Estovers

Practice based research on the concept of the commons within contemporary art

Joint portfolio with dissertation submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy at the Glasgow School of Art

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I, Emma Balkind declare that the enclosed submission for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy and consisting of Joint Portfolio with Dissertation meets the regulations stated in the handbook for the mode of submission selected and approved by the Research Degrees Sub-Committee.

I declare that this submission is my own work, and has not been submitted for any other academic award.

Signed

Student: Emma Susan Balkind

Director of Studies: Professor Ken Neil

ABSTRACT

Estovers is a practice-based research project on the concept of the commons in contemporary art. It comprises a thesis, and an accompanying portfolio of documentation which is available as audio and transcript on a USB 'stick' and as a printed publication.

This thesis project considers the research questions: What is the concept of the commons when it is referred to in contemporary art? For what reasons is it being employed as a concept in discursive practices?

Practice-based research activity is documented through discursive curation and participation in programmes at Scottish art institutions between 2012 and 2015. Projects were undertaken in collaboration with Jupiter Artland, Transmission Gallery, Gallery of Modern Art, Centre for Contemporary Arts, New Glasgow Society and Collective.

Through the use of the concept of 'estovers', the methodology explicitly uses the concept of the commons as a mechanism to open up the process of research and the dissemination of knowledge on the topic.

The thesis considers a broad history of commons projects. The timeframe of consideration runs from the publication of the Magna Carta, through to the Occupy movement of the early 21st century. Political philosophy confers an ethical duty on the concept of the commons, considering Roberto Esposito's description of *munus* in *Communitas* as 'the gift that one gives because one must give and because one cannot not give'.

It is asserted that the concept of the commons is used in projects which have been found to relate to many different themes: from the privatisation of public space, to notions of dwelling and inhabitation, to ideas concerning structures and construction, and the flattening of notions of physical versus digital space.

The contribution to knowledge is extended through the included notes towards a commons syllabus, in order that future researchers might supplement the content of the thesis and portfolio in the production of courses which encourage further study on the commons and its relation to contemporary art practices.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This PhD constitutes a constellation of invitations to/from, and discussions with, other people. As such, I would like to thank the following people for their help and friendship during the course of working towards my PhD:

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To the committee of Transmission Gallery, particularly Josée Aubin Ouellette for the invitation to write an essay response to Victor and Hester for the summer 2015 mail-out, and to Amelia Bywater and Emma Fitts for extending the invitation to further collaborations.

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To Matt and Jess at Good Press for their invaluable help with the printing of my portfolio.

Most of all my husband Joe, for believing in me and helping me stick with it!

RELEVANT PUBLICATIONS

The thesis and portfolio contain work which was published within the duration of the PhD. The publications are as follows:

Essay, *The Commons Subject and the Subject of Community* in Camera Austria Issue 129 (2015).

The Negotiation is Not Over: The Institution as Artist (The public was only an artist for three months) discussion with Anthony Schrag published in Revista MESA, Issue No. 3– 'Publicness in Art' by Instituto MESA, Brazil (2015).

RELEVANT PUBLIC PRACTICE

Producer of—
Estovers Pt 1: The Urban and the Rural at New Glasgow Society (2013).
Estovers Pt 2: The Digital and the Libidinal at CCA (2013).
Made possible with funding from the Graduate School at the Glasgow School of Art.

Invited artist as part of *Atelier Public #2*, GoMA for Glasgow International (2013-14).

Invited discursive partner to Tessa Lynch as part of *Raising* at Jupiter Artland for GENERATION: 25 years of Contemporary Art in Scotland (2014).

Invited workshop with Eastern Surf as part of *How Near Is Here* Intensive Programme at Collective (2014).

Commissioned written response to *Dreams of Machines* by Victor and Hester [Amelia Bywater and Emma Fitts] at Transmission gallery (2015).

Co-convenor of *Invisible Knowledge* research group at CCA, Glasgow—in association with Research at GSA—with Curator of Public Engagement, Viviana Checchia and Curator and Birkbeck PhD candidate, Tiffany Boyle (2015 - ongoing).

ESTOVERS PORTFOLIO

The following public-facing projects are included in the portfolio, as audio in the digital submission and as transcription in the printed book, with the exception of Dreams of Machines at Transmission where the project was by publication only.

Estovers: Graduate Research Seminar on the Commons
New Glasgow Society, 31 Aug 2013
Part 1: Urban and Rural
Historical and Contemporary
Commons and the Common

Nuno Sacramento, PhD. Director of Scottish Sculpture Workshop (Lumsden)
Simon Yuill, PhD. Artist and Programmer (Glasgow)

Programmed by Emma Balkind, funded by the Graduate School at GSA.

Estovers: Performed Presentations by Artists
CCA Clubroom, Glasgow, 22 Sept 2013
Part 2: The Digital and the Libidinal
Gay Cruising on the Commons
Contemporary Enclosures

Shona Macnaughton (Brussels)
Huw Lemmey (London)

Programmed by Emma Balkind, funded by the Graduate School at GSA.

Atelier Public #2
Group discussion took place on Friday 23rd May 2014 (the day of the GSA fire).
Discussion between Emma Balkind and Anthony Schrag, took place on 22 July 2014 / published 2015 in Revista MESA (Issue No. 3 - Publicness in Art) May 2015.

Exhibition curated by Katie Bruce at GoMA.
The discussion with Anthony Schrag was published as part of a case study on projects curated by Katie Bruce.

Raising
'Some Assembly Required' discussion with Tessa Lynch, took place on 23rd August 2014.
Exhibition July 17th - September 28th 2014.

Exhibition commissioned by Jupiter Artland and Curated by John Heffernan. I was invited to work on this project directly by the artist.

How Near Is Here
'Inhabitation' workshop with Eastern Surf on September 12th 2014.
How Near Is Here took place from September 9th - 12th 2014.
'Over four days, participants will take part in, trial and discuss practices that question how we live in and understand our locale.'

Intensive programme curated by Frances Stacey and Julie Crawshaw.

Transmission
Victor and Hester (Amelia Bywater and Emma Fitts) exhibition VH-16-22-7-12-3-22-5
Dreams of Machines. Text by Emma Balkind published in the July 2015 mail out.
The exhibition ran from 31 March 2014 – 25 April 2014.

Exhibition curated by the Transmission committee. I was invited to work on this project by committee member Josée Aubin Ouellette.

ESTOVERS DIGITAL PORTFOLIO: USB CONTENT

- **MP3 files of all audio pertaining to portfolio transcriptions.**
- **PDF of the portfolio book.**

Each file was recorded on a Zoom audio recorder by Emma Balkind with the exception of the discussion with Anthony Schrag which was recorded on an iPhone 5 via Skype. Files were edited and exported to MP3 using Audacity. Some files have had their sound quality improved for listening with the OS X app 'Boom 2' which is available via the App Store.

It is recommended that these files are listened to with headphones for clarity. The files are presented here as evidence of research activity by Emma Balkind.

WORKING FORMAT

All poster, portfolio and thesis design is by Emma Balkind.
Printing by Clydeside Press with formatting advice from Matthew Walkerdine and Jessica Higgins of Good Press.

Formatted USB sticks were purchased from OOOMS design, Denmark.

All photographs included were taken by, or on behalf of, Emma Balkind with her own equipment.

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Preface

This thesis was written between September 2012 and September 2015, and passed a viva in November 2015. The corrections were delayed due to illness and completed in 2018. Through the time elapsed in the corrections of this thesis, a number of globally significant political events occurred. In the summer of 2016, Britain voted in a referendum to leave the European Union. Scotland voted to remain. Article 50 was triggered. Theresa May became Prime Minister of the UK. In the US, Donald Trump was elected and inaugurated as President.

These events draw a line under the particular timeframe which is considered in this thesis as one which covers the Neoliberal moment between the global financial crash of 2008 until the end of the Obama presidency, and of the UK's belonging to the EU. The year was also punctuated by the suicide of the theorist Mark Fisher, who was known best for his consideration of this era of Capitalist Realism.

So, of course it is difficult to predict what comes next for art's political discourses, but if the first marches and Youtube clips of this new era are prescient then I would pick out two themes: the mass mobilisation of women and particularly of women of colour, and the punching of neo-nazi (alt-right) figurehead Richard Spencer. I would argue then that rather than considering if a utopian commons-project is possible, that protest movements are now engaged in a much more immediate process of demanding the dismissal of racist and sexist heads of state.

In this sense, my thesis considers what came before the re-imposition of borders to travel within the EU, and of a border wall between Mexico and America. It came in the aftermath of the student protests and youth riots of 2010/11, of Occupy Wall Street and anti-austerity movements. It was written in a time where politicians and states were make or break according to yes/no referendums. It reflects upon and harks back to times before capitalism and democracy as we knew it, to the Magna Carta, to religious orders and to political philosophy.

It is a commons thesis. Each chapter takes on its own tonality because each chapter must wrestle with the terminologies and epistemological shape of the discipline it reflects on.

I have tried to treat the commons not only as the topic of discussion but implicated myself methodologically in its production. I have done this by, in practice, openly consulting and provoking discourses on the commons in art with artistic practitioners, by making this thesis open source, and by producing a prototypical commons syllabus of texts which would allow for further study of the topic by others and the teaching of the commons as a subject matter in an art school or other interstitial spaces of learning.

The intention of this thesis is to describe the commons, to use it conceptually and philosophically as a tool to look at recent political events, and to point to particular artistic devices which have been used to enact or call to the commons and to consider the purpose of their use. It is reflected on through documented practice-based activity in the field of contemporary art, and it is given to the reader in usable and shareable formats which extend from the thesis.

The artistic practices considered in this thesis set out into the world to try to find the commons that has been written of in theory, or conversely it places the commons into a world which seems to so badly need it. This thesis traces these discourses, selects artworks which reflect upon them and also practices this seeking of the commons itself by participating in its logic of sharing and of extending the notion towards others to be used again.

While the timeframe that this thesis considers has now passed, and arguably politics have moved further to the right in the US and across the EU, the commons will live on as a concept which reflects upon need and injustice and attempts at forms of redistribution of the management of resources. It is intended that this thesis should offer some theoretical grounding in the topic so that others may benefit in further studies of the commons in future.

It is evident that managers are replacing art historians and curators as the heads of institutions. Between the globalised world of the market and a society ruled by an administrative regime, we have to find a space of resistance, a space in common. There is also an element of urgency in this: together we are stronger and we need muscle at a time when the market and bureaucracy are so strong. You need the strength — the legal strength — of being together…

Canon or counter-canon is not the issue. That is too modernistic, it tries to disclose a truth, and our proposal is not about that. The separation of research, academics, theory — I have always hated it. Also between the artistic or scholarly side of the museum and its management. We have to break with this modern — modern since the seventeenth century — idea of subject against subject, or the subjective versus the objective, etc. It's about something else — about relationships, about being in common, and not about absorbing one into the other.

Quote from Manuel Borja-Villel, Director of Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofía, Madrid (Zonnenberg, 2015)

Introduction: Surveying the commons

This research focuses on the concept of the commons as it relates to contemporary art today, relating the idea that the commons has become a central notion in discursive practice.

My thesis is not intended to be a complete survey of the commons, but a reflection of the current status of the term through discursive practice. I believe that an understanding of the concept of the commons in relation to art is still in the early stages of development as is reflected in the recent selection of articles on the topic in art journals such as Open! *Commonist Aesthetics* (2015) and e-flux journal no. 17: *In Search of the Postcapitalist Self* (2010), but mostly in presentations at symposia organised by and in tangent to art institutions.

When I began my PhD, I believed that I would be relating the idea of the commons through a speculative methodology. It seemed that many of the papers and discussions which were happening in relation to the Occupy movement were trying to envision the development of new ways of living and an alternative to the austerity which was widely instituted by Western governments after the financial crash of 2008.

As I continued my studies and completed my initial literature survey, the response that I received from the board at my institution was 'this is all very interesting, but what does she mean by the commons?' I realised at this point that it was not enough to simply assume that the commons was something already in existence, that could be called to in order to fix the current state of things, but I must actually detail what I and other people meant when making this reference to the commons.

I also realised that ideas of the commons are extremely wide ranging and at times do not follow a coherent order. The UK is a good place to study the commons because we do have some forms of commons written into our laws in Scotland and England. However, the idea of the commons as a concept in law is not usually the thing that is being referred to when people call for the commons today. So, what is it that activists, theorists and cultural workers are referring to?

My own interest in the commons came out of my MA thesis in Contemporary Art Theory at Edinburgh College of Art (2011), which was in part a case study of the thwarted projects

Fig.1 Architectural rendering of Northern Lights at Union Terrace Gardens (2008)

Fig.2 Protest by citizens of Aberdeen against the Wood Group plan for city square (2011)

EQUAL
ACCESS
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REMAIN
COMMON

Fig.3 Occupy Stockholm poster (2012)

of Peacock Visual Arts and latterly The Wood Group to build on Union Terrace Gardens, a piece of common good land in the centre of Aberdeen. I had worked at Peacock in 2008 and wanted to make sense of what had happened when the Northern Lights project, for a new gallery space and workshops, was defeated.

At the point of writing that thesis, the Millbank student protests (see Hancox, 2011), Occupy movement and various other initiatives and protests were calling out for the commons as it related to the public realm and I realised that there must be some connection between the

exploitation of a public garden in Aberdeen and the aftermath of the global economic crash in 2008 which led to these international protests and occupations. I made my PhD application with a digitisation of a protest placard from Occupy Stockholm as the cover: 'Equal access to our resources starts with making sure our commons remain common'.

My initial research questions were: If the Commons needs a community, how does the Commons relate to contemporary notions of Public Art and Engaged Practices? How might an engagement with the Commons be beneficial to the organisation of cultural spaces? Can the Commons project create a new space outwith existing paradigms of cultural organisation and practice? If this is not so, how does the Commons frame these existing practices differently than a neo-liberal approach?

In what ways might speculation on Commons and Commoning be productive towards creating a new constitution and cultural policy change? As a seemingly utopian project, is a consideration of Commons sufficient to affect the real change needed, to reverse capital-centric governmental attitudes to culture?

Today the questions have changed to be more specific: What is the concept of the commons when it is referred to in contemporary art? For what reasons is it being employed as a concept

in discursive practices? (You may notice through the thesis I have also dropped the capitalisation of Commons to commons to reflect its styling in general usage).

My submission takes the form of a combined portfolio and thesis, reflecting on the practice based research. This thesis draws together the literature survey which is needed to begin to understand the background of this topic. It then continues through a discussion of political philosophy, in particular, the notion of 'the common' as it relates to community. After which, there is a survey chapter on the role of the commons within art, followed by a chapter on the portfolio. Finally there is an analytical chapter reflecting on the practice based research undertaken. In addition to this I have created a suggested commons syllabus with the artistic-researcher in mind. The accompanying portfolio comes in two parts: a printed booklet of transcripts from a selection of projects which I variously organised and took part in through the course of my PhD research, which is partnered with a USB 'stick' containing the original audio from these projects and of second and third year progression presentations.

Chapter one is a literature survey of some of the key texts in commons theory, and also comprises some texts about neoliberalism and subjectivity such as Lazzarato's *The Making of Indebted Man* (2012). This chapter acts as a chronological perspective of the development of the concept of the commons as it relates to my research. Contemporary art is discussed in this chapter in the activities of 16 Beaver, David Joselit's book *After Art* and his position on Relational Aesthetics, a discussion of works on Greenham Common by female artists Condorelli, Margaret Harrison and Lucy Reynolds, and through Jodi Dean's critiques of art activism.

The second chapter is presented in two parts. The first section leans towards an analogy of the falsehood of 'the common' as necessarily good or utopian, and a demonstration that perversion and destruction is often in existence within iterations of the commons. The second section is an edit of the essay 'The commons subject/The subject of community' which was published by Camera Austria in 2015. The text deals with the notion of the individual who is subject to the relation of the commons and how this often sits either alongside or against an idea of community. This chapter considers contemporary art from a show and publication by Camera Austria, the writings of the artist and philosopher

Matteo Pasquinelli, a painted portrait of Jimmy Wales Portrait by the artist Pricasso, the MAP reading group Sick Sick Sick, and essays by the artist Celine Condorelli.

Chapter three is a contextual chapter on art and the commons, and in a sense this acts as a justification for my project. In this chapter I present other projects which have dealt with the commons in a discursive sense in the last few years and what themes were being investigated in this work. This is where I situate where my research questions came from and what the field looks like now. The artworks in this section are presented as a record of the commons in contemporary art history, rather than as a critical reflection on their merits. Due to the ongoing development of this topic within curation and art practices, I felt that this was the most appropriate way to document the use of the commons as a term within contemporary art at this time. The contemporary art in this section covers the curation of Biennales Documenta13 and KW at the Berlin Biennale and the Athens Biennale *Agora*, programming at Casco and BAK in Utrecht, the art of Amy Balkin and Clive Gilman, and curated programmes including *Atelier Public* and *Open Field*.

In the fourth chapter the background of the portfolio of practice is presented, with descriptions of how each event was organised and the context for each of these discussions. All of the portfolio — the projects Estovers Part 1 and 2, GoMA, Jupiter Artland, Collective and Transmission are detailed in this chapter. Contemporary art projects appear in this chapter with engagement in the work of artists including Tessa Lynch, Eastern Surf, Modern Edinburgh Film School, and Victor and Hester.

Chapter five presents an analysis of the practice and theoretical research. What did I learn about the concept of the commons as it is used in contemporary art while working on the projects presented in the practice portfolio, and what themes are represented in these discursive projects? From this point in the thesis, the art which is discussed here reflects primarily on the practice which I undertook, and which is documented in Chapter 4 and in the Portfolio.

Chapter six presents notes towards a suggested syllabus on the commons, which is intended as an extension to the contribution to knowledge. The contribution to knowledge is a representation of commons projects in relation to contemporary art, and the 'suggested

syllabus' reader which provides a context-specific route through a collection of texts about the commons. There is just one university which I have found to have begun to make space for theories and knowledge on the commons for students studying art and visual culture. This syllabus acts as a counter to what Goldsmiths created in 2014 to allow for more discussion of areas of study of the commons which lie closer to the concerns and output of practice and theory related to contemporary art, and focusing less on political economy and enclosures and more on a constructive depiction of the commons. I believe this is the most open and practical way I can give over the knowledge I have accrued.

Finally, the conclusion revisits the work undertaken: considers the scope of what has been included, how the notes toward a syllabus work as a means to allow for ongoing discursive practices related to the commons, and how I am developing some themes of the research through a collaboration with CCA with the group *Invisible Knowledge*. This submission is therefore a survey of what I have learned and over the course of three years of study and practice. It is my hope that each individual section of the project can stand alone as an informative element, but that together these sections can provide a general overview of the commons via a practice-based approach from within the research department of an art school.

Epistemology of the practice-based commons project

The theory of knowledge which this thesis embraces is that the commons itself is not only a descriptive term, but also a practice. The commons is something which exists as a production: to exist, it must be reiterated. So, the practice involved in the production of this thesis was about calling to this idea in public.

The concept of the commons is about providing space: in this case, for discussion. The projects which were undertaken were a practice engaged in a discussion of the commons through a form which relates the commons.

My practice has been one which has involved making space for discussion of the commons by others, something which was both an amelioration of the lack of discussion present in a

preliminary research on the commons, and also a means to reflect on the concept in public. Again, breaking open the process of research.

The thesis gave me a place to further develop discussions around philosophy and other existing artistic projects on the commons as a topic, while also reckoning with it *in practice* by creating space and accepting the creation of spaces by others which considered this topic. Further extension of the publicness of these projects came about through the publishing of the content which was created in these spaces.

My practice in the research process of this thesis was one of producing discursive projects which presented me with a jumping off point for my research but latterly also were reflections on research I was undertaking, in a non-linear process.

Throughout the course of the PhD, I have strived towards making my research as open as possible. I realized that this was not the norm during the research methods course, when an architecture professor told us how he had successfully hidden every part of his thesis writing from his studio mate by building a wall around himself and never speaking about his work to anyone in public. In hearing this, I knew that in my research I wanted to be true to the openness of the commons and that to do well by my topic, I needed to be out in public discussing and presenting ideas. Considering something which is often quite a grassroots concept within academic structures led me to constantly readdress my approach, looking at which parts of the research process should be modified or updated to deal with the ethics and open structural dynamic which comes from commons projects.

I believe that this particular combination of active practice-based projects and surveying the topic from an interdisciplinary perspective could form a new way forward for the academy. This kind of approach is something which I made a case for at the interview stage, and so I was pleased when I saw that the Universities of Stirling and Dundee would inaugurate the *Centre for Scotland's Land Futures*, bringing '…together perspectives from across the humanities – history, geography, economics, art, English, law and philosophy – in the process helping address a gap in the nation's knowledge and perception of the use of land.' (Isles 2015) While not strictly addressing all of the same issues as CSLF, it feels that there is a fledgling model of research being developed towards a new kind of study of concepts

related to land and living arrangements. I hope that the work I have undertaken in this thesis project can feed into such an approach.

I have a discursive practice of programme curation, producing public-facing events and working in collaboration with contemporary artists to articulate the aesthetic and political elements of their work. The rationale of my practice in this research is informed by the methodology of the Estover. This history of this concept is described in further detail in Chapter 1, but for the purposes of describing the methodology briefly here, the Estover is a means to open up the research process. It acts as a bridging point between practice-based research outside of the academy and the academic form of the PhD thesis, using active discussion in order to produce outcomes in practice which otherwise would not be available through traditional modes of archival research.

The concept of the commons is a relatively new concept within contemporary art and within it there is an existing methodological imperative for the commons to exist as an open platform for all to access. Allowing others into my research methodology breaks the primacy of the researcher and has allowed for a more open and interactive framework, taking account of a fluid research process. The practice would be driven by research and the research was informed by practice.

It was a process which fed itself and returned issues from within art to theory and from theory to art. Therefore, the progression of the practice happened in tandem with the production of the thesis. I worked as an organiser and a researcher, but also was present in other people's projects as a collaborator. (Note: While the production of practice for this project took place in collaboration with others, the production of the thesis was all of my own work!) This shifting position between individual study and collaboration is something which informs the approach and tone of the thesis and also ties into the methodological imperative of the Estover as a framing device.

Considering different registers

It is important to note here that the tone of this thesis differs according to the chapter and the stage of the PhD I was in while I was writing it. As a result, this thesis does not always use a traditional / authoritative academic tone, and the voice of the project differs greatly at times through different sections of the thesis. Each chapter reads differently: some are conversational, some are more theoretical, some are reflective. The relatively formal voice of the literature survey gives way to more experimental approaches of writing in the philosophy chapter. The analysis of practice is conversational, while the syllabus is in an embryonic form.

The structure of the finished thesis is a partially synthetic form. Throughout the time of writing the thesis, I was taking part in activities of practice. This is not to say the thesis doesn't follow the linear progress of work, but more that each chapter both consciously and unconsciously was affected in tone by the activities which happened alongside it. I also felt that the tone of the thesis should take on some feeling of the approaches which I had to undertake in order to write particular chapters. The concept of the commons is diverse, and so is the selection of expected academic presentations one must make on methodology, practice, theory, contribution to knowledge, literature survey and so on. The change of tone within the thesis is perhaps a result of this, and at times – particularly in Chapter 4, where I recount the practice undertaken – is tinged with discursive aspects of the projects which I was working on while I was writing.

Since each chapter has a different function and therefore presents differently, I have tried to link these chapters together as neatly as I can, but I think that some of the wildness of the activities does percolate through at times. Since part of the methodology of the Estover involves some existence both inside and outside of the structures that support it, each time I am required to be academic I also still have a foot outside in practice. Each time I am participating in practice I am thinking about how to process this information in relation to theory and contribution to knowledge. I would go as far as to consider that the tone changes in part to provide a reiteration of the methodology employed over the course of the thesis and portfolio.

The portfolio itself ranges between pre-scripted and unscripted presentations, performance, discussion and published essay. There is a looseness in this presentation of thoughts, and although the thesis takes more of an academic approach out of necessity, some of this looseness remains. The timing of the thesis and the way it has to draw on many different themes and disciplines is also reflected in this. It is my intention that it should come across as having energy and perhaps not too many ties to disciplinary expectations, while also fulfilling the expected function of a thesis of doctoral standard.

Chapter 1: A chronology of the commons

Recent exhibitions and discussions within contemporary art have centered on the concept of the commons. This chapter charts a history of this concept from its etymological foundations to its contemporary usage, in order to clarify the differences between various forms of commons, their specificity to particular discourses and, in some cases, political struggles. It is my opinion that the commons is a term which has a basis in ethics, but is contingent to the situation in which it is evoked. By assessing this plurality of forms of the commons, I intend to clarify what is meant by the term commons, in order to later consider its usefulness within contemporary art discourse.

This chapter charts a chronology of the commons and its popular usage, from ecological rights to use of resources considering Hardin and Ostrom, moving on to the early 2000s Anti-Globalization movement and Naomi Klein's *Reclaiming the Commons* and its relation to Creative Commons licensing as related by Lawrence Lessig. I then cover the concept of historical English commons law via Marxist historian Peter Linebaugh, and the now seminal text *The Caliban and the Witch* by Sylvia Federici. Considering also the concepts of urban commons and its links to gentrification and activism related by David Harvey.

The concept of communicative capitalism is integral to theories of the common for Hardt & Negri and Cesare Casarino. Here it is related to connections between communism and the commons by Slavoj Zizek and Jodi Dean, and the concept of the Undercommons - a space within or between institutions and precarious study considered by Stefano Harney and Fred Moten.

Marcel Mauss' concept of the gift is conflated with debt, via a reading of Esposito's *Communitas* and the concept of the estover in conjunction with *The Making of Indebted Man* (Lazzarato 2012), and David Joselit via Lewis Hyde considers commons as a 'kind of property' (Hyde 2010, 24). Finally, I consider women's place on the commons and the importance placed in particular of Greenham Common to the commons in contemporary art. This sets the scene for further investigation in later chapters of the use of these terms and concepts relating the commons in contemporary art.

What is the commons?

Dictionary definitions of the commons are varied and multiple. The *Oxford English Dictionary* refers to the *common* as provisions which are provided for a community or company in common, probably originally in monastic use. It also describes the *common* as something which one can enter or come into, be in or keep. It is to eat at a common table, to live together (particularly as members of a college) and to be in association with others (Oxford English Dictionary, 2014).

The *commons* is that which is provided for us, that is kept, that which describes a relation of being among others or in an association. All of these being things that are to do with the actuality and personal experience of commons. Whilst the *common good* is described as something more formalised and related to law, it is the public property of a community or corporation, as land or funds, held by magistrates with revenues payable to them, for the behoof of the community — that which is held for us on our behalf (Oxford English Dictionary, 2014).

The act of *commoning* is sharing or participating, a communion. It is the exercise of common rights over pasture, and it is land which is subject to common rights, or a piece of common land (Oxford English Dictionary, 2014). It is the practice by which one acts within the commons, acts on the commons, but also describes the spaces themselves that allow such practices to take part on them.

Through a discussion of literature from the varied fields of ecology, radical historical accounts, political philosophy, art practice and curation, I intend to further clarify and describe the specificity of these different instances and positions of the commons and its related forms. In this chapter the main questions that I aim to address are: What is the commons today? How has it emerged? What forms does it take? What characteristics do these iterations of the commons share?

'Picture a pasture open to all' (Hardin, 1968)

Ecologist Garret Hardin's *Tragedy of the Commons* (1968) deals with the question of a growing global population versus the resources available to cope with such a situation. That
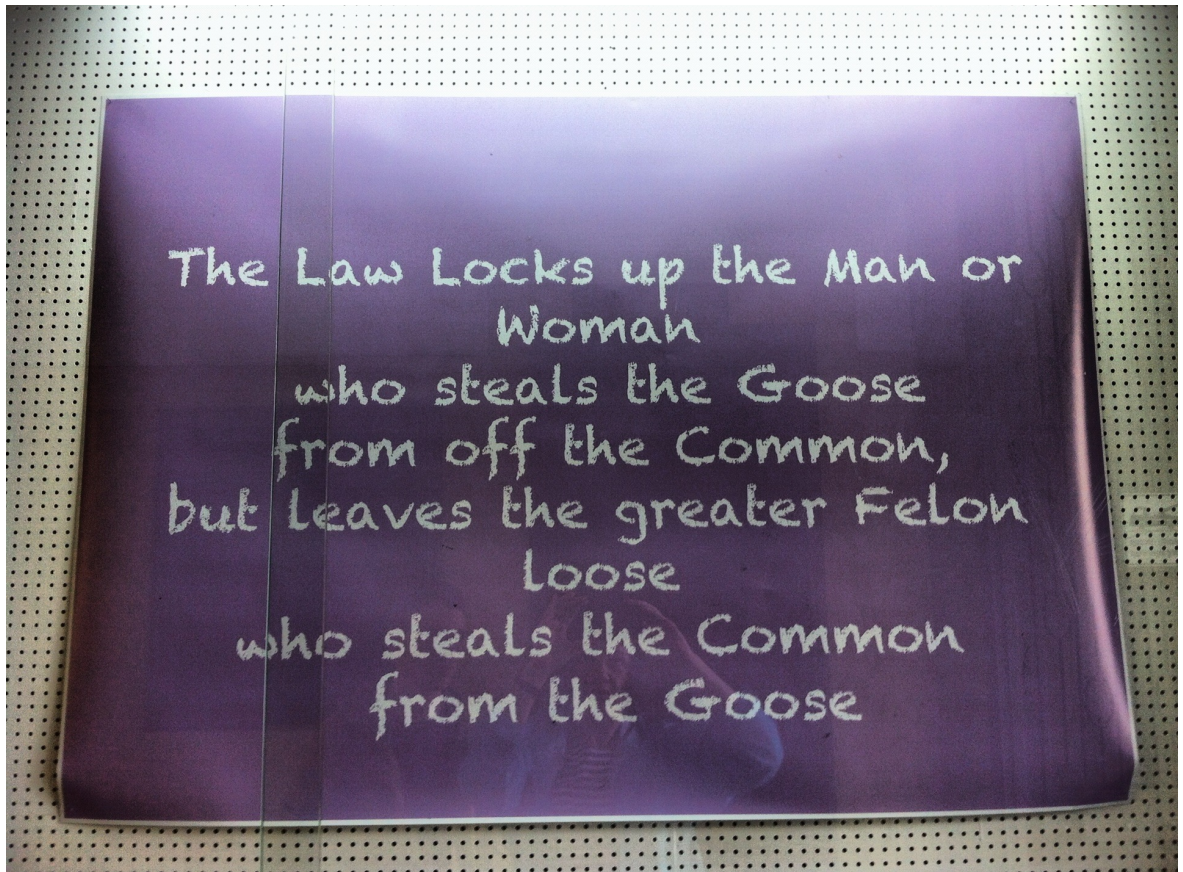
Fig.4 Margaret Harrison, *Preoccupied* (2012) at Silberkuppe gallery, Berlin.

we should want to maximise the good available to each individual is natural, he claims, but to compare these goods is 'impossible because goods are incommensurable. Incommensurables cannot be compared' (1968, 1243). Hardin proposes that if we imagine a pasture upon which anyone could graze their herd, that each herdsman would be unable to resist keeping as many cattle on the land as possible. As individuals we seek to maximise our gains in a selfish manner, without consulting others. He concludes that the only logical result is a situation in which 'Freedom in a commons brings ruin to all… Plainly we must soon cease to treat the parks as commons or they will be of no value to anyone' (1968, 1244).

He suggests that any other means of making the parks available to people is better than if they were to remain in common, whether they are managed by a public body, auctioned off to the highest bidder, given away on a 'basis of merit' (1968, 1245) or a first-come-first-served basis (isn't the ultimate end in this simply oligarchy?). Despite Hardin's admission that every instance of the sell-off of commons is objectionable, he insists that we must make this decision or face certain destruction of the common good.

Hardin sees that it is poorly suited to the modern world that the laws of society have been formed through the millennia of ancient ethics. He is against the welfare state, for which he blames the *overbreeding* of families headed by *improvident* parents and prefers that any additional children the family could not support should instead starve. He is also for controls on unions demanding better wages. It is his belief that guilt is useless in producing anything other than anxiety in people, and as such it would be useless to attempt to instill responsibility in the general populace by way of discussion. Such efforts he concludes, must involve coercion by way of taxation (1968, 1247), to persuade people not to overuse resources that are available to all; 'An alternative to the commons need not be perfect just to be preferable… Injustice is preferable to total ruin' (1968, 1248). Finally he states:

> Every new enclosure of the commons involves the infringement of somebody's personal liberty. Infringements made in the distant past are accepted because no contemporary complains of a loss. It is the newly proposed infringements that we vigorously oppose; cries of "rights" and "freedom" fill the air. But what does "freedom" mean? (1968, 1248)

Hardin's stance is typical of laissez-faire capitalism, under which *freedom* (like free trade) is a term reserved for those with money and privilege, not for the poor. *The Tragedy of the Commons* can be read as a proto-neoliberal argument for the restructuring of liberal society into one which provides only for those with (monetary) power, and brushes away the needs of those who would have historically had access to common land as a necessary resource .

In *Governing the Commons* (1990) ecological economist Elinor Ostrom sought to refute Hardin's position of enclose-or-die through detailed studies of natural *common pool resources* which were managed by communities. Her proposal contrasts Hardin's vision of a coercive state with real-life case studies which include ways of managing the commons that have been both successful and unsuccessful, commonly or privately organised, from fisheries to irrigation communities and mountain meadows. As Ostrom states; 'Instead of there being a single solution to a single problem, I argue that many solutions exist to cope with many different problems' (1990, 14). Ostrom's work inspired a generation of ecologists, and can be credited with rehabilitating the notion that group management of commons can be a productive situation for those who rely on them, and that conservative positions on privatisation (which is most often posited as the most obvious and only solution) are not a foregone conclusion or indeed necessarily the most productive end.

'Reclaiming the Commons' (Klein, 2001)

In the decade following Ostrom's work there came a rehabilitation of the commons as an emancipatory concept, which is in opposition to enclosure by capital. Naomi Klein wrote the article 'Reclaiming the Commons' in the *New Left Review* (2001) in which she discusses the anti globalisation movement as the result of 'oppositional threads, taking form in many different campaigns and movements. The spirit they share is a radical reclaiming of the commons' (2001). She links the privatisation and commodification of education systems, healthcare and natural resources with rapid commercial expansion, patenting of genes and big business lobbying in government and contrasts them with global actions which fight these threats. Among these movements were new types of common management with the introduction of Creative Commons licensing in 2001—the concept for which is defined by Lawrence Lessig in *The Future of Ideas: The Fate of the Commons in a Connected World* (2001)— the Free Libre Open Source Software movement (FLOSS), and Klein's now slightly more dated reference of Napster, the first peer-to-peer music sharing software. The Commoner journal was also founded in 2001. A statement on its website reads that the journal 'is about living in a world in which the doing is separated from the deed, in which this separation is extended in an increasing numbers of spheres of life, in which the revolt about this separation is ubiquitous' (*The Commoner*, 2014). Among its writers are prominent Marxist commons theorists, Peter Linebaugh and Silvia Federici.

As the most recent and complete study on the commons from its basis in English law, Historian Peter Linebaugh's book *The Magna Carta Manifesto: Liberties and Commons for All* (2008) is essential reading on the history of the commons as a physical and legal entity. The commons he describes were most often a forest which provided wood (which could be collected for building, for heat and energy), and had specially planted grazing areas for animals, where 'the soil belonged to the lord while grazing belonged to the commoners, and the trees to either—timber to the lord, and wood to commoners' (2008, 33). Linebaugh, an American brought up in England, seeks to read history for its hidden stories *from below* charting the history of the provision of commons from the document of 1215 to later struggles by the poor and oppressed against the state, resulting from the removal of common rights. Feminist scholar Silvia Federici's *The Caliban and the Witch* (2004) focuses on the

experience of women on the commons. She describes how from the late 15th century, women were banned from craftsman's workshops in a bid to limit them to domestic work only, and prevent them from being employed at a lower rate of pay, in lieu of giving a man a job (2004, 95). 'Those who dared to work out of the home, in a public space and for the market, were portrayed as sexually aggressive shrews or even as "whores" and "witches"' (2004, 96), and so within;

> …this new social-sexual contract proletarian women became for male workers the substitute for the land lost to the enclosures, their most basic means of reproduction and a communal good anyone could appropriate and use at will… women themselves became the commons (2004, 97).

The changes in law which necessitated the removal of rights of one section of the population (mainly men), through the enclosure of common land, created a physical enclosure for women where they would be confined to the home as domestic workers only. Today's forms of enclosure or *capture* of the common are strikingly similar, though the stratification of its affect is notably different. Contemporary (often *feminised*) labour practices, race and class divisions enclose access to resources through more complex means, namely privatisation and commodification.

We are the 99%

Since the global financial crisis of 2008, discussion of commons has risen to further prominence in protest movements and public discourse. In the collection of essays *Rebel Cities* (2012) social theorist Professor David Harvey has situated the commons as primarily an urban movement which reflects upon;

> … the seemingly profound impacts of the recent wave of privatizations, enclosures, spatial control, policing and surveillance upon the qualities of urban life in general and upon the potentiality to build or inhibit new forms of social relations (a new commons) within an urban process influenced if not dominated by capitalist class interests (2012, 67).

Harvey contextualises rising rents in cities such as New York (more recently we might consider San Francisco and London) as an expropriation of urban spaces from the diverse groups that inhabit them. Property developers and estate agents advertise based on the multicultural and mixed class make-up of an area to then rapidly develop and gentrify,

displacing people of low income. He describes the city as a collectively produced space at risk of enclosure by those that have the fiscal power to change both its physical and social landscape; highlighting what is missing in Hardin's vision of privatised spaces, that those with money and power will not act in the interests of anyone but themselves.

Harvey acknowledges that although most urban space is either private or a public good, that activism and the group action of people within these spaces, has the power to activate them as a site of 'political commons—a place for open discussion and debate' (2012, 161). 2011 brought this form of commons to the fore, by physically occupying Wall Street as a protest in the name of the 99% against the financial elites who caused the 2008 financial crisis. The Occupy movement spread to 82 different countries, inspired by political uprisings by the *Indignados* (the angry) in Spain, and the *Arab Spring* revolutions. Similar actions have continued more recently with Turkish protests centred around the enclosure of Taksim Gezi Park, *Il Forconi* (the pitchforks) in Italy, and widespread political disobedience and protest in Brazil by *Movimento Passe Livre* (the free fare movement).

The work of Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri has been central to the discourse surrounding these political movements. The *Empire* trilogy has been a staple for activists, for its depiction of globalisation and commodification of life under capitalism, and the concept of the multitude as a democratic movement of the people. I will further discuss the relation of political philosophy to the commons in Chapter 2, therefore in this introduction I will look to Hardt and Negri's individual projects in which they have investigated the political philosophy of commons and the common.

In Praise of the Common (2008) is a series of discussions and essays by Cesare Casarino and Antonio Negri. Casarino states that 'conversation is the language of the common: it is that form of language that brings us together as different from rather than identical to one another… To converse is to be in common, to produce the common.' (2008, 2) He describes how the historical notion of the common, which was delineated into a *potential* which becomes *actual*, has in the form of Hardt and Negri's Multitude become a process by which 'the common is now (its own self-producing, self-positing, and self-referential) production' (2008, 15). This reconfiguration has then created a situation in which 'the common is

virtually indistinguishable from that which continually captures it, namely, capital' (2008,15). The *conversation* of the commons then is the foundation of its existence and replication, but also contains the processes of its commodification.

Casarino suggests that resulting from this capture of the common we must find a way to distinguish between capital and the common from which capital was formed. This he says creates a *counterdesire* which is 'the desire to be in common — as opposed to the desire to be for the common-as-captured-by-capital… the desire to be captive of one's owns negation' (2008, 17). In a conference paper *The Common in Communism* (2009) Hardt describes how communicative capitalism with its biopolical, immaterial forms of production is the hegemonic 'successor to industry' (2009). In the West, where factory line production was once the central mode of production, work is now underpinned by technology and the production of affective commodity is its primary economic output and form of wage labour.

Hardt notes that with the production of immaterial goods, these commodities are always under pressure 'to escape the boundaries of property and become common' (2009). He explains that this battle between private property and public or common properties is what defines neoliberalism. Within this, the production of different types of property, material and immaterial—that which is able to be reproduced vs that which is scarce—is in constant tension. Hardt relates that for Karl Marx communism 'is the positive expression of the abolition of private property' (2009). Hardt takes this relation further by assuming that communism is the abolition of all property *as such*.

The tension which encourages the immaterial to become common is a threat to traditional property relations in that it presents the opportunity for the consumer to participate without a monetary transaction to the provider of the product or service (e.g. torrenting an album or television series online rather than paying through official outlets). For Hardt, that capitalism is reliant 'on the common and that the autonomy of the common is the essence of communism—indicates that the conniptions and weapons of a communist project are available today more than ever' (2009). These processes of common production are central to the workings of contemporary society, and have the potential to be harnessed by the

people for a wider societal benefit, rather than a top-down financial commodification of these processes.

The commons of communism

The rehabilitation of communism as a potential alternative to late capitalism has led much of the discussion around notions of the commons as it exists today. Slavoj Žižek and Jodi Dean present the possibility of future communisms and relate the need for commons as a desire towards—and from which—we might reshape society. In *First as Tragedy, Then as Farce* (2009), Žižek claims 'It is the reference to the "commons" which justifies the resuscitation of the notion of communism: it enables us to see the progressive "enclosure" of the commons as a process of proletarianisation of those who are thereby excluded from their own substance' (2009, 92). While, in *The Communist Horizon* (2012) Jodi Dean, asserts that Communism is the primary position from which to critique capitalism, rejecting the position of feminist geographers Julie Graham and Katherine Gibson's 'generic post-capitalism' (2012, 5) which she sees as *empty* in comparison to her own 'militant anti-capitalism' (2012, 5). Gibson-Graham's work reflects on the current state of capitalism, and seeks to break out of the one-solution ideology of globalisation, preferring to acknowledge and encourage 'diverse economy' (Gibson-Graham 2006, xiv) within capitalist economic structures. Dean however only supports the complete refusal of capitalism and considers Hardt and Negri's *Empire* trilogy to offer a 'new theory of communism from below' (2012, 9).

Dean takes a hard line against artistic modes of production which align with activism. In her view, dealing with politics on a small scale rather than through large-scale organised political movements has the result of making Communism look tired and stuffy. As such, a focus on aesthetics and creativity transposes potentiality of struggles off the street and into the gallery, thus removing discussion from its point of origination in the struggles of marginalised *working* people by moving political discussion into the field of art discourse. For Dean, art and its associated products and experiences circulate both as financial capital and political affect, displacing activism and producing a passive consumer experience of politics where 'spectators can pay (or donate) to feel radical without having to get their hands dirty' (2012,

13). Momentary political awareness sparked by films, novels and art in their singular forms 'disconnects task from goal' (2012, 13-14) by diverting momentum towards political change into mere transitory projects.

The question is whether we should work within communicative capitalism, and take advantage of visual, mimetic forms or attempt to eschew them entirely. Dean seems conflicted on this point. She criticises artistic projects but at the same time acknowledges the will of Occupy protestors to represent politics by spreading photographs, live streams, blogs, articles and tweets, which Dean says 'actively increase turnout' (2012, 231). Turnout of course is key, as without people at the camp there would be no protest. In this way the protestor multiplies the potential of Occupy by harnessing the power of media spectacle. Dean refers to Georgio Agamben in *The Coming Community* (1993) when he says:

> The extreme form of this expropriation of the Common is the spectacle, that is, the politics we live in. But this also means that in the spectacle our own linguistic nature comes back to us inverted. This is why (precisely because what is being expropriated is the very possibility of a common good) the violence of the spectacle is so destructive; but for the same reason the spectacle retains something like a positive possibility that can be used against it. (1993, 80)

Again we come back to the division described by Cesare Casarino 'where the common is defined according to two fundamental Aristotelian categories, namely, potentiality and actuality' (2008, 12). The *inversion* of language which Agamben refers to is a tool which has the capability to invert the common from the form of a potential politics into an actual politics, but is also destructive in its ability to enact the reverse. It is this disconnection which Dean is wary of, that our preoccupation with a creative potential (such as art) can reduce revolutionary actuality (of protest and the desctruction of capitalism) into a purely representative exercise.

Institutions and *Undercommons*

The academic institution too has been a site of protest against privatisation, for its proliferation of managerial positions alongside increases in tuition fees and the precaritisation of teaching with zero hour contracts and a reliance on adjunct—non-permanent, often graduate student—lecturers. New political subjectivities have formed within and alongside the institution, as the project of study becomes at once professionalised

(for the purposes of gaining research funding) while more radical scholarly activity is marginalised by a lack of tenured (permanent) research positions. The graduate student is exhibit-a of this culture, where one works inside the institution where possible but increasingly does so as a part-time project alongside equally precarious waged labour in the private sector. In *The Undercommons* (2013), Stefano Harney and Fred Moten discuss the commons in relation to the figure of the para-academic, a challenge to professionalisation which, as they see it, is negligence of the student and of the project of study itself—stating;

> the commons is already gone in the movement to and of the common that surrounds it and its enclosure. What's left is politics but even the politics of the commons, of the resistance to enclosure, can only be a politics of ends, a rectitude aimed at the regulatory end of the common. And even when the election that was won turns out to have been lost, and the bomb detonates and/or fails to detonate, the common perseveres as if a kind of elsewhere, here, around, on the ground, surrounding hallucinogenic facts. Meanwhile, politics soldiers on, claiming to defend what it has not enclosed, enclosing what it cannot defend but only endanger. (2013, 18)

The protests against enclosures within the academy present a paradoxical situation for Harney and Moten, in that industrial actions which present the commons as an ideal can only be presented in a pragmatic manner of organisation *within* the institution. Where Agamben's depiction of the spectacle as capable of inverting language, the institution operates in a similar manner. By organising in forms which are acknowledged by the institution, one can act only for a *politics of ends* that allows for, at best, a preservation of the status quo.

For Harney and Moten the notion of a commons of teaching and study provided by the institution is a fantasy, while the undercommons by contrast is real but visible only if one looks in the right (or wrong…) place. The para-academic scholar has one foot inside the institution and one foot elsewhere. Perhaps in protest movements, extra-institutional publishing projects or community teaching projects. The undercommons is this in-between space within which the para-academic inhabits in their compromised position of precarious study. It is in these situations that much of the discussion of commons has happened—within community projects, squats and art centres—spaces in which discourse can take place without finance, or with alternative forms of funding. A notable example of this being the artist-run space 16 Beaver Group in New York, who have implicated debt directly in their explorations of the Commons with seminars *Beyond Good and Evil Commons* (2011) and *A*

Common(s) Course: Commoning the City & Withdrawing from the Community of Money (2013-2014).

Gift, obligation and debt

> Love frustrates the simple opposition between economy and noneconomy. Love is precisely – when it is, when it is the act of a singular being, of a body, of a heart, of a thinking – that which brings an end to the dichotomy between the love in which I lose myself without reserve and the love in which I recuperate myself, to the opposition between gift and property. (Nancy 1991, 96)

Power structures exist within the commons in that they must either be given in common by someone, or taken in common, usually by a group. Historically in the UK, commons existed as a permission from a king (e.g. Union Terrace gardens in Aberdeen was given to the people of the city as a hunting forest by Robert the Bruce). For the practice-based component of this project, I have been particularly interested in one historical instrument of the commons, the estover, which was the legal right of widows to collect wood for their own use from common land. It is defined as something that is *necessary*, but also as *reparative* or *restorative* (Oxford English Dictionary). This particular framing of the commons allows us to view the estover as aid to a beneficiary who is in need, and as such as an ethical tool. It also provides us with a window on the subjective, which is important because the commons relies on this subject, the commoner, for its existence in perpetuity. It is in existence in its service to the other.

The commons is a concept which denotes ethical value (Esposito 2010, 2). Italian political philosopher Roberto Esposito describes how the etymology of the term communitas comes from the latin *munus* (2010, 4). Within the *munus* is a tension between gift and duty, which reveals itself as an obligation: 'the gift that one gives because one must give and because one cannot not give' (2010, 5). Through depictions of state forms which have been co-opted into the financial markets Maurizio Lazzarato gives an account of how this ethics has flipped in *The Making of the Indebted Man* (2012). In a neoliberal context, it is more the case today that the individual feels obligation through a duty towards financial debt rather than an obligation to society. Accountability is the primary issue; Lazzarato describes Nietzsche's categorisation of debt as forming a subject into someone who can 'stand guarantor for himself' (2012, 40). In stark contrast to social democratic governance under which each citizen has basic rights (to work, to a home, to healthcare), in the neoliberal state each person

is born in debt to the state, and further to capital in general. Debt is both newly permanent and ever expansive as neoliberal governments sell off public assets, such as pensions and student loans, to hedge funds.

Marcel Mauss' notion of *the gift* is expanded upon by Lazzarato; 'one gives away what is in reality a part of one's nature and substance' (Mauss 2011, 10). Today's average citizen is not a proletarian that fits Karl Marx' description. Rather than possessing only her labour power she is useful mainly in her capacity to take on debt. The extension of study, unpaid internships and government workfare disrupt the correlation between work and payment. The neoliberal subject lives to service forms of debt that are not a moral debt to society as a whole, but consist of an amalgamation of fiscal debts to private interests (Lazzarato 2012, 20). The obligation is inverted by capitalism by appropriating the good and replacing it with the commodity. Where the commons allows access to resources which it is understood any person will require access to regardless of their means, the commodification of such resources excludes and incurs debt within large sections of society to service their basic existence.

Art and the Commons

Within contemporary art discourse, commodification and exclusion has equally been a popular topic of discussion; in *After Art* (2013), Art Historian David Joselit examines the effective power of the image in contemporary art as it circulates as a mimetic form. He considers that today many view art as purely currency, a 'fungible hedge' (2013, 1), while its museums act as 'the art world's central banks' (2013, 1). Joselit reflects on what this art currency might become without financial imperative. He refers to artist Pierre Huyghe who considers his films to 'behave like a public space, a commons, which resists the enclosure of meaning that occurs when an artwork is assigned a centrifugal meaning' (2013, 48). Joselit also presents Lewis Hyde's definition of the commons as a 'kind of property (not "the opposite of property" as some say)' (Hyde 2010, 24) which 'stages several overlapping layers of rights to action… a building or a work of art may host several actions, both actual and virtual' (2013, 50). Joselit refers to the relational artwork *Secession* by Rikrit Tirivanija, where at set times the gallery was open for 24 hours and hosted film screenings and other forms of public entertainment for the duration of the exhibition. For Joselit, the concept of the

commons is useful as a tool to reframe the position of art as less than 100% commodity, and towards art as a space of reflection and engagement, while still retaining its ability to be a *kind of property.*

Relational art projects act temporarily as a public space but art works on the commons tend to represent *actual* public space by bringing in actual pieces of a commons site into the gallery space. Artist Celine Condorelli's *Life Always Escapes* (2009), exhibited as part of *Generosity Is The New Political* at Wysing Art Centre presented a reading room of materials on the commons, with a hearth burning estovers of wood, and a set of found postcards proudly depicting English commons as a civic good.

The commons as a site for investigation through contemporary art has in many cases focused on Greenham Common, a women's peace camp set up to protest the RAF's housing of nuclear weapons on the common. Margaret Harrison's exhibition *Common Land / Greenham* (1989) at the New Museum, New York included a selection of objects from the camp - children's clothing and toys, kitchenware, and photographs - tied to a section of perimeter fence topped with barbed wire. The exhibition text stated that 'the installation underscores the interrelation of these two tales of Greenham Common, situating political praxis in terms of its most seemingly mundane effects, and identifying art as signal means of civil disobedience' (New Museum, 1989). A recent re-presentation of the work entitled *Common Reflections* (2013) was included in the series *Reflect* for which Harrison won the Northern Art Prize in 2013.

Noting the changes which have occurred through the site's history, in their photo essay Silo Walk: Exploring Power Relations on an English Common (2010) artists Lucy Reynolds and John Schofield ask of the contested Greenham 'What might the common look like one hundred years hence? What will the monumental shelters of the missile site look like? How will enclosure look then?' (2010, 157). This question of enclosure of common space is integral to these artistic interrogations.

'The commons is not a park. This is the public domain.'

Today one can write of commons which locate space, place, subject or multitude, relation and ideal. Arguments on the topic are thrown across disciplinary boundaries. Writers and scholars of feminist geography, political economy, philosophy, ecology, history and computing have contributed to this evolving discourse. Protest movements have revived the commons as an emancipatory call for change against the 'capitalist realism' (Fisher, 2009) of neoliberal ideology.

The commons exists today as the reflection of a desire for that which is made inaccessible to us by the current structure of society. It is not accidental that commons has been taken on as a template for a resistant and collective resource. In order to draw out a comparison between these seemingly very different forms of commons; it is my intention to try to expose some of the character and *conversation* of the commons which is neither disciplinary, nor interdisciplinary by way of viewing one discipline from another, but indisciplinary.

There are descriptors for the commons which are not (yet) printed in dictionaries. In searching for the commons, it divides into innumerable parts. It is most often intangible, its intentions and characteristics obscured by time and changing political ideologies. The difficulty with the word commons is that it is not something that the average person uses in day to day conversation. The depictions above are historical, and in some cases pre-capitalist and, so, are at a certain disconnect from contemporary usage. The commons exists in tension with other systems of organisation. It can be seen as a tension against a public or state organisation of resources. Today it is often portrayed as a tension against financialisation, since intrinsically the commons cannot be given a monetary value. The confusion of private *public* realms is at the heart of these considerations.

The commons is a means by which we can emphasise the value of something shared, and assert the necessity of certain kinds of freedoms. Just as it does not have one quantifiable meaning, neither can its value be explained in financial terms. In order to define it, we must look not only to the commons, but also to the common, to commoning, to the commoner, and the common good. In light of these complexities, I hope to have shown in this chapter

some of the characteristics of that draw together these approaches and understandings of the commons, and to consider the contradictions that are created by them.

Fig.5 Letter Press Poster for the 'Public Domain'. (2012) Amy Balkin

Chapter 2: Political philosophy and the common

In this chapter I will run two concurrent narratives about the commons which deal with its form and use. There is the commons as it relates to ideas of the good and the utopian, and the commons as it relates to a freedom of will. It is my argument that the commons is generally perceived to be only 'good', but that as a relation the commons is actually much more contingent to the situation than many would care to suggest. The second section of this chapter was initially written as an article for Camera Austria and discusses the position of the subject under capitalism as they relate to the concepts of community, versus the subject as they relate to the commons and how this relationship shapes the subject and the commons itself.

The tone of this chapter is more of a creative meditation, and considers Thomas More, author of *Utopia* and a hair-shirt wearer — contrasting his position to that of a painter, Pricasso, who uses his nude body to paint an image of the founder of Wikipedia, Jimmy Wales. This brings about a discussion of Matteo Pasquinelli's concept of the 'libidinal parasite' and of the entropic nature of digital commons. This contrast is used to consider the idea of a common life as held by Franciscans against Ranciere's concept of *subjectivization* to consider whether the commons is inherently good or altruistic, by also considering the writings of Karl Popper on Plato.

The second section considers the exhibitions *The Unrepresentable Community* and *Among Others* which took place at Camera Austria in 2011, discussing the figure of the *other* or what Ranciere refers to as the 'part-of-no-part'. This then extends the idea that the commons which is related in artistic practices is not necessarily about community identification but can also come as a product of disenfranchisement or disidentification.

This chapter lays the foundation for the ethical and philosophical imperatives which are important to understanding the commons as a topic, in order that the contemporary art practice considered and undertaken later in this thesis can be apprehended in relation to the research questions. The intent here is to understand the slippery political nature of the commons, to then later be able to recognise its implications in contemporary art and discursive practice.

> Questions of the commons are contradictory and therefore always contested. Behind these contestations lie conflicting social interests. Indeed, "politics," as Jacques Rancière has remarked, "is the sphere of activity of a common that can only ever be contentious." At the end of it all, the analyst is often left with a simple decision: whose side are you on, and which and whose interests do you seek to protect? (Harvey 2011, 102)

If the idea of the commons has become infinitely flexible when it comes to the contemporary world, it brings about questions as to why it is still perceived to be a useful idea. What is it about the commons that is so convincing? It seems that some intrinsic characteristics of the commons remain despite its mutable shape, that the commons itself has a particular character. In the preface of *Utopia*, Thomas More is described by editor Henry Morlay as having an 'earnest character' which 'caused him while studying law to aim at the subduing of the flesh, by wearing a hair shirt, taking a log for a pillow, and whipping himself on Fridays' (2005).

In considering the commons there is this repetition of the idea of the branch of wood. The commons has this flexibility of conceptual permutation, in combination with the idea of being accessible according to need. The hair shirt wearer with the log for a pillow, or the widow with a basket of estovers which could just as easily become a broom-stick as it could a pyre. A branch of wood can represent peace in the case of the olive branch or repentance in the case of the cilice (hair shirt) which would occasionally even be augmented with twigs. There is an interplay between this idea of living simply out of duty to god and providing to those who live simply out of necessity.

More's *Utopia* by definition is 'no place' or 'nowhere', the commons too is a non-place in many senses. The commons is not only utopia in its perfection and relative impossibility, but it is also nowhere when we consider its sense of value. The commons has no financial value and thereby is 'no place' if we consider that all places today are party to land valuation. It is also 'no place' with regards to what can happen there, it is an intermediate site where one may not decide to live but where sustaining activity takes place. It has been said that the commons is not the site itself but the relation by which these activities take place. The commons becomes a mediator in addition to or surpassing its designation as a place. The

word site comes from the Latin situs, meaning 'local position' (Oxford English Dictionary). The idea of locality is of particular importance to discussions of commons which relate to communities.

The idea of a local position is not only pertinent to locality as a place. Where the commons becomes a relation, it is also a subjective form: the local position as related to the personal. It is situated and particular. It takes on meanings which are contingent to a person or group. When related through the public as opposed to the thought or ideal form of the commons, the commons which is lived through not only forms social 'goods'. The openness of form accommodates a wide spectrum of behaviour.
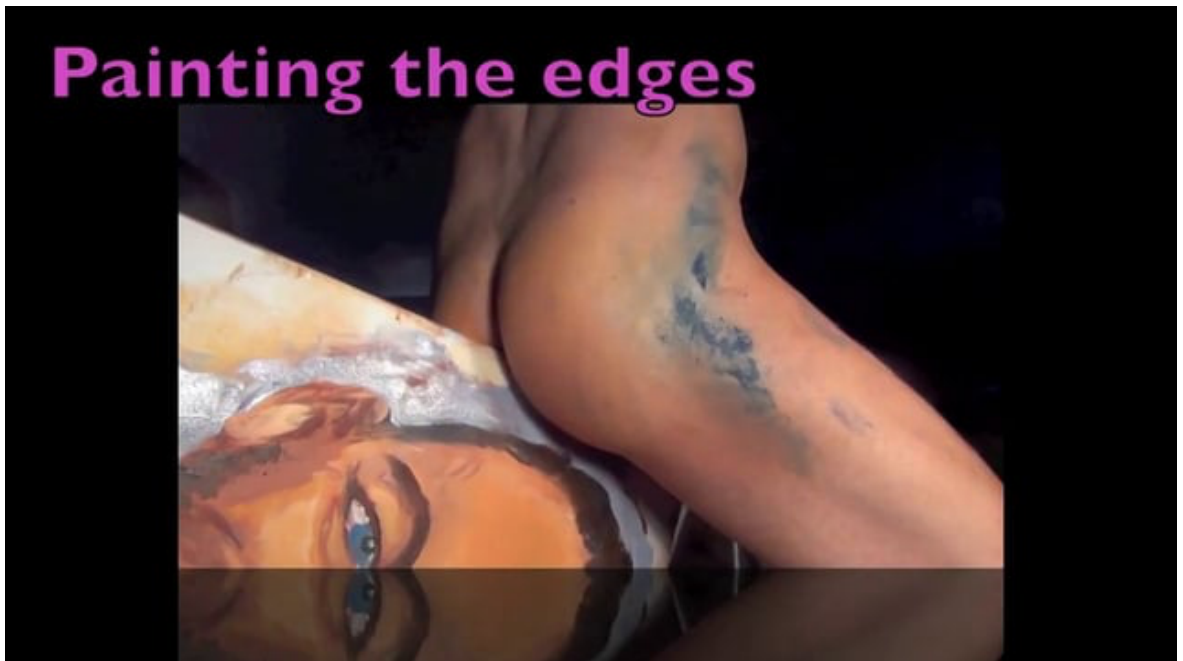
Fig.6 Automated Vimeo screenshot of Pricasso painting Jimmy Wales portrait (2013)

The artist Pricasso takes the opposite approach to life from More. He luxuriates in the possibilities of his own flesh, wearing candy pink chaps and top-hat while painting portraits with his 'wood' for a brush. The portrait of Jimmy Wales on the Wiki commons is an artwork commissioned by a negative relation made visible through the medium of Wiki-commons (Morris 2013). As the co-founder of Wikipedia, Wales saw himself as a benevolent king of the commons, and sought to preserve it as a family-friendly resource.

Fig.7 Painting of Jimmy Wales by Pricasso (2013), accessed on Wiki commons.

His portrait was painted as a result of the antagonism between editor and founder. It takes two forms: the blue-eyed angelic painting of Wales, and a graphic video documenting a nude Pricasso fully engaging his physique to depict Wales on canvas. Both works are represented on the commons as a lens-based documentary of this performance.

These images stand as a kind of incriminating evidence of the act, of the production of the negative common. Commons are not completely open but like any other relation contain hierarchies. Proponents of commons as a structure, such as Wales, like to think of the commons only as a 'good' and therefore that the actions which happen within them should be somehow pure. In actuality the commons allows for a broad spectrum of behaviour, within which libidinal/sexual practices often embarrassingly reach saturation point. Artist and philosopher Matteo Pasquinelli (2009) has written about this idea of the 'libidinal parasite', where the input of energy which is required to operate in a digital network creates outputs which are unintended perversions:

Digital machines have always been framed as symmetrical devices, where energy goes in and gets out, where input energetically equals to output… An entropic model of netporn is useful for demonstrating how the dominant techno-paradigm is partial in its fetishism of digital code and abstract spaces: there is always a dissipation of energy, a "nihilist impulse" that also affects machines. (2009, 4)

What has to be clarified by the critical discourse around communication machines (i.e. media culture and media activism) is that they are never a neutral tool for free speech, free culture and free cooperation… all the forms of collective intelligence and creative commons driven by technology may represent a real hazard against the capitalistic accumulation of surplus-value, but beyond or beneath the immaterial layer there is always a material by-parasite that is never seriously confronted (2009, 6)

Both the flame war between Wales and Wikipedia editor Russavia which created the context for Pricasso's work are evidence of this parasitical and entropic nature of digital commons which Pasquinelli describes. The rise of fibre and wireless 4G broadband technologies for the dissipation of knowledge online has been paralleled by the rise of internet pornography, both from production houses and the ordinary user. Even the casual performance of sexual acts in the private sphere are subject to entropy, as was represented in the recent spate of iCloud hacking of celebrities phones yielding a cache of nude selfies of actresses and performers which were posted online.

Fig.8 Photo of protest against ATVOD censorship (2014)

The commons itself is non-moralistic, it is a boundaried space but it takes group action or enclosure to close down forms of activity which are deemed inappropriate. The conservative government recently banned the depiction of a list of sexual acts in the UK. The list included spanking and caning, both forms of subduing of the flesh through self flagellation. In considering the commons this idea of the subduing of the flesh, meets both in parallel with and in opposition to the idea that we might all live together in harmony.

Being-together

The idea of living well together, is central to the life of the third order of Franciscan Monks. Agamben describes in *The Highest Poverty* '…the monastic rule "cenoby" (*koinos bios*, the common life),' under which Franciscans aspired towards 'the perfection of a common life in all and for all… ("live harmoniously in a house pleasantly," as ancient rule has it)' (2013, 6).

The basis of the idea of the commons is tied to this theological ideal. While the Franciscans took a vow of poverty, they understood the idea of living together as the means of being closest to god. This existence as an order manifested as a '"whole group of those who believed were of one heart and one soul, and no one claimed private ownership of any possessions, but everything they owned was held in common" (acts 4:32)' (2013, 10).

In the article *Enclosing the Subject*, Jodi Dean explains that 'Protestant theologies hail believers as singular souls responsible for their own salvation' (2014, 5). This polarity of theological position is illustrative of the opposing forces which have shaped our understanding of ethical obligation as it relates to the commons. The difference between Catholic and Protestant positions is that one is either subject-to the commons in a way that one is also party to its continuation as a form, or one is only considered individually as a sum of one's own personal deeds.

This is not only a theological divide, but one which continues to pervade discussions of the commons. The subject is intrinsic to understanding the commons in its specificity, but it is also an agent which contributes to the shattering of the idea of the commons under capitalism.

This process is described with different terminology by a number of theorists. Subjectivization (Ranciere 1992) is the process by which the individual comes into being as a subject under capital, Althusser refers to this process as 'interpellation' (1971) — the process by which the subject is realised in a moment of call and response, forming the subject in relation to the situation they find themselves in and the ideology they are subject to.

Writing about the commons from outwith the commons is a process of recognising the constraints one is under. It is to recognise the void of the commons as a distant form of possibility. For Dean the process of naming acts in such a way to subjectify a group which is then not part of a whole: '(t)he name-in-common can never fully designate... it cannot relate to itself as a structuring form' (2014, 11). Dean also points out that Judith Butler has referred to the subject him/herself as a *placeholder* or a *foreclosure* (1997), which is close to the terminology used in commons theory for the disappearance of the commons being an enclosure.

During my second year of the PhD in the reading group project *Sick Sick Sick: The Books of Ornery Women* (2013-2014) together with MAP editor and artist Laura Edbrook I brought together books which could be considered to be written with a radical or 'bludgeoned' subjectivity; books in which the writer herself was self-aware of her subjection under capitalism and other associated constraints (particularly patriarchy, gender and sexuality). As Dean has stated 'In their self-relating, the people always come up against themselves…' (2014, 10). The position of the subjectivized individual is that of alienation.

In considering the commons the alienated individual is always in contrast to notions of collectivism in a real vs. utopian split. Christian theology, as I mentioned before, evidences this split in the difference between the Franciscans and Protestants where one is either considered part of a group or one is considered to be personally responsible for ones own salvation. The idea of the altruistic individual, and the idea of friendship is central to Christian theology. In *The Company She Keeps* (2013), artist Celine Condorelli has discussions around the idea of friendship as it relates to philosophy. Philosopher Johan Hartle proposes the following questions;

> … could friendship be a form of production? Could cooperation (as in service-oriented or industrial labour) also be a form of friendship?… All this comes with the concept of cooperation, which has always been a leading concept for the socialist and communist movements. And in this sense the idea of the commune — and communality in production — and that of friendship are linked (2013, 18)

To which Condorelli responds;

> Friendship in this way leads towards the building of a common, the 'in common', or to a form of commoning. I went back to Aristotle, through Agamben's reading in the

little book he published, *The Friend*, and found something in it about desire: "And as all people find the facts of their own existence desirable. The existence of their friends is equally - or almost equally desirable. One must therefore also 'con-sent' that his friend exists, and this happens by living together and by sharing acts and thoughts in common. In this sense, we say that humans live together, unlike cattle that share the pasture…'" (2013, 18)

This vision of the cattle on the pasture acts as a direct link to Catholicism's pastoral care, of shepherding a flock (thus of friendship and guidance), but also could refer to its inverse in the case of the *Tragedy of the Commons* where impetus towards personal gain is anticipated to overwhelm the commons.

In the *Tragedy of the Commons* (1968), Garrett Hardin follows a Platonic logic under which the opposing form to that of the collective is presumed to be selfishness. However, if we look to Karl Popper's critique of Plato in *The Open Society and Its Enemies* (1945), we can see that Hardin's assertion misses the fact that in the Christian tradition the opposite of selfish is altruistic, and the opposite of individual is collective; 'Plato suggests that if you cannot sacrifice your interests for the sake of the whole, then you are selfish… Collectivism is not opposed to egoism, nor is it identical with altruism or unselfishness.' (1945, 87) Popper's reading reaffirms the idea of the altruistic individual and of friendship being central to the commons in the way that Condorelli suggests.

Institutions of the commons

Plato's *Republic* sets out the conditions for the ideal society, connecting the idea of individual justice with political justice. This vision is something that although *ideal* is not utopian in the sense that it cannot be an actually existing situation. For Plato the ideal form of something like a perfect state is something which has shape and is perfect in its realisation, yet existing alongside it there are versions of this thing which are less ideal, and subject to the constraints of being in the real world. In *The Open Society and Its Enemies* (1945) Popper describes Plato's *Republic* as;

> … an ideal state which is not a mere phantasm, nor a dream, but which is in its stability more real indeed than all those decaying societies which are in flux, and liable to pass away at any moment… The things in flux, the degenerate and decaying

things, are (like the state) the offspring, the children, as it were, of perfect things. (1945, P19-20)

By this Popper means that this ideal form is the most true and compelling and that the real forms which are of a relation to that ideal are actually very close to it in their composition. The process of de- and re-composition of the ideal into related forms is something which relates closely to the idea of the commons which could be said to exist in this way, in that it is understood both as an ethical or logical ideal and also as a real thing which exists in the world as an imperfect extension of this ideal.

Popper goes on to quote Aristotle's description of Plato's Forms or Ideas, which are separate to sensible things, which 'he said were distinct from them, and all called after them. And the many things which have the same name as a certain Form or Idea exist by participating in it.' (1945, 24) If we are to apply this to the idea of the commons, all versions of the 'thing' which is understood to be 'commons' then are participants in the idea of the commons, despite the fact that they can never enact a form of utopia, and by participating in this idea these versions exist under the same name. By this logic the greater commons ideal is perhaps then the perfect vision of what could be a common-ness, a generosity, and the many commons which proliferate and exist as many kinds of imperfect relations or versions in the real world.

It is often the case that ideas of the public cross paths with ideas of the commons, and it can become difficult to extract the difference between the two forms. Many times they are used for the same purpose, as a reference to ethics. Agamben points out that 'The idea of a "common life" seems to have an obvious political Meaning. In the *Politics*, Aristotle defines the city as a "perfect community" (*koinonia teleios*; 1252b29) and makes use of the term *syzēn*, 'to live together,' to define the political nature of humans ("they desire to live together"; 1278b22)' (2013).

The crossover between commons, community and politics often results in a utopian form. Karl Popper explains that Plato's particular combination of technology and 'historicist features' came to be representative 'of quite a number of social and political philosophers who produced what have been later descried as Utopian systems. All these systems

recommend some kind of social engineering, since they demand the adoption of certain institutional means, though not always very realistic ones, for the achievement of their ends.' (1945, 23)

Echoing Plato, in the essay *So-called 'evil' and criticism of the state*, Paolo Virno refers to the 'pure institution' as one which 'does not *represent* any force or reality… rather, it can only *signify* this force or reality' (2008, 50) and asks 'Which political institutions lie outside the apparatus of the State?' (2008, 23) It is often said that the commons lies outwith the state in that it is not administered in the way that the public is. Virno refers to Hobbes who contrasts the idea of a 'natural law' vs. the civil state. As in the case of Hardin's Tragedy of the Commons, Virno states that 'for Hobbes, the natural state is lacking in true and real rules because there is no guarantee for the application of these rules' (2008, 32).

Virno sees the 'state of exception' in which we now live is one 'in which it is difficult to trace a clear distinction between "never again" and "not yet," between continued loss and the beginning of redemption. In these apocalypses, the separation between potential and act is confirmed' (2008, 55). It is in these situations that the ideal of the commons is called to, where we are looking backwards into history while also being not yet able to forge a reasonable path forward. In his assertion that 'The public sphere consists, in short, of a *negation of the negation*: "non non-man"' (2008, 20). Virno makes the connection between what Ranciere refers to as the part that has no part, those who are denied their existence and exiled in the public realm.

> Can we conceive of an institution that is *political*, in the strictest sense of this adjective, if that institution changes its own form and function by means of language? Is it plausible to have a Republic that protects and stabilizes the human animal… A nonrepresentative, insubstantial, Republic based on differences and differences between differences? (2008, 50-51)

The commons may be a political institution in this manner. It does not represent anyone, it is constantly mutating in its shape and meaning and can only act as a signifier for a set of ideals. Is the idea of the commons as a perfect institution a possibility in reality? The connection between the commons and the shape of society which forms it — a state of exception. For Ranciere, 'political justice is not simply the order that holds measured

relationships between individuals and goods together. It is the order that determines the partition of what is common' (1999, 5).

Ranciere sets up the case for the subject of capitalism as a dis-identified mass who are not served by capitalism or by the state. He links this effective non-existence across the ages when he says that whichever of them 'has no part-the poor of ancient times, the third estate, the modern proletariat-cannot in fact have any part other than all or nothing' (1999, 9). The woman and the proletarian worker are two examples which Ranciere gives as subjects whose presence 'measures the gap between the part of work as social function and the having no part of those who carry it out within the definition of the common of the community' (1999, 35-36). He describes the process of political subjectification as a *disidentification* and 'removal from the naturalness of a place'.

For Ranciere the proletarian subject, cast out of society is the disruptive factor which interrupts dominant orders, and creates politics. This part of no part 'exists as a political community that is, as divided by a fundamental dispute, by a dispute to do with the counting of the community's parts even more than of their "rights." The people are not one class among others. They are the class of the wrong that harms the community and establishes it as a "community" of the just and the unjust' (1999, 9). It is in this dispute that the 'common good' becomes linked to the commoner in their vulnerability.

The emancipatory nature of the commons is equally connected to those who experience a disunity with the rest of society. It is in this process that the basis of politics is created. The commons is a concept which relates these ideas of the good and the libidinal or the disruptive. It relates to the notion of the individual as a positive and a negative relation, to ideas of utopia and public realm. To return to the situation of Pricasso and Jimmy Wales, we might consider the situation of Wikipedia as a form of commons, a digital version of a public realm, based on the ideal which Wales sought over many years to enforce as its protector.

The disagreement with editor Russavia over the possibilities of this public realm led to a form of politics being enacted. In commissioning Pricasso to paint a picture of Wales, Russavia made a king's portrait. One which cannot be erased. It is fated to remain forever on the

commons of Wikipedia. Wales sought to produce a commons which appeared in the ideal form which he had conceived for it, rather than one which was a version of his ideal, and imperfect in its re-presentation and development as a project edited and developed by anyone who cared to participate.

[How does today's subject relate to traditional notions of community?]

Fig.9 Communitas image essay from Camera Austria issue 129 (2015).

The commons subject and the subject of community

> …the common human condition turns up everywhere, more manifest and bare than ever. Indeed, it is manifest because stripped bare, and vice versa. The common condition is at the same time the common reduction to a common denomination *and* the condition of being absolutely *in* common. These two senses of common are both intermixed and in opposition to each other. (Nancy & Strong 1992, 371-2)

How does todays subject relate to traditional notions of community? I will attempt to distinguish this idea of the subject as it relates to the community and the subject as they relate to notions of the commons. Who is the subject of the commons versus the subject of community? What is the relation of the individual to the commons? Can we distinguish between the relation of the subject to the idea of community as separate to i) the idea of the community as it relates to the commons, or ii) the subject as related to the commons?

It is my feeling that we should highlight this separation between the ideas of a commonness or being-in-common against ideas of the commons, which do not necessarily identify this sort of one-ness between people. It is necessary to begin with the understanding that the commons itself is the identifier for the need and for the place or resource. In contrast to this definition, the commons itself becomes available through an identification – and indeed interplay between – need and obligation which to some extent produces a commonness. Although this is not necessarily something which galvanises a community, it is more a plurality of individual alienation from a particular situation which puts this subject into the position of relating to the commons. In this way, the commons represents both a necessary relation and a void or a lack within society.

The exhibitions *Communitas: The Unrepresentable Community* and *Among Others* took place at Camera Austria in 2011. Both exhibitions examined the notion of community as a concept distinct from individual or collective identity or specific societal groups. The works included looked at the idea of community as a utopia which is essentially irreconcilable with reality, and to the presence instead of the image of the alienated individual. The latin term commūnitās, from which the show derives its name, is defined in positive terms as joint possession or use, participation, partnership and sharing. It also refers to social relationship, fellowship, social ties, organised society, the community of nature or quality, of kinship and of obligingness.

Philosopher Roberto Esposito sought to redefine this term in his work *Communitas: The origin and destiny of community* (2010). For Esposito community is formed from the basis of obligation, which we can examine against the traditional definition of 'obligingness'. For Esposito such an obligation towards community, to the assistance of the other, has been replaced in late capitalism with the obligation to ones' debts. The community has become;

> the totality of persons united not by a 'property' but precisely by an obligation or a debt; not by an 'addition' but by a 'subtraction': by a lack, a limit that is configured as an onus, or even as a defective modality for him who is 'affected', unlike for him who is instead 'exempt' or 'exempted'. Here we find the final and most characteristic of the oppositions associated with (or that dominate) the alternative between public and private, those in other words that contrast communitas to immunitas. (2010, 6)

For Esposito, this idea of *communitas* as a positive contrasts with *immunitas* (immunity) as a negative. Where *communitas* implies caring and sociality, *immunitas* concerns those who are immune from the obligation of the community; 'immune is he who is sheltered from obligations and dangers that concern everyone else. Immune is he who breaks the circuit of social circulation placing himself outside of it.' Such tensions were made evident through the works included in *Communitas: The Unrepresentable Community* and *Among Others*, works which related to the politics of representation and of visibility, asking 'How are representation and the (political, social) mechanisms of exclusion connected?' (Camera Austria 2011)

In these exhibitions, works included examined the perpetual appearance and reappearance of particular images of the *other* as an oppositional figure as a means to galvanise the ideology of a community with shared identity. The commons was discussed in relation to public debates on how and why spaces in which our common interests can be shared or argued over are disappearing, and arguing that the presence and repetition of particular images reduces the scope of public debate.

There is another side to this fracturing of commonality and the prevalence of the subject who is impossible to naturalise into a traditional idea of community. In my own research, I have been trying to give shape to the idea of the commons which in itself always goes without a full description. The commons is such an old concept that we would expect there to be a complete definition for it, but as an idea it seems to be flexible (even slippery) conceptually,

to the extent almost of becoming meaningless. The commonality I have been seeking is one which can bring together certain themes which evidence the crossing over of narratives within different iterations of the commons, to make sense of something in-common between these many iterations of what we consider to be commons.

The commons is framed as objective (usually an objective good), but it is situationally contingent. What place does subjectivity have in a consideration of the commons? To answer this we might state that the commons relies on the subject for its existence. The subject is in receipt of the commons, usually for restorative reasons, in recognition of a material deficit. The subject can act in or on the commons, but cannot own the commons. There can be an owner of the commons, but (s)he is not its subject. What is it to be subject of/on/to the commons? The subject cannot be assumed to be passive, since commons must be active against enclosure. A commons is predicated on the activity of those who use the commons.

The commons is a subjective, posited as objective by its proponents. This happens because people become afraid to critique the commons in a way that may weaken it and cause it to be enclosed. Although enclosures of commons usually happen today through commodification of terms, rather than critiquing the notion of an objective good. One frequently cited subject of the historical commons was the widow who collected estovers of wood or a herdsman who grazed his cattle. Among today's subjects of common parks are gay cruisers, dog walkers and joggers.

In theory, the idea of the commons is almost entirely considered without the subject. When the subject is under consideration, then the individuals which form the community which the commons pertain to are secondary to the system that is in place; the commons. Conceptually this is the point at which notions of the subject which cannot be rationalised as part of a community, meets with the subject as they relate to the commons. From the theory which exists concerning the commons, whether in its historical form in law or as a philosophical and theological idea of the *in-common,* we might assert that the subject of the commons is the reason for the existence of the commons.

The commons itself is not directly formed by the subject, as the subject can be assumed to have a limited agency in that they are in reliance on the commons for some form of

continued subsistence. An oppositional situation occurs, where the commoner is formed when the commoner demands the commons. This demand can both be instituted directly as in protest movements such as Occupy or in the G7 and G8 protests, or it can be implied simply by the existence of the alienated person who is unable to participate in capitalism.

This interplay between giving (or demanding) and receiving can be found in Esposito's *Communitas*. The etymology of the term *communitas* is derived from the latin *munus*. Within the *munus* is a tension between gift and duty, which reveals itself as an obligation. What Esposito refers to as 'the gift that one gives because one must give and because one cannot not give' (2010, 5). It is this obligation that makes the commons an ethical form. The interplay with the person who becomes subject-to the commons through the process of subjectivization as Rancière would describe it is what characterises this idea of the commons being a relation, rather than simply a place or an ideal.

A situation occurs where the commons cannot be separated from that which encloses it, because of its tension-with and existence-alongside capital. The commons itself cannot be ascribed a financial value, and so it is always at risk of disappearance and change of form through privatisation. Alongside this, the idea of the commons as a form in law pre-dates capitalism, and so gives a feeling of existing outside of capitalism. This apparent existence of the outside-within forms the idea for what feminist geographers J.K. Gibson-Graham saw as 'alternative economies' (2006, .ix) .

The subject which appears in the Communitas exhibitions bears a resemblance to Rancière's part-of-no-part. A group of people that;

> exists as a political community that is, as divided by a fundamental dispute, by a dispute to do with the counting of the community's parts even more than of their 'rights.' The people are not one class among others. They are the class of the wrong that harms the community and establishes it as a 'community' of the just and the unjust. (1998, 77)

The idea of the commons becomes both a life-raft for the alienated subject, and a means by which capital preconditions more of these subjects. There is a constant battle for the continuation of the commons as a form, and its attempted enclosure by capitalism. This preconditioning of the subject occurs when the idea of the commons itself is subsumed into capital through privatisation. The flexibility of terms when referring to the commons has

found it being attached to ideas such as the 'sharing economy' with projects which produce a form of commons which is of negative value to the individual and perpetuates inequality.

The subject of the sharing economy becomes the meta-rentier - he who not only rents his place out on Airbnb to make the rent for the month, but also needs to rent somewhere else in the meantime because he has nowhere else to be (See Simon, 2014). In this case the subject under capital is not only a part-of-no-part in the rental economy, but must rent twice in order to participate. Esposito codifies the community as not 'only to be identified with the res publica, with the common "thing", but rather is the hole into which the common thing continually risks falling, a sort of landslide produced laterally and from within.' (2010, P8). There is a feeling from the way he writes this that the common is incredibly precarious and something which just as easily equates with loss as it does with a form of respite. Where stabilised rents would allow the real flourishing of local communities in a physical sense, the sharing economy premises the idea of community and sharing on our most basic needs and, in making them common, puts a price on them.

It is this situation of being-without which forms the bridging experience which joins together the notion of the alienated individual as they become disconnected from notions of community, and in need of the commons. The pair of exhibitions, *Communitas: The Unrepresentable Community* and *Among Others* were produced alongside steirischer herbst festival's *Second Worlds*, presenting a critical assessment of the idea of *being-with*, looking at modern and contemporary social and identitary models, their utopias, failures and the desire for or loss of faith in a 'different—second—world for negotiation.' (Camera Austria 2011) This figure who is in exile from traditional notions of community, and their un-representability in the public realm is the motive which repeatedly brings contemporary art and philosophical discussion in a loop back to the *other* and to the ever proliferating and diverging notions of the commons.

Chapter 3: Art and the commons

Addressing the research questions: 'What is the concept of the commons when it is referred to in contemporary art? For what reasons is it being employed as a concept in discursive practices?', this chapter directly considers recent examples of art on the commons, and considers the position of Simon Sheikh that *all* artistic practice is discursive. Examples of artists and art projects which consider politics and the commons in this chapter include Chto Delat?, Occupy Wall Street, and Teatro Valle Occupato. International festivals such as Documenta13 and KW at the Berlin Biennale and the Athens Biennale *Agora* are discussed. It is noted that the city of Utrecht is particularly concerned with the commons, with programmes at Casco and BAK each considering the topic as a response to large cuts to public art funding in the Netherlands.

Considering the themes of land use, works by artists Amy Balkin and Clive Gilman are documented alongside a discussion of the relationship between commons and community projects in 'curated' open programmes such as Atelier Public and Open Field. It is my intention that this chapter should act as a broad survey of the commons in recent contemporary art practices and their implicit thematic connections.

In considering the relationship between recent arts programming, curation and artistic production to the commons when used as a theme, this chapter includes exhibitions, artworks, symposia and writing which falls broadly within the reaches of visual art. My intention is to give some idea of the breadth of what is covered when curators and artists discuss the commons.

The selection of projects which I have made adheres quite strictly to projects which explicitly mention the commons in their intentions or form in some manner which allows me to consider them to have a political focus on the commons. There are of course other projects which could conceivably fit into a chronology of works which relate to the commons, but I think it is important to follow which projects carry this as an explicit intention. It is then possible to trace where the theory behind these projects comes from and how it relates to other projects and to the political environment which formed them.

This chapter presents a critical selection from a recent history of commons projects, rather than a gathering (though the notion of gathering itself is conceptually tied to the commons and e.g. to estovers and to the agora, perhaps it is not rigorous enough for a thesis). The common ground between the art in this selection is political. The art and institutions here respond to the political activism of this era which the commons presents itself to as an opportunity for as an alternative (whether simply discursively or otherwise). In some cases this is about the furthering of political aims, and in others it is simply about trying a new format for engagement which is less hierarchal.

Critiquing arts commons?

> [O]n what terms, if at all, will nominally sympathetic institutions lend themselves to the Occupy movement? It's a question that goes to the heart of how different strands of Occupy activists interpret the increasingly influential concept of "communization" … Is the capitalist control of social life best challenged through adventurist escalations on the part of self-selecting vanguard? Or is the project of reclaiming the commons best advanced through long-term coalition building within a plurality of social actors? Need these be mutually exclusive poles? And where does the work of artists and cultural producers fit? (McKee, 2011)

In this chapter I am presenting, for the first time in many cases, a selection of contemporary art projects which have each considered the commons as a topic in a political sense, and taking note of where each has occurred. At this point I must make an attempt at problematizing the nature of a commons artwork. Many of the artworks which are produced in the name of the commons are produced through socially engaged arts practices. Socially engaged art practice involves the collaboration of a community or group of people, and necessitate a level of engagement with a public.

Some artworks involve the discussion of a commons site or place, but even in this case the work is referential to the people who use that site. Since the majority of the works could conceivably be described as socially-engaged art practice, the commons itself can be seen to draw some of the qualifications and pitfalls that this mode of artistic engagement contains. Within socially engaged and political art practices, there is a difficulty in necessarily judging the artwork as 'good art' in itself if in fact the work is about taking risks by opening up the process of production.

When it comes to the commons 'the contents may differ from those on the packet'. Art which addresses the commons is not always a successful commons. I believe the value lies in the attempt at addressing that idea, perhaps within a structure where it is likely to fail or seems to be otherwise impossible or utopian. Many commons artworks use a site of or the imagery of protest, the commons standing against the encroachment or enclosure of public realms. These artworks in themselves are not necessarily political but still use the aesthetic of political dissensus.

Art critic and theorist, Grant Kester has addressed this particularity of participatory arts practices, and considers that the imagery of activism and political engagement have been taken on as a kind of ethical bulwark against a polished, internationally acclaimed, perhaps more commodifiable art. In an interview in the magazine *Circa* (Stott 2006, 45), Kester states that:

> …the concerns with public space and social networks that motivated previous activist art have undergone a process of ironic appropriation. In this process the traditions of activist art have been subjected to a conceptual reification and are made to stand in as the naïve, un-reflexive, and moralizing antithesis to the cosmopolitan, disruptive, and self-reflexive advanced art seen on the biennial circuit… It's symptomatic of a struggle to confine the current proliferation of art practices within a narrative that privileges the work of art as a kind of deconstructive machine whose primary function is to symbolize or instigate a therapeutic dislocation of traditional identities.

Although Kester states here that activist art is used as a *naïve antithesis*, each of the 2012 biennials which I reference in this chapter: dOCUMENTA, Berlin Biennial & Athens Biennial did not use protest as a naïve form but have actually used activism itself as a stand in for reflexive art, and as arts jumping off point in this financially constrained neoliberal moment.

Each of these programmes reflected on Occupy by simply taking Occupy protests onsite. Since curators couldn't ignore this global political phenomenon, it was appropriated, and in doing so, provided a reflective outlet on protest which was knowingly much larger and more globally significant in that moment than the biennials could be in themselves. Contemporary art concerning the commons straddles this situation of 'naïve antithesis' and active participant in globally-networked protest.

For the purpose of this thesis I am taking all forms of commons art to be equal in their political intent. However, it is still apparent that there is a difference between a spontaneous form of protest at a cultural venue such as the Teatro Valle in Rome (and other Occupato across Italy), compared to that which took place at Berlin Biennale, where the existing occupiers from elsewhere were brought in by curators to fill the white cube space of KW.

The pitfalls of this kind of instrumentalization are fairly obvious and have been discussed as problems within socially engaged arts discourse by Kester, Bishop and others. It is also frowned on by Communists such as Jodi Dean, whose position in Chapter 1 considers that art distracts from the goals of protest. However, in this chapter I want to return to McKee's analysis that the production of an occupation in the gallery was something which did not exist in a vacuum but synced up with that which was happening on the streets.

As Yates McKee (2011) has suggested, the furthering of the commons movement has, since OWS, occurred in part through symbiotic relationships between activists and institutions. My selections in this chapter have been made to represent interactions between politics, art theory, biennial curation and contemporary art practice in recent decades which considered the commons. The documentation of these projects in this thesis develops my argument that the concept of the commons exists within contemporary art and is manifested in these projects within particular reoccurring themes and processes of presentation. In this chapter I will further describe, and archive, these commons art projects. It is my intention to make visible what art on the commons has done so far rather than to review if individual projects were more or less successful in their presentation of the commons as a political project.

> To paraphrase philosopher Peter Osborne's illuminating insights on this topic: contemporary art shows us the lack of a (global) time and space. Moreover, it projects a fictional unity onto a variety of different ideas of time and space, thus providing a common surface where there is none. Contemporary art thus becomes a proxy for the global commons, for the lack of any common ground, temporality, or space.
> (Steyerl, 2015)

In recent years, contemporary art has acted as the central locus for discussions of the commons. Claire Bishop, in *Artificial Hells* (2012) describes how discursive participatory or socially engaged practices within art are 'drawn from a tacit analogy between anti-capitalism

and the Christian "good soul"; it is an ethical reasoning that fails to accommodate the aesthetic or to understand it as an autonomous realm of experience. In this perspective, there is no space for perversity, paradox and negation, operations as crucial to *aesthesis* as dissensus is to the political.' (2012, 39-40) The commons tends to be framed in the same way, so while it may not always touch on concerns of social engagement it is analogous to it in its representation. For Bishop, it is therefore important to reframe such *ethical imperatives* in order to better understand art's relation to the social.

In his doctoral thesis *Exhibition-Making and the Political Imaginary* (2012), curator and art theorist Simon Sheikh relates a scene in which a colleague turns to him at an opening and says 'I hate discursive exhibitions!' (2012, 6). Sheikh uses this example to pick apart what is meant by those with professions related to contemporary art when we describe an exhibition project as discursive. Sheikh's position is that *all* artistic display is actually discursive, in that it participates in a discourse of e.g. contemporary art or painting or political art. Unfortunately, discursivity is also used as a pejorative term by many people, or as Sheikh puts it, a 'purely negative adjective'. (2012, 6)

I believe that this difficult intersection between art and forms of art theory describes both the reason for the discussion of the commons within artistic contexts, and some of the perceived problems of doing so. To undertake work on a project on the commons within an art school, a gallery, a museum, or an art publication is in many ways not to talk about art at all. The self-referential nature of fine art is integral to its structure and understanding and it is evident that some colleagues can feel threatened by what is sometimes seen as an ignorance of that existing structure. My thesis topic, the commons, itself often questions the rigidity of institutional structures, and of *normal* working expectations so in this sense it presents an avenue for self-reflexive discussion.

Sheikh's discursive practices as a curator have often included the artwork of Chto Delat (What is to be done?): a Russian working group of artists, critics, philosophers and writers who take a critical theoretical approach to the commons in a number of their newspaper publications. Contextualised from their position as workers in post-Soviet Petersburg, their understanding of the term commons is framed in reference to communism.

In a discussion for *Third Text* (2009), David Riff and Dmitry Vilensky ask what it is to imagine communism. The presence of commons in proximity to communism is a different relationship than that of the commons to land because communism today mainly takes form as a political imaginary, something that does not yet exist or that once existed and is recalled through nostalgia. Whilst we might also for example talk about the commons as a real and historic space which is enshrined in law, the axis of how and in what ways we expect the commons to manifest is contingent with its co-existence with politics as it sits among other factors.

> We are living in a time of a paradox: on one hand the production of the 'common' is proliferating, but at the same time the commons are shrinking. The main issue is still how people – within micro-communities and society at large – manage to redistribute the incredible surplus value of their living labour, that is, how to distribute it for the people and not for the profit of the few. Notice how few people would call themselves communists, but there are many 'commonists'; one of the main struggles today is the fight over the commons. In art and culture, and also in attempts to save the environment, this struggle is very obvious. All speculations around the democratisation of cultural production and transformation of the public sphere are about this struggle, and Chto delat? is very much a part of that. (Riff 2009, 468-9)

Chto Delat's discussions around the commons began with the paper *What Do We Have In Common?* (2005), and continued with *Another Commons* (2009) and *Against Slavery* (2011). They have stated that 'The world is unconsciously moving toward communism, but capital consciously subsumes the new commons that arise in this movement.' (2009, P466) and later 'To be paranoid, we could even say that neo-liberalism is all about allowing commons to arise for the sole purpose of their subsequent economic privatisation.' (2009, P466-7) Alexei Penzin in the text *From Commonplaces to Community* (2005) asks:

> Is this common something that everyone can make use as the "common good"? Is it something that "touches" everyone affectively? Or is it what answers to our rational interests? All one can say is that this common, much like the community in which it is shared, is no "law" or "rule", but rather an exception that cannot be appropriated.

At the beginning of my research, I focused quite heavily on researching projects which came out of Occupy Wall Street. The projects in contemporary art which were most closely connected to this movement were *Occupy Museums* (2011) and *Art and the Commons* (2011) in New York city. However, it was not only in English-speaking countries that the call to the

commons was heard from occupations. In Europe especially, calls for the commons were most often heard from young voices in cities where large scale fiscal restructuring programs and austerity hit the most.

Artist Mike Watson worked with the Teatro Valle Occupato in Rome for a number of years. He documented the situation in Italy where the notion of *bene comune* (common good) is enshrined in article 43 of the Italian Constitution. Squatters brought this concept back to the forefront of the public consciousness by occupying and using cinemas and theatres in Rome (Teatro Valle), Milan (MACAO), Palermo (Teatro Garibaldi Aperto) and Venice (SaLE Docks, Morion and Teatro Marinoni) which were previously owned by the state. Teatro Valle created its own private foundation just 'one day after the public voted overwhelmingly in a referendum to make the water system a common good, rather than privatizing it.' (Watson, 2014)

In the article *Postcard from Rome* (2014), published in Frieze Magazine, Watson describes how the city of Rome's accrued debt stood at €850 million. In such a volatile economy, it is unsurprising that as Watson puts it 'people have naturally been left asking if there might be alternative forms of management for the arts, which can sidestep the Kafkaesque machinations of State and regional governance.' Teatro Valle's open programme saw performances and workshops from Tino Sehgal, Chto Delat? and VOINA, alongside visits and lectures from politicians and academics. Eventually after three years, in 2014, the Teatro Valle occupation were asked to leave the building in order that it could be put out to tender and auctioned off to private buyers. Nevertheless, Watson declares that the activities of these cultural occupations 'have ignited no less than a Pan-Italian bene commune movement.' (2014)

These *commoning* activities have not only been the sole preserve of Italian activists, but have also inspired forms of programming at international Biennials. At dOCUMENTA 13 and Berlin Biennale 7 in 2012, the curators also encouraged the presence of protestors within the exhibition site. The former providing a space for tents during Occupy, and the latter allowing an entire gallery in Kunst-Werke (KW) to be given over for living, working and discussion. In *Field: Journal of Socially Engaged Art Criticism*, Sebastian Loewe reports that:

In Kassel, activists camped on the lawn of the Friedrichsplatz in front of the famous Museum Fridericianum. They considered themselves an "evolutionary art work", adopting the slogan 'Everyone is an Artist' by famous German artist and former Documenta 7 participant Joseph Beuys. (2014, 192)

Echoing the financial takeover of Occupy Wall Street, Athens Biennale 4: *Agora* (2013) was situated inside of the vacant Athens Stock Exchange which had closed 6 years prior. The contemporary usage of the word Agora in Greek means marketplace, but in ancient Greece the agora was also a gathering place. The Encyclopedia Britannica states that the agora was 'an open space that served as a meeting ground for various activities of the citizens. The name, first found in the works of Homer, connotes both the assembly of the people as well as the physical setting' (2015). Reflecting this forum atmosphere, the biennale was organised by an open-call selected group of over 40 people (its group of curators included the CCA Glasgow's new engagement curator Viviana Checchia). The basement of the stock exchange was given over for a rotating set of programmed workshops and events. During the third week of Agora, *Uncommon Commons Re(Projected)*, a workshop curated by Jenny Marketou aimed to 'create a common space/time between people, teams, organizations of social research, art and activism and to promote exchange and retribution among them.' (2013)

Utrecht is the other main European city to have taken on the concept of the commons in artistic programming in recent years. In the Mute Magazine article *A new dark age for Dutch culture* (2011), Sonic Acts describe how the Netherlands State Secretary for Culture, Halbe Zijlstra, announced a €200 million cut to the cultural budget of the country from 2013, forcing some institutions to change their operations considerably to avoid closure. Following this, Casco Office for art design and theory in Utrecht set out the guidelines for their 2013-15 programming as Composing the Commons. In an e-flux announcement they stated that:

> we recognized that our activity is oriented toward building the commons—not only material commons but also knowledge commons, aesthetic commons, affective commons, and so on—and thereby contributes to understanding the commons-building process and the culture that corresponds with such activity. In looking closely at our methods of building (or rather, anti-methods which we take to mean methods that shift), we have redefined this entire process as compositional. (2013)

Casco curate public art programmes relating to sociopolitical concerns, with their projects spanning across exhibitions, books, meetings and public events. In 2013 they organised the symposium *What do we have in common(s)?* at Stedelijk Museum, at which John Roberts

presented the paper *Art, Neoliberalism and the Fate of the Commons* (later presented at Yale in 2015). The website for the Stedelijk symposium states:

> the notion of commons has suffered from an inflationary application, particularly in the area of network theory. This symposium is an occasion to investigate this view further, while at the same time looking into the concrete practice of "commoning" within the field of art and art institutional practices.

Casco reading group, *Rethinking the Commons* (2014), asks whether the commons could 'provide a viable alternative or a real challenge to our current economic system? Are they sustainable or will they be co-opted by the market? How can we make use of these practices to take charge of our own lives and our economic systems again?' Their curation of commons projects has continued with *Commonist Aesthetics* a guest edited issue of Dutch journal Open! (2015).

Also in Utrecht is basis voor actuele kunst (BAK), home to research project Former West. A recent symposium *The Commons as the Survival of the 'Public'* (2014) was moderated by Simon Sheikh. The speakers included Andrea Phillips on the Privatisation of art in the UK, Mark Fisher on the unworkability of working outside of institutions, and Massimiliano Mollona, an anthropologist who describes 'The common as a strategy which defies objectification of institutions'. BAK founder and artistic director Maria Hlavajova also spoke at the CCA Glasgow series *Curating Europes Futures* (2015), co-organised by my GSA PhD colleagues Kirsteen Macdonald and Leigh French, on using the commons as a means to continue public programming at BAK after a 50% budget cut.

Fig.10 Occupy tent at dOCUMENTA 13 (2012)

Fig.11 Rome Marathon (2012) at Teatro Valle Occupato

Artists projects on the Commons

Artists have also reflected upon issues of ownership and publicness through their projects on the commons. Amy Balkin's work *This is the Public Domain* (2003), 'makes visible the limits of "commons" in US law through her attempt to produce, via legal channels, the common ownership of a two and one-half acre plot of land. By doing so, Balkin reveals the very structure of the US legal system to work against commonly owned property.' (Donovan 2011) As Balkin's website states:

> This is the Public Domain is an effort to create a permanent international commons. The land will be free to everyone, and will be held in perpetuity. In 2003, a 2.64 acre parcel of land was purchased to serve as the site for the proposed public domain. Located in Tehachapi, California, sharing of this commons will be initiated when a juridical solution for public handover is found. (2003)

Fig.12 Amy Balkin, *The Public Domain* (2003)

Land based, horticultural, and garden or park activities are the main focus for commons-themed art practices, sometimes in combination with forms of architectural design. In these forms of projects, the link of commons to the garden is twofold: firstly through the links between subsistence agriculture and squatting, and secondly to the historic designation of

commons as parks. In addition to this there is a general idea of the commons as *going back to basics*, and a green and natural state is the most basic form we can think back to from our urban lives. AND AND AND (Ayreen Anastas and Rene Gabri), the artists behind the garden project *Commoning in Kassel* (2012) at dOCUMENTA (13) also worked with the Showroom, London and Casco, Utrecht on projects which referenced the commons. Anastas and Gabri are also members of the New York based 16 Beaver, an NYC artist-run space.

One Scottish example of a green commons artwork is Clive Gilman's work *Common Garden* (2008), part of the Signals in the City exhibition at the Hannah Maclure Centre, where the artist a planted Tayberry bushes; 'in various disregarded sites across the city of Dundee these sites are either permanently or temporarily made common - the fruit of the bushes is made available to anyone.' Links to the project website were appended to each bush 'in order that it may act as a resource for the concepts and principles around the notion of "common", debating the ownership of land, of crops and of the ideas themselves. The bushes themselves were located in sites either nominated by the users of those sites, or in locations that appear disregarded or in common use.' (Gilman, 2008)

Women on the commons

> The 'Common Woman' is far more than a class description. What is 'common' in and to women is the intersection of oppression and strength, damage and beauty. It is, quite simply, the ordinary in women which will 'rise' in every sense of the word — spiritually and in activism. For us, to be 'extraordinary' or 'uncommon' is to fail. History has been embellished with 'extraordinary', 'exemplary', 'uncommon', and of course 'token' women whose lives have left the rest unchanged. The 'common woman' is in fact the embodiment of the extraordinary will-to-survival in millions of obscure women…. Julie Grahn reclaims 'the common woman' as a phrase from vulgar Marxist associations, or such political clichés as 'the century of the common man.' (Rich, 1978)

The most broadly referred to form of commons in contemporary art is Greenham Common in Berkshire, England, a former RAF station which was squatted by a womens anti-nuclear peace camp between 1981 and 2000. In Chapter 1, I mentioned the work of Celine Condorelli (*You Have A Future In Common Use*), Margaret Harrison (*Preoccupied*) and Lucy Reynolds (*Silo Walk*), each of whom created works related to Greenham. Marysia Lewandowska's archival project *Open Hearing*, takes form as a tent acting as a cinema and listening booth

for visitors to revisit the Greenham camp project. Celine Condorelli's *Life Always Escapes* was exhibited at Wysing Art Centre and consisted of postcards of common good parks, and estovers of wood which heat the gallery through a wood burning stove. Lucy Reynolds' *Silo Walk*, made between 2008 and 2010, takes women on 'memory walks' through the site of Greenham Common. The site acts as a symbol for feminism, as Adrienne Rich says the description (and depiction) of a '"common woman" is … the embodiment of the extraordinary will-to-survival in millions of obscure women'.

Fig.13 You have a future in common use (2004) Celine Condorelli
Fig.14 Life Always Escapes (2009) Celine Condorelli
Fig.15 Silo Walk (2010) Lucy Reynolds
Fig.16 Archive Image from Greenham Common (1983) / Open Hearing (2011) Marysia Lewandowska
Fig.17 Common Land/Greenham (1989) Margaret Harrison

Commons and community projects

The group exhibition *Where do I end and you begin*, took place at Edinburgh Art Centre as part of Edinburgh Art Festival in 2014. Selected by five curators from Commonwealth countries, the artworks included covered a breadth of topics, as is prevalent in contemporary art discussions of the commons; rolling together ideas of being-in-common, commonwealth, common good, community and public ownership. It is arguable that this is perhaps the most honest way to deal with a topic like the commons, as these definitions are tangled up together even in dictionary descriptions. However, working in this way it becomes much more difficult to make sense of the meaning of individual terms. Such terms can begin to feel like buzzwords rather than a solid description. The politics of the common are always at risk of appropriation and the removal from a potential politics, as Marina Vischmidt states in ephemera journal article *The Auto-Destructive Community: The Torsion of the Common in Local Sites of Antagonism* (2006):

> The 'common' is a ground of potential politics, while the community in relation to this ground cannot guarantee, or exist towards, a politics — its constitution is simply a movement of appropriation of this 'common' in all its unpredictability and occasional futility. (Vishmidt, 2006)

Commons projects often allow the audience to come and produce part of the program. In Simon Sheikh's thesis he describes how community has been constructed in projects such as these, which he refers to as project exhibitions; 'an articulation in form, not a curatorial selection or collection of individual works of art by individual artists illustrating a theme, a history or a medium… the project exhibition partly displaced the discussions on how audiences are produced as a community. Community is here produced among the practitioners as well as outside of the exhibition.' (2012, 28)

Katie Bruce's *Atelier Public* I (2011-12) and II at GoMA (2014) were inspired by the Open Field model. *Open Field* was curated by Sarah Schultz, director of education and curator of public practice, taking the site of the gardens of the Walker art centre in Minneapolis and turning them into a cultural commons. During the summers of 2010, 2011, 2012 and 2014, anyone could come and book the garden space for activities ranging from painting workshops to an internet cat video festival. *A* publication *Open Field: Conversations on the Commons* (2012) documents the first three years of events.

Atelier Public took as its starting point from the idea that the gallery space could and should be made common to its visitors in order that the gallery space itself becomes an artist studio for everyone. This notion of a *public studio* in a public institution like GoMA creates a number of interesting possibilities and questions relating to the permissions and aesthetics of the space. The concept for *Atelier Public* was reminiscent of a project by The Blackie which Claire Bishop describes in *Artificial Hells*;

> 'Towards a Common Language', [was] held in the Education Room of Liverpool's Walker Art Gallery, 22–28 October 1973. The show comprised blank canvases, boards and paper attached to the gallery walls, ready to be painted by visitors, who had the choice of looking at the completed works or creating one of their own. In one week over 3,475 visitors came to the museum; 301 works were completed by adults and 642 by children. Visitors could take their painting away, or leave it in the gallery, where it would be put on display in poster racks. 'The exhibition will consist of the blank "pieces" and/or people at work/play', wrote Harpe in his notes for show, and 'there will be no "opening" or private view'. (2012, 185)

Commons and social engagement

The commons as a concept begins from a starting point without form or visibility, while the commons as a space or a place is only made manifest through structuring institutions like communities or the law. As a relational idea, the commons presents itself as an invisible force which must somehow be made present by artists in order to exist as a project. As I mentioned in Chapter 1, David Joselit refers to the commons as a concept which is integral to relational practice. In this sense commons projects can be ones which literally and figuratively grow, which bring people together in groupings, which make assessments of the immaterial, which are temporary, discursive, documentary, or which adhere themselves to other forms such as land or architecture.

My own projects which are documented in the portfolio, and discussed in Chapter 4, were discursive presentations which always acted in response to or to be given consideration alongside the work of others. Overall, we might consider these commons practices in contemporary art to be an emerging form of discursive production. In reference to the socially engaged work of artists such as Chto Delat? and Wochenklausur John Roberts states:

> What unites much of this work, or is at least implicit in its participatory forms, is its adaptation of practices of group learning. This means we need to address what is presupposed by art-as-the-commons as a form of free exchange, by repositioning art-as-the-commons under the auspices of Bildung — of free communities of learning — in which self-transformative action is constitutive of a given collective process. (2015)

If this kind of collective process is indeed what is driving production of commons projects within art, not only in *art-as-the-commons* but also in forms of discursive programming, curation and publishing then I would make the case that we might need some more education and understanding of not only the theory behind the production of this kind of work, but also of the methods that might be used to produce them. In the coming chapters I will discuss my own practice working with the notion of the Estover to develop public-facing projects in association with other artists and curators in Glasgow and Edinburgh; moving on to describe the themes which have linked these practices together, and finally offering some notes towards a suggested commons syllabus which is intended to further an artistic understanding of commons theory in relation to existing concepts of art theory and contemporary art history.

Chapter 4: Estovers, the commons in practice

In this chapter, I will discuss the methodology of my discursive practice and the nature of its documentation in the accompanying portfolio. This chapter functions as a descriptive account of discursive practice on the commons, which is then critically discussed in Chapter 5. The contemporary art projects discussed include the *Estovers* events, Convocation on Raasay, *Atelier Public #2* at GoMA and *How Near Is Here* at Collective.

I reflect on how I came to produce the first event at New Glasgow Society with Simon Yuill, and Nuno Sacramento, whom I had met due to his involvement with GradCAM's commons course. This event considered concepts of historical and rural commons and their typologies. I also discuss the second event at CCA on digital and libidinal commons, which performed relations of the body to the commons through discussions that considered the topological layering of apps over physical space with the artists Huw Lemmey and Shona Macnaughton.

Further projects considered include *Atelier Public #2* at GoMA, where we created a commons within a public insitution, *Raising* at Jupiter Artland where the project related to ideas of common law and barn raising and at Collective where we considered the common good space of the observatory on Calton Hill through digital commons methods with Eastern Surf. Finally, the exhibition with Victor & Hester at Transmission allowed me the space to consider the relation of women and modernist architecture to the commons.

The voice of this chapter is more diaristic in tone than those which came before it, as I am relating the experiences I had in conducting practice-based projects. This portfolio, Estovers, contains documentation of work which took place from the end of my first year of studies on the PhD until third year. It is presented in chronological order and includes documentation from published projects and public-facing events. For the events which I produced myself, the content included is a direct transcription of the work of others who presented. There is no referencing or footnotes for this material. These transcribed materials are intended as a simple documentation of practice for the purposes of examination. As such, it has been provided in as unadulterated a condition as possible from its initial public presentation. The provided USB stick also includes the original audio files from these presentations and discussions.

My position in this project is reflective of my practice as a curator of discursive programmes through the epistemological lens of the commons. I saw Estovers as a means to deal with the concepts from within my research by bringing together useful, performative or otherwise differently situated knowledges than those I would be able to access in the library. This process of creating discussion and producing projects with artists and curators whether, as was the initial situation, I invited people and organised them myself or, as in later activities, I was invited to collaborate within curated projects by other people. It was a valuable means to assess the current usages of the concept of the commons and to be able to develop my own thinking in tandem with research for the chapters of this thesis into the history of the term, how it has been used in contemporary art in recent decades and what it means in relation to political philosophy and, as will be presented later in this thesis, its relation to the process of learning about the commons within the frameworks of contemporary art.

The process I followed with the presentation of public events was to initially devise a pairing of two events which I felt examined some of the key themes I had been following in the presentation of the commons within spaces of contemporary art. From the moment that I began to make my research public, starting with the first year progression presentation, I was invited to contribute to other peoples projects. From the initial progression presentation, I was invited by Jenny Brownrigg to participate in *Convocation,* a residency as part of the project Colm Cille's Spiral, in summer 2013 prior to the Estovers events. After *Estovers pt.1* I was invited to take part in *Atelier Public #2* at GoMA by Katie Bruce, and from presenting *Estovers pt. 2* I was invited to take part in *How Near Is Here* at Collective by Frances Stacey.

More invites followed and quite quickly I went from having started the PhD unsure of what my practice was or how it would be evidenced, to exiting *Convocation,* the Colm Cille's Spiral residency with a newly-purchased audio recorder and the means by which to document the discussions and conversations I was having. This was to become my process of understanding and reflecting upon the thesis project as a whole. It should be noted that some things are not included in the portfolio where they developed chronologically as a part of my public practice, but were too peripheral to the actual project of making a thesis project on the commons. Most notably the audio piece I produced for Colm Cille's Spiral, and the documentation from *Sick, Sick, Sick: The Books of Ornery Women…* a female-subjectivity

reading group I ran with artist Laura Edbrook in conjunction with MAP from autumn 2013-2014.

I recently discussed this with Caroline Gausden, a PhD candidate at Grays, as I realised she had presented on my work with Laura Edbrook as part of the Dundee project *If the city was a commons* (2014). On the website for the project, the description of this talk related my thesis on the commons and the reading group as though they were part of the same research project. I felt this was a misrepresentation and that there was a separation between these parts of my practice. I did not see the organizational form or the politics of Sick, Sick, Sick as a commons project, but something that was primarily directed by myself and Laura Edbrook.

At the time I stated to Caroline in an email that 'The way I see what we did linking to my thesis research is the difference between a subjective / objective presentation of knowledge'. *Sick Sick Sick* was a literary arts project focusing on autofiction and memoir, where the theoretical engagement in Estovers was cross disciplinary and mostly considering the commons as a political project or concept. There is of course a natural amount of crossover between projects, and I think that in producing a practice based project for the PhD it is often the case that one will draw from many different strands of inquiry. Nevertheless, this is where I chose to draw a line between the various public-facing curated discursive projects I was working on between 2012-2015. Some further discussion of this split in my practice is noted at the end of Chapter 5.

This chapter includes a description of each of the projects which have been included in the portfolio with some background as to how I came to working with these particular artists, curators and theorists. I was interested in a definition of the common by Cesare Casarino in which he states:

> Neither monologic nor dialogic, the common converses. For the common is that which is always at stake in any conversation: there where a conversation takes place, there the common expresses itself; there where we are in common, there and only there is a conversation possible. Conversation is the language of the common. (2008, 1)

I felt quite strongly from the beginning that the commons was not something that I could

find purely through studying in the library. For all of the books that I ordered in to GSA and those that kept dropping through my letter box, I knew that there was something more to learn through discussion.

At the time I had some small disagreements with my supervisors, who sought for me to do more writing after the first couple of Estovers events were completed. I knew I was continuing with public discussions in a way that did not seem fully productive to them for a time and this was difficult for me during second year in particular when trying to give a sense of my progress. Regardless of this, opportunities to work on public-facing projects which discussed the commons kept presenting themselves and so I continued to work on them, and document them mostly without knowing where they would lead or what I might learn.

Background and motivation for each of the projects

Fig.18 omnia sunt communia banner (2013) Seomra Spraoi, Dublin.

During my first year at GSA, I attended *Struggles in Common*, a student symposium on the commons at GradCAM in Dublin on May 18th 2013. The keynote address was given by Peter

Linebaugh, with a panel on 'The politics of everyday commoning: what are the potentials and limitations of the commons?' and another on 'Social reproduction, common rights and contemporary crisis.' I followed on to the squat Seomra Spraoi afterwards where activist group The Free Association continued their presentations under a huge banner which read 'omnia sunt communia'—all things are held in common.

It was intriguing to me that there was a whole school of graduate students involved in this work and operating in the space between art and activism. The only similar project which I have been aware of in recent years is Manchester MIRIAD's *Common Senses* (2014). In my initial research I had found that Nuno Sacramento had been involved in running one of the commons courses with Mick Wilson at GradCAM and so it was arranged that I would invite him to speak at the first event. Prior to this we had met briefly through a summer workshop at SSW for my colleague Kirsteen Macdonald's curatorial project *Framework* and this made it easy for me to invite him to Glasgow.

Simon Yuill was also someone whom I had met up North, when I was in Aberdeen. During the time I worked at Peacock Visual Arts, he was recording interviews with Polish workers for his project *Stackwalker* (2010), and he would often come in to use the wifi and speak with me during some dark winter afternoons in 2009. At the time I would not have known what a commons was, but early in my research toward this PhD it became apparent that he would be a perfect person to invite when I realised that he was so well versed in Scottish commons, commons as they relate to various forms of historical activism and to Free Libre Open Source Software.

Both of the Estovers projects were funded by GSA Graduate School through an informal application for funding which I submitted to Ken Neil and which was approved by the head of the school at the time. I applied for £900 for the two events, paying each speaker £75 and covering travel, accommodation and hospitality costs. £100 was donated to NGS in lieu of a hire fee, while CCA waived the hire costs for my event because it was free entry. The rest of the money was spent on the printing of posters, which I designed myself, and purchasing of refreshments for the attendees.

The decision to use the space at New Glasgow Society came as a result of meeting the designer and curator Neil McGuire and being invited to speak at a NGS Pecha Kucha in the first few months of the PhD. In return I asked if the board would be open to having the first event there. We agreed that with the funding from GSA I would give a donation to NGS in lieu of a hire fee. The operating aims of the society appealed to me and I felt it was an appropriate space for the seminar, since NGS describes itself as 'a civic society promoting, protecting and raising interest in the City of Glasgow, through campaigning, discussion, projects, talks and exhibitions… The aims of the Society are; To promote, encourage and stimulate public interest in, and care for, the beauty, history and character of the city of Glasgow and its surroundings.' (2015)

At this event, I presented a modified version of my first year progression presentation, which differentiated a typology of different types of commons from historical commons through common resources, the common good, creative commons, knowledge commons and the concept of new enclosures.

Nuno's presentation concerned his own situation as the director of SSW, based in Huntly and considered the political and ethical obligations of his position there and of the obligations of the Scottish Sculpture Workshop in general to the local community. This summer Nuno continued with many of the themes of this presentation through the programming of the marathon 11 day long project *Camp Breakdown Breakdown* with artist Brett Bloom, as they put it 'challenging our industrialized sense of self and relation to the ecosystems we inhabit and rely on. It is for researching, debating, and practicing post-oil aesthetics and culture.' (2015)

Simon gave an extremely comprehensive description of the commons as it related both to his own practice as an artist and researcher and to his work as a programmer, beginning by problematising the commons as a broad term and arguing that it is 'becoming almost like a constitutional equivalent of organic food or fair-trade coffee.' He covered topics from Scottish commons to squatting, communism, and crofting.

Spending time with all of the audio a few years after these presentations in order to prepare

the transcripts, I was surprised to find mentions to so many things which I had subsequently followed up on in my research in the intervening years without revisiting these presentations. This gap in time was partly due to being preoccupied in furthering my research through other means, and partly because it had taken me a long time to find a good technical setup to be able to listen to the audio. The recorder works best when the mic is situated close to the main speaker, and I hadn't learned to do that yet. It wasn't until I began transcribing the audio in 2015, that I purchased some audio software to improve the sound quality sufficiently for listening. In the end, I think it was good to have some time away from their perspectives in order to build my own, and be able to compare our positions a few years on.

Huw Lemmey @spitzenprodukte · 5 Feb 2013
Just as landlords forced us from our cottages and into wage labour, so the gaylords forced us from our cottages into commercial cruising.

↩ ↻ 10 ★ 7 ●●●

Huw Lemmey @spitzenprodukte · 5 Feb 2013
The development of a gay bourgeois male identity has been concurrent with the privatisation of public spaces (parks/public conveniences etc)

↩ ↻ 13 ★ 11 ●●●

Huw Lemmey @spitzenprodukte · 5 Feb 2013
Traditionally gay cruising grounds have always been topographically coincidentally with the commons.

↩ ↻ 6 ★ 4 ●●●

Fig.19 Twitter screenshot of Huw Lemmey @spitzenprodukte (2012)

Estovers Part 2: The Digital and the Libidinal

On February 5th 2013, I was taking a break from research in the library and saw these tweets posted by @spitzenprodukte. Upon reading this relation of gay cruising to the commons, I quickly sent a DM to Huw to invite him to Glasgow to talk. Huw is an artist and a writer based in London whose output ranges from live video streams to articles on digital culture, sexuality and politics and (occasionally slash) fiction. His tweets were written as a note towards the article *Digital Dark Spaces*, which was published by the New Inquiry, August 2013.

I had previously worked with Shona Macnaughton during my MA in Contemporary Art Theory, towards the production of a publication to accompany the group exhibition *Microstoria* at Talbot Rice Gallery. At the time, Shona was on the board of Embassy Gallery and had been using the collective username Lee Joss to author projects. Myself and my ECA colleague Helena Barrett requested that we use Lee Joss as our editor for the publication. When I attended the *Exhibition Histories* symposium at Edinburgh University in 2012, Shona told me that she had been reading a PDF scan of Silvia Federici's *The Caliban and the Witch* (2004) on her iPad. I told her of my plan to invite Huw for an event and asked if she could produce a performance which had some relation to the book. She accepted.

At the time I had become obsessed with the story of the trolling of Wikipedia co-founder Jimmy Wales through the medium of portrait painting, as related in Chapter 2 of this thesis. The image for the poster for Estovers pt.2 is this likeness of Jimmy Wales painted by Pricasso. Reading about this altercation had challenged my beliefs about the commons being an open system and I expected that Huw and Shona's performative means of working could untangle some of these feelings. In particular the idea that the commons had room to include a space for perversity and mischief was incredibly compelling to me after almost a year of research in which the common and the 'good' were repeatedly conflated together. The commons was not all nice and wonderful things, neither was it all about public gardens, and I thought that together we could show that.

It was expected that while Estovers pt.1 would cover historical and geographical notions of the commons, that part 2 would be more situated in ideas of digital commons and of the relation of the human body to the commons. My presentation covered the story of the Jimmy Wales painting and some description of the Conservative Lib Dem coalition aims at the time to prevent certain types of erotic content being viewed online. I showed photographs of magazine 'modesty bags' and 'modesty boards' in the aisles of a supermarket. I also related the introductory quote from Lyotard's *Libidinal Economy* (1974) 'Who knows not how to hide, knows not how to love', to the emerging description of LOVEINT, the code for stalking of ex-partners through the servers of the CIA.

Shona approached her presentation as one would a piece of work for display. She asked me to source a proprietary cable so that we could present a slideshow direct from her 'partner', the iPad, which contained images gleaned from interior design websites. Huw gave a critical reflection on the changing nature of gay cruising, and the spaces which it had been enclosed from. He related the traditional cruising grounds of the public park, public toilets and sex cinemas in New York and London to the reconfigured digital space of cruising online through apps such as Grindr.

To me this workshop felt the closest to something that I wanted to be able to achieve with my research as I feel it really drew together the process of working with artists to draw out various themes from the otherwise often dry or dense subject matter that I had been reading

to understand the commons. After this point I had expected that I would continue to organise events myself but upon reflection, I think that accepting invites to work with artists and curators on their own projects and for my role to be active in providing a way to think through the commons and act as a discursive participant allowed for my project to grow and develop in ways that I could not have organised on my own. It required a lot of trust in my own ability to deal with and use these invitations well, and an openness to work on projects which I otherwise would not have considered. I am very grateful that I was given the opportunity to develop my practice in this way, and the project which follows was one which required the most mediation in both an emotional and theoretical context.

Atelier Public #2

The exhibition *Atelier Public #2* took place at GoMA, produced by the curator of learning Katie Bruce. The concept was designed in order to allow members of the public to come in and use the space and make works on the walls. Sticky-backed vinyl was provided for this purpose, and very quickly the gallery walls and floors became saturated with colourful images. The project ran as part of Glasgow International's public program, alongside solo shows by Aleksandra Domanović on the bottom floor and Sue Tompkins above us.

When inviting me to participate, Katie was clear that I could take part in whichever way I would like to. She was open to the production of work, the addressing of curatorial strategies, discursive texts, events, anything that I and the other invited participants wanted to do. I decided I needed to see more of what was happening, and visited the space a lot through the course of the exhibition. In the end I took a discursive and critical role with relation to Katie's suggestion that the exhibition was a form of commons within a public institution. The artists who were invited to participate in the show mostly spent time in discussion, or did not make work in a visible sense; some retreated from their original plans entirely.

I worked closely with the artist and PhD candidate Anthony Schrag and we had many discussions about what did or did not make this a public or commons project. This resulted in a published discussion in *Revisita MESA* the Brazilian art journal of Instituto MESA which is included in the portfolio along with a general roundtable discussion which we both took

part in with just a few of the invited artists.

Atelier Public in its initial format, was conceived by Katie Bruce in collaboration with associate artist Rachel Mimiec as an exhibition with invited artists, which was open to the public. The show took place at the same time as the project *Open Field* at the Walker Arts Centre in Minneapolis, a project that Katie had taken a strong research interest in and which opened up the garden space outside of the museum to the public for self-organised community events and performances.

For the second part of *Atelier Public*, Bruce wanted to investigate the notion of the commons more overtly, as the curator Sarah Schultz had at the Walker. Initially I met with the Katie to discuss the project individually, and then also a number of times in a group with other invited artists, student interns, and various GoMA staff. The organisation of the exhibition was unlike any other show I had participated in the curation or management of up until this point. There were a very large number of people who had been consulted for their input into how the space would work, how we would invite the audience, and what events would happen. The exhibition space itself was provided to the public empty on opening night other than some sticky back vinyl and a few video and poster works by Modern Edinburgh Film School.

Speaking with Katie about the management of the space, she described the role of the gallery assistants both as *gatekeepers* and *documenters*. Having worked as an invigilator in many galleries myself in the past I was very curious about this change in dynamic. The invigilator usually serves as a protector, primarily looking after the works of art which have been installed in the space. In this case, the gallery assistants were being asked to exercise their own judgement as to whether the kind of activities which were happening in the space were appropriate. They each were given cameras to document the works which were made by members of the public.

> People [including some of the artists I was working with like James Mclardy] found the aesthetics of the exhibition and work itself challenging. It changes rules and it challenges our assumptions of what we should expect in the gallery. No wonder hardly anybody wrote in the comments books as they would generally feedback in the gallery, we were asking them (and our staff) to behave differently. (Bruce, 2014)

The judgement of the gallery assistants was supplemented by a list of rules on the wall of the space, which Katie had kept from the first exhibition of Atelier Public. The rules alternately encourage the visitor to take part and remind them to have fun, but also discourage inappropriate behaviour. Katie explained that the rules had been the only part of the space which sat untouched for the duration of the exhibition. No visitor had attempted to remove the rules or even modify their wording.

GoMA is a public institution which is funded and operated by Glasgow City Council, and is well known by artists for having some very inflexible health and safety regulations. Prior to the Commonwealth Games in 2014, the council set out a list of amendments to the existing laws by which the city parks and open spaces are governed (see Mac, 2014). Each line begins 'No one shall in any park…' followed by decrees against the participation in performances, processions, exhibitions, camping, the cleaning of linens, erection of any structure, memorial, and the exercise of more than three dogs at one time, amongst other things.

The rule of local law extends to the exhibition programming of GoMA too. The exhibition *Unmasked* (2014) which opened in the gallery during the run of *Atelier Public,* presented work supporting the criminalisation of the purchasing of sex. The exhibition was launched by city councillor James Coleman (also chairman of the Glasgow Violence Against Women Partnership). This tension between the institution as a space for play, as suggested by Bruce's project, and the institution as a place to set policy is a soft power approach. One could extrapolate that GoMA in this sense is a tool to form the ethical mindset of the gallery visitor into an acceptance of council rule, and to a certain extent, public censorship.

With the council remit in mind, artist Anthony Schrag sought to encourage conflict within GoMA, and so devised a destruction event where works that have been created within the exhibition would be destroyed if not personally protected by their maker or a nominee on a given date. He wrote of this plan 'Ontologically… one cannot "make" anything without destroying something else – to draw from a pen depletes the ink in the pen; to cut shape out of paper means to destroy the initial form paper; to sing is to deplete the air in the lungs. To create means to destroy.' (Schrag, 2014)

Alex Hetherington, working here as Modern Edinburgh Film School, presented a changing set of works within the space. Objects and characters from a film and a developing edition of posters visited the exhibition at unannounced intervals. Hetherington tested out the relationship between the gatekeepers and the visitors to the space by leaving precious objects: a diamond, a block of silver, a visiting persian cat, and his fathers ashes, to be appropriated at will by visitors. In doing so his work was refracted through the lens of unknown contributors, credited as *Anonymous* and reabsorbed into the narrative of his work in later posters. Hetherington also called for people to bring mirrors to the space.

Claire Docherty of Sonic Bothy introduced the possibility of the exhibition as an acoustic space, and sought to find donations of a piano and drum kit. At meetings the discussion of this was much more positive than I had expected, given the usual nervousness in galleries and museums at the idea of noise travelling through the building. The call-out for instruments read 'We would ask that you are comfortable in accepting that anything at all may happen to your instrument – it may be used by anyone – to be played, or be decorated, or be broken, or simply disappear as part of the exhibition!' I wondered at the time whether the museum accepted that it could be treated in this way too by the audience? The thread of performance was picked up by Catherine Payton and Tom Nolan of Edinburgh artist-run space Rhubaba who conceptualised a foley room and speaker system which could project unexpected soundscapes into the space. They also planned movable screens to be inserted into the space.
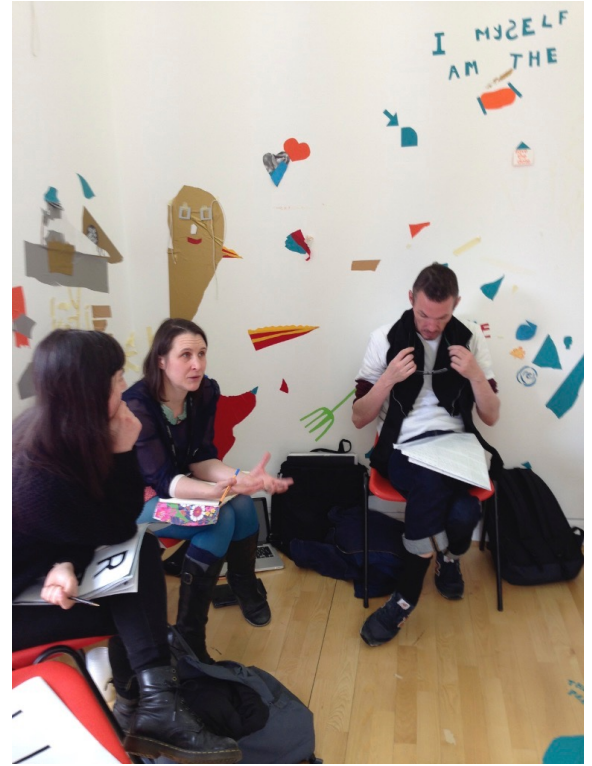
Fig.20 Destruction event at GoMA (2014).

Fig 21 Frances Davis, Katie Bruce and Alex Hetherington at GoMA (2014).

Raising by Tessa Lynch at Jupiter Artland

> I was thinking if we were to give a name to our discussion, that 'some assembly required' would be a good name. If it's not appropriate for you, I might use it when I write it up for my supervisor. I was thinking that it can relate to the flat pack nature, but also that you are calling for people to assemble to work on this project with you. It also implies an assembly, or a public meeting.
> (Emma in email to Tessa, 25 July 2014)

This conversation was initiated by the artist, Tessa Lynch, who invited me to be part of a panel discussion on-site at Jupiter Artland. Tessa had been student president at Edinburgh College of Art during my time there in 2010, but we had met only briefly. My involvement in this project came as a result of a re-introduction by a mutual friend and artist Rachel Adams. Rachel had a studio at the Glasgow Sculpture Studios, at the same time as Tessa was undertaking the Graduate Residency there, and suggested to Tessa that the themes of this project might overlap with my research.

Tessa had initially been invited to produce a performance for sculpture park Jupiter Artland as part of the programming for *GENERATION: 25 years of Contemporary Art in Scotland*. Somewhat ambitiously, Tessa responded to this brief by proposing a temporary sculpture which would be built on site every few weeks with the actual construction of the structure being considered as the performance. The site is a private estate, owned and inhabited by Nicky and Robert Wilson. *Raising* was inspired by English laws of barn raising, where the community of a particular area would have to come together to assist any new incomer with the building of their home. So, Tessa's design for a temporary structure made of CLS board to be *raised* on set dates through the summer was set up on a site adjacent to the Wilson's home.

We met a number of times in Glasgow and shared notes and book suggestions around the themes of the project to contextualise her work together through articles on modernism and modular housing production, social housing and common rights. I had intended to view the building of the structure at the opening of the show in mid-July but the extremely inclement weather conditions in Wilkieston that day led all but the most intrepid visitors to hide in the cafe, having gotten soaked to the skin in the walk up the path from the edge of the estate to the main site.

Fig.22 Raising (2014) at Jupiter Artland.

On August 23rd 2014, a group of visitors successfully designed and raised the build and we lit a fire in the hearth and drank mead together before moving on to our discussion in a tent on the site, covering ideas related to the commons, self-builds, modernism and modular production.

That summer I was also invited to speak on a panel at the Christian festival *SOLAS* alongside land-rights reformer Andy Wightman and Kathy Galloway, director of Christian Aid Scotland, as part of their Creative Commons programming *Philosophy in a Field*. This invitation came out of a chance meeting with Reverend Doug Gay, from the faculty of Divinity at the University of Glasgow. *Raising* and *SOLAS* provided me with two quite different general audiences to present ideas of the commons to, outdoors. This really tested out my ability to understand some of the concepts sufficiently myself to be able to pass on the information in a non subject-specific manner, outside of the my comfort zone of the very artist-friendly city of Glasgow.

Fig.23 Photo of panel at SOLAS with Kathy Galloway and Andy Wightman (2014).

How Near Is Here?

How Near Is Here (2014) was a symposium and intensive programme (a late summer school), on the theme of locality. The project asked 'What constitutes the local now, and what role do artists and art organisations play in shaping this locality?' I was invited by Producer Frances Stacey to present part of a day workshop alongside the artists Eastern Surf, formed of a collective of four artists Ana Kuzmanic, Francesca Nobilucci, Ewan Sinclair and Shona Macnaughton.

Our workshop was on the Thursday, which had been given the theme of *Inhabitation*. Initially Eastern Surf proposed a workshop on the co-option of emotional space. Frances Stacey asked that I speak about the commons generally and offer some kind of return to the artists practice. We were also asked to select texts for an afternoon reading group, to which I submitted *Politics, Identification, and Subjectivization* by Jacques Rancière from October journal (1992) and a section from Andy Wightman's *The Poor Had No Lawyers* (2013), including Chapter 22 'Three Score Men with Clubs and Staves: The struggle to protect common land'.

The timing of this workshop and the accompanying organisation was difficult for all of us. Francesca Nobilucci pre-planned the concept in advance with Ewan and myself at a meeting with Frances Stacey, but was in Italy when the workshop was taking place. Shona flew in from Brussels, and Ana from Zagreb. I was in midst of renovating a new flat. This meant we essentially met on the day having prepared in advance individually but without a pre-formed group agenda.

> I'm just gonna say stuff and then I'm gonna ask Shona to flick through my Facebook and my Instagram and Google Image search and find me some images, but I feel like that's maybe quite a good algorithm for me. (Emma during workshop)

Eastern Surf had formed through precisely this kind of disjunction of group practice. Having studied together on the MFA at Edinburgh College of Art in 2008, each of the artists had moved to different cities and countries in the UK and Europe. They began to develop a means to work together by meeting on Skype and drawing up group documents online but the frustration of slow internet connections meant that it became, what Shona described at

Fig 24 Facing Detection workshop participants make masks (2014)

Fig.25 Group take selfies during performance on Calton Hill (2014)

Fig.26 Shona Macnaughton of Eastern Surf wears her mask (2014)

the workshop to be 'like a series of speeches… There was a stiltedness in that communication and that's what we focused on to start with. The things where stuff was breaking down and getting kind of confusing.'

Fran had asked me to think about my project and the work of Eastern Surf in relation to Collective's new site at the Observatory on Calton Hill, which is held in the common good. In an email on 13 August 2014, Fran had said 'you may want to address that… what this actually means, can such a commons exist… but happy for you to build on whatever you are working on currently.' I was interested in presenting the disjunction between the commons as a relation which can be both physical and digital, and also to consider how we might inhabit commons, and in what ways we might be enclosed from public spaces.

> Why do artists have the need now to be imagining themselves as (ghost) actors in a projected reality of Edinburgh? Or as homesteaders drawing together friends and family to 'allow' them a place to stay? What does this say about Edinburgh as a locality? What does it say about the position of artists? (Emma, email to Fran on 18 August 2014.)

My workshop talk covered the crossovers in our work, between approaches to land use and ownership, forms of enclosure and co-option of public spaces. Eastern Surf's workshop invited the participants to create masks which subverted the gaze of facial surveillance algorithms. The workshop was then taken out onto Calton Hill where participants took selfies and uploaded them to social media, flooding the #caltonhill hashtag on Instagram with masked faces. Eastern Surf's art complicates the connection between the subject and public space by inhabiting corporatised forms and revealing the digital layers of existence which lie as a vector over our experiences IRL.

VH-16-22-7-12-3-22-5 Dreams of Machines: Victor and Hester at Transmission Gallery

> Dreams of Machines intends to draw questions around a feminist reading of domestic labour, technology and companionship, and will explore tensions between language, architectural space and the bodies that move/work within and between these frameworks. (Victor & Hester 2015)

Dreams of Machines was an exhibition and residency period produced by Emma Fitts and Amelia Bywater. I was invited to take part in this show by writing a text to be sent in the members mailout after the end of the show. It was stated by the committee that the only guideline was that it should fit in the envelope with the other flyers and ideally would be able to be printed on the A4 photocopier in the gallery.

As I mention in the text, Emma and Amelia had attended and read along with some of my reading group project *Sick, Sick, Sick: The Books of Ornery Women* at the CCA, Glasgow. I immediately read the outcomes of the exhibition as relating to a similar kind of *readings* of work by other women, trying to disperse a set of quotes and snippets of production. It took a long time for the gallery to give me set dates for the show where there would be activity happening. The space was installed in a sparse manner with large wall hangings sewn from soft charcoal grey chenille, and odd pieces of geometric furniture made of pine and softened with sheets of memory foam. On the occasions I visited the space, the blackboard upstairs held the recipe for a cocktail.

Similarly to the situation at GoMA during Atelier Public, Victor and Hester programmed the exhibition space by employing more and more people, mostly other women (spatial designer Tessa Peach, economist Marilyn Waring and Irene Revell, director of Electra amongst others), to develop work in the space and on the website for the show. Readers were published in the space with writing and extracts from lengthly email correspondence between Emma, Amelia and other artists.

I saw the invitation to write about this show as an opportunity to examine some of the connections I had seen between my research for the reading group into subjectivity, and an interest in modernism to the commons and more specifically to the approach of Estovers as a research project. In particular I had been inspired by a talk at the Architecture School of

Edinburgh University in November 2014 by Elain Harwood on *The British New Towns 1945-75, and the Importance of Cumbernauld*, and a quick mention of hers that many of the original high rise blocks of brutalist or modernist design were built to house women. In an email after the show on May 4th 2015 , Emma Fitts said:

> The movements through public and private between the commons, gardens and the home and labour are really interesting. The transience of the cherry blossom seems really appropriate not only for the structure of the gallery space but also for our interests in reasessing statements / language — trying to be more at ease with the idea of changing language / statements / and direction — The wind blowing these blossoms apart.

I have continued to work with Victor & Hester on artistic projects since this invitation, including on a text work for *Messaging* at 126 Gallery, Galway in 2015.

what is it to go beyond our bodies?				opposite of what she had imagined
	She described it as advanced capitalism that has gone completely in its own direction from anything we know			
	women clandestine kung fu fighters		capitalism has managed to absorb and subsume these alternative ways of living and being	
"Like most lonely women, like most women of all kinds, Margaret Dagemen had an imaginary lover...		regulating bodies		a university being like a phallocentric architecture
	very narrow apartments			sympathy music broadcast by loudspeaker

Fig.27 Diagram image from Dreams of Machines (2015) Victor & Hester

Chapter 5: Analysis of the commons in light of practice undertaken

This chapter is an analysis of the projects which have been undertaken as part of the practice element of the thesis, which is related in Chapter 4 and documented in the printed portfolio and USB stick which accompany this thesis. I write this from the perspective of a curatorial practitioner and someone who has participated in dialogue as a discursive collaborator.

In this analysis chapter of the thesis I will make a case for the use of the commons as a practice. I state here that the methodology of the thesis project as a whole is one in which the subject material of the thesis project – the commons – is used as a device to open up the process of writing and producing the thesis. This practice is what has created the thesis project in the form it exists in, through an iterative and cyclical practice of curation, discussion and documentation of commons projects.

I begin by considering the historical contingency of commons, and the initial issues with my research relating to a lack of specificity in the term commons. I reflect on the fact that this is a part of a developing field of commons study, within which my research practice has considered the fundamental concepts of how we live and work together and the challenges in doing so. It has also considered notions of enclosure against the opening up of new spaces.

The themes considered in this chapter extend from reflections on my own practice, including open models and the experimentation of where/how spaces of art are presented, commons methods, and the methodology of the Estover which acts as an ethical framing linked to the necessity of open access of the syllabus. Further consideration is given to the evident themes which recur in the practice projects: the twinned concepts of dwelling and inhabitation, structures and construction, and the dynamics of subverting the use of public or private space.

I extend the idea that my practice of discursive curation has necessitated the production of the commons syllabus to allow for 'the importance of the process of dissemination' (Tatham). Finally, I consider some practice which has not been included in the portfolio, reflecting on where the consideration of the commons in my practice begins and ends.

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The use of the term commons in the practice of estovers

In this thesis, my analysis of the concept of the commons within contemporary art covers the period from 1989 when Margaret Harrison made *Common Land/Greenham* up until the present day. This analysis presents its value by its ability to characterise the commons as a notable and under-represented topic of study in relation to art. As David Bollier points out in *The Wealth of the Commons* 'Necessarily, some perspectives and topics are missing. This volume does not address, for example, the role of arts and the commons...' (2012, xiii). In this thesis I have attempted to draw together some preliminary points of reference so that the commons can continue to be studied and referenced with relation to artistic practices.

Considering the commons as a useful subject for study within the academy, it has previously been confined to such fields as ecology, geography, and political-economy. This gives a certain subject-specific form to such outcomes, so in this thesis I have attempted through interdisciplinary study and discursive practice to produce a more open approach to the form of the commons. This subject specific approach means the commons tends to be seen in a particularly objective framing when considered as an object of study.

Through this cross-discipline review of literature and the methods employed when producing discussions with artists I believe that bringing a more subjective tone into understandings of the commons as a topic can be beneficial and has allowed me to produce new outcomes in this thesis which would not have been possible by following a more conventional mode of study.

These studies of course form the basis for current understandings of the commons as a broad concept and therefore are of great value, and by connecting some of these disparate texts and combining them with a study of artistic practice in the field has produced a contribution to knowledge, and the basis for further study as an art-related interdisciplinary field.

By tracing a history of the commons through a selected range of examples, from a broad literature survey through to political philosophy, art related practices in the field and my own discursive practice it is illustrated as a clear topic of interest with great significance to

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the current economic climate and the situation of artists and art institutions alike. It challenges assumptions about the commons which might frame the topic as purely a means to consider resources and has produced a more nuanced set of connected themes.

This study of the commons within art indicates how commons have come about as a popular term for study and for artistic practice, and gives a historical contingency to the moments in which it is called to. The commons is intricately related to the political standing of ordinary people and will re-emerge whenever they are in trouble and are losing their necessary resources.

By treating the commons as a broad theme, this study has brought out specific examples which show both the commonalities and differences between various iterations of the commons and offers new perspectives on it as a topic. The practices on the commons which I have presented here make explicit the fact that the commons is a recognisable theme and phenomenon within contemporary art which deserves further consideration. The philosophy on concepts of the common, from Nancy, to Casarino and Negri, to Ranciere, to Esposito allows us to bring the subjective framing of the common forward which in the field of contemporary art is necessary due to the very individualised modes of practice and study.

In this chapter I will move towards the question of how discussions of the commons can move forward in the field of contemporary art from here. Presenting a response to the research questions and following on to some themes which have emerged over the course of this research: what is the term commons when it is used in contemporary art? Why is it used today?

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What is the concept of the commons when it is referred to in contemporary art?

As we have seen from the literature survey and the discussions on political philosophy, the notion of the commons itself is a broad church and has been used to describe practices which are both hierarchical and non-hierarchical. This thesis so far shows that the commons is not only a term but a practice in itself. The practice of the commons has a set of parameters which are loosely defined by the ethics of the term. This practice implies sharing and of either giving or taking of resources which are needed in a given situation. The notion of the commons as a practice has been reiterated in a recent book *Space, power and the commons : the struggle for alternative futures* (2015) edited by Samuel Kirwan, Leila Dawney and Julian Brigstocke.

For a commons project to be successful I posit here that it must therefore attend – in practice – to deficiencies in the institutions that give it a shape which is to most intents and purposes *un*-common or to some extent privatising. However, this delineation does not protect art on, or, of the commons as a perfect ethical tool. Art historian and critic Claire Bishop has investigated the history and traditions of participatory practices in her book 'Artificial Hells'. In relating the trajectory of socially engaged practice in contemporary art, she states that when artists produce work which is intended to be politically engaged, a tendency has grown not to critique this form of artmaking because the moral objective of the project exempts it from the kinds of scrutiny which would ordinarily face other forms of art production.

> This line of thinking has led to an ethically charged climate in which participatory and socially engaged art has become largely exempt from art criticism: emphasis is continually shifted away from the disruptive specificity of a given practice and onto a generalised set of ethical precepts. (23, 2012)

It is therefore important to recognise here that arts engagement with the commons as a concept and as a practice can fall into the same traps. That while the term commons, when it is used in contemporary art implies a particular type of practice – one which opens what was previously shut, one which reflects on political movements, and one which actively undertakes a mode of production which is active and engaged – it also has varyingly had its actual political effects at times underplayed or overstated, but rarely critiqued in depth.

For what reasons is it being employed as a concept in discursive practices?

The examples of contemporary art and curation used in this thesis have served to illustrate art on the commons which engages with the enactment of politics in some form, whether actively or passively. It is at times reflective of a politics of protest, of rejection or a documentation of struggle. At other times it has been used to demonstrate the possibilities of democracy or of sharing cultures, admittedly at times in a banal way.

The notion and practice of commons today has been used for a variety of reasons, but most often it has been used to reflect upon the loss of previously accepted public-goods. There is a gap in art literature here around the reverberations of the WTO protests and globalisation movements of the early 2000s, which was most arguably the trigger point of most contemporary discussions on the commons today. We can see this reflection on loss in the work of female artists in the early 2000s and before reflecting on the use of the public park Greenham as a nuclear site and the collective female political actions which were undertaken to reclaim it.

Latterly we can see the loss of the public reflected in the formation of art biennales and the formation of new practices within cultural centres in countries affected most by the political austerity policies of Mediterranean countries: Spain and Italy have been central to discussions around the commons and of 'commoning' or squatting venues. Art of course is a mirror on the world, and in the case of the commons it is no different. The protests of Occupy were literally and physically taken into the biennial sites of the Berlin Biennial and of dOCUMENTA. Thus the notion and the practice of being common, is about restitution and recomposition of forms of artistic relations which cannot compete with neoliberal capitalism because they have alternative forms of value. It is an investigation into the value of art, the value of space, the value of sharing and of slow cultures.

The selection that I have made has taken its form as a result of public discourse on the commons which was called to through recent decades and which has been reflected by artists and institutions in their programmes and in artwork that has been produced. In particular

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the fact that I began my research on this topic in the immediate aftermath of Occupy, shaped the type of projects which seemed most relevant and tend to reveal an intent of activating the public realm or of representing protest.

As the abstract to this thesis states, this was a particular period which is framed by neoliberalism and with some initial shifts toward conservatism in Western politics post the global financial crash. The works represented in this chapter in particular are characteristic of various struggles to integrate with an imposed politics of austerity.

The works themselves may not seem to always be successful as a political activation or even be fully successful at articulating what a commons is or has the possibility to be, but they do represent perspectives from some leading artists, institutions and biennials which attempted to develop thinking around the commons through practice. Something which, in this thesis, I have attempted to do myself.

The art and institutions represented here respond to the political activism of this era which the commons presents itself to as an opportunity for as an alternative (whether simply discursively or otherwise). In some cases this is about the furthering of political aim, and in others it is simply about trying a new format for engagement which is less hierarchal. As Yates McKee's has stated, since Occupy, commons projects have occurred largely through symbiotic relationships between activism and the kinds of arts institutions which are surveyed here. In the case of my practice portfolio, many of the same concerns are evident. The remainder of this chapter serves as a presentation of the themes which are present in the portfolio projects.

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Considering the portfolio of practice

The portfolio is the documentation of work which was undertaken from the end of the first year of the PhD until the middle of third year. Here I have described the findings of my research project on the commons from both the portfolio and the background research which is evidenced in the first few chapters of this thesis. I will begin with some of the issues encountered in my research and how I dealt with them, and then move through into a discussion of some of the themes and outcomes of my research before moving into the concluding chapter of this thesis.

Beginning with the literature survey, the main problem which I faced came from the lack of specificity of the term commons and the very broad literature review that it had necessitated. I found that I was still reading on concepts that were unfamiliar to me well into second year and it took a long time to come to terms with how I would be able to close the project off and make it finished. I found that by revisiting the documentation of the portfolio I began to see the threads of where different theories were reflected. The themes which I found in this are referred to in this chapter: open models, dealing with commons methods and a methodology based on the ethics of the estover, dwelling and inhabitation, structures and construction, the dynamics of subverting use of public / private space, practice and notes towards the suggested syllabus.

By producing a portfolio of documentation without additional description, the development of my research can be read from the initial Estovers event programming as a form of research and building of theoretical grounding, to later discussion and engagement directly in the work of others and eventually a more authorial voice where I was able to reflect on the work of others. I tried to adhere to practices which I saw as already being used in what might be termed the developing field of commons study. That includes a broad study of the field to try to understand some of the links and a sharing of resources through the syllabus / reading list form.

While I did not take the direction of dealing with the study of urban commons through sociological or geographical research, the practice still took on some of the concerns of this

form of commons. We considered how it is we could live and work somewhere together, and the challenges of doing so; the tensions between obvious enclosure of spaces we can inhabit and the opening up of previously 'closed' spaces. Within this there are parallels to be drawn between the commons and the common, in that one is about a greater discussion of a group of people and a resource and the other is about a more personalised and subjective description of the necessity of commons.

Pragmatically, I feel that I took an open approach to the research process. I undertook a broad literature survey but I had to be reflexive in the way I used that information to relate to creative practices. I shaped a dialogue by inviting particular speakers, but then I accepted being invited into situations where other curators and producers expected I would be able to filter something for them in describing parts of their projects in relation to the commons or through a particular discursive lens.

The production of new commons knowledge, as I have stated before, is in Casarino and Negri's view, carried on through conversation. This is created through an activeness and a criticality. This activeness can be seen in the commons as a means to avoid enclosure. The critical distance is what keeps commons on the fringes of institutional structuring, and what encouraged me out of the art school/academic institutional model and into a mixture of different external structures which were able to deal with the development and discussion of the commons as a model in a more open way.

Estovers

The creation of Estovers as a method for discursive practice, considering discussions of the commons as necessary and restorative, revealed a number of themes which came under consideration. Estovers Pt.1 at New Glasgow Society considered themes of the commons as they relate to urban and the rural, historical and contemporary, and ideas of the commons and the common. Estovers Pt.2 at the CCA considered themes of the digital and the libidinal, of gay cruising on the commons, and contemporary enclosures. The work with Katie Bruce as part of Atelier Public 2 considered the commons as a theme in relation to curation of spaces for art in which the audience is invited to play and create instead of to simply form

the role of observer. This complicated the role of the artist and of the institution when they were implicated in this commons-style programming.

Tessa Lynch's *Raising*, created the opportunity for the audience of the work to participate in its modular composition and constitution, role-playing the position of community members assisting the creation of a dwelling on the commons. The *Inhabitation* day at Collective as part of *How Near Is Here* Intensive Programme presented connections between ideas of the common good as a green space or a public space (the observatory) and the subversion of enclosures of real-space by hacking digital methods for facial tracking. Through the response written for Victor & Hester's *Dreams of Machines*, the estover as a restorative and feminised function of capital was presented as a precursor to the social state, evidencing its connections to modernist architecture and the housing of women. When considered alongside the literature review and recent developments in contemporary art, themes emerge from protest movements against austerity, around the creation of green spaces such as gardens and parks and the sharing of these kinds of resources.

Through Estovers I presented discursive events as a public-facing exercise of research. Other projects which have dealt with the commons through discursive practice include the work of Chto Delat? who have used newspaper publications to present ideas of the commons as it relates to communism. Institutions such as Casco and BAK have presented conferences, reading groups and socially engaged practices in order to challenge the cuts to funding models in the Netherlands. 16 Beaver in New York City have presented educational workshop series. It is most often presented in artistic spaces or with artists but in a form which is not as readily described as visual art. These engaged practices have been described by John Roberts as 'art-as-the-commons' (2015).

Open models

The times where I was invited into the programming of institutions were always as part of unusually openly structured projects. In the case of GoMA, the exhibition space was being turned inside-out from being a spot for the public to visit artists work, to a space for artists to be encouraged to respond to the work and creative production of the general public. While

it was still taking part inside of the institution, we were subject to the anarchy of an ever-changing space with its seemingly undepletable resource of enthusiasm and sticky backed plastic.

At Collective, I was invited as part of what is usually the summer school but which had been extended into an autumnal *intensive.* Neither part of a curated contemporary art exhibition, nor part of the geography and sociology inclined conference which came before it, we workshopped together on concepts relating to public and private space and then performed outdoors on Calton Hill. Tessa Lynch's *Raising* at Jupiter Artland was conceived as a performance commission but ultimately produced a buildable and (digitally) shareable model for a framework to build a home. The discussion continued from a field owned as part of a private country estate, into a tent beside the onsite gallery. At *SOLAS* the discussion similarly was held in a tent, as part of a series of discussions under the name 'philosophy in a field'.

There is a contrast between the outdoor, the public space, the research space, and the space of private dwelling. Even in Transmission, I was one of a series of people to be commissioned as a secondary lens to deal with work by the actual invited artists. Victor and Hester is a project by Amelia Bywater and Emma Fitts, within which they act as micro-curators of content. Structures and textures and a theme are brought in by Victor and Hester, around which they ask artists and writers to discuss with them on different topics. They programmed films by women from archives such as Cinenova, and commission texts and the design of those texts in the gallery space, which is becomes both a place for research and display.

There was experimentation with the gallery space itself or in holding the projects outside of the gallery. Ultimately the questions that each of the projects were dealing with was to do with notions of space. Where do we live and how do we live there? What are our relationships like with other people we have to deal with in situations which we have developed experimentally as part of projects within arts institutions. How do we negotiate physical and digital spaces and their affective resonances as enclosures impinge upon long-held ways of existence and cross-cultural contact?

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In producing projects and then returning to become a participant in other projects, I had to learn what it was to present an idea of my own through the organisation of other people's work but also what it was to be directed through another person's project and how to deal with presenting in public in this way. Each project required me to reconsider the topics I was reading in a different way. The approach of Estovers was to consider that the concept of the commons was one which could be divined through discussion and participation rather than only through historical study and time in libraries and archives. For better or for worse, I chose a topic which is still in development, and approached it from within an art school. This allowed me to gain a broader perspective than if I had chosen to study the commons from an ecological perspective, or a historical land use perspective.

Dealing with commons methods and a methodology based on the ethics of the Estover

As I have mentioned at the beginning of the thesis, the methods I used to do my research were based on a cross-disciplinary reading of literature about the commons and its related themes (e.g. enclosure, neoliberalism) and of contemporary art which has dealt with some of these themes. I recognised that reading alone would not be enough to understand the complexity of this intersection between theory and practice, so I set up ways to do practice myself which involved other people directly in discussion of this theory in order to better understand it.

Initially this practice took place as a pair of events with the name Estovers. The idea of the estover became a conceptual framing for the public facing research. Each part of my research is in effect an estover. The estover is described as something which is necessary and restorative. I am offering the information I have found and worked with and organised to someone who needs it. This could be seen on a larger scale, in that I am offering a contribution to knowledge in the field through a synthesis of knowledge about the idea of the commons in contemporary art; but it could also be seen on a smaller scale as a method which is replicable, considering discursive practice as an active mode of research.

The name estovers is something which I acquired and am reusing conceptually as a framing, but the openness of commons research is a given. It is a strategy of working which operates with generosity and openness. To close off any part of the research would make it seem

incongruous to the ethical standpoint and philosophy of the commons. While I was writing up my thesis I worked with Magnus Lawrie, another PhD student from a separate institution, who is also working on a project which relates to the commons (in his case it is more closely related to Free Libre Open Source). We would meet up regularly to discuss our progress with our writing and in dealing with our topics as an informal peer support mechanism. When we talked together on the 3rd of September 2015 about the idea of a method in producing a practice based research PhD he said to me that the methodology 'implies your perspective and the values that you bring to your research'. We agreed that the commons presents a particular type of ethical framing to our work and in the ways that research on the commons tends to be conducted at a remove to the institution and its ordinary working processes.

Organising discursive projects to deal with the commons is something which happens in my field. It is the primary means by which ideas of the commons are disseminated and furthered in scope. This was a method which I saw happening in arts organisations and in projects by activists, but something which doesn't tend to be brought directly into the institution. The commons itself does not follow institutional norms, if it is to be thought of as a system then it should be seen an open and dynamic one. As such, I decided to follow through with public practice that other people invited me to do when it related to the commons and to use those public discussions as a means to explore different themes.

After documenting and describing these discussions, I knew that I was also yet to deal with many other themes which appear in discussions of the commons. The literature search was lengthly because the topic is still new and therefore presents further developments in the field on a regular basis. One way that discussion on the commons is distributed is through unofficial reading lists and non-academic or extracurricular syllabuses. I decided in that tradition that I should make my thesis open access, and to also produce some notes towards my own suggested syllabus for anyone who might be approaching the commons as it relates to contemporary art, and is unsure of where to find the information they need. While everything that I read was useful in extending my understanding of the commons, there was still much that could not be said in the course of this thesis project and I would prefer that the synthesis of these texts does not become lost to the alphabetised format of a bibliography.

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The reason that I consider these discursive events as a form of practice based research is that it is still a new topic. Each time that I worked with others on a new event for the public and saw a particular art or curatorial practice through the lens of the commons, we were talking about something which I was unable to go to the GSA library and take out a book on. There was a creation of viewpoints and perspectives happening, and I was able to document them through the process of recording and transcribing them. In this chapter I will discuss some of the themes which became visible through this process of research and documentation.

Dwelling and inhabitation

In the first talk of the Estovers events, Nuno describes dwelling as a methodology for the production of artistic programmes in his post as Director of Scottish Sculpture Workshop in Lumsden. *Dwelling* is a word which he takes from the work of the anthropologist Tim Ingold (1993). For Nuno, this word has an implied ethic to him, the same way that the word estovers does for my research. In this case, dwelling is a means to describe working in an integrated way and producing work that is for the benefit of the people who are local to it, who should not be overlooked in its presentation and discussion.

Returning to transcribe this talk in the summer of 2015, 2 years after the event, I was immediately struck by his use of the word because it was so resonant with other projects I had participated in since that time. Most notably the intensive programme *How Near Is Here* at Collective which was was co-organised between Collective's curatorial team and artist and planning researcher Julie Crawshaw was themed around ideas of locality, described on the Collective website as 'a complex term that refers to geographical surroundings, the people occupying an area, or the buildings and spaces that define it.' (2014)

The theme of the day I was invited to workshop with Eastern Surf was *Inhabitation*. It seems to me that the words dwelling and inhabitation are almost interchangeable, but they each have a specific political implication. To dwell is to act in an integrated way in consideration of your surroundings and its inhabitants. Inhabitation is described in the dictionary as the process of living or dwelling in a place (as people or animals - implying the importance of

nature) and to exist or be situated in or to dwell in, while inhabitation implies the action of the person dwellling in a place.

We could also consider the work of Victor and Hester as presenting ideas of dwelling in their exhibition *Dreams of Machines* at Transmission. An inspiration for the exhibition was Eileen Gray's E1027 house, which Gray described as 'a dwelling as a living organism' serving 'the atmosphere required by inner life' (see Moore 2015). The dwelling that Amelia and Emma created was a social one, a statement on dreamsofmachines.co.uk states that:

> Presenting the domestic space as a potentially potent social space, the work draws questions around a feminist reading of domestic labour, technology and companionship, and explores tensions between language, architectural space and the bodies that move/work within and between these frameworks. (2015)

Amelia and Emma organised film screenings, performances and readings which were presented in the space which was sparsely furnished with angular benches made of untreated pine and covered with grey cloth covered mattresses. Large curtains of chenille textured charcoal grey fabric were draped from the ceiling, and a small nook sliced out of the side wall hid a shelf of feminist literature and potted plants.

After this show, Amelia Bywater and Emma Fitts invited me to be part of the working process for the following show Messaging at 126 Gallery in Galway. The piece I wrote was an index to the concepts we had been sharing by email and Skype, through PDF, video and photo attachments. The index was propped up in the gallery space behind a potted plant as a nod to my locating of the project's home within the domestic.

Structures and construction

The domestic dwelling brings us towards themes of structures and construction which I identified from within the discussions documented in the practice portfolio. Most obvious in this was Tessa Lynch's *Raising* at Jupiter Artland, which consisted of a digital model of a modular house-like structure which was fabricated and brought on site. The action of designing the maquette and then the full structure was a performance commission on the site of the Wilson family estate.

Tessa used this process of production and collective design and construction to consider questions around the right to build in the UK. As a mid-career artist, Tessa was aware that neither she or her friends would be able to afford the land to build on, but she could produce something like a house through her practice as an artist. She framed the project around an English common law which allowed for someone to build their home on common land if everyone in the area helped with the build, so that it was allowed to stay if a fire was lit in the hearth by sundown.

In contrast to this the work of Eastern Surf deals with the negative flip side to construction by documenting the surrounding urban landscapes and the privatised 'public' areas which proliferate in Edinburgh such as the Quartermile. Unlike Tessa's work, the end product of the processed affects of Eastern Surf is always digital and ephemeral. It never touches on the landscape it so wishes to manipulate and adapt for its own ends. In a text written for their exhibition *Kernel Panic Control* in Zagreb in 2012, I stated that:

> Through becoming new inhabitants of these privatized spaces as critique, embodying advertising, and manipulating spaces both virtually and materially, what is exposed is the cruel optimism of citizens whose only chance of participation within these optimistic architectural forms is to recreate and interfere with them digitally… The workers inhabit a privatized space, document the space, create a SketchUp model of the space, create a virtual intervention within the model, build virtual interventions in real space, and finally, document this in various media. Their processes expose the emptiness of the advertorial embrace of capital, rehumanise that which is abstract and digital, reenact structures of power which would ordinarily be exclusive, and transform the very architecture of power through digital intervention and reproduction. (Balkind, 2012)

The dynamics of subverting use of public / private space

The subversion of space is something which has been intrinsic to many of the discussions which happened through the course of my practice based discursive projects. Subversions of space happen when individuals try to make a mark on their surroundings, and occur in reaction to what has been termed *enclosures* of public domains when they are made private. Notably, Huw Lemmey presented on the enclosure of particular forms of libidinal practices within the public domain. The closing off of public toilets and parks to avoid cruising and other *unwanted* behaviour has seen a move of these practices back into a domestic realm

through the use of technology. In his talk he describes how the sexual topography of available hookups changes as you move across the city, divining access to bodies through cruising apps:

> The city looks different on Grindr depending on where you are. If you're in Mile End or further out towards Stratford or something, you get entirely different sort of people than if you check your Grindr when you're in Kensington or Clapham. There's different people who inhabit these little communities, which is all to do with again, elements of class, you know. People who live in Clapham and people who live in Kensington might be earning the same amount of money but they define their sexuality to their class in a completely different way. So, it produces gay and queer experiences that are kind of separated, but it's emphatically not a public space. (Lemmey 2015)

We might also contrast the explorations of female correspondence within the domestic space in Victor and Hester's work against Lemmey's assertion that gay male sexuality is something that is public and that even in the private domain of the home, the possibility of being outed or prosecuted for ones behaviour presented this situation.

To contrast with this we can consider the exhibition *Atelier Public #2* at the Gallery of Modern Art where the gallery space's white walls were given over to the public for the duration of the show. Curator Katie Bruce's plan for the show was that the public could use the gallery as a space for play and experimentation, somewhere in between the experience of an adventure playground and an artist's studio. In the introduction to the discussion I had with Anthony Schrag as part of the case study for *Revista MESA*, we stated that the presentation by GoMA of: '"A space for looking, thinking, exploring and making… [Where] everyone is invited to come into, to make artworks that will become part of the installation" seemed to place an emphasis on the positively productive and "nice" aspects of expression' (Balkind & Schrag, 2015). Atelier Public presented an open space for play within a public institution, which resulted in many discussions around the 'erasure of the artist'. For most of us it was impossible to produce for a space which was constantly in use and always in flux.

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Practice and notes towards the suggested syllabus

In her PhD thesis *Heroin kills : context and meaning in contemporary art practice* (2004), Joanne Tatham stated that in practice-based artistic research:

> The current model fails to reflect the wider context of production and exhibition; it does not acknowledge the importance of the process of dissemination, and presumes a limited site in which meaning occurs. My PhD research has been dependent upon maintaining and developing opportunities to produce and exhibit work. This provides both a discourse with which to engage, as well as the space and money necessary for production and exhibition. The current model often seems to wish to confine practice to a monastic existence. (P.61)

I offer the suggested syllabus in recognition that the word count of an extra disciplinary practice-based PhD cannot take care of digesting all of the relevant information at hand. It is offered, within the PhD, under a share and share alike licence, as an encouragement towards the sharing of this information so that other students might be able to use it as a map through the disparate variety of texts in existence which describe and discuss the commons.

The syllabus also acts as a bridging point between the sensibility of the practice undertaken, and the presented thesis. I believe that, had I been given access to a syllabus like this at the beginning of my studies, I would have been able to take the opportunity to choose a more specific aspect of the commons to investigate. Since I have done the work to collect these texts and pick out the ones which I found to be particularly novel or useful, then it makes sense to share this so that another person might benefit from it. I did not see the bibliography as being an open enough form for this, as there will be all sorts of additional material included which is only tangentially related to the topic at hand. I wanted to be able to collate the content as I chose, and to guide the prospective reader.

Conceptually the commons is a bubble which exists as a free(er) space which crosses into institutional boundaries at times but is not ever created as part of a hierarchical system. In some ways I saw the art school as a better place to try to understand the commons as a concept than, say, a university because it just tends to be younger and less discipline specific in its understanding of theory. The syllabus acts as a bridging point, to exemplify my position as a researcher. This is what I can offer to other students and researchers.

Chapter 5: Analysis of the commons in light of practice undertaken

A note about practice undertaken which is not included here

As I have previously mentioned, throughout the PhD I worked on some projects which are not documented in the portfolio but which nonetheless contributed to my understanding of what could form a practice for me and acted as a shadow to the work which has been more central to my thesis on the commons. These brought out a few threads in my research which may be understood without reference to the project but which I would like to mention here in order to make clear their relevance to my work.

Firstly, I was invited to participate in a group residency on Raasay as part of Derry-Londonderry city of culture in 2012, in the summer of my first year of the PhD. The project was based around the work of St Columba, and my role on the residency was as an *Illuminator* alongside the designer and printmaker Edwin Pickstone. As an illuminator I had to respond in some manner to the many different threads and projects which had taken place on the island and provide this reflection for a public audience on completion of the project. I took an audio recorder and decided to record as much as possible of our time there. My output was an audio piece *Raasay ASMR* which consisted of all of the moments in-between the organised lectures and presentations, where we went on walks through the forest and along the coast, ate dinner together, taught skills to one another and sat in the van being ferried between different parts of the island. The way that this reflected in my output for the PhD was partly reflected in the form and approach. I have diligently recorded everything that has happened publicly through the three years and reflected on this documentation. It also informed my understanding of the commons as something related to the in-common within Christian theology.

The second interest of mine which began during the PhD and will continue beyond it is in a reading group project which I programmed at the CCA with Laura Edbrook with some support and partnership from MAP. This project was originally intended as a reading group of texts from the art theory publisher Semiotext(e) distributed by MIT Press, and developed into a long-form project about a particular kind of 'bludgeoned' female subjectivity in novelistic publications. We had 7 meetings, screened two films: Daisies by Vera Chytilova and Gravity and Grace by Chris Kraus, and invited the first full-length production Remastered by Katherine Angel and The Blackburn Company.
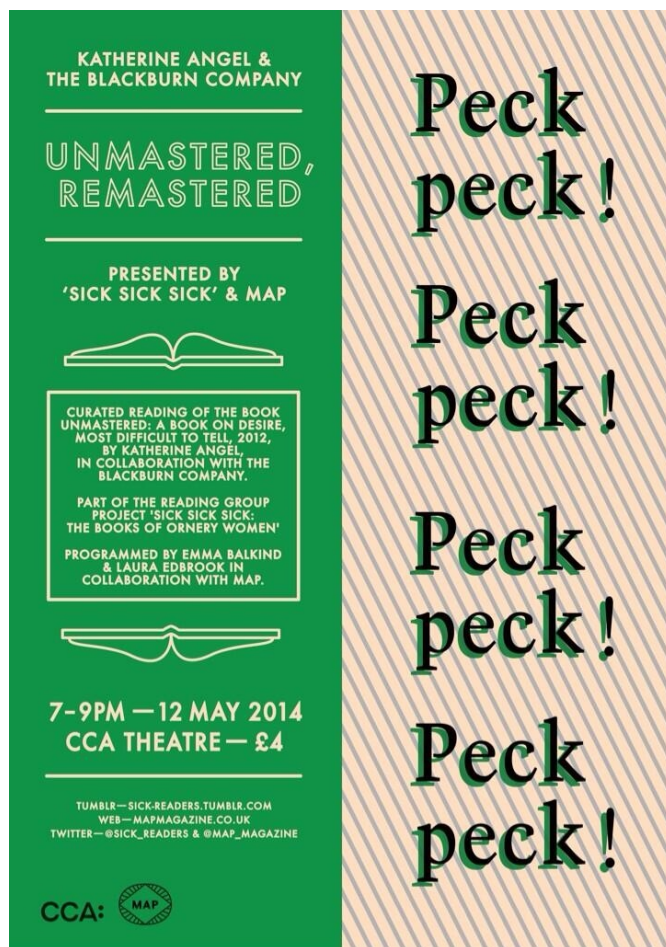
Fig.28 Poster for Katherine Angel & The Blackburn Company, *Remastered* **(2014)**

The reading group changed my focus in the PhD in that it provided a way for me to explore subjectivity while studying theory which was largely presented as something impenetrably objective. It also began drawing a thread between the figure of the woman as a person in need who is represented in the commons and the public. I have tried to begin to make sense of this somewhat in the piece I have included in the portfolio for Transmission gallery.

Chapter 6: Notes towards a suggested commons syllabus

Citation is when you bring your people along with you.

Sensing the Commons, (Berlant 2015)

In the chapter 6, the notes towards a suggested syllabus presents the syllabus as an extension of my practice of discursive curation which is related to the methodology of the Estover. I describe how it has developed from my knowledge of the Goldsmiths course on the commons in the department of Visual Cultures. It considers themes which have been present within the thesis so far such as ecology, creative commons and FLOSS alongside additional reading lists which I have drawn from in order to relate my practice to that of other commons scholars.

This short reading list acts as a set of notes towards a suggested commons syllabus for the understanding of the commons as it relates to contemporary art and culture. The form of a reading list as a basic syllabus is prevalent within commons projects as a means to further spread its precepts. I believe that rather than continue this process only as a grassroots project, more syllabi on the commons should be created to breach the gap between the various topics of study across the arts, humanities and sciences which relate to the commons. It is also obvious that the commons in art is a project still under development, so I believe it is important to keep documenting it in order to understand and encourage its further development.

The purpose of this embryonic syllabus is similar to that of the previous chapters, in that it is drawing together existing knowledge on the topic for the benefit of the reader. I see this as an extension of my practice as a curator of discursive events, and an extension of the methodology of Estovers in this thesis. By giving over this knowledge in an accessible format, I hope to encourage an open engagement with the concept of the commons within contemporary art. While I believe it would be antithetical for this information, as a commons project, to only exist within the framework of the academy, this thesis has allowed me the time to gather an appropriate set of readings which I believe is of critical value for further research in this field.

Chapter 6: Notes towards a suggested commons syllabus

In 2014, I found that Dr. Nadja Millner-Larsen at Goldsmiths was running an undergraduate unit in *Forming the Commons,* which I believe was the first Visual Cultures course to present a project of this type. I define this list as a variation on what is available across the many different commons reading lists online, from a set of texts which I found particularly useful in creating a basis for my own understanding of the commons from which I have written this thesis. By offering this list, I hope to be able to direct people in a similar line of study to my own, thereby passing on valuable information as to my trajectory and allowing other researchers to continue the work I have done if they so wish.

These notes begin in a roughly chronological manner with some discussion of commons definitions, and some texts on historical commons and ecological commons. They move on to discussion of the public and the common, to creative commons and FLOSS and then to some political philosophy relating the commons to communism, protest and contemporary art. It then considers education as it relates to the common, the subject's relation to 'the common', expanding into notions of libidinal commons and precarity. I have also included other commons projects, and reading lists or courses which cover aspects of a similar content.

Commons for beginners

What are some good, not-too-technical definitions of the commons that can be used to draw someone's attention to this important subject and that include the idea of the activities of 'commoning'?— Quora

http://www.quora.com/What-are-some-good-not-too-technical-definitions-of-the-commons-that-can-be-used-to-draw-someones-attention-to-this-important-subject-and-that-include-the-idea-of-the-activities-of-commoning

Commons — Wikipedia
The commons is the cultural and natural resources accessible to all members of a society, including natural materials such as air, water, and a habitable earth. These resources are held in common, not owned privately.
https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Commons

The Commoner journal
http://www.commoner.org.uk/?page_id=31

Historical Commons
Hardin, G. (1969). "The Tragedy of the Commons." *Ekistics* **27**(160): 168-170.

Federici, S. (2004) *Caliban and the Witch: Women, The Body, and Primitive Accumulation.* United Kingdom: Autonomedia

Linebaugh, P. (2008) 'The Magna Carta Manifesto', in The Magna Carta Manifesto: Liberties and Commons for All. Berkeley: University of California Press

Wightman, A. (2013) The poor had no lawyers: who owns Scotland and how they got it. United Kingdom: Birlinn.
— Particularly Chapter 22 'Three Score Men with Clubs and Staves: The struggle to protect common land' which describes the difference between commons, common good etc in Scotland.

Video: Andy Wightman - Conquest, Colonialism and the Commons (2014)
http://www.andywightman.com/archives/3852

Ecological Commons

Ostrom, E. 1990. *Governing the commons : the evolution of institutions for collective action,* Cambridge, Cambridge University Press.

— Chapter1: Reflections on the Commons

Mies, M. and V. Bennholdt-Thomsen (2001). "Defending, Reclaiming and Reinventing the Commons." *Canadian Journal of Development Studies / Revue canadienne d'études du développement* **22**(4): 997-1023.
http://commoningtimes.org/texts/mies_benholdt_defending_reinventing.pdf

Illich, I. (1983). "Silence is a Commons: Computers Are Doing to Communication What Fences Did to Pastures and Cars Did to Streets." *CoEvolution Quarterly*, Winter.
http://www.preservenet.com/theory/Illich/Silence.html

Documentary: The Gleaners and I, Agnès Varda (2000)
http://vimeo.com/37089032

The Public and the Common

Arendt, H. (1999) *The Human Condition*. 1st edn. United States: University of Chicago Press.
— Chapter 11: The Public and Private Realm

Barthes, R. (2013) *How to Live Together: Novelistic Simulations of Some Everyday Spaces.*

Condorelli, C. (2009) *Life Always Escapes.* e-flux issue 10.
http://www.celinecondorelli.eu/texts/life-always-escapes/

Video: 'The Commons as the Survival of "The Public"'
http://www.formerwest.org/ResearchSeminars/OtherSurvivalisms/Video

Creative Commons and FLOSS (New millenium = new commons)

Levine, P. (2011). Collective Action, Civic Engagement, and the Knowledge Commons. In E. Ostrom and C. Hess (Eds.), *Understanding Knowledge as a Commons: From Theory to Practice* (pp. 247–275). Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.

Lessig, L. (2002) *The Future of Ideas: The Fate of the Commons in a Connected World*. New York: Knopf Doubleday Publishing Group
— Chapter 2: Building Blocks: "Commons" and "Layers"

Berry, D. M. (2006) *Copy, Rip, Burn: The Politics of Open Source.* Pluto Press.
— P26-28, and Chapter 3: The Concept of the Commons

Documentary: The Internet's Own Boy: The Story of Aaron Swartz
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vXr-2hwTk58

New Enclosures
"The New Enclosures," *Midnight Notes* 10 (Fall 1990)
http://www.midnightnotes.org/pdfnewenc1.pdf

Klein, N. (2001) Reclaiming the Commons. *New Left Review,* 9**,** 8.
http://newleftreview.org/II/9/naomi-klein-reclaiming-the-commons

Zizek, S. (2009) *First As Tragedy, Then As Farce*. London: Verso Books.
— The New Enclosure of the Commons-Socialism or Communism? P86-104

Hoedemækers, C., Loacker, B. and Pedersen, M. (2012) 'The commons and their im/possibilities', *ephemera*, 12(4), pp. 378–385.
http://www.ephemerajournal.org/contribution/commons-and-their-impossibilities

Commons and Communism
Dean, J. (2012) *The communist horizon*. London: Verso Books.

Magun, A. (2005) 'Res omnium – Res nullus / Common thing – Nobody's thing', *Chto Delat? Newspaper*, 9.
http://chtodelat.org/b8-newspapers/12-66/res-omnium-res-nullus-common-thing-nobodys-thing/

Video: The Common in Communism - Michael Hardt at EGS (2009)
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Q_Ey5ioS4GU
http://seminaire.samizdat.net/IMG/pdf/Microsoft_Word_-_Michael_Hardt.pdf

Occupy (Wall Street)
Chomsky, N. (2012) *Occupy*. London, England: Penguin Books

Harvey, D. (2011) *The Party of Wall Street Meets its Nemesis*.
http://www.versobooks.com/blogs/777-david-harvey-the-party-of-wall-street-meets-its-nemesis

Friday, M., Joselit, D., and Kolbowski, S. (2012). Roundtable: The Social Artwork. *October*, - (142), 74–85.

The Journal of Aesthetics and Protest: Issue # 8 Grassroots Modernism, Winter 2011/12 http://joaap.org/issue8/8toc.htm

Teatro Valle - One Year and a Half of Commoning http://www.teatrovalleoccupato.it/teatro-valle-occupato-one-year-and-half-of-commoning-english-version

Steyerl, H. (2012). Art as Occupation: Claims for an Autonomy of Life. *The Wretched of the Screen* (pp. 102 – 120). Berlin, DE: Sternberg Press.

Art and/on the Commons
Roberts, J. (2015) *Art, Neoliberalism and the Fate of the Commons,* Yale.

Joselit, D. (2013) *After art,* Princeton, Princeton University Press.

Condorelli, C. (2014) *The Company She Keeps*. United Kingdom: Book Works.

Peters, S., Bielak, S. and Center, W. A. (2011) *Open Field: conversations on the commons*. Edited by Sarah / Schultz and Sarah Peters Artist. Minneapolis: Walker Art Centre,U.S.

Dragona, D. (2013) *Artists as Commoners in the Years of Indebtedness* - springer|in 4/13: Art of Indebtedness. http://springerin.at/dyn/heft_text.php?textid=2794&lang=en

Raunig, G. (2013) *Inventing the Art Institution of the Common* http://cc.au.dk/en/news-and-events/event/artikel/professor-gerald-raunig-inventing-the-art-institution-of-the-common/

AND AND AND: Commoning in Kassel at dOCUMENTA (13) http://d13.documenta.de/#/programs/the-kassel-programs/and-and-and/commoning-in-kassel/

Casco - 'Composing the Commons' http://www.e-flux.com/announcements/composing-the-commons-onward/

Marina Vishmidt – *The Manifestation of the Discourse of the Commons in the Field of Art*
http://kunci.or.id/articles/marina-vishmidt-commons-in-the-field-of-art/

Ptak, L. and Lewandowska, M. (2013) *Undoing Property?*. United States: Sternberg Press

Education and the Commons

Haiven, M. (2014) *Crises of Imagination, Crises of Power: Capitalism, Culture and Resistance in a Post-crash World*. London: Zed Books.

Slater, J. B. (ed.) (2005) *Underneath the Knowledge Commons*. United Kingdom: Mute Publishing.
http://www.metamute.org/editorial/magazine/mute-vol-2-no.-1-–-underneath-knowledge-commons

School of Commoning
http://www.commonslearningalliance.org

Levine, P. (2011). Collective Action, Civic Engagement, and the Knowledge Commons. In E. Ostrom and C. Hess (Eds.), *Understanding Knowledge as a Commons: From Theory to Practice* (pp. 247–275). Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.

The subject and 'the common' : political philosophy and precarity

Harney, S. and Moten, F. (2013) *The undercommons: fugitive planning & black study*. United States: Minor Compositions.

Casarino, C., Negri, A. (2008) *In praise of the common : a conversation on philosophy and politics*, Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press.

Raunig, G. (2013) 'Dividuum and Condividuality*', in Magun, A. (ed.) *Politics of the One: Concepts of the One and the Many in Contemporary Thought*. United States: Bloomsbury USA Academic, .

Rancière, J. (1992) 'Politics, Identification, and Subjectivization', *October*, 61(Summer), pp. 58–64.

Federici, S. (2011). Feminism and the Politics of the Commons. *The Commoner*.
http://www.commoner.org.uk/?p=113

Precarity / Economy

Raunig, G. N. (2013) *Factories of Knowledge, Industries of Creativity.* United States: Semiotext (E).

Lorey, I. (2014) *State of Insecurity: Government of the Precarious.* United Kingdom: Verso Books.

Lazzarato, M. J. and Jordan, J. D. (2012) *The Making of the Indebted Man: An Essay on the Neoliberal Condition.* Cambridge, MA: Semiotext(e).

Berardi, F. B. (2009) *Precarious rhapsody: semiocapitalism and the pathologies of the post-alpha generation.* London: Minor Compositions.

Digital / Libidinal Commons

Lemmey, H. (2013) *Digital Dark Spaces.* The New Inquiry.
http://thenewinquiry.com/essays/digital-dark-spaces/

Pasquinelli, M. (2009). *Libidinal Parasites and the Machinic Excess: On the Dystopian Biosphere of Networks.* PostPornPolitics: Queer Feminist Perspectives on the Politics of Porn Performance and Sex Work as Cultural Production. T. Stüttgen. Berlin, b_books.
http://matteopasquinelli.com/docs/Pasquinelli_Libidinal_Parasites.pdf

Preciado, P. B. and Benderson, B. (2013) Testo Junkie: Sex, Drugs and Biopolitics in the Pharmacopornographic Era. New York: Feminist Press at The City University of New York.
— Chapter 12 'The Micropolitics of Gender in the Pharmacopornographic Era: Experimentation, Voluntary Intoxication, Mutation'.

Commons in a Post-Occupy age

Power, N. (2013) *Essay on the Commons for Law course: Is the Enclosure of the Commons Complete?*
http://thehrofpower.blogspot.co.uk/2013/01/essay-on-commons-for-law-course.html

Vishmidt, M. (2014) *All Shall Be Unicorns. About Commons, Aesthetics and Time.* OPEN.
http://www.onlineopen.org/article.php?id=128

Reading lists & courses on the commons:

A COMMON(S) COURSE: Commoning the City & Withdrawing from the Community of Money
http://16beavergroup.org/common/

Beyond Good & Evil Commons
http://16beavergroup.org/silvia_george_david/

How To Work Together
http://howtoworktogether.org

Bollier 'The Commons Rising' Amherst
http://bollier.org/commons-resources/commons-course-syllabus

'Forming the Commons' Goldsmiths - Course developed by Dr. Nadja Millner-Larsen
https://learn.gold.ac.uk/course/info.php?id=3466
Reading List: http://readinglists.gold.ac.uk/lists/360B213A-F0AC-02A3-0D1E-916DDEA853E3.html

Economy of Crisis Capitalism and Ecology of the Commons (Dec 2012) Zagreb
http://commons.mi2.hr/?lang=en

Peter Linebaugh
http://www.onthecommons.org/magazine/commons-101

e-flux journal, issue 17 "In Search of the Postcapitalist Self"
http://www.e-flux.com/issues/17-june-august-2010/

Monoskop
http://monoskop.org/Commons

Local Projects

If the City Were A Commons, Dundee
http://onsiteprojects.wordpress.com/if-the-city-were-a-commons/

The Dundee Commons Festival
https://dundeecommonsfestival.wordpress.com

The Farmhouse Project, Govan
http://www.inthecommongood.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/11/Farmhouse1-PAR.pdf

'Public cultures and the Commons' reading group, Lumsden and Dublin
SSW and GradCAM (Graduate School of Creative Arts and Media, Ireland) seminar series
on Rural / Urban Culture, Connectivity and Contestation.
http://www.absolutearts.com/artsnews/2011/02/07/artspublish/2348910266.html

PhD Theses on the commons

Rowan, Jaron (2012) *The creative industries and the cultural commons: transformations in labour, value and production.* PhD Thesis, Goldsmiths. University of London.
http://research.gold.ac.uk/8022/1/CS_thesis_Rowan.pdf

Ball, Sophie Anita (2015) *Reclaiming the commons: a discourse for new politics. How grassroots activists are shaping the future.* PhD thesis, Middlesex University.
http://eprints.mdx.ac.uk/15146/1/SBallThesis.pdf

PhD projects on the commons (ongoing)

Dimitriou, Orsalia - PhD candidate in Visual Cultures, Goldsmiths. University of London.
Blog: https://studiosynthetica.wordpress.com
Documentary: Avaton https://vimeo.com/16935954

Conclusions: Continuing practices on the commons in art

Estovers is a thesis with a textual and audio portfolio of practice. The research was informed by a series of self-initiated programmed events and invited discussions with other artists. This approach came from a willingness to open the research process up to the possibility that since I was working within an evolving discourse, it would be beneficial to work in the field in addition to conducting research of relevant literature. The rationale which determined the form of the portfolio was my wish for it to be a simple record of the research which was undertaken. It is my hope that the examiners, and other readers of my work, will be able to draw some conclusions from this work without having to necessarily also read the thesis. Each part of the project should be able to stand alone, but form a contribution to knowledge when read together.

As I complete my project write-up, the concept of the commons has continued to be used as a theme for programming within contemporary art. At the end of August 2015 there was a *Commons Festival* held in Dundee over the course of a week, with topics ranging from bread baking to digital networks and art practices. Coming up in Berlin is *UN|COMMONS* at the Volksbuhne theatre in October 2015. Considering that this theme of the commons is so prevalent across Europe and has only recently entered the confines of the academy through Goldsmiths module *Forming the Commons* (2014), my contribution to knowledge is based on the collected knowledge in this thesis where it exists as documentation and the clarification of a set of understood means by which to continue projects which relate to the commons.

I have related this developing discourse on the commons to the assertion by John Roberts that the practices which deal with and further consider the commons are a kind of collective learning project. This position can be juxtaposed with the projects of Harney & Moten's *Undercommons*, and the financial rift in academia between the managerial class and the student and adjunct lecturers.

These situations too can be related to the removal of funding from public cultural spaces in the case of the Italian cinemas and theatres, or in the precarious situations of art spaces such as Casco and BAK in Utrecht. When we consider that the educational and presentation

spaces for art are equally imperiled by the economic climate of fiscal austerity, then the need for Roberts' collective learning arises as a means to understand peoples individual circumstances. This points to the need for more understanding of the commons as a generalised theme within culture, which reaches outside of the confines of financially oriented political theory which is represented in the Goldsmiths course to make suggestions towards a broader syllabus which can be self-taught or distributed among students and workers to be able to further develop arguments for the commons.

The notes towards a suggested syllabus then act as a starting point to distribute some of the various forms of commons theory, taking in a variety of perspectives from art, ecology, political philosophy, amongst others with the aim of considering the commons as a kind of cultural marker for particular modes of understanding and working within precarious and otherwise accelerated personal and cultural circumstances, which relate to the crossover points which I stated in Chapter 5: the privatisation of public space, to notions of dwelling and inhabitation, to ideas around structures and construction and the flattening of notions of physical vs digital space.

After Estovers

Considering the legacy of this project for my own practice, I can reflect on the fact that I have been working as a producer, writer and collaborator alongside my PhD research for the past 3 years. Some of this work overlaps with projects which have been part of the PhD and some do not. I have tried to make clear the crossovers as they happened and what relevance they might have to a contribution to knowledge. On completion of the PhD, I am faced with decisions to make about how best to continue to develop my discursive practice.

Myself and other students have found that we must be able to research whether we end up within the institution again as researchers or lecturers or our outside of an institution, working as freelance curators, writers and artists. Along with Birkbeck research student Tiffany Boyle, I have been planning a means for us to continue our research projects and to strengthen the position of researchers who are to some extent working alone. Together with

the new curator of public engagement at the CCA, the research group *Invisible Knowledge* (2015) was formed as an experiment in peer production methodology for artistic research.

Invisible Knowledge

PhDs in art practice are proliferating, with little sign that the job market will catch up to an increase in doctoral graduates. Together we ask; what can researchers do in this context when they are working tangentially to, or outside of, an institution? What might a space for peer production related to research into and alongside art look like? How can we create links between a widely dispersed group of researchers through the process of programming and discursive practice?

Using research to inform a public programme of events, the group will seek to consider the nature of independent research as it relates to attendant structures and contexts. In part, we wish to work towards a critical understanding of policy-making around PhDs and independent research in the arts.

Invisible Knowledge will run as a two-year programme consisting of a number of meetings and events. A selection of these meetings will be produced as public-facing projects, others will be produced only for involvement of the group. The aims and intentions of *IK* include the provision of a space in which researchers can produce programming which relates across / between / without institutional interests, and to critically assess where, when and how research takes place, within and beyond institutions today. The group will take a particular focus on how organisations such as the CCA, Glasgow and GSA can operate in a productive partnership to develop research within artistic programming, and to understand in what forms a mutual exchange with researchers might take.

We take our cues from projects such as *The Public Programme* at Nottingham Contemporary realised in collaboration with Nottingham Trent University and the University of Nottingham, and research groups at Matadero, Madrid working in partnership with the Centre for Postcolonial Studies at Goldsmiths. Each includes a broad programme of lectures, debates, symposia and screening programmes, seminars, reading groups and workshops which are presented by the researchers.

Invisible Knowledge seeks to expand existing models of research and programming partnership, in reference to the above mentioned programmes in Nottingham and Madrid by connecting with the general public as an audience for research produced by, and in collaboration with, artist-researchers. This allows for experimentation on behalf of researchers, who will have the opportunity to present their research to the public in a different format and for non-academic and non-specific arts audiences to engage with research in an institution such as the CCA, Glasgow.

In this sense we wish to act as a platform for profiling and giving visibility to researchers and their attendant research practices across the arts in Glasgow and Scotland on an individual and collective basis, and to act as a bridging project between the work happening in the GSA, CCA, Glasgow and other external art and non-art institutions. It is anticipated that members will form pairings and clusters, according with common ground (or antagonisms) between their research and practices, and to produce public events/projects.

IK members are based in the city of Glasgow or have links to the city, where we meet as a group approximately once a month. Collaborations between members of the *IK* group will be encouraged, and there is a modest budget, support and space from the CCA, Glasgow and Glasgow School of Art. It is anticipated and encouraged that events and other projects should come out of this research project.

Considering the commons as a working method

Invisible Knowledge continues some of the themes of my PhD research and the activities I have undertaken while a PhD student. It also considers practice from commons mindset, approaching research through a working process which sits beside the institution rather than coming from within it.

Through conducting research through *Estovers* this thesis project examines not only the concept of the commons as a topic, but a working method for approaching research with an openness to collaboration. This thesis consists of three years of research towards the concept of the commons in contemporary art, covering a broad field of literature and discussions of political philosophy as it relates to notions of the common. The practice-based research consisted of a set of public facing discussions which act as research which is presented both as a printed and digital portfolio.

Conclusions: Continuing practices on the commons in art

This open method is both part of an ongoing discursive practice, and an implication of studying the commons. When considering the concept of the commons within spaces of contemporary art we consider these new forms of engagement and a broadening of access. Reflecting upon my own research and the programmes of institutions such as the CCA, Casco and BAK, I believe that this is the way forward for a partnership of art and research in spaces of display and of learning. The thesis project acts as a representation or survey of the current use of the word commons within contemporary art, but also offers it as a framework for further production; presented together as a contribution to knowledge which I hope can act as a useful guide for other researchers interested in the concept of the commons within contemporary art and its related methods.

Communitas: The Unrepresentable Community. (2011) Available at: http://camera-austria.at/ausstellungen/communitas-die-unrepraesentierbare-gemeinschaft-3/?lang=en.

Among Others (2011) Available at: http://camera-austria.at/ausstellungen/communitas-unter-anderen-2/?lang=en.

Occupy Museums. (2011) Available at: http://occupymuseums.org.

Art and the Commons. (2011) Available at: http://artandthecommons.org.

Agora: 4th Athens Biennale. (2013) Available at: http://athensbiennale.org/en/agora_en/.

Commonist Aesthetics. (2015) Available at: http://onlineopen.org.

New Glasgow Society. (2015). Available at: http://www.newglasgowsociety.org.

Agamben G and Hardt M. (1993) *The Coming Community,* Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

Agamben G and Kotsko A. (2013) *The highest poverty : monastic rules and form-of-life,* Stanford, California: Stanford University Press.

Althusser L. (1971) Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses (Notes towards an Investigation). *Lenin and Philosophy and Other Essays.* New York: Monthly Review Press.

AND…AND…AND (2012) *Commoning in Kassel.* Available at: http://d13.documenta.de/#/programs/the-kassel-programs/and-and-and/commoning-in-kassel/.

Balkin A. (2003) *This Is The Public Domain*. Available at: http://www.thisisthepublicdomain.org.

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