, sweat crisscrosses

differently gendered bodies and traverses the human and nonhuman. So, as human sweaty engagement with the world is already metabolic and more-than-human, why do we then not include nonhumans as living, social actors, and thus as members and partakers of our lives and communities?[108]

In my view, Anna Tsing puts the question in even better words, when she asks how it could have "ever occurred to anyone that living things other than humans are not social? The more one thinks about it, the more ridiculous an opposition between human sociality and nonhuman – what? 'non-sociality'? – becomes" (Tsing 2014, 27). But since we are not used to think of nonhumans as social, Tsing continues to write, we become reluctant to include them as partakers of our lives (Tsing 2014, 27). Thus to contest this predominant way of thinking, she sets up to explore the sociality of nonhumans. With "social" and "sociality", Tsing means the ability "to make in entangling relations with others" (Tsing 2014, 27).

Turning to "our" nonhuman bodies that make up the community kitchen "in entangling relations with others", we clearly see that food

[108] See also how philosopher Annemarie Mol treats food in a way that makes her treat edible matter as community members. In *Eating in Theory* (2021), she writes "In eating…subject and object interfere with each other, change each other, intertwine…relational modalities are at stake" (Mol 2021, 73-74). These relational modalities between food and human bodies makes her search for new philosophical insights from "the creatures from whose flesh (eggs, milk, leaves, fruits, seeds, roots)" we cook and eat (Mol 2021, 114). Mol further argues that humans and food are not only relational beings, they also share a "vitality". Like human bodies, food is a living thing – it can thrive and die – and (cooking and) eating is literally acts where the human body becomes even more enriched by new modes of nonhuman life (Mol 2021, 109; 2002; 2008).

entangles with pots and pans as well as with gendered human bodies, as they world-make the practice of the kitchen. For example in Scene 3 (Chapter 1) and Scene 7, the green beans play a particularly important role for the constitution of the community kitchen: without them, there would be no bean stew to gather around and to fill the bellies of precarious people in Montreuil. The green beans both take part in social relationships with their human cultivators, traders, cooks, and consumers, as well as in nonhuman relations with the air, soil, insects, and the many other beings they live with in symbiotic processes (Tsing 2014; Rubow 2022, 131). This makes the community kitchen become a place, practice, and product of multispecies agency, in which food is a vital member, which, in turn, suggests a reconfiguration of social inclusion as a matter of more-than-human politics.

Thus, let us imagine the green bean's testimony as a partaker of the community kitchen similar to Fatima and Alice, whose experiences we have been listening to and thinking with in the chapter. From Susanne Freidberg's ethnographic descriptions of the supply chain of the green beans (Chapter 1), we know that the beans are commodified and that they undertake cross-continental travels to arrive to *Rungis* (Freidberg 2004b) – before some of them end up in Montreuil. By letting the bean tell its story, we tune into the ecological challenges of the current human-food relations that detach us from seeing and treating food as members in the first place. Diving into the bean's journey from Burkina Faso to Paris, we thus add to what we have

already learned in Scene 3 (and Chapter 2) – now with the specific concern of more-than-human social inclusion in mind.

The Green Bean's Story

Stage 1.

"With hard labor from Burkinabé farmers, it has taken me two months to grow big enough to reach harvest size. The peak season for me to grow in Burkina Faso is between January and March but the period has shortened with the increasing lack of water supplies from global warming. I need a well-drained soil to live and thrive.

Now, I am in a truck, laying in a five-kilo box surrounded by my companion beans. It takes five hours to arrive to the airport in Ouagadougou from "my" farm in Vallée de Sourou. It is getting dark, the plane is supposed to leave at night.

As I lay here in the car, I go through the challenges we might meet on our way. We might not arrive to the airport in time, we might get rejected at the packing house in the airport, and we might thus risk feeding no one, because Burkinabé cannot always afford to buy us."

Stage 2.

"Luckily, we arrive to Ouagadougou without any obstacles and the women in the airport's packing house get us ready to board the plane. I discover that not all of my fellow beans come with me; the women

decide that some of them are either too fat, wrinkled, or asymmetrical for French people's standards (to want to buy them and eat them).

On the plane, we now look more homogeneous as we are stored in cooling boxes. This second step of the journey is a bit longer than the drive to the airport; it takes around six hours to land in Orly and then there is the drive to *Rungis*.

I have mixed feelings about being on my way to France. I was born and raised in Burkina Faso but I know that my ancestors lived in France. Going to France thus means going to the homeland of my lineage. In the early 20th century, French missionaries brought my crop to Burkina Faso and they taught Burkinabé to grow the vegetable."

Stage 3.

"We finally arrive at *Rungis*. What a place! I have never seen so many different kinds of vegetables and fruits – and in those quantities. I still do not know if I am going to a Parisian restaurant, to a supermarket in France, or somewhere else.

Then, I see a silhouette of a man who gets closer to the stack of boxes I am placed in. With some kind of vehicle, he moves the whole stack to one corner of the room. I do not know what this means but after a while, I hear three women chatting as they enter the building. One of them shows some kind of certificate to the man and he points them in my direction. The women smile, thank the man for offering them the boxes, and approach the stack I am in.

One of the three women carries me into a van, and I feel relieved. For a moment, I thought I had undertaken this long journey to rotten up in a bin at this gigantic fresh produce market, but it now seems as if I am going to feed someone."

Conclusion

With this short anthropomorphic bean-story, I have sought to create some ecological attachment to the green bean. Specifically, I have envisioned it as a member of a more-than-human community in Montreuil. The vignette thus enables us to conclude that social inclusion is not only about (1) including gendered, (sexed, classed, and racialized) bodies, but also a matter of (2) including nonhumans. This reconfiguration of social inclusion notices the differentiated – human and nonhuman – sweaty work members undertake to create a practice, a place, and a community.

In the making of the community kitchen, we have seen that the bodies of especially Fatima, Alice, and the green bean sweat. Fatima sweats when she works at the stove, Alice sweats when she gleans at *Rungis* and when she fights for transforming the kitchen into a queer space. And the green bean sweats as it grows to harvest size, is transported from Africa to Europe, and then fears to become waste. Moreover, the soil – the home of the bean before it is harvested – dries out as our human-food relations (embodied in *Rungis*) emit too much CO_2, which makes the world become a warmer place. As these

processes continue, food scarcities turn more serious, which makes the heated politics of social inequality become even more heated.

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The *gilets jaunes* fight against this development in their kitchen. Different from the general assembly in Chapter 4, the community kitchen materializes through bodily work that does not articulate the commons verbally. The kitchen does, however, embody the commons otherwise, when (gendered) bodies prepare and serve food for precarious people as a common good. Making the community kitchen a place of common meals, we have seen that its identity navigates in-between becomings of a "woman place" (Fatima) and a "queer place" (Alice) – and even of a "more-than-human place" (the green bean). Thus, similar to the general assembly in Chapter 4, the work in the community kitchen in this chapter moves ambiguously in complex modes of inward and outward sweat. We can also describe the dynamics in this way: Fatima and Alice fight for undoing the subordinate effects of the historical linkages that continue to tie women to food. In this chapter, I have argued for an approach, which queers the gendered divisions of labor and identities within, between, and beyond humans and nonhumans. On top of addressing issues of gender politics that are crucial to contemporary feminist debates, I have thus also initiated a thinking of how we can become more ecologically attached to food, which is a subject I continue to pursue in Chapter 6.

Interlude III

Louise

"Fatima is the best chef among the *gilets jaunes*. She and I want to throw you a dinner; I host and Fatima cooks. You should hear more of her stories of resistance: did you know that her mom fought in Algeria with Frantz Fanon?"

Fatima

"I love to cook, so does my mom; women are good at cooking. I shop in the supermarket. It's easier and cheaper (though not as cheap as before). I often buy meat. Hard work demands a full belly; meat is nourishing, *éco est bobo*" [*eco*logy is *bo*urgeois-*bo*hème].

Alice

"We should talk more about issues of gender and sexuality. About the fact that society's division of labor is reproduced in the community kitchen The kitchen should be a queer place and an ecological place. A place, where a plurality of identities glean, cook, and eat food that is cultivated and traded sustainably in ecologically attached human-food relations."

From Burkinabe Beans to French Fruits

Every country and city witnesses its own history of human-food relations. In many places though, the stories are similar to the ones I have told in “The Green Bean’s Story” (Chapter 5) and in the development of modern food in France (Chapter 2). Different concepts seek to describe these predominant relations. For example, Vandana Shiva, as discussed in Chapter 5, frames them as histories of an agribusiness paradigm that rules under the “law of exploitation” (Shiva 2016). And Donna Haraway and Anna Tsing talk about the “plantationocene”, which they define as a set of modern agricultural structures that erase certain (colonized, indigenous) forms of lives and relationships (Haraway and Tsing 2019; Haraway 2015, 162).

In the chapter we turn to now, we will see that the *gilets jaunes* fight against these structures by experimenting with becoming more attached to food – and to peach trees in particular. To explore this third tenet of the commons – on top of self-organization and social inclusion, we exit the community hall – both the meeting room (Chapter 4) and the kitchen (Chapter 5) to move outdoor to the northern part of Montreuil. This is where the third world-making of the

commons takes place and it differs from the previous two worldlings in at least three ways.

First, in contrast to both the general assembly and the community kitchen, the democratic activism enacted with the peach trees is not initiated by the *gilets jaunes*. Instead, different activist groups and associations engage collectively in the fruit orchards in Northern Montreuil. In continuation of the discussion in Chapter 4, the practices of the commons in this chapter configure more pluralistically, because they move beyond the *gilets jaunes* in the community hall, engaging with a plurality of civil society actors. At *murs à pêches* – the field site of Chapter 6 – the commons bring together different people, moving it in the direction of the broader public.

The second difference relates to my presence in the field. I visited the fruit orchards in Montreuil during the last months of my fieldwork, and this experience made me view the democratic activism of the *gilets jaunes* anew. It opened up the commons toward a whole movement of food and climate activism beyond the community kitchen. Moreover, even though I only participated a handful of times in the activities at *murs à pêches*, the peaches have been on my mind for a longer time. They have been a reconvening

theme from my many conversations with the *gilets jaunes* in the community hall. For example, recall the counter currency, *La Pêche*, which is named after the peach production in Montreuil (Chapter 2 and Chapter 4). On top of this, the practices at *murs à pêches* exemplify what the *gilets jaunes*, such as Alice and Emma, as well as many other activists, are now doing in many places in France. They work with the soil, cultivating food with practices that experiment with ecological ways of living (Pruvost 2021).

Thirdly, Louise, Fatima, and Alice are no longer the main protagonists. This is simply because they have not participated in the same activities I have attended. The voices of these three women are still, though in subtler ways, present. Alice – but also Louise – find great interest in the politics of resisting global warming, and Fatima literally lives on what used to be the ten times bigger area of *murs à pêches*,[109] where the chapter takes place.

This latter point makes us recall that the urbanization and industrialization of the natural area of *murs à pêches* has provided housing for "new French people", such as Fatima. Thus, in even the most urbanized sites, such as this

[109] Please go back to Chapter 2 for a review and analysis of the natural history of *murs à pêches.*

landscape that has become more and more concreted and paved – we shall see that – it is still possible to become ecologically attached by developing and enacting a set of communal practices that care for the more-than-human, while also welcoming new people.

6

The Peach Trees

Scene 8

This scene takes place on a Saturday at *murs à pêches.*

I stand in front of the entrance to the school garden in Montreuil. Fatima lives just on the other side of the corner, so I already know the place quite well. I think about how her home is built on the soil that used to house the roots of the 30 hectares peach trees.

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Paul, one of the *gilets jaunes,* (Scene 4 and Scene 5, Chapter 4), speaks a lot about *murs à pêches*. He is a volunteer and often tells about the activities the school garden hosts. Today, it is an event on care for the peach trees.

I walk beneath the big stone arc with the inscription: *"Jardin-école"* (school garden) and arrive in a garden full of trees and plants in various shades of green. The contrast feels sharp. A minute ago, I was surrounded by grey apartment blocks and noisy, polluting cars and scooters. Now, I stand in a landscape with subtle sounds of chickens substituting the buzz of motor traffic.

I do not see any humans, which makes me wonder if I am actually in the right place but I decide to explore my surroundings for a moment, before I draw any conclusions. I follow the sounds of the chickens and as I come closer, I see a bunch of them circling a pile of vegetables, from which they nip. Next to them, I see a kitchen garden and I assume that the greens the chickens eat have been grown here. Signs are planted in the soil: "*tomates*", "*salade*".

I walk further toward the back end of the garden and pass a tiny apple tree orchard. Behind these trees, a blueish colored wall demarcates the frontier of the garden. Here, dozens of peach trees grow with their branches nailed up against the wall.

Photo 12. A peach tree at *murs à pêches*

I am captured by the colors: the blue background of the wall, the green leaves, the green-grey-rose skin of the immature peach fruit, and the red curly leaves on some of the branches. I have read about the special method of growing peach trees on walls, so I also register how the trees connect to the wall with nails and broad strings. The contact of the wall and the branches makes the tree absorb

the heat of the stone, which, in turn, make the peaches become sweet and tasty, their skin turning orange.

I hear steps behind me and turn around. An elderly woman is approaching and she asks if I know where and when the workshop will start. I tell her that I am searching for the same information. She will look for somebody who works here, she says.

10 minutes later, the woman returns with Philippe, the organizer of the workshop. Each of them carries a ladder. Today, Philippe will teach us – more people have arrived by now – one important stage of peach production, which is to remove some of the fruit from the trees. This technique releases weight and gives more space for the remaining fruit to mature.

I climb the ladder Philippe has fetched for me to reach the height of the tree crown. Philippe instructs us to remove only the small fruit. If we take away the bigger ones, he says, more of the tree's labor will go to waste. I do as he says and grab the smallest peach fruit on one of the top branches, but as I pull Philippe corrects me, "You are supposed to twist the fruit gently around and let it drop, not dragging it like that. It's a collaborative work between you and the tree."

Photo 13. A workshop participant on the ladder

I try again with another tiny peach, it loosens and falls to the ground. “Yes just like that”, Philippe says. I continue the work until the tree bears the right amount of fruit. While doing it, I think about how this work differs from the work in the community kitchen. Here, I get to learn the processes that are involved in the production of food; I even assist the

tree in growing its fruit. In contrast to this, the closest I get to the green beans is to pick them up at *Rungis*.

I like the idea of the tree and I collaborating in cultivating the peaches. This requires a great deal of sensorial work: looking at the fruit and touching them, I see and feel which ones are the least mature. The color and size are two such indicators: the smaller and the greener the fruit is, the less mature it is. A third indicator is the texture of the peach skin. The skin that feels most tight indicates that this fruit should be removed.

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After a while, I decide to ask Philippe some questions. I find him in a small kitchen behind the reception preparing coffee for the participants. From my talks with Paul in the community hall, I have already learned a lot about the school garden but I still want to ask Philippe how he thinks of the place and the workshops. The main purpose, Philippe says, is to create a collective and inclusive place of ecological exploration. “The goal is for us city-dwellers to experience a more intimate relationship to food, the soil, and nature”. This is what the workshops are about and they are free and open for everyone. “The hope”, he continues, “is to create an awareness among people in Montreuil of the

labor and modes of life that are embedded in the food we eat”. He adds that, “The issue of food autonomy is not what matters the most here.” To learn more about that fight, he suggests I visit the autonomous micro-gardens that are located in other parts of the remaining area of *murs à pêches*.

Scene 9

On my way to the micro-gardens, I pass Fatima’s apartment block on my right-hand side. On my other side is a cemetery. I stop there for a minute to digest the experience. From the heights of the graveyard is a marvelous view of Paris. I identify *Montparnasse* to the left and *Sacré-Cœur* to the right. As I stand here, I imagine how the peaches, throughout numerous centuries, were carried from Montreuil down the hill to *Les Halles* in Paris (Chapter 2). Before I left the school garden, Philippe showed me a photo of the fruit laying in big woven baskets on a chariot that transported them the 10 kilometers to their destination. I cannot help comparing this picture of the peaches with the image of the green beans in the cardboard boxes on the plane from Burkina Faso (Chapter 5).

*

I continue my expedition toward the other parts of *murs à pêches*. The garden I randomly enter is surrounded by peach walls similar to the ones in the school garden, but this allotment divides into three or four even smaller gardens, the so-called micro-gardens. In the garden closest to me, I hear voices from a small shed. I approach it and see two young men chatting and drinking a soda. I ask them if it is okay to look around and one of them promptly responds: *"Mais oui, bien sûr. Tout le monde est le bienvenu !"* (of course, everybody is welcome). He even offers me a small tour, which I gladly accept.

The man, whose name is Mohammed, tells me that the municipality formally owns the lot but inhabitants and associations in Montreuil are responsible for taking care of the place. Everyone can apply for the use of a spot. Most of the people cultivate food but the place can also serve as a way to spend weekends and leisure time in green surroundings. Mohammed says that it has been a struggle to maintain the area as a natural, public place. For many years, activists have fought for protecting the place from further extraction. They have mobilized against the pressure from real-estate agents and other commercial actors who have wanted to turn the land into either housing, a mall, or parking lots.

We stroll around the garden and Mohammed shows me his beehive, tomato plants, lettuce, apple trees, and peach trees. He loves his time in this garden, he says. If he is here alone he, “Sometimes speaks with the trees – and they happen to speak back.”

As I listen to Mohammed describing his relationship to the trees like that, I cannot help but think of the Japanese-American peach farmer and author, David Mas Masumoto. In the book, *Epitaph for a peach* (1995), Masumoto depicts his peach trees as smiling children when he writes, “I can see my Sun Crest peaches…the trees look…like a five-year-old’s smile that’s missing some teeth” (Masumoto 1995, 18). Masumoto experiences his relationship with the peaches as an intimate bond with a living, anthropomorphic nature. Throughout the book, he writes about the peach trees as kin and even as family members (Masumoto 1995).

Both Masumoto and Mohammed experience a companionship with the trees and by doing that, they expand on what it means to live in a community and in a family, because to them, the trees are also part of their lives.

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I realize that I am still in the middle of a conversation with Mohammed and that my thoughts have wandered away to Masumoto. I try to refocus on my chat with Mohammed. He continues as if nothing had happened. “By the way, another fight that’s going on at the moment is the one initiated by the association *“Garde la pêche”* (Save the peach). They fight for depolluting the soil”.

The fact that the soil is polluted surprises me, as I recall that it was the quality of the soil in particular that brought about the great success of the peach production in the past (Chapter 2). I ask Mohammed to tell me more about this. “In 1871”, he says, “A leather fabric – and later a textile factory – was founded here. Producing textiles, the factory polluted the soil and the water resources with chemicals, such as benzene and trichloroethylene, leading to serious environmental damages. The factory finally closed due to these injuries and its buildings are now occupied by climate activists who demand that the municipality cleans the soil and the water.”

As Mohammed speaks, I look at his trees, and I envision their trunks being rooted in the – apparently – toxic soil. I then wonder whether the peaches are toxic too and if so, whether the human and nonhuman bodies eating these fruit

also turn out to be poisoned. All of this makes me think of walnut trees, because this tree species can be toxic in itself, even without human-invented chemicals. Walnut trees poison the soil around them, which creates a toxic environment that diminishes the growth of other plants competing for nutrients (Tsing et al. 2020). The difference between this process and the one in Montreuil is, however, that this poisoning is temporary; it disappears with time and weathering. Human-made toxic environments, such as the one at *murs à pêches*, take another dense and accelerated form and scale.

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I do not want to disturb Mohammed and his friend any longer so I let him know that I will discover other parts of the area on my own. He suggests I go see the amphitheater where festivals and other cultural events take place in the summer. “There’re pleasant green spots for relaxation”.

I follow his instructions and walk through the maze of peach walls from one micro-garden through another to a third. I think about how my conversation with Mohammed has added a bit of gloominess to this strong experience of the local resistance and empowerment at *mur à pêches*.

This reminds me of Anna Tsing's saying that we should not "make lemonade from lemons" by which she means that we ought not to dress up the ruin (Tsing 2015, 212). Could we also say that that we should not make peach juice from peaches and thus not forget the ecological crises of pollution and degraded landscapes?

Shortly, I arrive to the arena Mohammed suggested to me. I see a stage with benches forming an oval shape around it, and I imagine the liveliness of the place during the concerts and shared meals that take place on this spot. I then identify an exit on the other side of the amphitheater and I go in that direction, heading back to Paris.

Skinship Commons

"How do "we" make and share a commons? Can we, for example, begin to see…fruit trees…as living beings participating in the co-constitution of the community…?

J.K. Gibson-Graham and Ethan Miller (2015, 15)

"In…everyday acts, skin and wetness…constitute the *thickness of the flesh*…that enables selves, human and other, to establish and communicate the nature and networks of their mutual relations."

Sophie Chao (2022, 86)[110]

As I read them, these quotes encourage the ecological potential of the practices Philippe and Mohammed carry out in Scene 8 and Scene 9. At *murs à pêches*, these two men – together with other people – experiment with treating peach trees as living beings, as they care for and communicate with the trees, and include them as co-constitutors of the school- and the micro-garden(s). We can also say that the activism in Northern Montreuil moves toward sensations of more-than-human connectivity. Essentially, this means that even in urban fruit groves, situated in-between building blocks (where Fatima lives) and highways (that delimit the infrastructure of Paris), it is still possible to develop more-than-human communal modes of living.

[110] With the notion, "thickness of the flesh", Chao refers to the phenomenology of French Maurice Merleau-Ponty, which he develops in *The Visible and the Invisible* (1968, 135).

Specifically, Scene 8 shows that when Philippe – as a volunteer at the school garden – teaches people about the life processes of peach trees, the workshop participants, including myself, become more attached to nature, food, and to the connections of human and nonhuman bodies. And by communicating and imagining a kinship with the peach trees, Mohammed – in Scene 9 – enacts another mode of attaching to the more-than-human, not necessarily through words, but by coming to sense the vitality of the trees.

The aim of this chapter is to dive into the more-than-human becomings that take place at *murs à pêches* in order to develop a new way of thinking about how to build communities that care for the more-than-human. I refer to this objective as a skinship commons. With "skinship", I draw on the work of anthropologist Sophie Chao, who – in conversation with Merleau-Ponty and the Marind people in West Papua – describes how sensations of more-than-human connectivity can occur when humans touch the *skin* of nonhumans. The point is that through more-than-human touches, we – humans – can learn to experience, feel, and sense whether plants thrive (sweat) or not. The sensorial practices with the peaches, as a specific mode of skinship, arguably embody such an ecological possibility.

In the chapter, I thus tie together the human and nonhuman modes of sweat by suggesting that we can experience a cooling effect of the heated crises by learning from the practices at *murs à pêches.* Notably, if we develop the activities into a broader thinking of, what I call a "skinship ontology", by which I mean that human and nonhuman bodies connect, as they touch the skin of each other. In

these touches, bodies come to sense the meshwork of life, in which humans and nonhumans are mutually implicated. Or, in the words of Merleau-Ponty, they come to sense "the flesh of the world" (Chao 2022, 82; Merleau-Ponty 1968). Another way of saying this is by using the words of Astrida Neimanis, when she writes that human bodies require more-than-human sensibilities to better handle the climate crises (Neimanis 2017, 53; 64) (Chapter 1 and Chapter 3). This is what I seek to develop with my notion of skinship commons.

Chapter 6 also concludes the overall journey of Part II. Recall that I, in Chapter 4, expanded the commons activism of the *gilets jaunes* to include a plurality of bodies within and outside the general assembly. And in Chapter 5, I proposed a gender (and species) inclusive way of organizing the *gilets jaunes'* community kitchen. Together, the pluralist and queer instantiations of the commons sweat, as they resist global warming and social, gendered inequality with members who feel the cooling attributes of living and resisting. (Recall how bodies experience exclusion as a heated affair (Chapter 3 and Interlude II)).

So, we sweat more with the rise of global temperatures (and social inequalities), until the heat increases so much, that we cannot sweat anymore (Chapter 1). This applies to nonhumans too. Recall how the bee orchid (and the bee, as they live in a symbiotic relationship) struggles to sweat in its fight for survival (Prologue). In this chapter on how to become more ecologically attached, I therefore expand the sweaty movements further into the terrains of the more-than-human, which makes the specific commons, I advocate, become a matter of skinship on top of pluralism and queerness.

I begin with an account of more-than-human commons theory. This first step adds nonhuman perspectives to more classical commons theories (Chapter 4) as well as to feminist commons theories (Chapter 5). At the same time, it also points to the blurred boundaries across notably feminist- and more-than-human commons thinking. I then turn to Sophie Chao to further develop some of the sweaty insights that are embedded in Philippe and Mohammed's practices with the peach trees at *murs à pêches*. I end the chapter by thinking with the hybrid human-tree creatures the Danish artist, Rasmus Myrup, exhibited in Copenhagen in 2020. Myrup's artwork allows me, in a more extended way, to illustrate how a pluralist, queer, and skinship commons can look like from the world of art. This final step works as a playful common conclusion to Part II, before the Epilogue (the next and last chapter) closes the dissertation as a whole by suggesting that sweaty commons reconfigure hydrofeminism in a new, and arguably both more appropriate and comprehensive, way than its former two versions of blood and tears.

More-Than-Human Commons

Let me introduce more-than-human commons theory by returning to Vandana Shiva – the feminist commons scholar we already know from Chapter 5. As discussed in the previous chapter, Shiva's work draws on the experiences of notably indigenous women who have had their land – and thus food – taken by past and present forms of colonialisms in India (but also in Latin American and African

countries). Turning to these testimonies, Shiva develops a decolonial way of thinking about human-food relations that treat land and food as vibrant matter and common goods. This point has become a general insight to what we can refer to as more-than-human commons theory,[111] which means that the subject matter of ecological attachment plays a key role. Shiva frames the concern of ecological attachment as deriving from the so-called “law of return”, which ruled among precolonial Indian women. The goal within this paradigm is to create, what Shiva calls, “earth communities” that consist of small-scale farming based on modes of interconnectedness between humans and living nonhumans (Shiva 2016, xi-xvi; 4; 113).

To understand how this objective differs from the predominant human-food relations today,[112] Shiva also describes the logics of the “law of exploitation”. This approach sees nature as a dead matter separable from humans (Shiva 2016, x). Here, it is about turning food into consumer goods, and the most profitable way to do that is through big plantations, regardless of whether they harm the land and the people who live close to it. This way of treating land and food – the so-called agribusiness paradigm – is, according to Shiva,

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[111] On an overall level, more-than-human commons theory builds on decolonial theory that ranges from Indigenous studies to cosmological ways of thinking and acting (Jaarevic 2024; Larsen and Johnson 2016; Posthumus 2018; Tallbear 2016; Todd 2015, 2016). One can thus approach more-than-human commons theory as a heterogeneous but collective attempt to counter the epistemological hierarchies in social theory that have valued the perspectives of the white (hu)man the most. For more on such hierarchies, see also (Mohanty 1988; Mahmood 2012; Haraway 1988; Tlostanova, Thapar-Björkert, and Knobblock 2019).

[112] Such as the ones at *Rungis* – but also the dynamics that have reduced the area of *murs à pêches* by 90% (Chapter 2).

responsible for 40% of all greenhouse gasses, as well as for 30% of the global food supply that goes to waste, not to mention the 50% of the food, retailers and consumers turn into trash (Shiva 2016, xiii; 106).

The reason for mentioning these two different ways of approaching human-food relations is that they allow us to better see the frictional struggles that are at play at *murs à pêches.* In Chapter 2, we learned that *murs à pêches* has become a place of ecological degradation due to the politics of industrialization and urbanization that took place between the 1950's-1980's under President de Gaulle. The ecological effects of this include a contaminated soil (Scene 9) and the fact that a vast majority of the area has become concreted and paved (in order to house people, such as Fatima, and to expand the infrastructure of Paris). Yet, Philippe, Mohammed, and many other activists counter this development of ecological detachment by turning to the remaining peach trees as living beings in line with Shiva's idea of a more-than-human commons. We can also take the example of *Rungis* from Chapter 5 to stress these complex dynamics: *Rungis* embodies the law of exploitation, while the *gilets jaunes'* community kitchen fights against this in line with the law of return (by turning surplus food into a common meal). So, I want to suggest that there is more at stake than describing our present as being ruled by exploitative laws and "hyper-separation" (Plumwood 2002).[113] Similar to my argument

[113] Val Plumwood also refers to hyper-separation as a severe degree of various forms of remoteness (Plumwood 2002, 72).

in Chapter 2, we see, in this chapter, how the *gilets jaunes* and other commoners in Montreuil build alternative worlds.

In line with this idea of empowerment, Gibson-Graham argue, in *Manifesto for Living in the Anthropocene* (2015), for a more-than-human commons in order to overcome the hyper-separation of the economy that dominates – yet, not fully rules – today (Gibson-Graham and Miller 2015, 7-9).[114] For this to bear fruit, they write, we must rethink, "[T]he identities and social categories through which we've grown accustomed to view our interrelationships", by which they mean to challenge the liberal view of human individuals as bounded entities separate from nature (Gibson-Graham and Miller 2015, 12-3). Or, in the words of Shiva: we need to challenge the law of exploitation. The new thinking they advocate must take place in inter-species spaces of learning, such as in the meeting of humans and fruit trees (Gibson-Graham and Miller 2015, 15) – that is, at *murs à pêches.*

Thus, we see that Shiva and Gibson-Graham, as two representatives of more-than-human commons theory, argue for communities that enable a plurality of human and nonhuman lives to flourish. The activists at *murs à pêches* add to this by showing specifically how sensorial worlds emerge in Montreuil when they care for the fruit trees (Philippe) and even communicate with them (Mohammed). Philippe overcomes the hyper-separation by teaching people about

[114] Gibson-Graham were also the ones to help us identify the world-making potentials (again, in Chapter 2).

the complex ecosystems, we, humans, take part in. And Mohammed adds to this by sensing the vibrancy of the trees when he communicates with them. He feels that his peach trees issue a call, even though he does not quite know what they are saying. These modes of knowledge dissemination and human-tree communication are, in my reading, not so much about words but about evolving a "perceptual style" that opens up for more-than-human connectivity (Bennett 2010, 5) – and as such, resists the dynamics of separation.

Put even more sensorially, Philippe and Mohammed connect with the peach trees by touching them in corporeal-affective ways. Their touches embody a set of current ecological practices but, as I see it, they also point to a vision of future communities that build on modes of more-than-human connectivity. Their ecological engagement sparks an idea of communities, where we – humans – feel the flesh of our own and other human bodies, but also the skin of peaches, trees, and multiple other nonhuman bodies. The tacit touches between human hands, the bark of the trees, and the flesh of the peaches thus come to energize and empower dispositions for building communal practices, in which we become aware of and perceive the world as more-than-human. To further advance this way of thinking the ecological stakes of the activism at *mur à pêches*, we now turn to Chao.

Multispecies Skinship

In the book, *In the Shadow of the Palms: More-Than-Human Becomings in West Papua* (2022), Chao tells an intriguing story about an indigenous Marind community whose livability is under pressure from the increasing oil palm industry. The oil palm crop is cultivated close to Marind homes and on much of their now former territory that gets deforested with the expansion of oil palm (Chao 2022, 83). This development has both destructive social- and environmental impacts to the Marind people who has a special relationship to the forest they inhabit, and in particular to the sago palms that are replaced with oil palm trees in an accelerated pace. Marind not only eat the sago fruit; they share a cosmology with the trees. By nursing and eating sago, Marind people experience more-than-human becomings with the trees.

These becomings revolve around skin, wetness, and sweat. According to Marind people, the "skin" of the landscapes (the soil), of the forests (the bark), and of the rivers (the water) have always been wet and life giving for the people in the community. This vital wetness of nonhuman skin – which demonstrates its health and nourishment – passes on to other bodies, including human bodies, through touches (Chao 2022, 81-82). For example, when a Marind person touches a sago palm tree, a flow of wetness connects the permeable membranes of the tree bark with the human skin, which means that the touch transfers the wetness of the sago – its strength and energy – into the human body. This is what Chao's concept of multispecies skinship seeks to describe (Chao 2022, 82).

Chao unfolds the conceptualization further by turning to the specific Marind woman Evelina, who stands out as an exemplar of how multispecies skinship is enacted and experienced as a mode of ecological attachment. One day, Chao notices that Evelina rubs the skin of her stomach against the bark of a sago palm in the forest. She finds out that Evelina does this because she knows of the skin and wetness of sago; touching its bark (and eating its fruit) makes her body – and the body of the fetus she is carrying – absorb its wetness, which, in turn, makes them become healthy and strong, nourished with the life-giving forces of sago. Evelina also knows that "the *sweat* of those who had felled and rasped the starch, too, would seep into the food and fortify them" (Chao 2022, 78, my emphasis).

By touching the tree with her belly skin, Evelina both feels the sweaty work entailed in felling and rasping the tree and the sweaty labor the tree has undertaken to grow its fruit. Marius, another Marind community member, tells Chao that when he returns from a walk in the forest, "I carry "amai [kin] in my body, my smell, my blood, my *sweat.* I have shared skin with amai." (Chao 2022, 87, my emphasis). From this, Chao contemplates, the material-affective Marind-sago practices "invite new kinds of communalisms and intimacies across species lines" (Chao 2022, 87). These communalisms, I would add, build on sweaty modes of working, living, and coexisting.[115]

[115] Another example of how sweat works as a corporeal more-than-human mode of ecological attachment is Elizabeth Povinelli's description of how rocks can smell the sweaty labor of aboriginal people (Povinelli 1995). See also "Sweaty motions",

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Unfortunately, we know that the Marind-sago relationship is threatened by the massive presence of oil palm that dries out the wetness of the forest, of the sago, and thus of the Marind people's skin (Chao 2022, 83). Or, in Shiva's words, Marind experience the destruction and violence from an agribusiness industry that rules under the law of exploitation (Shiva 2016). This, eventually, makes Chao conclude that multispecies skinship is endangered; oil palm breaks the skin of Marind people (Chao 2022, e.g. 83; 93; 185).

This conclusion of the stakes of skinship continues to disturb me. For, how can a skinship die and break if we understand the concept as describing a more general connectivity of more-than-human bodies? Instead of approaching skinship as being threatened in West Papua, I see it as something that can take place all the time (and which can still occur in West Papua as well as in urban spaces, such as in Montreuil). By this, I mean that our human skin touches the skin of the world in endless meetings, and these fleshy entanglements continue to constitute new modes of skinship – some of them ecologically flourishing; others not.

For example, as my fingers now touch the keyboard of my computer, or when the flesh of my cheeks meets the oxygen in my office, two modes of skinship instantiate. In relation to the Marind, this means that the Marind-oil palm relation – that is replacing sago – comes to

where anthropologist Julie Soleil Archambault writes that the world-making force of sweat is part of Africanist ways of thinking about relations among people and species (Archambault 2022, 335).

constitute *another* mode of skinship (rather than no skinship at all). This opens up the concept to also include more troublesome relations. In such new light, skinship enables descriptions of how the skin of our bodies entangle with the skin of nonhumans in flourishing and diminishing ways – and often in both modes at the same time. We can also say that skinship happens under the law of exploitation, the law of return, and notably in hybrid forms of these two logics. It is therefore not only an ethical concept but also an ontological notion that describes the more-than-human *thick* flesh of the world – a flesh that not only concerns trees in the forest and "uncultivated nature", but any sort of skin – of the rural and urban landscapes and of nonhumans and humans.

Urbanizing and Universalizing Skinship

The concept now enables us to develop skinship as a more-than-human mode of becoming that is at stake in Montreuil. As we know, the area of *murs à pêches* – a green spot in the middle of the urban zone of Île-de-France – contrasts the forest in West Papua in many ways. By thinking with skinship in Montreuil, we can thus think of this more-than-human mode of becoming as taking place in urban spaces too. As a third example that seeks to clarify what I mean with skinship ontology, let us say that skinship can even occur in the metro on the way back to Paris from *murs à pêches* (following from Scene 9). Imagine that while one stands on the platform, awaiting the train to arrive, one's body feels the "flesh" of the underground, such

as the bodies of the other passengers, the warm air, or perhaps a rat that traverses the railway tracks. A sense of skinship is thus also, in this place, under development, and it makes the world appear anew; it orients us of the "flesh" of anybody – human and nonhuman, organic and inorganic. Rethinking skinship as both an ontological and ethical concept, we learn that even in the most assumingly inert places, such as in Île-de-France, we can cultivate a skinship – and thus a connectivity with the more-than-human world.

Add to this what Tsing writes in her 2005 publication *Friction.* According to her, protest mobilizations rely on universalizing rhetorics and experiences of rights and justice (Tsing 2005, 5). By universals, Tsing does not refer to abstract principles. Universals are concrete engagements that take place in specific contexts, and these travel and widen their scope, eventually becoming "universal aspirations" (Tsing 2005, 7; 267). This, I argue, goes for skinship too. Skinship is experienced by the Marind people in the forest in West Papua and it is also a sensation that is emerging in the middle of highways, apartment blocks, and factory buildings in Île-de-France. At *murs à pêches*, an urbanized mode of skinship – as a universal aspiration – is taking shape. Allow me to illustrate this a bit more.

Doing so, we go back to *murs à pêches*, where my encounters with Philippe and Mohammed in Scene 8 and Scene 9 made me become eager to learn more about the world-making modes of skinship that are under development in this place. I searched for new workshops, tours, and talks, and I soon joined a guided tour in the area around Mohammed's micro garden. As part of a group of nearly 20 people, I

walked through the gardens once again, now with the guidance from Charlotte – a third volunteer at *murs à pêches*.

During the walk, Charlotte took us to a place of *murs à* pêches she, as an artist, has contributed to in a particular way. By crafting a number of artworks on the original peach walls, Charlotte has, she told us, tried to sensitize and channel some of the ecological knowledge, the walls, the trees, and the natural history of the place embody. Her artworks seek to honor the *savoir-faire* (knowhow), the *main d'oeuvre* (handcraft) – and thus the sweat of the peach trees and the farmers, we can add in line with Evelina and Marius – of the traditional way of cultivating peaches in Montreuil.

"This fruit production, Charlotte said, "witnesses of an intimate relation with the fruit; one that cares for the peaches. The farmers – from the pre-modern era – even spent time on decorating and painting the skin of the fruit to indicate their preciousness." So, to worship and revitalize the ecological insights of these practices, Charlotte has created a whole collection of artificial hands that each touches a peach seed in a particular, sensitive way. I read these touches as embodying a mode of more-than-human becoming that makes us become more attached to the food we eat.

Photo 14. A hand touching a peach seed

On the photo above, we see one of Charlotte’s hand that holds a peach seed between its fingers, as if it closely inspects the seed, noticing its details, such as its structure and color. We do not know if the person who holds the seed has already consumed the flesh of the fruit. Nor do we know what the hand is about to do with it. Perhaps, I wonder, it will let it fall onto the ground so that new peaches can grow eventually – in line with the law of return.

Photo 15. A hand stroking a peach seed

Another of Charlotte's artistic hand touches a peach seed in a way that looks like a stroke, similar to when one strokes a pet, a child, or a friend. With the hand that carefully touches the peach, Charlotte, again, seeks to cultivate a sensation of a more-than-human connection to the peaches that makes us remember the careful work that has been going on for centuries in Montreuil and may inspire us to further ecologize the place of *murs à pêches* and other places too. In this touch, the human and the peach act as companion species (Haraway 2003). Or, in the words of Tsing, the artistic hands show that, "Groves of fruit trees…remain as markers of a community that may re-form in the future on the basis of its ongoing, tree-made memories." (Tsing 2005, 257).

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Today, we know that it is challenging to sense the food we eat as living beings with complex trajectories and lifecycles that connect with and condition our own lives. By attuning to these more-than-human touches – these modes of skinship – we may nonetheless experiment with sensing the vibrancy of edible matter some more. This, in turn, arguably, makes us think of and treat nonhumans more ecologically, and it thus also creates visions for how to live together. My fieldwork at *murs à pêches* explores a skinship commons of more-than-human becomings, in which people experience the commons as a place of both human and nonhuman lives. *Murs à pêches* is the home of the peach trees and also a place, in which people meet to care for the trees, to enjoy the green spot, or to share a common meal. It is, in a nutshell, a place where modes of more-than-human communalisms develop.

During the guided tour, Charlotte told us – the participants – that ten years ago, the parts of *murs à pêches* we were walking on, were ascribed a protected status. “This success”, she said, “is a product of our fight for the place to become a common ecological environment. The area of *murs à pêches* is now safeguarded as an open green space in Montreuil.” So, despite numerous challenges, such as a degraded soil[116] underneath the walls, as well as the many future building projects in the area – that may constitute more diminishing ecological modes of skinship – small wonders take place. Together with *Garde*

[116] Philosopher Maria Puig de la Bellacasa argues that the invisibility of the soil poses a challenge to its – and ours – health, because the soil constitutes “the hidden world beneath our feet” (Puig de la Bellacasa 2015, 692-93). Yet we see that the activists at *murs à pêches* manage to formulate demands of depolluting the soil.

la pêche, Charlotte now fights for making the municipality obliged to depollute the soil at *murs à pêches,* so that the chemicals from the former textile fabric – that have leaked into the underground below the peach trees (Scene 9) – can be cleaned and washed away. This, again, shows that the frictions between environmental challenges, on the one hand, and modes of local resistance, on the other, mobilize and enable alternative world-makings. They do so by giving birth to a sense of more-than-human connectivity (the role of the activists), even though the challenges of global warming, such as the modern human-food relations, separate humans from nonhumans by treating the first as vibrant and the latter as inert. As a result, we see that even local forms of activism have the power to shake and undo these ideas. Or, paraphrasing Shiva and Chao, we can say that the French activists direct some of the movements of the law of exploitation into the paradigm of return, as they cultivate a skinship in ways that resonate with the sensations Evelina and Marius experience with sago palms. They – the activists in Montreuil – even manage to do so in a place, where the expansion of the city has turned many of its trees into paved streets and building blocks.

Our three activists have shown this by teaching knowledge about the ecosystems of peach trees to the public, by communicating with the trees, and by crafting artistic hands that touch the fruit in gentle ways. As I see it, their practices reinforce each other by collectively coming to build a commons that cares for the more-than-human. As such, the activism at *murs à pêches* transforms a small space situated in Île-de-France to a common habitat for both humans, peach trees, and other

nonhumans. Philippe, Mohammed, and Charlotte fight for cultivating wet, juicy, and sweaty peaches. As they do that, they resist the dry and heated modes of the human-food relations that *Rungis*, the hypermarkets, such as *Carrefour*, in Île-de-France, and the urbanization of *murs à pêches* all embody. The point is that these structures of ecological detachment are not impermeable or flawless; *murs à pêches* is a flourishing flaw that lives and aspires in spite of the developments that partake in the current acceleration of global warming and its myriad ecological crises.

The Wo/od/men

We now take one final step to envision a skinship commons by moving to an especially thought-provoking piece of artwork, which, in my reading, mobilizes our skinship thinking the most extendedly. The art installation, we turn to, enriches our imaginations of future communities of ecological attachment. Let me begin with some context. The exhibition, *Salon des Refugés* (2020)[117] is constructed by the Danish artist, Rasmus Myrup, who is not a member of the *gilets jaunes*, nor is he engaged in the fights that take place at *murs à pêches*.

[117] Myrup's installation was part of a larger exhibition *Heksejagt* at the Danish art center Charlottenborg in 2020. I engage with this piece of artwork more thoroughly elsewhere (Dichman 2023b). For more on Myrup's thinking of his more-than-human creatures, see *The Völva's Bestiary of Best Friends* (Myrup 2023)**.**

Myrup's work nonetheless invites us to envision a (possibly self-organized) community that consists of more-than-human (and queer) becomings. As such, my reading of *Salon des Refugés* also pulls together the arguments from the former chapters, notably the eco-queer thinking in Chapter 5.

Photo 16 from the exhibition shows three of more than 20 sculptures that were part of the installation. The figures are neither humans, nor nonhumans, they are all entangled human-tree creatures. I choose to refer to them as wo/od/men (wood, women, od(d), men) in order to stress the odd and queer possibilities that are at stake when a plurality of human and nonhuman modes of life entangle (Dichman 2023b). Myrup names the specific creatures in Photo 16 Gerd, Freya, and Skadi. From the left to the right is Gerd, whose face is made of pinecones and whose body has a wooden structure. In the middle of the picture is Freya: a human body with a rose-face. And to the right is Skadi, whose body and face are made of pine needles. We see that the wo/od/men interact in some way. So, let us hear what they have to say.

Photo 16. Gerd, Freya, and Skadi

Gerd

"What an exciting and uncanny feeling it is to live as a wo/od/man. From this mode of embodiment, I wonder how we can build communities where my fellow trees and human companions thrive and coexist. Could we, for example, stop cutting down so many of my kin pines – as well as my relatives; the peach trees and the sago palms – so we can continue to breathe CO_2 and cool down the earth, while creating a more pluralistic landscape with different breeds? How wonderful it would be to feel some fresh, wet air on my dry pine skin."

Freya

"I hear you Gerd, and I also want to share the story of my recent experiences. Since I have started to experiment with becoming more attached to my roses in the garden, I feel a change. Well, as you know, roses have always been my favorite flower, but I now treat them differently. I have begun to nurse them, sitting with them – almost every day – inhaling their delightful aroma, and touching their soft petals and sharp thorns. When I am back in the house, I feel as if the roses are still with me – even though I only see them through the windows. Our touches have affected me; they have made me become a rose-woman creature."

Skadi

"Thanks for sharing your testimonies friends – and let me add to these by telling you about the relief I feel in our wo/od/men world, where fluid sexed and gendered categories rule as the norm. It strikes me why humans continue to divide their identities into binary categories, when it brings no fuzz here that some trees are not male nor female; not men nor women.[118] The fact that the natural world is so queer has made me experience a much more stimulating community."

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[118] (Blake-Mahmud and Struwe 2020). See also (Barad 2012; Haraway 2016; Hird 2004; Mortimer-Sandilands and Bell 2010).

Conclusion

According to the World Bank, 56% of the world's population live in cities today, which amounts to around 4,4 billion people. In 2050, the number is expected to increase to 70% (World Bank 2023). And in France, 82% of the citizens already live in cities (World Bank 2022). Thus, instead of dreaming about us all becoming farmers, moving to the countryside or to the forest (because we may think that skinship can only flourish in those places), we must learn to cultivate modes of ecological attachment in the communities of cities too. We know that it is not an easy task in a world of sweaty commons and "hyper-separation" (Plumwood 2002), where structures – such as the predominant human-food relations – make many of us experience modes of detachment from the lives of nonhumans.

In this chapter, the activists at *murs à pêches* have taught us that – even in Île-de-France – it is possible to build communal practices that care for the more-than-human. By disseminating knowledge about peach trees and ecosystems, by communicating with the trees, and by crafting art that amplifies more-than-human becomings, we can begin to sense a skinship with the fruit trees – and with other nonhumans. Thus, Philippe, Mohammed, and Charlotte inspire us to become more ecologically attached to the nature and food that sustain our lives. Or, by staying with the trouble (Haraway 2016), the *gilets jaunes* and other activists in Montreuil show how to fight and sweat for the world to cool down. Part II has turned to three of their resistance practices in the general assembly, in the community kitchen, and, in this chapter, in the fruit groves.

Together, I have used the practices to conceptualize sweaty commons as a resistance form and alternative community building that is pluralist (tenet 1: self-organization), queer (tenet 2: social inclusion), and embodies a more-than-human skinship (tenet 3: ecological attachment). Following Anna Tsing's way of thinking about politics of global connection (Tsing 2005), the *gilets jaunes* have inspired me – and hopefully the reader too – to think of the commons as a "universal aspiration" that is apt for cooling down both global warming and the social, gendered inequalities of – the heated – sweaty commons.

Epilogue

Blood, Sweat, and Tears

Blood, sweat, and tears. According to the Cambridge Dictionary, (this is) an idiom for extremely hard work. It signifies the greatest effort possible in order to achieve something. As I read the expression, it also summarizes the *gilets jaunes'* political resistance, as they fight to overcome the conditions of sweaty commons. However, in *Sweaty Commons*, I have chosen to focus on the ways in which the French activists sweat rather than on how they bleed or cry. In this Epilogue, I argue that sweat reconfigures hydrofeminism in a new – and arguably more appropriate – way than the versions of blood (formulated by Grosz and others) and tears (developed by Neimanis in particular). Before I elaborate on this argument, allow me to repeat the overall question I have addressed in the thesis. How does political resistance to global warming and social inequality empower new ways of living together within and across gender identities?

I have framed the challenges (global warming and social, gendered inequality) as matters of a heated sweaty commons (Chapter 1 and Chapter 2) and proposed a cooling sweaty commons as an alternative to this, which I have conceptualized on three different levels: an ontological, methodological, and political.

Chapter 4, Chapter 5, and Chapter 6 have most explicitly enacted the two latter levels of methodology and the political. This is so, because the chapters have shown how the *gilets jaunes* aim to build a political community of self-organization, social inclusion, and care for the more-than-human. Theorizing with the French activists, I have practiced political theory as a sweaty enterprise that follows the cycle of sweat, beginning with the heated stage of entering the field; then looking for sweaty bodies in the field; and finally undertaking the more cooling stage of conceptualizing (Chapter 3).

I now expand on the ontological level of sweaty commons, which speaks to other existing hydrofeminist traditions.

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Based on Chapter 1, one could think that hydrofeminism begins with Neimanis' theory of bodies of water (Neimanis 2013, 2017) – even though her thinking draws on an earlier version of hydrofeminism developed by Luce Irigaray (Irigaray 1991). In my reading, however, Neimanis develops a second hydrofeminism that adds to the theory that is formulated by Grosz in *Volatile Bodies* – among other feminist thinkers I elaborate on below. Here, (menstrual) blood – a liquid of water, salts, and protein (plasma) – cultivates the thinking of sexed bodies (Grosz 1994). So, the genealogy of hydrofeminism I want to give sees blood (Grosz and others) as a first version, followed by water (Neimanis), and "ends" with sweat as a third configuration. Let me say a bit more about each of them (than I have already said in Chapter 1) in order to better appreciate the sweaty variety I advocate.

Hydrofeminism Vol. 1: Blood

In the beginning of the dissertation, I mentioned that Grosz thinks with menstrual blood as a way to theorize the specificity of female sexed embodiments. That said, I am aware that she takes the question of sexed bodies in a more queer direction, when she draws on Deleuze and Guattari's

term of “becoming woman”, which essentially means that both men and women can “become women” (Grosz 1994, 187). To “become woman” is a matter of desedimenting the body, turning to corporeal flows, changes, movements, (becomings), rather than approaching bodies as binary identity markers (Deleuze and Guattari 2013; Grosz 1993, 176). Due to this ambivalence in Grosz’ thinking, which, on the one hand, turns to the female sexed liquid of menstrual blood, while it, on the other hand, wants to theorize bodies in non-binary ways, I suggest we turn to a clearer and more illuminative example of the implications of thinking with menstrual blood.

In my view, the book, *Le Satellite de l’Amande* (1975), by French Françoise d’Eaubonne – the first to develop the concept of ecofeminism in an European context (d’Eaubonne 2020 [1974]) – provides such illustration (d'Eaubonne 2023, 11).[119] In the book, d’Eaubonne imagines a feminist utopia, where novel norms structure social interactions in radical new ways. An example of such novel practice is to pour drops of menstruation blood into coffee. This act honors the fluids of the cis-woman body, and the reason for praising blood like that is to counter its

[119] The French book is not yet translated into English, but a Danish translation exists, see *Mandelsolens Planet* (d’Eaubonne 2023).

patriarchal associations with disgust, dirt, and excrement (Eaubonne 2023, 143-44; Grosz 1994, 205; Stolberg 2012, 511-12). In d'Eaubonne's so-called SCUM (Societies for Cutting Up Men), blood thus creates a woman bond (Eaubonne 2023, 166).

One can further argue that the practice of drinking coffee with blood ties together a particular idea of women, because menstrual blood is also seen as a "female sperm" (King 2012). Blood thus links to a maternal and gestational idea of woman embodiment too. By highlighting these associations, I do not want to say that menstrual blood is not an important liquid to think with. Obviously, important feminist works study the politics of menstruation (e.g. Bobel 2010; Bobel and Fahs 2020; Laws 1990). Yet, in the version of d'Eaubonne, the specific exclusion of men, transwomen, and other bodies that do not menstruate, is one of the reasons why I turn away from it. To be clear: by exclusive, I refer to the link of menstrual blood with cis-women (and cis-women mothers), which arguably risks turning this feminism into an anti-pluralist gender movement.

*

Elaborating on where I would rather go, let us return to some of my earlier arguments in the dissertation. For example in Chapter 4, we may recall Honig's reading of the women who flee from Thebes in Euripides's play the "Bacchae". Honig also writes that, "[T]he women flee the city that *maternalizes* them, but rather than refuse to nurture…they breastfeed animals out in the wild…" (Honig 2021, 22, my emphasis).[120] This way of queering motherhood across lines of species brings us further to my argument in Chapter 5, where I think with the eco-queer theory of notably Haraway. Remember the way in which Haraway conceptualizes the human as a "guman", and gumans are not mothers in the traditional sense; instead, they make kin with other species (Haraway 2016). In my reading, this means that the eco-queer communities Haraway and Honig advocate are commmunities in which membership and kinship cross both species as well as the acts of mating that are conditioned by menstrual blood. In a nutshell, blood becomes less relevant. So, I wonder, perhaps gumans do not menstruate?[121]

[120] In *Antigone Interrupted* (2013), Honig even more explicitly writes about how maternity is also a matter of hierarchy, when she turns to sorority as a more capacious notion of a more horizontal relationship (Honig 2013). For more on this, see also (Cavarero et al. 2021).

[121] Some other species do in fact also bleed during menstruation.

With the aim of including more genders and species in a democratic politics, I argue that a woman commons is not a normatively attractive end-station. It is indeed valuable to revalorize the liquid of menstrual blood – as long as it is part of a more pluralist and queer ethics, as the one I seek to cultivate by theorizing with sweat.

Hydrofeminism Vol. 2: Tears (and Water)

Do tears then constitute a more inclusive bodily liquid? Tears are the closest we get to a clear corporeal water; unlike blood and sweat, tears are transparent – they are "pure" (Grosz 1994, 195). Add to this that all human genders can cry, which may point to tears as a pluralizing bodily fluid.[122] That said, we must bear in mind that when bodies cry they act feminine, which links not only tears to the feminine, but further ties the feminine to modes of vulnerability; tears mostly signify states of grief – even though human bodies cry joyful tears too (Stolberg 2012).

[122] Bear in mind that humans is the only species that cries emotional tears, which, unfortunately, makes "a tearful commons" a human-centered community (Walter 2006).

Take for example the expression “to cry like a girl” that emphasizes the cultural associations of tears, girls, femininity, and weakness. This water-femininity nexus constitutes a main pillar in Neimanis’ hydrofeminism. In *Bodies of Water* she writes that, “Rather than arguing against the association of the feminine with water…my goal is to expand our understanding…Keeping the feminine in the picture is not the problem…” (Neimanis 2017, 118).

As I see it, the emphasis on femininity does, in fact, cause a problem in two different ways. The first challenge consists of the way in which femininity relates to modes of vulnerability and precariousness (as the idiom “to cry like a girl” has just demonstrated). Echoing my argument in Chapter 1, my point was that Judith Butler’s ontology of precariousness risks ending up in lamentation and, in turn, downplays the very vitality I seek to highlight with sweat. Sweaty bodies arguably embody a more energetic mode of resistance, because sweat is a life-giving mode, while precariousness often brings more stillness and diminishing state of being (Honig 2013, e.g. 42-45; 2021, 10-11).

Yet, when it comes to my second doubt: again, the marginalizing effects of (the feminine as) a feminist strategy, I firmly agree with Butler. As a queer theorist and

person, Butler writes that, femininity installs a pathos of exclusion, which can be no ground of feminism (Butler and Braidotti 1994, 39). They even reject the feminine as nonsense, because the feminine, according to them, leaves no room for queer bodies who seek to escape the binary scheme of femininity-masculinity (Butler and Braidotti 1994, 47).[123] From this, sweat embodies a more (1) empowering and (2) queer alternative to water and tears.

Hydrofeminism Vol. 3: Sweat

I argue for theorizing with sweat, as it is neither a female liquid (blood), nor a feminine fluid (tears). On top of that, sweat embodies the temperature aspect, which is so quintessential in the heated world we live in. In short, our earth needs to cool down by sweating some more. I have argued – and demonstrated throughout the dissertation – that sweaty commons is a better proposal than a bloody commons and a tearful one.

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[123] In this regard, femininity is someway similar to the subject matter of blood.
We can also say that Butler seeks to destabilize the cultural associations of femininity and precariousness.

Sweat serves, in my view, as an opening; a heterotopia of both comfortable and uncomfortable modes; an experimental rehearsal of a more social and ecological future that is not yet secured. As such, sweat offers an opportunity for pluralizing our thinking of bodies that live with and resist the challenges of global warming and social, gendered inequality. When these bodies mobilize, they touch the skin of each other (and the flesh of the world) and sweat collectively in both hot and cool modes of classed, gendered, racialized, generational, and cross–species experiences. Sweat teaches about how these bodies suffer but also about how they empower new worlds. As such, sweaty commons – bodies that sweat together – provide an ontology as well as a set of specific instantiations of how this is lived, as the case of the *gilets jaunes* has shown. Again, this sweaty thinking includes testimonies and experiences from a plurality of bodies beyond the lines of ideology and party-politics (notably wider than the anarcho-Marxism in Chapter 4), gender (broader than the man/woman binary in Chapter 5), and species (the more-than-human thinking in Chapter 6).

*

Now, let us return to the beginning of the story by revisiting the French artist, Mimosa Echard, and her sweaty bee orchid, who gives its last drops of sweat to the bee so both of them can continue to live a bit longer (Prologue). In the book, *Beekeeping in the End Times* (2024), anthropologist Larisa Jašarević tells an Islamic tale of two angels who wonder whether the bees on earth are still swarming. As long as the bees swarm, the world holds together. Unfortunately, Jašarević learns from her beekeeper interlocutors in Bosnia and Herzegovina that their honeybees weather the effects of climate change. For now, they live, but it is uncertain – even unlikely – that they will continue to do so (Jaarevic 2024).

Yet, we have seen that at *murs à pêches* in Montreuil, Mohammed's beehive is still thriving. And the possibility for this to continue increases with the well-being of his fruit trees, since the nectar of the trees – like the bee orchid – feeds the bees in life-giving sweaty ways (Chapter 6). This is how symbiosis works: when Mohammed cares for his peach trees, they flourish and his bees sustain from the nectar of the trees. Moreover, the survival of the bees affects Mohammed and the human species, because the bees pollinate the vast majority of the crop that feed 90% of the world (BBC; Petruzzello).

So, as long as the bees still swarm and sweat, there is hope. Notably, if we take seriously the lessons we have learned from the *gilets jaunes* and their fellow activists who resist the heated sweaty commons in a plurality of innovative ways. I see this knowledge as a vital puzzle piece in the fight for a cooler sweaty commons.

Photo 17. Mimosa Echard's artistic bee

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