Estovers

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Estovers

Graduate Research Seminar on the Commons

Part 1:
Urban and Rural
Historical and Contemporary
Commons and the Common

Nuno Sacramento, PhD
Director of Scottish Sculpture Workshop

Simon Yuill, PhD
Artist

Programmed & Chaired by Emma Balkind
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Saturday August 31st 2-5pm
New Glasgow Society

Register by email - estovers.project@gmail.com
Free event, refreshments provided

Considering SSW as a commons resource

Nuno Sacramento

Well thanks a lot for the invitation, I'm always delighted to come back to Glasgow where I used to live a few years ago. I'm now living in Huntly in the North East of Scotland, and I'm part of the staff of the Sculpture workshop up in Lumsden. Are you familiar with this organisation? Have you been up there, any of you?

I'm going to start by showing some slides for those of you not so familiar with it. Then I'm going to talk a little bit about how this concept of the commons and the practice of commoning impacts both the artistic programming of SSW and it's management practices.

I always like to start talks on the commons with this slide. So, commons in Aberdeenshire, again I'm not going to be talking about urban commons so much but I'm not either going to be talking about commons in the traditional sense. So this is the location of Scottish Sculpture Workshop, it's about an hour to the West of Aberdeen city. It's about 4 hours to get from Glasgow and Edinburgh to SSW.

The little dot, the little A there is the Lumsden green. SSW is located to the North of that, the Primary School is located to the South of that. Just out of that picture there. I'm very interested

in how people can connect with the school as well in terms of the development of this idea of commoning. So, it's a Primary School with a few dozen students and we're very interested in being at extremes of the village, actually taking over the village from all sides.

This is another picture and it's actually taken from the commonty. If you can see out there there's a straight line going to the right there and there's a hill up here. So the photo is taken more or less from here. This bit here used to be the Lumsden commonty. Pretty amazing landscape all around SSW, but of course the place is not that idyllic. I'm always interested trying to move away from this idea of the rural idyll and the residency as retreat.

So, a couple of times a day we've got someone flying over us, which is a reminder of war. It's a terribly loud noise. We're surrounded by estates, so in terms of geography it's very interesting to talk about the commons in a place where you're surrounded by estates. Conversations about housing, around access to land, you're surrounded by agribusiness as well so conversations around food and farming practices. And, we're near the oil capital of Europe so what better place to be talking around energy, energy extraction and so on?

In a way I'm often asked, what am I doing up there if I'm interested in producing critical contemporary art, and I really can't think of a place which is better suited for a number of my interests at the moment than Aberdeenshire and SSW having been there for 35 years. It's a very interesting environment where artists come to do residencies, and then engage in conversations with local people. So, that framework is a very interesting way to think about commons.

Anyway, historically we've had a number of exhibitions and projects. We run residencies. We've got facilities, we've got the foundry, a wood and metal workshop and we've also recently set up a ceramics studio now that ceramics seem to be disappearing from the official curricula of art.

Emma: When was SSW founded?

1979, same year as Thatcher came to government!

How can SSW then contribute to this idea but also to practice commons, particularly in Aberdeenshire? So the question is actually a broader question of how can arts organisations, publicly supported, located also elsewhere, contribute to this idea of commons? The idea is that all these commons practices that are advanced by arts organisations and other kinds of civic associations are then kind of networked to become a bigger commons.

Now, at the moment I'm working with an archaeologist from Huntly, a local historian as well, and he's in parallel to SSW in close conversation developing the same project of commoning for heritage. So basically, he's enskilling communities from kids all the way up to older people to be engaged in the process of field archaeology. But also of processing the data and writing about the data, so they've published a book. Half of the essays that are written in that book are written by people that never thought of writing an essay before, but they are published alongside academic essays so we're very interested in that.

So, we need to network these practices with practices of commons that happen in Glasgow, with practices that happen in Lumsden. Practices that happen in the rural, practices that happen in the city. Contemporary arts practices, heritage and these

sorts of practices. There's no methodology to go about to develop commons and commoning. So you don't say this is what commons are and this is how they're going to be enacted. So, it's a process of exploration and discovery that emerges through doing it.

But for this particular talk, I'm using two kind of building-thinking blocks. One is this idea of dwelling and the other is this idea of commons. So, how can culture, how can art contribute to this commons of dwelling? I'll clarify these two ideas in a minute. I'd just like to read a quote by George Yudice. The book is called The Expediency of Culture and in it he looks at the idea of culture-as-resource, similar to nature-as-resource. We can find a parallel here already. Nature as a resource for a long time held in common, was then privatised. Now culture as a common. Culture as a resource which was held in common, is now privatised more often than not.

So what he says is, I quote (p.9):

> I argue in this book that the role of culture has expanded in an unprecedented way into the political and economic at the same time that conventional notions of culture largely have been emptied out. I do not focus on the content of culture — that is, the model of uplift (following Schiller or Arnold) or distinction (following Bordieu) that it offered in its traditional acceptations, or more recently its anthropologization as a whole way of life (Williams), according to which it is recognized that everyone's culture has value. Instead, I approach the question of culture in our period, characterized as one of accelerated globalization, as a resource.

It's a very interesting book because it uses a lot of thinking not

only in terms of European and American practices, so Western practices, but a lot of these case studies are from Rio de Janeiro and places like that so if you've got an interest in Brazil this is a very interesting text.

So, one of the questions that emerges is yeah we're gonna be developing commons, if we're going to be commoning how do we prevent this commons from being co-opted? And again, from being monetized, commodified, it just turns into something that only a few can make a lot of money out of. So that question is sort of left hanging.

Now, in terms of SSW we're very interested in the relationship between art and other fields and that really raises the question of autonomy. What is the new autonomy of art? And, I think Michelangelo Pistoletto's contribution in the publication Visible: where art leaves its own field and becomes visible as part of something else [Angelika Burtscher, Judith Wielander (Eds.)] is a very interesting one. I'll quote again (p.12):

> I believe that there is always a profound and poetic intimacy in art—an invisible space that can be drawn upon, but if it does not have an autonomous area of its own outside of an economically and politically subjugated art system, its poetic creativity ends up by betraying its basic freedom, or altering its integrity. If it then attempts to isolate itself, it ends up hiding deep in its burrow, without really taking part in the world.

So, we're very interested in seeing how critical contemporary practices can within a place like SSW can converse with other practices that are also already happening within the environment.

So it's all against this idea that art has to stay in it's own corner, it must become visible in other spheres. The question for SSW is how does it then become visible in other spheres in the North East of Scotland. So our programme is called 'Making Stuff' and it's the program for the next two years, and it comprises a number of projects. These are just some of the kind of vectors that we use for our thinking around that idea of presence and visibility, eruption into the world. It's divided by these five areas, again these five areas are constantly being reshaped:

- Land - is understanding the world around SSW, it's geological structure and uses ranging from farming and forestry to fishing to energy extraction. How is the land used perceived, organised and managed? This is a very very important thing for us. We believe that we can have a role in helping thinking theoretically as well as in practice but also owning and commoning of this knowledge in opening up this knowledge to the people that we live around who also contribute to this knowledge.

- Material and immaterial world - this project investigates how raw and man made materials are implicated in many activities in the world of art making and consequentially within the world of visual art.

- Crafts and also labour comes into this. Looking at the commonality in discourse between all making practices at SSW engages local craft and art practitioners who share making inherent art's heritage in contemporary culture.

- Communities and cultures. Anthropologists just jump at these two words, we find them useful as a starting point. Investigates human communities and what cultures they produce,

and how visual art can perform agency within the everyday.

- Again, we've got open space. Open space is the space for all of the things that are yet to come. So, we are often approached by people to do projects with their ideas and we like to support it. So, we maintain part of the programme which is very open for that.

We work with academics, with artists, primary schools, with farmers, with craftspeople etc, in an embedded and a situated way and we like to call this dwelling. Again, it's a slightly problematic word, it's a concept by Tim Ingold who I'm going to quote. But again Tim Ingold possibly seems to be changing his mind on words like dwelling and landscape and environment, so it's very interesting to be following something that also changes in terms of it's perception. I'm going to spend Monday afternoon with him in Aberdeen this week speaking about some of these things. This is very outdoors but let me quote what Tim means by this dwelling perspective. I quote [Essay, The Temporality of Landscape]:

> …what I call a 'dwelling perspective' according to which the landscape is constituted as an enduring record of — and testimony to — the lives and works of past generations who have dwelt within it, and in so doing, have left there something of themselves. For anthropologists, to adopt a perspective of this kind means bringing to bear the knowledge born of immediate experience, by privileging understandings that people derive from their lived, everyday involvement in the world.

This throws in a really interesting question, and one of the sub-chapters of an essay that I've just sent to the editor this week

had a subheading which was "from gazers to dwellers" and one of the things that I was kind of advancing in that subheading was that most people are taught by efficient schooling to be gazers rather than dwellers and I was one of them. I was taught someone else's history, my history and my family's history never really came into question. So I always kind of learnt about things that were extrinsic to me and therefore I was kind of a passive spectator. Through quite a lot of reading and writing, of people like Colin Ward, the man that eventually became an anarchist here in Glasgow, I started kind of understanding some of those structures, but also people like Paulo Freire and Ivan Illich, so this started becoming kind of a bigger project. The project of turning from a gazer to a dweller. From a a gazer I mean someone that is involved in gaze, in just kind of looking at things from an extrinsic position.

I quote Tim Ingold again:

> Whilst both the landscape and the taskscape presuppose the presence of an agent who watches and listens, the taskscape must be populated with beings who are themselves agents, and who reciprocally 'act back' in the process of their own dwelling.

So this kind of a movement from gazing to dwelling, and he here introduces another term that he changes his mind about. I was reading an interview about Tim Ingold by some anthropologists in Sao Paolo in Portuguese and he was saying in this interview that I just stumbled across, if he changes his mind about this idea of taskscape. So, if I didn't speak Portuguese, I might still maybe… it's very interesting that he changes his mind. So, I contend that this idea of dwelling, as he says is done through this notion of taskscape.

Fabulous essay from, I think from the early 90s - 1993 - called The Temporality of Landscape. He reads the painting by Pieter Bruegel the Elder, called The Harvesters from 1565 to develop this idea of taskscape: “This means that in dwelling in the world, we do not act upon it, or do things to it; rather we move along with it. Our actions do not transform the world, they are part and parcel of the world’s transforming itself. And that is just another way of saying that they belong to time.” We could spend hours in the kind of baroque thinking around this idea of taskscape and we might be able to do that at a certain point.

The thing that he kind of advances is that landscape and taskscape are not two different things, they are the same thing, and the landscape is made through the taskscape and vice-versa. So, they are both kind of foreground and background, they are not seperated. He also has a problem with this idea of dwelling because it sounds a bit cosy, and he wants to… he’s often criticised for not being political enough. I think that somehow the project with SSW can politicise a lot of thinking around this idea of dwelling and we sort of hope to do so. He’s very engaged with the question of the human and the non-human, he talks about organisms.

The question that I keep asking myself is, what would happen if all those schoolkids, all those people that are on low incomes, people that have been somehow sidestepped, what if they become active and responsible dwellers? And, I think that’s a really powerful proposition. It’s one that SSW is interested in advancing.

Anyway, moving on to the idea of commons and Emma has done a great job of surveying the concepts and I’m sure Simon with his encyclopaedic knowledge will do an amazing job. But,

once I started a couple of years ago, looking into this question of the commons I found it very big and very hard to navigate. So, where do you start? You know, commons is natural resources, commons is knowledge, commons is data, is language, is art. Commons is a form of governance and management. Commons which are generative or depletable. So, where to start, you know? And, then I got this great essay by Tine De Moore, who is doing a lot of work around the commons, working with Casco in Utrecht who is also doing a whole programme from now on, on commons, and I'm going to quote her [Essay, What Do We Have in Common? A Comparative Framework for Old and New Literature on the Commons*]

> In a world where markets and the state have started to reach the limit of their capacities to govern resources in a sustainable way, society is turning increasingly to "joint resource management"; more and more, collective initiatives of 'stakeholders', trying to reach their economic and social goals via collective action, are popping up in the developed world. Examples of such initiatives are energy consumers' collectives, car-sharing, and the development of open-source software. Although they may seem rather marginal as yet, these forms of institutionalized collective action are nevertheless gaining momentum. Many of the initiatives use the concept of 'the commons' to emphasize that they are indeed sharing a resource… Knowing what commons are, and what they used to mean for our society, could be a major source of inspiration for this task.

Again the historical task, something we are working on with Colin Shepherd. One of the really pertinent moments for the commons in my practice, in SSW practice, was the walk in the woods of Clashindarroch about 15 minutes away from SSW,

and me and Colin were walking this Forestry Commission land and he was showing me the vestiges, the remains of the houses, the long houses, pre-improvement period, and through rentals and through a number of local resources he was able to tell me what was going on then. So, they've created again very interesting historical evidence and an advanced hypothesis around the burning down of these houses and so on.

Of course, the Lords are still there and the artists that we work with, Lorenzo Casali and Micol Roubini, a couple of Italian video-makers... artists who work with video, in a recent interview to one of the Lords were confronted with a very different narration. So it's very interesting that still today, the descendents of the lords that were responsible for some of the clearances and the enclosures are still there and are still voicing a certain perspective. I'm very interested in how does that kind of play out in the surroundings of SSW? So, we were actually inside one of those long houses and you could imagine what people would be doing there 250 years ago. There are lots of records. You might know, Huntly is a very prosperous and very relevant part of Scotland during the 1700s, 1800s. So, there's a lot of stuff written that we can research.

Anyway, De Moore advances an amazing diagram to make sense out of this whole conversation around the commons. So basically she calls it "overview of different opinions on commons, structured horizontally by the different dimensions. Which she calls CPR, CPI, and CPRR, and vertically by the associated negative or positive connotations in the literature. So she will look at Garret Hardin, she will look at Elinor Ostrom… But for us in terms of SSW it's very interesting to start thinking around how this diagram kind of sheds some light on a functioning SSW in 21st Century in Lumsden. How can SSW be a common pool

resource? Used by people who are commoning. How can it be a common-pool institution? It's management reflecting not neo-liberal forms of management, but commons forms of management. And finally, commons property regime, how can SSW consider all of those three ideas?

I'm going to start unwinding again by quoting Peter Levine who wrote an essay called Collective Action, Civic Engagement, and the Knowledge Commons as part of a Charlotte Hess and Elinor Ostrom book, Understanding Knowledge As A Commons (p.251). I'm actually having a conversation back and forth with Charlotte Hess about this.

> There is an important category of commons that are owned by private nonprofit associations. The owner (a formal organization) has the right and power to limit access, but it sees itself as the steward of a public good. As such, it sets policies that are intended to maintain a commons. For example, an association may admit anyone as a member, on the sole condition that he or she protects the common resource in some specified way. (Libraries tend to function like this.)

And just to finalise with a question. How can we use SSW - our buildings, our tools, our staff, our artists, our skills, our labour, our time, our materials, our money for the commoning of dwelling, for the commoning of this idea of taskscape?

I'm going to stop here… I did have another point to make around this idea of deprofessionalisation because think that this idea of deprofessionalisation and of finding a new relationship between the expert and the non-expert will do a great deal to advance this idea, but I'll leave that for another time. Thanks a lot for listening, this is just to finish, a slide that I took yesterday as I

was preparing the presentation I looked out of the window and these kids were there. The new headmistress of Lumsden primary school, she takes them out of the classroom every Friday and they're imagining parts of Lumsden. They're writing about what they like, what they don't like, and they're taught from a very young age to start thinking about what it means to be a dweller in Lumsden, so we'd better work that out very closely with them. Thanks very much for listening.

The Uncommonality of the Commons

Simon Yuill

So as Emma said I want to talk a bit about the complexities and contradictions of the commons and I'm also going to focus a bit more on specific historical commons in Scotland. To some extent the various definitions of the commons that we've heard today already to me suggest a problem in the concept. It's become so broad as to include everything and I would argue it's becoming almost like a constitutional equivalent of organic food or fair-trade coffee. It seems to be a good thing but yet it's so ... has little substance to it and to an extent a lot of the discourse around the commons is in danger of undermining what might be the actual possibilities for alternative or transformative politics that might come from that. And there's a real danger of this just becoming an empty talking point rather than any actual movement as such.

Part of my interest comes, and part of my more critical take on it, comes from the fact that I am a programmer as well as an artist. I've been involved in what's called Free/Libre Open Source Software ... which is a kind of movement ... not really a movement at all ... a form of programming practice that emerged in the 80s, as a ... initially as a critical stand towards the commercialization of programming but which has become a widespread norm within software production and spreading towards other forms such as social media. There have been interesting developments in how

that's evolved and the contradictions within the politics of that arena. And it's been one of the main things that has stimulated my interest in this discourse of the commons.

The other thing is a long-standing interest in self-organisation and self-organised structures, particularly self-organised forms of production and that partly comes from as a teenager I was involved with anarchist groups in Edinburgh and was exposed to that form of politics from quite a young age and that informs some of my interests and to some extent is the starting point for projects I did recently looking into different forms of commons and different forms of self-organisation. These were three projects which exist as a kind of trilogy and some of them ... or material from them was shown at an exhibition at the CCA back in 2010 called Fields, Factories and Workshops which title comes from a work by Peter Kropotkin a 19th century anarchist philosopher. I tend to work quite slowly over a long period of time and show my work as it evolves, so that show back in 2010 was some of that material. One of the main parts of that project were interviews with different people which had been transcribed and published online and in the exhibition some of the transcriptions were shown in printed form.

The three projects were Stackwalker which started off looking into the idea of self-organised rural production in Scotland. I ended up focusing from that broader topic particularly on crofting communities and migrant worker groups within the fishing industry in Scotland partly because these were two areas where, on the one hand, with crofting you had this long history of self-organisation and commoning, and then within migrant, contemporary migrant worker groups in fishing there was an interesting parallel in that historically the fishing industry in Scotland has always relied on large amounts of migrant labour

and originally this was largely migrants from Ireland and Gaelic-speaking communities in the Western Isles. This internal migration was the basis of the fishing industry in Scotland and now that kind of migration is ... or at the time I was doing the work which began in 2008, this was mostly A8 migrant workers who were from Poland, Lithuania and Latvia. And what I found were people who had set up groups to represent themselves because it's an area where unionisation is quite difficult. The interesting parallels are that historically with ... how ... not the crofting community as such, but how Gaelic-speaking Scots as an internal migrant labour force within Scotland in the 19th century had constituted themselves in, for example, cities like Glasgow where you've got smaller organisations who represented initially people in terms of their birthplace and home affinities, so you get associations based around people from Lewis, which evolved into more class-based organisations and ones that formed the basis of early 20th century and late 19th century workers movements led by figures like John Maclean, Ed McHugh. So that project I interviewed ... from the crofting areas I particularly looked at areas that had been sites of struggle. The interesting thing about crofting is not so much that it represents a timeless form of farming but rather that it was a site of struggle for land and political action around land in the late 19th century and I went to areas where there'd been various forms of struggle such as land raids and riots and stuff and spoke with people ... in certain cases direct descendents of people who were involved in this. And these actions went right up to the 1950s. The contemporary follow-on from that has been the idea of the community buyout in areas like Eigg and Assynt where they've bought out the land from private landowners. So that was that project. It touched on other issues such as land, law and language and where linguistic and ethnic differences were often used to normalise class differences and these are some of the legacies of the

way crofting is a form that's been used to naturalise what are really artificial forms of class construction in Scotland ... rather than an indigenous farming system.

The second project is called New Common. It's pulling together interviews from different smaller projects which had been both in England and in Scotland that cover areas like commons and the Common Good in Scotland as well. It includes Andrew Wightman's interview. It also includes interviews from communities around the outskirts of Bournemouth which were all built around ... which were council estates built around common land. There is a connection between the commons as a kind of historical infrastructure with the idea of Estovers that Emma has touched upon, and then the Welfare State as a form of public provision which has to a certain extent replaced and absorbed aspects of the historical use of the commons. These included a place, one called West Howe, which is built next to a common called Turbary Common and Turbary is one of the rights of commoning similar to Estovers. A Turbary ... the rights of Turbage are the rights to gather wood and heathland materials to use for fire and Turbary Common cites the idea of these rights into its name. There's also an interesting literary relationship there ... this particular part of the country is where Thomas Hardy is from and Thomas Hardy's fictitious Egdon Heath maps across the same area so these are communities living in the same area as Thomas Hardy talks about in works such as Return of the Native. So the themes of class transformation that exist in Thomas Hardy's work are mapped to the contemporary experiences in these areas.

The project also included work in Hulme in Manchester where you have a contemporary example of the revival of the common idea. Hulme is most famous ... it was built as an area of

1960s tower block housing that became derelict in the 1980s and became a large scale squat and it was famous for Manchester bands like Joy Division and Happy Mondays. In Hulme the tower blocks were destroyed in the 1990s but many people that were part of the squatting movement in Hulme stayed on in the area and have run different projects. The house I was staying in is a place called Redbricks which was a set of council houses in Hulme that are run like a kind of unofficial housing cooperative, so the residents themselves set up a cooperative system within the council housing system as a form of self-representation. There was also efforts there to turn some of the land that had been designated for property development into a commons in order to block the property development on that area of land so that was an interesting contemporary variant on the commoning idea.

Woman in audience: Can I interject at this point and ask what's happening with the field in Maryhill?

Sorry?

Woman: The field in Maryhill in that similar situation.

Do you mean the Children's Wood field?

Woman: Yes

That's ... you shouldn't ask me (audience laughter), this person's more involved than I am. As far as I know that piece of land doesn't form any kind of Common Good designation because it was ... I'll talk more on the detail later. At the moment that is, as far as I understand it, in bureaucratic limbo basically.

Woman: Cos I think the government ... the Scottish Government said to the developers “you shouldn’t really be pursuing this” basically but I haven’t heard much since.
No ... my basic understanding is it’s in bureaucratic limbo which will last until either the campaign loses strength and the council can push ahead with the building or the council give up and the land stays as it is.

There have been examples ... There have been examples of where Common Good Law has been used as a way of preventing commercial planning in Scotland. Perhaps best known is the Botanics where there were plans to build a nightclub a few years ago and by identifying that land as Common Good land the local campaigners were able to prevent that. Similarly the project to build a commercial adventure play park in Pollok was also stopped through invoking Common Good Law.

The third project that covered these issues was called Given To The People which is about a thing called Pollok Free State and Pollok Free State was originally established as a local protest camp on a section of Pollok Park to prevent the M77 motorway being cut through that area. This was in the mid 90s ... early to mid 90s. It was distinctive in that whilst many of the road protests of the 90s often connected with more liberal, middle class environmentalist politics, the Pollok Free State connected itself with working class politics and the issues of the Pollok housing estate itself and there’s a strong correlation between the idea of self-determination and class politics over the use of ground in that area. And ... it called itself the Free State, issued its own passports, it had its own constitution, set up its own university, established itself as a kind of autonomous republic.

One of the things I'm continuing to look at following from that project is some other forms of radical republicanism in Scotland which is quite an interesting ... groups like the Army of Provisional Government who attempted to create an equivalent of the IRA in Scotland in the 1970s. They were most famous for bombing the Clyde Tunnel in 1975 and they were kind of a, if you like ... they were portrayed as a kind of failed terrorist organisation and slightly as a sort of comical organisation but they're interesting in that ... what I'm interested in is this idea in republicanism of the the equivalence of the citizen, the body of the citizen and the body of the state, and how this relates to the politics of the body as a kind of public politics.

The last thing I started to look into are Sioll Nan Gaidheal, the Seed of the Gael, who are Gaelic nationalists, a republican organisation with ... quite an interesting complex history. Began in the mid 70s as well and veered towards a form of neo-fascist politics. They were involved in a lot of the so-called 'anti white settler' demonstrations and actions in the 70s and have moved towards situating themselves as a green socialist group nowadays. And this slide towards fascism within republicanism is, the danger of this is something I'm interested in exploring and I think it's also part of the spectrum of values of the commons as well. By fascism I'm not saying an idea of totalitarianism but rather a slide towards a politics that's based on mythology, spiritualism and a politics based on things that you cannot question. And this generalisation of the commons has a danger to it that it becomes this principle that you cannot question. So it has a kind of ... what I would call a quasi-fascist dimension to it which is something we have to be aware of and wary of. Also there are different politics of the commons so we have ... again this is an area where if we have a tendency to homogenise things under this one label it leads to a blurring of distinctions which is prob-

lematic. It tends to create an homogenisation of quite distinct and arguably antagonistic political viewpoints. In that way I'm reminded of Stewart Home's critique of integralist anarchism where he argued that the different strands of anarchism seeking to integrate one another could never work because, as he put it, if you tolerate each other you'll tolerate anything (audience laughter). It has an inbuilt failure within it ...

Some of the distinctive strands of identifying the politics that claims the commons or makes a claim upon the commons. I think there are four in particular who have interesting historical significance. One is the idea of primitive communism and this very much relates to the early ... so, for example, Peter Linebaugh's work. He's looking into the Charter of the Forest located in historical forms of the commons that Emma was talking about earlier. And this relates to the idea of primitive communism ... Commons and communism are from the same etymological roots. They basically both refer back to a form of settlements and a management of the land based around the communes, the community. And this idea of commons as a primitive form of communism is found in the work of Marx. One of his first writings as a journalist was to write about woodsmen in the Rhineland who had been fined for gathering wood as their common rights to harvest wood from the forest had been withdrawn. Similarly Engels discusses primitive communism in his book The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State where he cites the forms of communal organisation that existed within German rural communities up until the 19th century. In many respects crofting is seen as related to this idea of primitive communism.

And another strand, quite closely related, is that of anarchism and by anarchism I mean classical 19th century anarchism as

defined principally by Peter Kropotkin. Kropotkin identified ... who was also an anthropologist and who'd studied various forms of agricultural structure within areas around Russia and across Europe ... identified this as a kind of model ... as not only a prior form of property and labour organisation but also potentially the model for future organisation. In a sense the distinction between a communist take on the commons and the anarchist take is that 20th century communism in the form of state communism looks towards the construction of the state as the centralisation of all common property, the state becomes the guardian of the commons, whereas anarchism from the Kropotkin tradition looks at decentralised forms of commune as an actual political structure in its own right and seeks to build a new politics around that.

Two other political strands very different from this are those of liberalism and use of the commons within liberal politics and this dates to the 17th and 18th century of thinkers like William Petty and Daniel Dafoe who talk about the need to create publicly funded infrastructures through which private enterprise could be supported and the modern equivalent of that is probably Lawrence Lessig who coined the phrase 'Creative Commons' and Lessig's take on the internet is very much similar to William Petty and Defoe's concepts of the common. The example of liberal commons is something like the rail network when an infrastructure is built that would be too expensive and too risky for individual private enterprise and which would be prone to the market. So by making this a public commons structure the risks of private enterprise are shifted onto the shoulders of society, so it's a way of socializing risk. This is a key form of the commons that has emerged within liberalism. A distinctive aspect of it is that whilst it is often defined as a public good and placed under the jurisdiction of public bodies such as the state, those who

gain access to it and benefit from it are often quite unevenly distributed. So you'll see the creation of a public good but in terms of the benefits that come back from it they are unevenly distributed, so the rail companies benefit at the expense of passengers rather than a people's rail service that is based on an idea of the distribution of the means of travel. And to one extent that's demonstrated in the preference for the use of the word 'public' rather than 'common', which has a more institutional history behind it in terms of it's etymology in Roman law.

A more recent development related to the liberal concept of the commons is a neo-Hayekian concept of commons which is related also to the neoliberal form. Hayek was an economic theorist of the 20th century who rejected what he saw as any form of socialist or collective economics, who believed in highly individualised economics. He even rejected the word 'economy' because the word economy in its origins means 'how to manage a household', as being too collective. He believed in a highly individualised economic structure. Hayek was one of the key influences on the emergence of neoliberal thinking. What have been called neo-Hayekian elements of thinking that are represented by figures such as Elinor Ostrom whose Governing the Commons draws upon Hayek's theories for explaining how commons-based systems worked. In particular she evokes Hayek's idea of an ad-hoc economy, the idea of individuals finding common needs and addressing them through a localized market system. Ostrom's concept of the commons interestingly, like Kropotkin, draws upon actual existing examples and even some of the same examples as Kropotkin, particularly the Swiss mountain farming systems are both invoked in Kropotkin's work The Conquest of Bread and Ostrom's work Governing the Commons. The conclusions they draw are quite different.

One of the aspects that I think is quite distinctively different is that this idea of the commons within a kind of neoliberal and Hayekian tradition relates to a form of what's called domestic economy. The domestic economy is the ... we come back to the idea of the economy of the household, it's a small-scale sphere of circulation that may be separate form the mainstream markets but which enables, for example, the way in which a family might provide food for itself through a process such as crofting. And that, rather than being a removal from the market, it is a form of safety valve for the market. It's exploited by the markets as a form of safety valve. So, for example, domestic economy models can be used to justify the reduction of wages because the family provides it's own food and therefore it doesn't require to be paid this amount of wages.

It's these different political strands or different political claims on the idea of the common, that we can identify and have to be brought into focus when discussing ideas of the common and not simply to take the common as an inherent good in its own right, but to question what the political trajectories cutting through it are.

So discussing in more detail some forms of the ... forms of what might be called the actual existing commons within Scotland. There's crofting, the Common Good, and community buyouts and they each demonstrate some of the complexities and contradictions within the idea of the common and how it might be realised as a form of political activity, how they might support that.

Firstly, crofting. Crofting is often seen as a kind of timeless ancient indigenous farming method that's spread across the Highlands and Islands of Scotland. It's often portrayed like that, for

example, in tourism and Scottish cultural production. This is not the case however. Crofting is really a product of the industrialisation of rural areas which came into being in the late 18th century and early 19th century. One meaning for the word 'croft' in Gaelic is 'allotment' and there's actually parallels between crofting in rural areas and allotments as they first emerged within urban centres as well. Crofting carries on certain aspects of the earlier pre-industrial farming systems which are known as the township system but introduces certain forms of structure and particular dependency upon ... upon the need to sell one's labour that were not there ... that were not present in townships as such.

The relationship of the township system to the idea of primitive communism is actually interestingly put forward by Alexander Carmichael who was a 19th century folklorist and an amateur anthropologist who was most famous for gathering Gaelic songs and hymns from the islands. Carmichael himself was not a proponent of communism but he was brought forward to the Napier Commission which was a government body set up in the 1880s to investigate the civil unrest within the Highlands and areas where crofting was established. In the opening words of his statement to the Napier Commission he writes ... he spoke: "the word commune has unpleasant associations but being descriptive of the social economy of the Highlands I shall use it here." And he goes on to explain how the township systems govern themselves and at the end argues that even though he is in no way a proponent of communism that these systems should be reintroduced and it's interesting that the conclusions of the Napier Commission were broadly in favour of that. The actual Crofting Act which came out in 1886, which is the legislation that applies to crofters to this day, rejected this idea and instead chose to maintain the new crofting system.

The aspects of primitive communism that Carmichael identified included various forms of local governance and the use of common grazings and the idea of a kind of rotation of power within the community so rather than being ... having a head of the community who ... who remained in power from one year to the next there was a regular change — a bit like the Transmission Gallery committee in some ways (audience laughter). There was a conscious rotation of power within the community and also deliberate deferral of power. So he describes these events where people decided who'd be the head of the community for that year and usually these involved forms of random selection and a process where the first person would reject the offer until eventually no one was left to reject it and eventually the role was taken on. So there was a conscious deferral of power rather than an idea of acquiescing of power. To an extent this represented a vestige of the hybrid nature of governance and jurisdiction that existed in Highland areas up until the 19th century, but to many extents crofting was one of the methods that actually brought that to an end rather than continuing it.

In the 18th century we had figures such Henry Home Lord Kames who was a Scottish legal theorist and mentor to figures such as Adam Smith, David Hume and John Millar who ... one of his main contributions to Scottish law was to revise Scottish law in line with ... what's called the institutional model which is to move away from a common law basis towards the idea of defined statue law following the model of Roman law developed in the Netherlands, towards a rationalistic logical model of law. Kames ... whilst claiming to represent a universal abstract system of law nevertheless took the principles of mercantile capitalism as the basis for that and that relates to the stadial theory that Kames and Smith and Millar popularised in the 18th century. This was the idea that society passed through stages of matu-

ration from early nomadic cultures to early agricultural cultures to peasant communes to the mercantile society. Kames sought to make the mercantile society the basis of Scottish law.

Part of that was to reject feudal law. He was very much against the idea of lineal land ownership and existing feudal inheritance but for Kames this also meant doing away with common law and doing away with various forms of local law that existed in the areas that formed ... that allowed forms of self-organised legal representation. And he actively implemented these ideas. He was what's known as a 'circuit judge' and travelled around rural areas of Scotland arbitrating on disputes over land. He was well known for being incredibly severe with punishments towards people accused of stealing sheep or going on someone else's land. So we had this movement towards a homogenization of law in Scotland happening in the 18th century which did away with much of what might have been existing forms of localised commons. So in the sense that it's different from what Peter Linebaugh describes in England where you have the Magna Carta and the Charter of the Forest which took some of these existing forms of common and gave them an institutional form.

It was in that context that crofting came into being. Crofting is really a re-organisation of the land to maximise it for economic profit. One of the key distinctions between the crofting system and township system is that people are given fixed plots of land, so the allotment concept in the main. Whereas previously many township systems would rotate land ownership within the community in the crofting system people are given a regulated piece of land with a fixed size. This was introduced to enable taxation and to value ... to see the community as a financial resource that could be tapped for land taxes or water taxes, building taxes and such. And the size of the land that was given to people was of-

ten deliberately restricted so a family could only feed itself from what it could produce on that land and not produce any excess produce and this compelled people ... in order to pay the taxes it compelled them to take up labour which was set by the landowners so this would be things like the kelping industry or going into fishing and such like. So it's a mechanism to force scarcity upon the communities and force people into waged labour. When the Crofting Act came into being towards the end of the 19th century rather than representing the emancipation of the Highland communities it's effect for them was as a kind of entrapment within a problematic system, a kind of legalistic gilded cage. The historian Allan Macinnes made an interesting point that whilst the Crofting Act is often celebrated as a being this emancipation or recognition of rights for Gaelic Scotland it actually brought about an exclusion of rights for many sections of the Gaelic community. Many aspects of Gaelic life actually died as a result of the Crofting Act because they weren't given any kind of legal recognition at all. Issues such as communal squatting for example which ... nowadays when you think of squatting you think of 'illegal' occupation of housing but up to the 19th century squatting was a way in which people who did not have access to property could be supported by their communities, a form of welfare ... the way that housing was given to widows and such like this. And this was illegalized by the Crofting Act so there's a ... how squatting developed in the 20th century was very much affected by laws such as those for crofting.

What is interesting in the crofting communities however is the kind of growing rebellion against the system that emerged in the mid to late 19th century. So it's not the fact that crofting in itself which was significant, but rather the way the different communities rebelled against the system. This became, around the 1880s with the riots of Bearnaraidh and riots on Skye ... this

led to actions of large scale land grabs where people went back onto the land they'd been evicted from and claimed it back and this process went right up until the 1950s. It was this ongoing process of protest and land grabs which led to recognition and set up ... which actually led to the Crofting Act. The Crofting Act was introduced by the Conservative government and very much followed the principle that had been applied to Ireland, peasant proprietorship as a way of tying people into property ownership so that they may be made to feel ... so that they are forced into having debts and dependencies. They will therefore be less likely to rebel in the future.

What the Crofting Act did ... what crofting did continue were one of those aspects of commoning, the common grazings, so this was one aspect that did carry on through that. The space still exists where the common farming systems are still at play ... this is very much, if you like, a kind of restricted part of the common.

So that's one history of commons in Scotland and you can see the ... the picture's not quite as simple as you might think. There are complexities and contradictions within it. And interestingly, to some extent, crofting is often invoked as a model for how farming could develop and what might be a basis for a future commons-based farming system. Yet crofting itself is perhaps more symptomatic of the problems rather than the possible solution.

Another historical example is the idea of the Common Good. Emma's already introduced the term at the beginning in the more general sense but it has a very particular history in Scotland. There is a law called Common Good Law in Scotland and this is a set of statutes that place particular goods into public ownership of a kind. And it doesn't just mean land. There's a

tendency to think of the commons as being land and everyone has the idea of the rural commons but Common Good is something that emerged within cities and it's any kind of asset or resource that might have a common benefit. So it includes land like Glasgow Green, that's part of Glasgow's Common Good. It also includes things like all the paintings in Kelvingrove Museum. It includes the city council buildings. It includes many of the public buildings in Glasgow and many of the cities across Scotland and it includes artefacts like the robes of the mayor, stuff like this. This is all Common Good. Common Good has an interesting history. It's origins lie within feudalism and the allocation of the commons as a feudal charter, but Common Good Law as it exists in Scotland now relates far more to the development of the burghs, so it comes from the urbanisation of Scotland. Also it is due to this tied in with the emergence of bourgeois culture in Scotland. Burghs ... The French bourge ... from which we have bourgeois is the French equivalent of burgh in Scots and we have the word 'burgess' in Scots which is the bourgeoisie. The Common Good is first defined in charters that were written up to define the powers of free trade centres ... Glasgow, Edinburgh ... Aberdeen is one and such. To some extent they're early forms of liberal commons. They provide an infrastructure for the towns people who do not have access to resources so it enabled the concentration of power within the city. Bob was talking about Glasgow Green earlier, that it was given over as a commons because the housing for workers in the city did not give adequate space for people to dry their clothing so a field was set aside for people to dry their clothing and do their washing and that's Glasgow Green. So it's this 'commoning' of living resources for the workers, which is used to justify lower wages again, but as in the case of Glasgow Green we can also see it as a resource claimed by the workers.

Another aspect of the Common Good which very much relates to bourgeois principles of culture is also tied up in philanthropy. One of the key criteria for something to be Common Good is simply that ... one criteria is that it is used as a public resource but the other is a gift given to the city and it very much was about the idea of philanthropy to generate the city and civic virtue. Some of the Common Good campaigners around today ... see the need to preserve the Common Good as being far more about this idea of respecting philanthropy and respecting this idea of the rich people gifting to the city rather than it being the infrastructure for the common people. So there's this angle to it which has to be born in mind.

The interesting thing about the Common Good is arguably not the intrinsic nature of it in itself but rather the fact that it can be exploited in order to ... as a kind of legal anachronism really, to bring about arguably to seek to transfer some power from councils back into communities. To that extent it has been effective in some of the campaigns that are going on which Bob has been involved in. So the Common Good is ... figures like Andy Wightman have been championing it to some extent and I think Andy Wightman actually has a more nuanced take on it. One of the key things he puts forward is that Common Good Law needs to be radically transformed and that we have to see this as a kind of legacy that can be reinvented as something genuine rather than something that's just a quirk of our heritage.

Lastly, one of the more modern forms of what might be called a form of commoning in Scotland is the idea of community buyouts which relate both to crofting and to the Common Good in many ways. So when I was doing Stackwalker I went to the Isle of Eigg which was one of the first islands to be bought out by it's local community. I also went to an area on Lewis called Parc

which in the 1890s was the site of major crofting rebellion. There was an incident known as the Parc Deer Raid where the crofters stormed the laird's deer forest and slaughtered his deer and it was staged as a media event. This will give you an idea of the kind of militancy of the crofting community in the 19th century. They were not people doing community petitions. There were often quite violent forms of protest. That was the extent to which they were seen as a threat. Anyway, more recently Parc has been involved in what is known as an 'aggressive buyout' and they're attempting to buy back the common land, the grazing lands, of Parc for the community from the owner.

We also see a similar idea of proposing community buyouts in urban contexts so Govanhill Baths is a good example in Glasgow where it's been proposed that the building will be bought by the community and similarly it's been proposed that Kinning Park Complex buy back the building. This however highlights what I regard as some of the problematic aspects of the community buyouts. Some of the community buyouts I'm very sympathetic to. The Eigg one was a case where you had a negligent landowner who deliberately treated the island basically as a kind of toy and ... people had restricted access to ... people were basically living in houses that had no central heating, with damp and such and the landowner ... the landowner was deliberately restricting ... preventing people from upgrading houses and such because he liked the quaint look of ... this heritage feel of these damp houses with no heating and such and no toilets. So the community buyout, which happened at a very early stage of the introduction of the laws, was argued as a necessary means to address these issues and there were larger economic problems on Eigg as well. And that led to the creation of a self-run island there.

What has become ... as the community buyout idea has spread

and become more commonplace is a pattern where rather than it being based upon the idea of the community becoming the governors of their own land it's more about the idea of the community becoming partners in a business and it's about turning the communities into business operations. The community buyout laws and the governance of how community buyouts are actually given to communities demand business plans that demonstrate the way in which the community generate profit from the process. And this in turn leads to communities often commodifying themselves and to come back to Parc ... this is the kind of process you're seeing there where the community buyout is driven not so much by the desire to produce local governance or a decentralization of politics but rather the idea of an economic venture that commodifies the community. It is also interestingly tied into the fact that this part of Lewis is where the major land connection for renewable energy from Lewis to distribute back to the mainland is going to be sited. So potentially the community will become the owners of ... or the controllers of the gateway for this energy source going back to the mainland. So really it's a business plan. It's got less to do with the idea of decentralization of politics, of empowerment of the community, and more to do with a business venture and this is very much the way the community buyout system has gone.

Within the urban context it creates a somewhat ... in regard to places like Govanhill Baths or Kinning Park, the rather contradictory fact that you have ... this is one of the key distinctions of rural and urban ones ... whereas rural buyouts largely are based within communities buying land that is privately owned and bringing it to a form of public ownership, urban buyouts are usually based around buying property that is publicly owned already but putting it into non-council management. And that, for example, is what's proposed at Govanhill Baths and it's been

proposed at Kinning Park. There's a contradiction because basically you have the public raising public funds to buy a public building to put it into public ownership and yet the building is public in the first place. So rather than being a solution to the problems of poor governance within councils or solution to problems of the mismanagement of finances ... they're really symptomatic of it ... and community buyouts in a sense are complicit with the privatisation of public resources. And in a way they come to epitomise that kind of neo-Hayekian model. It's a move towards privatisation, to a fragmentation of resources rather than providing a collective governance of resources.
We can see therefore that there's a need to be far more sceptical about the idea of the commons. Broadly there's many aspects of it that I support and am sympathetic to. My interest in looking into these things came from being attracted to many of these ideas ... but there is a need not to take these things on superficial value, but to question the underlying structures and political trajectories that are running through them. Another aspect of this, which comes back to the idea of domestic economy, is the ... socialization of risk and the exploitation of volunteerism which I think are also problems that haunt the idea of the commons.

I think there's several misconceptions in some of the ways people look at the common. One is to think of it in terms of assets rather than labour and I would argue that the commons should not be a thing that's thought of in terms of common assets but rather in terms of the labour that is used to produce them, what the relation of labour and governance of assets is. Assets themselves are not the issue. This is something that Peter Linebaugh does talk about, the commons of activity: "To speak of the commons as if it were a natural resource is misleading at best and dangerous at worst — the commons is an activity and, if anything,

it expresses relationships in society that are inseparable from relations to nature." I think we need to be much more explicit about that. It's really about how the commons are produced and how they are reproduced from one day to the next and one year to the next, what sustains the commons. It's labour that sustains the commons. It's about the people. It's not about the fact that it's some kind of naturally given gift.

The other thing often related to it is that the commons is often seen ... there was a picture up about the idea of alternative economies in relationship with things like barter economies and gift economies and this is a kind of rhetoric around the commons that has been quite strongly promoted within the Open Source sector. Open Source ... a guy called Eric Raymond who is one of the definers of Open Source talks about it as a kind of gift economy, a gifting of code between programmers. This is often presented as a kind of intrinsically altruistic act, as though somehow a gift economy itself is inherently not a form of capitalism and somehow it's inherently anti-capitalist. And yet the analysis of gift economies and work on economies that people like Marcel Mauss and his book The Gift, which is often cited as a source for this kind of idea, actually present gift economies not as a kind of emancipative form of free exchange but rather as a means through which hierarchies are structured and maintained. Gift economies do not necessarily of themselves create a more equal society as such, they can be mechanisms of hierarchisation. Similarly, feminist anthropologists such as Marilyn Strathern and Lisette Josephides have talked about when there is a distinction between those who make the gifts and those who exchange them and in the studies they have conducted they looked at how women make the gifts or are the gifts and men benefit from the process of exchange. This creates an unevenness within the economy, a dependency which is very similar to

that between the proletariat and the capitalist. So the gift economy is not intrinsically altruistic at all.

The problem with a lot of the rhetoric of alternative economies is that it tends to confuse the mechanisms of exchange with the politics of exchange. So the belief is that money is inherently capitalistic, if we don't use money we've got rid of capitalism. But capitalism is not simply money, capitalism is a set of power relations around processes of exchange and those power relations can be structured around any process of exchange. Barter was the main means through which Western merchants spread capitalism to the world, as they began to colonize the Americas and such. So ... again what we see here is the use of what seems like a superficially good idea (alternative economies) but one that hides the deeper political problems and you've got to bring these to the surface.

And lastly, related to this is the fact that even though you may have spheres of circulation which internally seek to escape forms of capitalisation it does not mean that they're necessarily excluded from processes of capital. So where you have, for example, an idea of mutual help in order to create an alternative economy. This often defines the characteristic of the Open Source movement and also artist-run practice. Artists help one another freely to create a bit of work and to create the infrastructures to produce their work. This in itself does not necessarily mean exclusion from the problems of capital but rather it's maybe seen as a kind of resource that is exploited for capital, and it's a means through which risk is offset from the capitalisation itself. So within Open Source software one of the problematic points is that Open Source software frees the companies that use it from liability. There's no ... the licensing of Open Source software means there's no liability for any problems within the

software. The risk therefore of the software failing is projected ... not taken by the company that is necessarily marketing it, as Apple have done in quite complex ways, but rather in the developer community who are a mix of paid and unpaid people volunteering their time to a project. Similarly, within artist-run practice this is most endemic in situations like ... well things like the Glasgow International and the way in which artist-run practice is used as a kind of fringe event to the main festival which creates this platform of activity that is capitalised as marketing for the city. As such it represents a ... is also used as a kind of talent pool to pick artists from. So artist-run practice, rather than being an alternative to a market-driven practice or to institutionally-driven arts practice, which is historically how it emerged in the early 70s, is nowadays often used as a pool, to pool talent, and for the risk of early development to be born by the artists themselves, rather than it being a distinct practice in its own right, rather than being a critical action against other forms of market-driven or state-driven art.

This in a sense is an issue where the promotion of the idea of the commons within artistic practice needs to engage with the commons as a politics but often it does not. It often projects this idea of commons as an inherent good ... of the creativity of the artists. It expresses itself as a selfless community but fails to recognise the ways in which that energy of creativity is tapped and exploited as a resource at other levels. Similarly because a resource in itself may be free or may be free of cost ... presented as free, does not necessarily mean that it's free of capitalisation if the means to access it are controlled and capitalised. Now it's something we've seen both in the emergence of free resources on the internet and I would argue is also endemic to the nature of artist-run practice today.

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Estovers

Sunday 22 September
2pm - 4.30pm
CCA Glasgow

Part 2: The Digital and the Libidinal
Gay Cruising on the Commons
Contemporary Enclosures

Performed Presentations by Artists
Shona Macnaughton & Huw Lemmey

Programmed by Emma Balkind

Graduate School
The Glasgow School of Art

Ornamental Wheat

Shona Macnaughton

For the whole summer I have had nothing but an iPad and my partner physically present to me to communicate with. This has been somewhat limiting. These parallel ways of seeing have begun to merge during these months. The iPad device has begun to reveal itself as similar to the operational mechanics of a monogamous, long-term relationship. You can touch it, it is close to you, you can have it in bed, but there is always something out of reach. You can receive and you can give but you can't alter what you receive or give. You cannot dissect its parts, the elusive promise of the personal computer, it must instead be taken as a whole. You are not in control, the power dynamic is on the side of the balance from equal to dominated. You can never dominate it, but you always feel dominated. You play other but never feel other. The dialectic is not complete.

It is incompatible with others, a singularly singular device to make a couple. You can't really share it, not intimately anyway. Your privacy has also been sacrificed. By linking yourself to this connected other you leave yourself open to the cloud and to the social respectively. Just by asking how you are you can be divulged at any time.

There is a reason why the monogamous long-term relationship endures, in the model of a straight line. And has come back stronger than ever. From former hippy portal to the whole world to current hipster hand held locale, it fits economically to a roman-

tic poverty. It's cheaper, more portable. It is about a soothing of the immaterial fragments of our cognitive overload… Open source is a nice idea but …

It is about an idea of reproduction. And it is about love of course, love as a happy construct, felt for sure, by tapping at an image. Within this landscape the closeness we get is post the original enclosure of a wild space of non-property and multiple enclosures since of commonly held property; the vestiges of brief social gains now built to anticipate the moment when welfare wholly goes out to tender. Schools. Prisons. Apartments. Hospitals. Office blocks. Interchangeable and flexible, they all look like this. Here within this wreckage my love protects me from myself. Indeed it gives and gives my partner, very generous. But it conceals its inner workings so I can love:

"Who knows not how to hide, knows not how to love"

It will never propose to me but I don't want it to, better to share bank details, properly appropriate to the regime under which we dwell. Other people's weddings we will attend with aplomb and applause. They are the best live theatre around, like post mediation Brechtian learning plays, the audience is fully implicated and we play at communism for a harmonious day, it is all we can muster, there is too much bad connotation in the word, and red bot can spot it too easily in networked life.

Now as carefully positioned as the symbols within a Dutch 17c painting, a tight roster of props for the day that can only be positive. After the weekend of Enough Togetherness, and adding of postponed digital comrades, we'll share in these images that are absent of people either in front or behind the lens. No conditions which have imposed themselves, nothing is manipulated.

For the light is constructed, and the composition is unimpeded. Everything is deathly clean. Waiting for life. It was the ultimate symbolic exchange masquerading as gift, whats mine is yours and together we are hot property, marriage, mediated by its mediation. The bearer of ornamental wheat.

And increasingly these images, like the debt they encourage, are prescribing the personality of their future inhabitant. On the back of the museum to liberalism things have gone from bad to worse with the erection of a prosperous tusk which mirrors all around it. It was so blatantly visible that it became desirable to live as close as possible to it, premium property was so close so as one could only see oneself. In 2009 when I discovered the first photo they still believed in the wealthy non-gendered hipster still life but now they had abandoned this for strokes of a globalische success man, an abstract oily impression of finance, to whom I could never aspire, only serve.

But the thing is I didn't actually like or not like John Lennon or Tiger Woods. And I barely even noticed they were male. For I had learnt to re-identify with the female professionally, carry plates for celebrations, fold napkins for marriage, wear skirts for authenticity, dance for serving drinks, polish glass clear for gifts. I smile in your face. Professionally. I organise. Professionally. I administrate. Professionally. I charm. A performing subject setting the coffee table for your Liberal Salon.

There was of course constructors of these images but they could scarcely be accountable authors, more subscribers to a type of taken for granted desire of the masses, just doing their job. So who was causing these final enclosures, that of even our prized choices? I had actually began to start looking at the price of butter in the supermarkets. I began to search for one who was re-

sponsible but my attempted personification evaded selection, future archaeology was not popular with the artist run volunteers. “we were so surprised at the number who applied and by the strength of application”

Pay walls continued to be erected, but how to tear down something that is not immediately visible, that is hidden with(in) love. I can’t accelerate through an invisible wall. Increasingly we realised we had found its limits, it’s shape, and there was no hope of rupture. It was purer, more refined, so transparent that it mocks us, mimics us. We can’t revel in it as in the everyday the actual and the virtual have merged. Abstract IRL. Could we mimic it back or was that a position of stasis? A circulating sibling irritant: I’m going to copy everything that you say, I’m going to copy everything that you say, I’m going to copy everything that you say…

Hermetically sealed, off the hangar pockets of community got worn within the other option of good citizen costumes, hired for stag and hen feeding. But I couldn’t get that right either: the professional activists were suspicious of my brogues, even if, as I said, it was 2nd hand office wear, too stretched for a mole.

Clutching the ornamental wheat which we were way past owning, an image of someone else’s property I tried to plant it firmly in a communal garden. It doesn’t take long to find one nowadays. The latest I found was on the roof of the modernist national library, languishing in the benevolence of its social democratic design. But the design was not enough anymore, just being a tomb of knowledge was impotence, the building itself had to be seen to be doing something productive, active, positive. The concrete roof was resistant to the vulgarity of my blatant reference to the feudal idyll. Here on the private land of the publicly

accessible spaces the problem seemed to be that I was trying to plant an image in an image. And this was not a commons, what was planted could not sustain us. It couldn't actually function beyond the costume-wearing niche within which I was mingling. Rye bread gave me the shits on the residency. My body would not take it, this image of wheat.

So was there a third option, could it, this image be yielded, last without being eaten, weaponised, not instrumentalised. What could happen in the aftermath of its consumption? In the ruins of my empty bowels there is no space left to reform, no boundaries for the avant garde to play, only a flow of meat into installations which historicise the social through the glaze of rise, Hudson, sierra, sutro, hefe.

These images seemed to be our only estovers, existing in the only wild space without property, given to us, apparently free and without agency, belonging to our prosumer's gaze, we are permitted them at least.

From their surplus I have laboured on an image of your personality and from their time I have unmasked a character that can now be made accountable. A collective character. A capital accretion. I tried to insert some of my own images, but their conditions of production were such that they fell short. They failed to mimic, they enacted a bad impersonation of absense. The security guard takes a while to twig but he does because the scene is not quite as it was meant, but neither is it as it is.

Commissioned by Emma Balkind for Estovers pt.2
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Cruising and the commons

Huw Lemmey

Great, so I'm going to talk about cruising and the commons, and the politics of public sex within public space. So first off, just as a brief warning which I think is the done thing now, which is obviously going to involve the discussion of sex, sex acts, sexuality and stuff, so if you don't want to have that discussion you can feel free to leave. And also, it is quite a partial and subjective view, I see myself as a writer and an artist and not in any way an academic so don't expect that level of rigorous… some of the ideas are much more anecdotal and it'll also be heavily weighted towards gay men specifically and other men who have sex with men.

So, this is the only image I'm gonna show which is one of my favourite political figures today, George Michael. George Michael was caught cruising in 1980—I think—in Los Angeles by an undercover policeman. He was in a public space, in a toilet. Cruising in toilets is known as cottaging. He was arrested for lewd behaviour when he was masturbating with this policeman, and he dealt with it in a really interesting way. Rather than hiding it, denying it, he accepted straight away that it was what he was doing and that he disagreed with the legality and the ethics of American culture around that and that he wasn't going to change. And as a result he changed his career quite drastically, this is the video for the song he did which was called Outside, which was about public sex and how much he enjoyed public sex. In it he harpoons the police officer and the American jus-

tice system and all the hypocrisy around it and the fact that he was essentially entrapped. He walked in there and the policeman propositioned him, asked him if he wanted to masturbate with him and he did and then he got arrested for it. So, that's what I'm going to talk about a little later on.

My talk is specifically going to be dealing with—as we're discussing parks—I'm gonna contrast two types of cruising one of which is cruising in parks and I'm also going to talk about cruising in cinemas and the relationship between the two. So, what is cruising? Cruising is a sexual practice but it's also a social practice. Basically, it's soliciting anonymous sex in public places with strangers. It takes place in public and generally involves public sex as well so there's an element of risk there. But it also involves a constantly changing set of social codes, and it's based around an affective exchange. It's not just having sex, it's knowing how to find the right people to have sex with and what sort of sex they like to have. And also because of the issues of legality and risk it's about hidden codes, so you don't just walk up to someone in a park and ask if they want to have sex. There's all sorts of extra codes going on and those are changing constantly as attitudes to sex and public sex are changing, and as the policing's changing around it. So, perhaps we reached a high point in the early 90s where people were most open. You probably could get away with walking up to someone on Hampstead Heath and saying "would you like to have sex?" if you thought they were the right sort of person. Today, I don't think that'd be possible, and it would certainly not have been possible leading up to the 1980s.

So, cruising therefore is totally tied up with wider social ideas of class, gender, policing, public policy and general morality. And I'd like to start with a quote from Joe Orton's diaries, Joe was a gay playwright in the 1960s. This is from March 1967, so just be-

fore the legalisation of homosexuality which came in that summer. It wasn't an equalisation of laws, because homosexuality was still persecuted in public spheres - soliciting and stuff like this - and also there wasn't an equalisation of the age of consent up until the last 10 years. He's just had his play on in the West end and it's doing really well, and this is from Saturday the 4th of March (p.105-6):

> The publicity has been good for the play. Mark tells me that the Matinee was up and the evening performance was sold out except for a few seats. When I left, I took the Picadilly Line to Holloway Road and popped into a little pissoir— just four pissers. It was dark because somebody had taken a bulb away. There were three figures pissing. I had a piss and as my eyes became used to the gloom, I saw that only one of the figures was worth having— a labouring type, big, with cropped hair and, as far as I could see, wearing jeans and a dark short coat. Another man entered and the man next to the labourer moved away, not out of the place altogether, but back against the wall. The new man had a pee and left the place and, before the man against the wall had returned to his place, I nipped in there sharpish and stood next to the labourer. I put my hand down and felt his cock, he immediately started to play with mine. The youngish man with fair hair standing back against the wall, went into the vacant place. I unbuttoned the top of my jeans and loosened my belt in order to allow the labourer free reign with my balls. The man next to me began to feel my bum. At this point a fifth man entered. Nobody moved. It was dark. Just a little light spilled into the place from the street, not enough to see immediately. The man next to me moved back to allow the fifth man to piss. But the fifth man very quickly flashed his cock and the man next to me returned to my side, lifting up

my coat and shoving his hand down the back of my trousers. The fifth man kept puffing on a cigarette and, by the glowing end, watching. A sixth man came into the pissoir. As it was so dark nobody bothered to move. After an interval (during which the fifth man watched me feel the labourer, the labourer stroked my cock and the man beside me pulled my jeans down even further) I noticed that the sixth man was kneeling down beside the youngish man with fair hair and sucking his cock. A seventh man came in, but by now nobody cared.

The number of people in the place was so large that detection was quite impossible. And anyway, as soon became apparent when the seventh man stuck his head down at the level of my fly - he wanted a cock in his mouth too. For some moments nothing happened. Then an eighth man, bearded and stocky, came in. He pushed the sixth man roughly away from the fair-haired man and quickly sucked the fair-haired man off. The man beside me had pulled my jeans down over my buttocks and was trying to push his prick between my legs. The fair-haired man, having been sucked off, hastily left the place. The bearded man came over and nudged away the seventh man from me and, opening wide my fly, began sucking me off like a maniac. The labourer, getting very excited by my feeling his cock with both hands, suddenly glued his mouth to mine. The little pissoir under the bridge had become the scene of a frenzied homosexual saturnalia. No more than two feet away the citizens of Holloway moved about their ordinary business. I came, squirting come into the bearded mans mouth, and quickly pulled up my jeans. As I was about to leave, I heard the bearded man hissing quietly ‘I suck people off! Who wants his cock sucked?’ When I left, the labourer was just shoving his cock into the bearded man’s mouth to keep him quiet. I caught the bus home.

> I called Kenneth (who's his boyfriend) who said 'It sounds as though eightpence and the bus down the Holloway road was more interesting than £200 and a plane to Tripoli.'

…where'd they'd just come back off holiday!

So that's a classic example of the London cruising scene I suppose, in the 1960s. In this talk I really want to talk about the practice of cruising and what it can actually tell us about space and the relationship between public space, private space and common space. My basic thesis is this, that what is regarded as common space and private space is actually quite fluid and subjective, and is not necessarily defined by law but by the forms of social relations that take place in it. Historically gay men have had a different type of common space to straight people. Things that straight people see as common is not common for gay people, things that gay people think common is not common for straight people.

I also later on want to discuss my pet subject, which is the sort of effect that the internet and communication technologies are having on sex in spaces now. I suppose it's important to state that cruising is a practice that can only really happen with urbanisation. That's when the recorded history of cruising starts. That means a high population, so there's lots of strangers, less risk of being caught by someone you know. It requires civic and urban spaces, specifically parks and public toilets, and those are common spaces which you can access without payment. It arises also especially when there is a lack of privacy in working-class houses. So, as houses become more and more packed, the need to find that space becomes more important. Lastly, it involves state involvement in moral policing. It's an act of subterfuge, publicly and it's defined - a lot of the sexual thrill for a lot of men comes

from the fact that what they are doing is illegal.

So I'm going to talk about parks before going on to cinemas. Public parks emerged at the end of the 18th century as a brief philanthropic gesture towards the working classes, and to help public health. They're places to go and play and relax, and they have a civic function as a gathering place. They are also an alternative to alehouses and gin palaces in the East End. I'm a big fan of parks, I go to the park a lot. I think there's a case to be made that parks are really the birthplace for a sense of urban solidarity and in Britain they're the birthplace of the workers movement. Bodies come together in parks, they amass, and they're there in search of pleasure and joy and not in search of consumption necessarily. I live right next to Finsbury park and if I go up into the park on a weekend you get a cross section of anyone who lives within about three or four miles of the park. It's completely ethnically mixed, gender mixed, there's kids playing on the playground from the ages of one and two up to to old couples walking hand in hand, they're lovely places. And, I think you can define them by people who don't like parks.

Property developers hate parks, they're seen as wasted space. There's this amazing land in the centre of a city which seemingly has no function for a property developer. All it does is give people pleasure, so why would they be interested in them? And, police hate parks. They're notoriously hard to police. They're locked at night for specifically that reason and that is also the reason why they become these common spaces. If you look at the history of the workers movement in the UK, up until the mid 19th century, anything of significance that happened in the workers movement happened in public parks. Peterloo massacre happened in a park, Henry Hunt and the chartists gathered in the parks, and so that's this coming together of the bodies,

and I think that gay life that happens in parks is analagous to that. It's a challenge towards mainstream values which is enacted through bodies coming together.

And they're unpoliceable. In the 19th century they began to fence in parks, and put in all sorts of hedges and landscaped things which was ostensibly designed to stop people moving around parks en-masse. They wanted to keep people of parks at night, and they wanted to channel people out of parks. In South London a lot of protests still move off from the park. There's this big park in Lambeth and historically that's where all of the protests would move off from, and in the start of the 19th century they started to put these huge 20 foot high fences all the way around it so that the police could control where people moved and they could choose which gates they came in and out of because it was a site of the mob. The *mobilus vulgaris*, the common people, with their vulgar needs and desires and the police wanted to control that.

So, parks are now cruising grounds, and that started at exactly the same sort of time. They were places where men could come together generally at night to hook up with each other and have sex. And the reason for that is exactly that reason, they're unpoliceable. Hampstead Heath is something like 40,000 acres, it's absolutely enormous. You cannot patrol it. You can't stop people going into the woods, to do that would take probably the whole of the Met. That's why they try and stop people having demonstrations in parks for that exact reason, you have to be able to control people.

Why do some places become cruising grounds and other places don't? That's another really interesting thing. You wouldn't go to Hyde park to have sex with somebody, you wouldn't go to

Green park or St James' park any more, although 80 years ago you would've gone to St James' park if you specifically wanted a soldier. That's where the soldiers used to go to cruise. But you would still go to Clapham Common, and I think that's a really interesting because it shows that what's going on here is a social act. It is something with a social and subcultural memory, people know which parks to go to. Which shows that this isn't just people thinking "I need to have sex, I'll go to this area and hope to find somebody", it becomes a practice. Places like Clapham Common and Hampstead Heath for hundreds of years have had this continuing, there's areas of the park where you go, and there's all sorts of affective things that go on there. Hand signals, eyes, questions that you ask, "Have you got a light?" was traditionally the famous one.

Having said that, in all parks there tends to be some sort of aspect of that. So, in the smaller parks depending on location - so where I live near Finsbury Park - Finsbury park doesn't have a particular cruising area, it's locked up at night and there tend to be police around. But, Abney park cemetery in Stoke Newington does and Clapton Common does. One of the interesting things about Clapton Common is that it's right in the centre of the Hasidic Jewish community and there's actually a lot of Hasidic Jewish men who cruise in Clapton Common. So some people go there specifically because they like hairy men, and that's a great place to get a hairy man (audience laughs).

Other ones, other parks which were cruising parks have closed within our lifetime. I have older friends who used to go a lot to Bloomsbury Square and Russell Square, which is right next to UCL and all the universities. That obviously had a completely different class makeup, so you'd get academics there, you'd tend to get rich people there, and a lot more visitors to the country.

Those were closed as part of redevelopment plans to make that area "safe" in the mid nineties. And those were enclosed with high gates and more police patrols and now it doesn't exist, even though you can probably get into Russell Square if you'd want to hop over a wall it generally doesn't happen. One of that other reasons for that is also because that population who are slightly more wealthy and have more education were quite early adopters of internet technology, which I'm going to get on to later. But to a certain extent stuff like Grindr has killed cruising in the more dangerous urban centres.

The other aspect of this is obviously cottaging. Cottaging is cruising within urinal spaces, which is a slightly different practice of cruising and has all sorts of interesting other elements. Notably, blackmail which tended to happen in cottages because it's much more difficult to explain why you're hanging around a urinal for a couple of hours than it is to be in a park. They were also the places where policemen would go because again, it would be easy to get a conviction. One thing that's notable about that is that entrapment was a big function of the police when they brought in the vice squads. The vice squads started in the early 20th century, the most famous one was C division, and they tried to close down a lot of these spaces. They did that through entrapment and one of the tantalising prospects of this in a libidinal economy was the idea of the gay policeman, and that was a space for certain gay working class men to be able to have as much sex as they wanted. So if you got put on a job in the Vice Squad, it was understood that the policemen were gay. You'd go there, you'd have sex with a policeman, then they'd arrest you. One of the things in this fantastic book by Matt Holbrook, which is called Queer London, he notes that there was a big joke amongst the queer community in London that gay policemen would always let you finish the job as opposed to the

straight ones. Which I think is a real insight into the mindset of the police officer that they're willing to be completely selfish and get their end away while still persecuting people who are just after the same thing they're after.

In the 1930s there started to be a big moral public scare about urinals, and that led to the redesign of a lot of spaces and urinals which were physically designed to make that a lot harder. Moving them apart, the introduction of the solitary urinal rather than the trough, comes from the 1930s and that was entirely designed through gay panic. One of the big differences between then and now is that they wouldn't close down all of the urinals as it was seen as the sign of a civilised society to have these public spaces within the centre of London, and also if you close down urinals, where do people urinate? I think that's really interesting today, because if I walk around London there is nowhere to go for a piss in a public space. You have to go into a shop or a cafe or a pub or something, but now we've closed almost all of the urinals. There's very few urinals left in central London, one of which is in Carnaby street and they have 24 hour Antisocial Behaviour controls, like the vice squad has come back and there's signs up saying 'this is patrolled by the antisocial behaviour squad'. It's essentially another form of moral policing, it's just couched in this different language which is Antisocial Behaviour.

So with the closing of the urinals in the 1940s, cruising became park based again, but it also led to a recurrence of sex in cinemas which was quite a big thing at the start of the 20th century and then became a big thing again in the 1950s. This is a fantastic book by an American science fiction writer called Samuel Delaney, and this is split in two. The second half is a theoretical discourse on cruising, but the first half is just anecdotal aspects of his life, spending 40 years in Times Square sex cinemas. But

in London, in Covent Garden and in Soho, the cinemas there which weren't specifically sex cinemas became cruising cinemas and that actually let to a complete redesign of the way that cinemas were laid out. I've got a quote here [from Matt Hollbrook's Queer London] (p.58):

> The LCC responded to these concerns by elaborating their regulation of cinemas. From 1916 licencing provisions demanded "shaded lights along the sides so audiences can see each other" and supervision by trained staff — "each with an electric torch to frequently patrol the gangways, switching the light along the rows of seats to detect any improper acts." In official circles, the cinema's darkness was assumed to underpin the existence of sexual transgression. "The moral question," one civil servant noted, "was largely bound up with the lighting question."

So there is again this aspect of darkness and anonymity that comes into it, and Samuel Delaney talks about that quite a lot and for him the most important thing is what he calls inter-class contact. He sees the anonymity as a situation which doesn't remove class signifiers but can allow for a period of humanisation of what he sees as the enemy within the class struggle. I've got a quote from him in here [Times Square Red, Times Square Blue] (p.15-16):

> In the sixties I found similar theaters in every capital of Europe. That may explain why foreign gay tourists located these places here so quickly. The population was incredibly heterogeneous—white, black, Hispanic, Asian, Indian, Native American, and a variety of Pacific Islanders. In the Forty-second Street area's sex theaters specifically, since I started frequenting them in the summer of 1975, I've met

> playwrights, carpenters, opera singers, telephone repair men, stockbrokers, guys on welfare, guys with trust funds, guys on crutches, on walkers, in wheelchairs, teachers, warehouse workers, male nurses, fancy chefs, guys who worked at Dunkin Donuts, guys who gave out flyers on street corners, guys who drove garbage trucks, and guys who washed windows on the Empire State Building. As a gentile, I note that this is the only place in a lifetime's New York residency I've had any extended conversation with some of the city's Hasidim.

So there's this development of a community within cruising which is removed but not completely detached from the general class makeup of society. Parks were also sites in the early 20th century where straight couples went, and here we see the importance of understanding the rise of all these phenomena as being intrinsically linked to urbanisation. Matt Holbrook talks about that in the early 20th century, working class straight couples would use parks—reasonably openly—as places for public sex because young working class people were trapped in shared houses with large families and they couldn't afford to rent places for sex. So, the act of public sex was much more common. You couldn't walk through Hyde Park at that time, which was generally in the evening, covered with straight couples having sex. Which has completely gone now I think. I think the idea of heterosexual public sex which is so close to the city, maybe it's different out on the beach or something like this, but is generally associated now with dogging which has again got this whole moral aspect tied in with it. But there's a big difference obviously between public sex then and cruising, which is that these were couples that could have a public relationship, and they generally tend to be of quite similar class backgrounds and stuff and the whole affective background of cruising wasn't really there.

A key point of this is that pre-legalisation of gay sex, in London there wasn't a private space for gay men. You could be arrested absolutely anywhere including in the sort of private bourgeois bedroom, if it was a same-sex act. So, it became a matter of balancing risk and the un-policeable space of the park and the common, actually became a safe space because the risk of neighbours and blackmail from friends and stuff kind of disappeared in that scenario. Matt Holbrook writes in his book (p.20) :

> …the law collapsed the conceptual distinctions between public and private that, notionally, went to its very heart. As Leslie Moran suggests, public space was understood as the realm of law's full presence… The private, by contrast, was 'An alternative place where the law is absent.' The Law's 'absence,' however was contingent upon conforming to notions of normative sexual and social behaviour. The 'bad subject' — the sexual deviant — remained subject to state intervention, and was deemed sufficiently dangerous as to warrant intrusion into the sanctified private sphere.

So, conceptualised by heterosexual society, the common is a public space, but for gay men their house becomes a public space or normally private space becomes a public space and it's more risky. Then the common becomes a safer space and has an element of privacy that has it's own gay society to it, that's away from straight society, unpoliced, and a place of intimacy. Where the restrictions of the bourgeois straight world can be temporarily shrugged off. Much like the bourgeois married couple would have their bedroom, where what happens there stays there. An Englishman's home is his castle, etc etc. There's a little quote I'd like to read out [Holbrook] (p.41):

> The distinction between public and private space is, indeed,

> a theme that runs throughout part 2 (of this book). My taxonomy of the sites of sex and sociability is, in part, organized around that distinction: in moving from the urinal to the bachelor flat, the chapters move across the putative boundaries between public and private life. In exploring the geography of queer urban culture, however, we need to rethink this binary opposition, for these boundaries were unstable and problematic. The queer body was a public body, subject to the potential force of the law even in the nominally private realm of the home. By contrast, many men were often able to find precarious moments of privacy for sexual encounters in the most public of urban spaces. Queer lives always occupied spaces that were simultaneously and to varying degrees public and private, subject to surveillance and invisible, dangerous and safe.

It kind of reiterates that point that the boundaries between what is common and what is private are completely blurred within a scenario where the acts that take place in those are subject to state enforcement. So, one interesting aspect to that then is how the commercialisation of gay spaces has affected cruising and how nominally straight spaces such as these porn theatres which showed straight pornography became gay cruising grounds… like in the Covent Garden cinemas as well. So, if gay men are inhabiting these spaces, and the praxis of cruising is going on in those spaces, how is that changing the public nature of that space? And, how can the act of cruising turn into a common space, a private space? I think that's really interesting these days because in the last 30 years, the gay rights movement has been very very successful within a very narrow remit, which is the sort-of bourgeoiseification of gay rights. And, the victories of the gay rights movement have not been towards self determination, but towards a liberation that happens entirely within a

rights-based agenda, which has in itself changed the relationship with public sex. So, nominally gay people have all the rights of straight people, they can get married, they can join the army, they can have children. Seemingly a victory for gay society, but actually really a victory for generally white middle class gay men who have moved towards the assimilation. How much of a victory in terms of sexual liberation is being able to join the army? I personally can't see how those two things are linked. But, as part of that process, as those voices which are very privileged voices control what is seen as a gay voice within the media, they have become part of the bourgeois apparatus which suppresses public sex. And now, public sex and cruising is becoming more and more taboo amongst gay men and actually becoming deviant within gay society. I mean, obviously not entirely, and that is also linked towards public and private space as well so… It's not taboo within saunas, cinemas probably generally are seen as more taboo, and then in public space it has become fetishised. So whereas 20–30 years ago most gay men would have had an experience of public sex and cruising, it's becoming much more rare. And that's part of the sort of general clean-up and neoliberalisation of the city, and I personally find that very problematic and it's changed the nature of cruising because when it happens in private spaces those are now really limited in their class makeup by what you pay on the door. So if you're paying £30–£40 to get into a sauna for the night or something, then the makeup of that sauna or the cinema etc is going to be very very different to if you're just meeting anyone on the heath who you can bump into, and so that's totally changed the makeup of it so you're having sex within—supposedly—a public sphere because other people are watching but actually it's become privatised and it's become class based again.

And that really is, to me, the analog of the enclosures. Com-

mon spaces that are sort of formed by sexual subjectivity have been bought back within the realms of capital and again by a primitive and violent accumulation. Which has been antisocial behaviour laws, and the recriminalisation and reintroduction of moral laws around public sex, in the UK and in New York as well. People engaging in public sex previously which has been deviant behaviour, perhaps with it's own subculture, has now been almost pathologised and people arrested for public sex are now brought within a discourse of sex offenders, rather than rebels perhaps. That's what I find quite interesting about the whole situation, so rather than I suppose a liberalisation of society, what you would have perhaps expected to see was more public sex, and also it spreading out into heterosexual relationships. Now you've actually seen a narrowing of it within what is acceptable and bourgeois. So now, public sex for straight couples which in the past would have been a working class phenomenon and within certain parameters is now seen as dogging and has this whole new load of taboos around it which are quite strange.

So, just to finish off I'd like to say how the internet is probably changing this as well. Whether Grindr is in fact a development of a type of cruising which we've not seen before. I've got mixed ideas about this, I mean, it is a form of cruising. It's a sort of shared social and sexual practice, it is based around sex with strangers, but it has a whole different code of signals and affect — it's a lot easier for people… there's probably more people now cruising through Grindr than would've ever cruised on the Heath. What's interesting with it in regards to the commons is that it's very much engaged in this idea of a digital dualism, where you have two aspects of your personality, an online and an offline and this is then recategorised as this private thing. People don't discuss Grindr with people other than their close friends, the sort of relationships they form through Grindr or the way

they present themselves on Grindr, and there's a reintroduction of anonymity into it that way which is a lot more rigid. People won't put their name on Grindr, whereas perhaps in the past if you met in the park, people would've maybe shared names… you know, it's a messy area. As a common idea, the online is a space which is not the real world, it's a seperate sphere and people delineate that by saying IRL (in the real world) and online or in cyberspace, which I think actually, we're starting to move away from that. I think that's a really bad analogy to talk about space although it's often a handy analogy to talk about space. It confuses things, it simplifies things into confusion I suppose. I think more, it's an augmentation of real life. It's not seperate but it's enmeshed, and because of the nature of Grindr which is geolocated, it's created another sort of aspect of gay common space, which is a sort of invisible gay topography which sits over a city and reshapes it and which is private. That if you're not a gay man on Grindr, or not someone who goes onto Grindr, you don't necessarily have to be a gay man I suppose, you understand the way that reshapes the city. 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. It's a privately owned company, it's controlled by incredibly strict censorship, and that's because it has to be allowed on the Apple Store. To

be allowed on the Apple Store you can't have any sort of adult content whatsoever. Much like the modesty bags [which cover up magazines] it's a very old fashioned form of censorship that's being brought back in a discourse of protection, protecting children. I mean, I don't understand it because if it's got an age restriction of 18, who cares what's on it? But, because it's free and downloadable, and you don't have to prove your age, that might be part of it. I was actually trying to look up the image restriction guidelines on Grindr but because Vodafone… I've got a Vodafone contract…

Emma: it blocks it…

It's got some kind of blocking thing [audience laughs] so I can't actually… I could download Grindr, but I couldn't look at the Grindr website for some reason. So erm, but I found a JPEG of it so that's obviously not censored, and I just thought that I'd read some out because it's verging on this sort of hilarious, the sort of thing that sounds Victorian or nowadays you'd probably laugh at it regarding women in Iran or something. Some of them make a lot of sense so… "No images of anyone under the age of 18. No copyrighted pictures or illustrations. No images of sexual acts, either real or illustrated." Makes sense, but they get more and more bizarre.

> No bare skin below the waist line, the hip bone area or above the upper thigh can be shown. No underwear can be visible. Swimwear can be visible but it must follow the bare skin rule above. Pants and shorts must be worn normally, buttoned. They cannot be pulled or hanging down. Hands or fingers cannot be put down pants, or be pulling underwear outwards. No images that show semen or any fluid made to look like semen or ejaculate may be shown in any pho-

> to. Photos cannot be altered to hide sexual acts including a black box or filters to hide images such as touching of genitals by hands. No photos of frontal, back, or side nudity. No nudity, particularly of the genitals, covered by a towel, hat or other means. No public hair can be visible. No photos of sheer or otherwise wet material below the waist. No outline of genitals through the clothing. No crotch area neither back nor front. Photos cannot contain sex props and toys, including the use of fruit and vegetables. No images of firearms or weapons…

And it goes on and on "… and including no profanity and no curse words." So you've actually got this incredibly restrictive… and it's operated, this isn't like idle rules that aren't followed, these sort of things are operative, and it actually restricts the ways people can express themselves sexually on Grindr, so the photographs that you get are either face shots—which makes sense—or chests. So, it's totally changed, some people just aren't turned on by chests and torsos. They're turned on by buttocks or hairy legs or something but you can't show anyone that, so there you go.

Emma: but if you went onto Craigslist you would still see cock shots.

If you went onto Craigslist, you could see anything you wanted, yeah because that is again more of a… it has a different delineation of common space. So it's actually very extreme censorship, which infantilises people, but the fact that it is free at the point of access means that you do get a return to these inter-class connections. So in conclusion, I suppose I just want to make the case again for a more adult moral discussion around the return public sex. Why have we gone away from this sort of peak of

freedom maybe in the 1950s, to do with public expressions of sexuality or especially the 70s and 80s, to this point now where adults who knowingly choose to sign up to a private app can't display vegetables or side shots of buttocks? You know, it's bizarre. And I think that works alongside, again, the bourgeoisification of common space, the steering into commercialised spaces where you can have sexual freedom if you buy sexual freedom within certain aspects. But in terms of a public persona or a public discourse on them or a public identity of sexuality, that has been increasingly restricted and that has disappeared from discussions in gay politics in which now the battle is to get married, and to emulate this very rigid understanding of public sexuality. And, I think it's also part of a war which is a subset of class war, which is about space — who controls space. I think the debate around public sex should come under the same banner as public assembly and demonstrations, the fightback against ideas of antisocial behaviour and the discourse of antisocial behaviour which is used as a really blanket piece of legislation to stop people doing things that infringe perceived social norms. It is an incredibly repressive piece of legislation because rather than having a form of law where things are legal unless specifically prohibited, we're coming into a situation where things are prohibited unless specifically legalised by law, and that's part of the same discourse of public and private space.

ATELIER
PUBLIC#2

COMMENTS

Does this
mean I
can trash
all the
other shit
exhibitions?

ATELIER PUB Guidelines

Have fun, fee at h me and respect the spa e y u are w rking in.

This is a space f r everyb dy t exp re – there are materials, w rkbenches and seats s y u can read, think r make.

Y u d n't have t make anything, y u're we c me t just visit and enj y.

Please respe t what thers have made.

Feel free t either take h me what you've made or p ace it somewhere in the space t inspire thers.

The curator wi remove any work which cou d cause offence.

The curat r wi be taking d wn w rk during the exhibiti n t make spa e f r m re. H wever, a w rk rem ved wi be d cumented.

P ease d put unused materia s back s that ther pe p e can p ay with them.

P ease ask the Ga ery Assistant if y u want any m re inf rmati n ab ut this exhibiti n.

ALEX

JAN

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The Negotiation is Not Over: The Institution as Artist

(The public was only an artist for three months)

Artist Anthony Schrag's current research explores the relationship between the artist, the institution and the public within participatory settings, looking particularly at how institutions set-up/guide/support participatory projects. His contribution to Atelier Public#2—an experimental studio in an art museum context—explored how the institution framed the creative, participatory experience from its marketing and public invitation:"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.

Doctoral candidate Emma Balkind's research deals with the notion of the Commons, which has been a popular concept for curators in recent years. The Commons is understood to be the means by which we organize around a shared resource. Sometimes the resource itself is referred to as a Commons, but it is the relation by which it exists that is the important factor that defines it as commonly available. The idea of creating a Commons within a public institution is something like putting a square peg into a round hole. The sharp edges have to be rounded off for it to work, and so an acceptance from the beginning that the concepts do not easily fit together is necessary.

Much like the invited public, we were invited to participate in the exhibition in whichever way we chose. The organization of the exhibition was unlike any other show either of us had participated in 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 save for some sticky back vinyl and a few video and poster works by Modern Edinburgh Film School.

As a civic institution managed by the Local Authority and a publicly funded, policy-enacting agency, Glasgow's Gallery of Modern Art (GoMA) is legislated to provide inclusive and respectful art projects that do not exclude or offend any of its diverse citizens. Anthony was interested to test how far this "state aesthetic" could be challenged and so proposed an intervention into the Atelier Public #2 context with a work entitled Make Destruction that aimed to question the "nice" art-making gesture by inviting anyone to come to the gallery and to "destroy" artworks, rather than create them. Anthony hoped that the specific invitation to "destroy" rather than "create" could act as a provocation that might raise questions about how the institution was placing value on a certain form of expression (i.e., creation) rather than its equal and opposite force (i.e., destruction), as well as speak of the value systems at play that praised one way of expression but disavowed others and how this problematized the very notion of participatory artworks (i.e., works developed collaboratively and collectively).

We decided to have a conversation about our experience of the exhibition, emphasizing our particular interest in the ideas of ethics and commons within the show.

Like the experience of Atelier Public #2, we enter into a conversation already in progress….

The public studio: who was the artist?

Anthony: …and even when you walk in, the making or the doing space is around the corner. I don't think it was ever a public studio though.

Emma: I think it was in the first version of it, because we talked quite a bit about how differently it turned out this time. I asked her [Katie Bruce, Curator/Producer of Atelier Public #2] whether she thought it'd have been any different (aesthetically) if she had not invited any artists. She first said no, and then she said … apart from the artists' works, which were in the space.

I said what would happen if you did a third run of the show and you didn't invite any artists? What would be different about that, and what would that highlight in what we did? Because I feel like all that we did was talk, because we were always trying to deal with what had (just) happened. There was a timeline of events and nobody could be there for all of the events or all of the things that would happen in that timeline, so we were always trying to wrestle with what had happened. Where, if it was a studio, ideally you would go in and nothing had happened since the last time you were there.

Anthony: Is there also something about that feeling of a lack of control? Everything was constantly finished in some sense. Someone had already finished a work. Someone had already come in and done something, and you came in and you'd go: "Well alright, I could change a work, but it's already done."

Emma: I think the thing that I felt was that the public was obviously comfortable with moving other people's work around and changing it, and when you had the destruction event, ripping it off the walls. But then I don't think that anybody who was actually invited to be an artist for the project felt like that was okay for them to do that. There was never really a space to do it, because I think that the expectation for the space to be like any other space that you would normally use was always superimposed onto this situation. So because it didn't meet with that, you felt you didn't want to get rid of someone else's work, because if you were in any other situation with someone else's work you wouldn't just take it away or move it around or something. The only other person who did something with someone else's work was Alex, and he ended up copying works and then taking them somewhere else (out with the main space). I don't feel that we ever challenged what was happening there.

Anthony: I don't think we did. And even those people that did "destroy art," there was never any value placed to it anyway.

Emma: No, because you were just acting like any other member of the public might do in that situation. I felt bad enough about it that I didn't do anything. Obviously there was that group that came in to save stuff. But, do you think it'd have been any different if there'd been no artists?

Anthony: I think nothing would have happened in terms of trying to challenge that space, but nothing that we did challenged that space. So in some ways, I think: no it would be exactly the same. I suppose there were all these efforts to change, efforts to think about it, efforts to negotiate it differently, but they all ultimately failed.

I wonder if the failure proves something about the power of the exhibition, or the impetus of the artists? I don't know. If we're still talking about it and it's still interesting, then obviously there's something about it that's still resonant and still interesting to talk about. So in some ways, it was an exhibition or a proposition that was too much for the artists to deal with. Maybe not too much, but it erased the artists to such an extent. I find that quite exciting about it. I'm thinking about the idea of removing the artists.

Emma: I just think it's a strange position to be in. I think there's a lot of anxiety at least within the academy, if not within museums and exhibition making, that things should be visual—and visible—and I think that we allowed the public to be the visual and visible element in the show and disallowed ourselves to be part of that in our insistence to just continue discussion the whole time.

Anthony: Because they were active, and we were quite passive. The public made the stuff; they were performing constantly and were actively enacting the making of it. Whereas we didn't do anything! (laughs) But that's interesting, because maybe that is the critique. As artists if that is our role to be critical, that's where our "power" lay, is actually not to act.

Emma: I feel like our ethical imperative with this has changed from "is it right to give a public space to people and let them do what they want in it?" to "is it right that we all sat on our hands and just talked about what was happening … instead of doing something?" (laughs)

Anthony: Yeah, you're right it's a total shift because in some ways we—speaking as artists "we"—we denied being part of the

public. Not that we ever were, but in some ways if we're saying, "Okay we're going to make you, the public, active artists," but we deny that we would be equal to them.

Emma: Yeah, completely deny it! But I think that the institution sets that up, and if you're talking about a traditional notion of a Commons or a public, that split is evident within that anyway. A Commons is not really for everyone: it is given as a contained thing. To that extent, maybe it was common, and we were just outside of the scope of the benefits of it. I suppose maybe part of the question is: "Why would artists want to be like the public… in this situation?"

Anthony: (laughs) Isn't that… it goes back to the idea that artists are special.

Emma: That's exactly why everybody didn't want to do anything! We said, "Oh, the aesthetic is bad" or "Oh, it's too busy and noisy." I think we were just being precious because we're used to a particular circumstance…

Anthony: We're used to being treated as special.

Emma: … and we couldn't direct the circumstance, so we had to just do what we knew how to do, which was talk amongst ourselves!

Anthony: That and deny that what the public was doing was actually valid. Which is what we do all the time anyway. It's just that this time the public was doing art, so we said, "Well, we're not going to do art!"

Emma: I think that's what happened! I don't know that that was

necessarily a failure on our parts; it's just a very weird situation to be put in.

Anthony: What does it say about the artists? Imagine if Katie chose artists that weren't like us, and [they] actually decided they were going to paint and be completely egalitarian and equal to people. Would it have been anything different? If the artists in good faith said, "I am equal to the public, and the public are equal to me."

Emma: I think it's possible, but I think the result would have ended up as a pastiche of what was there already. I think there was probably an anxiety of being confused with the public, and confused with that anonymity.

Anthony: Do you think that the public was afraid of being confused as artists?

Emma: No! The public loved it. They thought it was brilliant because they were being given an opportunity that they would never normally get. I think the thing with artists is they want to get a good deal out of whatever they do (laughs) and so if you get put in a shitty situation…

Anthony: It's the same with all people, everyone wants to get a good deal.

Emma: But I think it wasn't a good deal for the artists, this situation.

Anthony: It's interesting because the deal was given from the institution, for the art.

Emma: We were invited in a very different way than the public was. The public was sent a flier and we were sent emails and a promise of a fee.

Anthony: Do you think the public knew that there were artists doing projects about the work?

Emma: Uh … I have no idea! The 2014 Glasgow International Festival program had the names on it, but you could take anything from that. You could think that they (the artists) did it, or you could think that they were behind the idea.

Anthony: I also think that most people that went into that space didn't read the GI program.

Emma: No, I think an art-going audience was not who was going to go and see that. I have friends that are interested in music, and they go to the GoMA quite regularly, but they are not artists and they really liked the show and took a lot of photographs. I really feel that it was about the experience of the space, people liked that; they didn't go for art. Maybe some of the public went to make what they felt was art, but they were on a very different plane than what the artists were on in that circumstance.

Anthony: I think that we at this point, by writing something, we are claiming ownership of it in some way, or we're writing our way into it. We're making ourselves have agency.

Emma: I feel that I am trying to make sense of what happened, to say to myself that I have finished this and it's done.

Anthony: So this is your completion of the Atelier Public experience. Can I ask what the completion needs to be? Does it need

to be about resolving what it does?

Emma: I think I just need to give something back to GoMA so that I can then stop feeling bad that I just kept turning up and saying, "I don't really understand what's going on here."

Anthony: Isn't that enough? I mean, you were contributing.

Emma: It probably is, but I am not used to accepting that situation.

Anthony: I still really think that it's about the negotiation of the exhibition itself.

Emma: Do you think it was an exhibition though?

Anthony: I do, because it did what exhibitions do. It had all the criteria of an exhibition. It was a public space in a white cube, art happened inside it, and now it's gone. It was the proposition of an idea, quite a cohesive proposition of an idea.

Emma: Do you think that it is problematic for the institution to set up situations like that if artists find it impossible to produce within them in the traditional sense.

Anthony: No, I think that's the best thing.

Emma: Do you think that they should always do that?

Anthony: Not always, but I think that if an institution has any thought of what art could be for the future, then I think that it has to occasionally challenge the artist. If that is actually erasing the artist, it is making the artist work harder because if the insti-

tution merely existed to serve the artist, then I don't think that it would work.

Emma: I think that for Katie, it seemed like she felt very aggrieved that she had done that erasing, particularly with regards to Modern Edinburgh Film School. Yet at the same time I think that she really likes the project, and would happily run it again.

Anthony: I think that's fair though.

Emma: Which is interesting, that she wasn't anticipating that tension before this started because they didn't get the same outcome last time in the set-up that they had.

Anthony: Yeah it's interesting that she should feel aggrieved about the erasure of the artist, but not necessarily (although she does) about the public's work.

Emma: Oh, she did. I think it's just the public wasn't speaking to her about it. If the public had been turning up at her office every morning and crying…

Anthony: I think that says a little bit about the Interpretive Policy Analysis aspect of the institution. The public was only an artist for three months (or however long the exhibition was), but they stopped being an artist as soon as the exhibition came down.

Emma: Can we call it that: "The public was only an artist for three months?"

Anthony: Sure! Yeah, because then they stopped and the institution said, "No, no, no, you're not an artist any more! You can go

back to being a human." I like those problematic things, where it says something that isn't actually that nice.

Emma: I said to Katie that I did think it was productive to do all of that talking; it was just also frivolous in not involving the public at all. I mean the only person who came along to the roundtable that was not "us" was somebody who knew Tara. So, obviously that fed back into what Katie feels about the show, but what does it do other than that?

Anthony: For the public? Or for anyone else?

Emma: Yeah, just generally. It's a very unusual situation to be in, and I also was saying to her that I felt it was funny. Last summer I was invited to do a residency on Raasay, and there were 18 of us. In that circumstance, we got there, we were not given any studio spaces or private space, we were staying in dorms. We were eating together; we were spending every minute of the day together and every day was full of activity. Then we were forced to leave it 'til we came home to come up with something that was then given to the public through an exhibition or whichever way we wanted to mediate things.

So I was saying that I felt like these experiences were remarkably similar, that there was no space for contemplation or production outwith your own home and your normal day-to-day experience after the fact. It wasn't engineered that way, and I was wondering whether that is a way that curators will continue to do things or whether it just happened like that.

Anthony: There's an assumption about how artists work: "Oh yeah, you make stuff, it just happens!" There's not an understanding of the practicalities of how that happens.

Emma: Yeah, so there's not any catering to what is needed in that circumstance. Or at least the artist is going to have to work that out for themselves, which is an echo of the way everyone needs to be freelance and work on all aspects of what they do by themselves now. If an institution commissions a circumstance like that…

Anthony: So then it becomes about institutionalizing an artist, if you were to say, "This is what an artist does, we will give you that, that's what an artist needs." Then, it's like: here's this amazing studio; here's your facilities, "but I don't make art so this studio is useless to me!"

Emma: That was one thing: Katie was there virtually the whole time, for everything!

Anthony: Yeah, but she is the main artist. That's something that would be interesting to talk about, the institution as artist. We were secondary artists to her in some ways.

Emma: Yeah, I can see that. So, do you think that what she did was not curation in this circumstance, then?

Anthony: I dunno, because maybe she's not the artist, maybe she is the curator … No, I would say she is the artist because, you know, the whole idea of the artist and art being a question, of proposing difficult questions.

In The Aesthetic Unconsciousness, Jacques Rancière describes Oedipus and Hamlet as the classic "fools" who both "know and do not know" who "act and do not act." He goes on to suggest that the aesthetic realm therefore is a "thought that does not know," where there is a "logos in pathos and a pathos in logos."

In this sense, Atelier Public #2 formed an ideal Aesthetic Realm, as it did not complete itself but rather stayed unfixed in its pluralities…. In some ways, that is what Katie was doing with the exhibition, problematizing what "public art" was and was not.

Emma: Yeah, though she never outwardly did it.

Anthony: No. And, if that's the case, if she was the artist and not the curator, does that position it more problematically, because we just became materials to her artwork?

Emma: Ohh! You were going to be equated to the sticky back plastic?

Anthony: If that was Katie's work or the institution's artwork, the artists became just another mechanism to produce for them. We had no agency in and of ourselves. If that's the case, then maybe that's why it was so problematic.

Emma: I think I would look at it in a less pointed way than that. There are parts of that, that I definitely would agree with, but I think it was just genuinely a development from a previous project and there wasn't a lot of consideration as to how differently it might turn out, being in a new space and not involving the artist Rachel Mimiec, who was assisting Katie with the first one. Maybe you are right, maybe in the absence of Rachel, Katie did become the artist.

Anthony: Maybe it's the institution as an artist rather than Katie herself, because it was the institution that was making the gesture, the provocation, the spaces. They instituted themselves through Katie; she was the one pushing it through.

Emma: Okay, I would be more inclined to agree with that.

Anthony: That is an interesting thing to think about, how can the institution be an artist? I don't want to think about that, that's too complicated!

Emma: Well, it was very institutional the way that things became. The way that work was farmed off to other people repeatedly. So that would be quite a convincing thing to say.

Anthony: Maybe I will start with that. I will probably still want to think about the institutional approaches.

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Atelier Public #2 roundtable

Katie Bruce: I set this up on a bit of a whim a while ago, just because I had a 'whats on' deadline and just thought that selfishly this would have been quite useful for me to have an almost public discussion in the space just before it closed down. Because there were a number of discussions with artists that I'd invited in to work with me on this exhibition, some of whom are here today, there are a number of others that couldn't make it that actually were influential in the thinking before the exhibition actually opened but also critiquing, moving it, shifting it, as the exhibition rolled on. And because also the exhibition moves at breakneck speed, into chaos and anarchy and back out again and then doing it's own thing, I thought it would be quite a useful point for us to come back together and have that kind of discussion in the space just before it shut down.

So in some ways, I called it a roundtable discussion because I thought that I didn't want to present. This has never felt like a presentation place, but I also didn't actually send any information out to the artists about what I might want them to discuss (laughs).

Anthony Schrag: What I find interesting is how these events have often replicated the very intention of the whole event, the whole exhibition.

Emma Balkind: Yeah, I think we've been challenged more than the public has.

Anthony: I think you're totally right…

Emma: I was thinking about it in the shower this morning and I thought actually a lot of things that were structural about the show that was supposed to be the model that was kind of like to challenge the public, were things that ended up challenging all of us and making all of us thinking through things. Which, is like I dunno, it's just as good to be put in that position.

Anthony: Yeah, absolutely. I agree.

Katie: But then, I think it's also… because it is a studio I didn't want to have the answers, and set up a particular structure or commission anybody right from the beginning, because then you're not setting up a studio, you're setting up a different thing. I suppose, one of the things… I actually wrote this on the back of an envelope this morning, in my head… So I could at least think well come in with something, but then be prepared for this to be totally ignored as a lot of things happen in this space and it goes off into its own direction and does its own thing.

But, part of this is selfishly knowing by the end of August it's the deadline to write a case study about this and just sort of, some of those things that I've been throwing around in my mind around this, and it relates to some of the conversations that we've had in the past but also some of the questions that you guys had posed me as well. So for this roundtable discussion I didn't necessarily want to have commissioned essays right from the start, to start the conversation off because I've not actually commissioned anything in this exhibition. People might have responded in that way. But the idea was not about commissioning something, the idea was much more open than that. I didn't want to direct those people that I'd invited into the space with their participation, for want of a better word, because I wasn't necessarily doing that to the public either…

Anthony: But you do. You have commissioned, and you have set some form of curatorial direction.

Katie: Have I?

All: Yes…

Anthony: You have decided to invite us. You decided to use a kind of replication of the materials [from Atelier Public #1]. You've decided that they are - and because of the institution - there are certain things that can and cannot happen so that also frames the limitations.

Katie: Which I think have happened anyway regardless…

Anthony: Yeah, but I think that in all of those ways. In some ways a lot of it has been about saying "No, no, everyone can do anything, it's fine!" but there's a kind of subtext…

Emma: You've set up conflict without ever admitting that you intend to do it. I don't know whether you secretly intended to do it or not. I was thinking this morning about how I don't think any of us thought oh well, what we want to do would be completely incompatible with what the public would want to do in this space. And I think as time has gone on that's shown itself as an issue more and more, and that's why we've ended up talking so much, I didn't that we'd be talking this much.

Katie: What did you think we'd be doing?

Emma: I don't know! But I didn't think.. I mean I've come here a lot and every time I've come here we've had massive conversations.

Anthony: I think that is a credit to your idea for this, and you sticking to it, to the guns of the idea because it has meant that it has been interesting because it's challenging. Sorry, I interrupted you…

Katie: No, no it's fine… I think it's interesting that you've been challenged by it, the institution's been challenged by it and I suppose that was one of the things that, in my conversations with Jessica about this, about the idea about models. In the museum sector we talk a lot about the forum and the temple in institutional ideas and then this… I'm looking directly at you [Tara S. Beall] because you talk about the institution as a material, which I just, I'd forgotten about in all of this idea of the studio, and I think talked around it but when you spoke about it I was thinking. Actually, possibly, yes, and you've challenged me in this institution and it's one of those things that I wanted to bring the studio or the lab model into the institution but as an exhibiting model that is fundamentally quite challenging from the start. Although, the public… visitors to the gallery using this that haven't been part of these conversations don't seem to actually - actually, that's a lie, some of them do have a huge problem with it - but the majority that are making work within this and kind of come in don't have the same problem with it.

The other model I was trying to bring in was an adventure playground model, although this could never be an adventure playground because of the way they work, in terms that you sit down and make the rules together, and then you go off and you 'do'. Adventure playgrounds don't have cleaners, can I just say that!

Tara S. Beall: But they have stewards! Sorry, on you go.

Katie: No, they have stewards, but they're playworkers, but they

will often go back and wait until they're invited in. So there's an element of that but we couldn't be in the space as playworkers all of the time because of the nature of the building. But we also can't… you'd [Emma] pointed out about visitors coming back, there are a few of those, but it's a very transient visiting public whereas playgrounds will have return visitors so there is an investment in the space. The conflict I suppose of bringing different models into institutions and trying to work that inside a very very institutional model that already exists. I think that has been quite challenging for us.

Anthony: What do you think will change from those challenges to the institution, if anything?

Tara: Oof, straight to it!

Anthony: Why beat around the bush? We're here, let's go! That's unfair because it's a question directly towards you rather than us generally but I suppose that I would be interested at a later point to discuss that.

Tara: I would be interested in this group then coming forward with a series of recommendations, not to let you off the hook, but to make this a collective responsibility. So that say we come forward with a series of suggestions for ways in which the museum's rhythms could change to make them more easily accessible for these kinds of participatory opportunities and for the group to then present those to the the senior management team, for example. That would be a fun conversation.

Anthony: Yeah. I guess the issue that I would have with that, not issue, I guess the forseeable difficulties with that is — what do we mean when we talk about participation? Because, I

mean, we've talked about this. This isn't a public space and the people who come to participate in this space are generally the same sorts of people. So, I guess I'd be interested in going well can we think about other forms of participation? Because the people who come in here, yeah, they'll participate in the sense that they might make something but they're already participating in the way that they come here already.

Tara: So in other words what you're saying is that it's not a new audience? "Audience group" to use museums language. It's an existing base of people who are coming in and out of the museum and then are interacting different. It's the same group of folks. Do we know this for sure?

Emma: Well they're the same demographic I think, but they're not the same group. I think it's a flow mostly of people who visit once. I think there's definitely been repeat visitors here. But I think that one of the things we talked about at the start was about if it was a public or a common then it would have to have a community which is like a stable group and I don't think that there has been a stable group, other than the people that you [Katie] have invited—as in us!

Anthony: Which is us, we are the public!

Tara: We are the community!

Emma: Which is a weird kind of dichotomy to the whole thing, but I'm enjoying the challenge of that because we're trying to consider other people in their absence. Their presence only being shown by this [looks at wall], or in them running around destroying things when we ask them to but it's not a present community. We're the only present community.

Anthony: And the gallery guy.

Emma: Yeah. I mean, anybody who has been somehow related to you [Katie]—I would say —is the community of the space.

Anthony: So if we go back to Tara's point, could this ever exist without you [Katie]? Could we actually come up with a set of guidelines that could exist without Katie driving it? Or do you think this is essential, that you are here, you are involved in this, this is yours?

Katie: I mean theoretically not…

Tara: I think that's the most interesting thing actually, is how self-reflexive this is, in a way. That's why I started talking about the institution as material right away because the institution as a thing drives everything. Is sort of a silent driver absolutely in the same way that sort of curatorial stewarding or guidelines are an absolute driver but in some ways kind of an invisible, but really loud in that way. It's something that I've found, when I talk to people about this show and how it's changing and they describe it they'll say things like chaos or… it depends but it's just the overwhelming amount of stuff. You know, there's all of this kind of, that activity in the first instance, seems really like the most active, or loud… It seems like the loudest thing about the show, but I think in a lot of ways the loudest thing is the one that's…

Anthony: … not being spoken of.

Tara: Yeah, strangely. I know it sounds a bit… but I think it's about the institution and the curatorial. Strangely the curatorial strategy seems even more weirdly important than in a traditional show.

Emma: Yeah. If you consider the materials even. They're so… I mean, you gave a very limited series of materials to people.

Katie: Which was much more limited than last time, but interestingly enough I would have kept to that but the learning team upstairs were having a clear out. So they just kept putting lots more things in here. My thought around this was to try and programme it a bit more and shift and change the materials very subtly and move it rhythmically by just shifting materials. It ended up being completely outwith my control because either the materials were completely cleared out by the cleaners… Or, learning assistants would go 'there isn't enough down there' and so they'd put out some completely different materials so it was kind of interesting how that came in, and with the costume coming in at the end as well. Even if I'd programmed it, there were other people coming in and curating in this space as well as I was, going along.

Sofia Rodriguez: I would like to go back to the question at the moment, about whether this could work without Katie. In my experience from being here from close to the beginning with Katie. Even though she said it was something open, it was her imaginary that has been constructing everything, even the work that Arthur and I did selecting other artists was filtered through her vision and discussed with her.

Anthony: It's true, you're kind of like a giant sieve. We all go through you! (laughs)

Sofia: But still, we took that freedom and tried to match with her vision, trying to integrate it with the nature of the space, and we even discussed possibilities. So it has been very open, but still the presence of the curator, it's there, it's felt in the process.

Arthur Dimsdale: Yeah, it's like being a middleman because often, as you say, it would go through us and then so often things would also slightly get lost in translation, or changed to fit with the general, the overriding idea of Atelier Public. Which can be a good thing actually as well because it fits in, it is a thing as a whole.

Sofia: I think every single person that has been part of the project has reinterpreted your vision, but still in a dialogue with you, not all the artists have brought their own project but they're always in dialogue with your vision so I think in a way yes, the presence of Katie has been fundamental to how this is the way is.

Anthony: Yeah, if someone else had done it, it would be a very very different thing, and you know that's a good thing. I think you made it good but in some ways yeah your presence is…

Katie: It's required.

Anthony: In some ways, I would say, yeah. Imagine this in another space, in another gallery with another programme curator doing it and it would be utterly different in a different situation.

Katie: But would it? Because we had this conversation with Sarah Schulz from the Walker, because I think she'd originally come over thinking it'd be really interesting to take this back, from what she's seen online, from the conversations we'd had previously. Then she spent a couple of days in here and went "I can't take this to the Walker". In some ways… she was asking me you know what would it look like if we took it over and if we used the same materials, essentially, I imagine it would look pretty much the same in some ways. But then I think that's maybe…

Anthony: It may look the same, but I think what we were saying is that there's other things that are happening that are the kinds of things that are being filtered, that are interesting, that are guided, that are directed, and not in a bad way! I'm not saying that this is a sort-of critique… absolutely not. But, if for example we wrote up these things and we went to Glasgow Life and Mark and Bridget and sat them down and said "here's what you need to do" I don't think that would ever be implemented in the same way that this show has been guided by you.

Emma: I think it would also be seen as more risky by the institution, in the way that early forms of open space type of shows were risky. Like the conference that you said you went to, the ones that failed. I think that we all felt that there was not a situation in which this show could fail because all the institutional parameters were there for it to continue for the duration of the show in a way that if you were to… say there was an Atelier public #3, I think there would be more chance of it failing because of a difficulty. I feel that your role was very much a person to touch base with and you would decide whether the institution could deal with something or not, or try to mediate that thing. Because, the last meeting that I was at, you [Claire Docherty] had your organ and you were like "let's put it in the space now" and Katie was like [speaking out the side of her mouth] "I'm not sure that we should put it in the space now. It might get broken" and you were like "No, just put it in the space!" It looks like it's still ok!

Katie: One of the little discs [from the organ] has gone but I've got it in my drawer and we can glue it back.

Arthur: Does it have more vinyl on it now, or not?

Claire Docherty: No, it didn't.

Katie: And, I think that's the other interesting thing. I think there were dots on it—because I've got photographic evidence —and there was vinyl but then I think that some of the visitor assistants, or gallery assistants, have taken that off. I think that's really interesting because of the custodians of the space, and last time it was in a much smaller space and what I found with the gallery assistants is some of them were really looking after people's work as it came in and they make personal connections with different pieces. I think a lot of different people have made special connections with that harmonium, so they're actually keeping a wee eye out on it and they're looking after it and you know, there are certain things like the windmill… that has moved. Oh, it's up there now!

Anthony: One of the things that I was supposed to save at the destruction event… and I didn't…

Katie: They might be coming back on Tuesday Anthony, and I'm here by myself! (laughs)

Arthur: So they've been put in this special exhibition, and they've been taken away touring the country.

Katie: Possibly…

Anthony: Either that, or somebody else has come in and taken them, and that's fair too.

Katie: So, there is that. But, I suppose in some ways what curators tend to do is disappear in exhibitions, and we're meant to disappear and I suppose the artists do as well.

Anthony: I think the artist has disappeared in here.

Tara: Yeah, that's one of the other most interesting things…

Anthony: I mean, I wasn't here but I think maybe you guys were here, one of the discussions I was talking to Alex Hetherington about the erasure of the artist, and how this space actually erases the artist.

Claire: What's really interesting from a music point of view is the fact that because there is just one instrument, actually when you sit and you listen in the gallery it's not… I was just thinking this morning, if the multiple set of voices in terms of the visual markings and pieces on the walls, if that was existing as sound in here, then it'd be a really different thing. Because you know, I came in and I sat in the chairs one day and I was listening. I was just listening to people play, and people that were coming in to play were playing fragments of things that they knew, all sorts of things. There was Bach, playing about, and there was Schubert and there was Chopsticks, and there was Katy Perry, Coldplay—there's always Coldplay, I don't know why (laughs])—but you know, there was all of these fragments and a lot of them were formed pieces in a way. And, I just thought that was quite interesting because although there's sound in the gallery, there's the sound of people in the gallery, there's sounds maybe coming from the microphone on the other side occasionally, there's the sound outside. You know it's quite porous in terms of sonic space, and you could be reacting to it, but because none of the sound and music in here has been documented in the same way, there's nothing fixed about it, it's very temporary. It means that there's always sonic space to do something, and so I kind of think that whatever people were doing has been less dissolved by…

Anthony: Musically?

Claire: Yes… than perhaps maybe you're gauging in the visual. I came in to do some scoring work on my own and I completely had that experience of like, you know, I had written some sketches and they were in fixed notation. I was like, right we're going to try and do something with this, I'm going to try and translate this now, I'm going to to some kind of graphic score and it was just this sort of erosion of that kind of individual identity and the decisions you make, and I just had to find something elemental, and eventually when you start putting it down, it sort of gets completely overtaken by the language. Here, that all becomes part of it, and then the complexity of the piece—or the score if you like—is actually the number of voices that are present within the space. But that wasn't happening with the harmonium because there's only one instrument, and I guess I wonder if we had 15 instruments that would have been a completely different thing then, because sonically… there'd be more information in terms of your ears. So yeah, it's interesting.

Katie: One of the questions I have been kind of thinking about in my head, is that idea of values and validation. And you know, you were saying, would this happen without me? Would this happen without the institution? Because that's one of the questions we've been asked, if we were talking about going to senior management and putting this proposal on the table, we have already in terms of putting it in community venues, we were asked to put that forward, that proposal. I suppose there is that interesting question about the validation of the institution although it's incredibly problematic. That it's in a studio model, it's within an exhibiting institution, there's still the notion of the validation of the institution, because it's here.

Anthony: But I think that's why people come in and make it, because it's here. I mean if it was in a community space in Dalmarnock, or wherever, I don't think it would have as much value because this represents the value system that people want to be part of.

Emma: And it's so central that people are just always passing through the building so the accessibility of it, I think, is really important.

Katie: But I also think there's the conversation part of that as well…

Anthony: Are there horses outside?

Emma: Sounds like it.

Katie: Probably… well there's horses heads in here as well, which have also been paraded through. There are various photographs of that.

Anthony: If the values, so the value system… There's a bunch of different tangents but I suppose what they all relate to is the value system and I was reading about how Zizek suggests that in order to imagine the success of something you have to imagine the failure of something. So, imagine how something is totally and utterly destroyed. So, what would the failure of Atelier Public be?

Katie: White walls.

Anthony: No-one engaging altogether.

Arthur: Or the other end of the scale broken windows and you know, like smashed lightbulbs, or would that be a success?

Anthony: Would that be a success? That's kind of interesting, cause that kind of frames the parameters of what is the success of… yeah. And, I think that challenge to think about 'how would this fail?' actually kind of starts to begin to talk about how did it succeed or not? And, I think it comes down to those value systems that this institution represents because people want to take part in those value systems.

Audience: But even so, when that wee boy came in, his dad said he was famous because he had done his thing and it was here, so like, that's pretty ridiculous.

Katie: But then how does that work, for say for all of you artists that I've invited in here that disappear within this?

Anthony: Well that's just been challenging hasn't it?

Katie: In terms of that validation of your involvement which to me has been hugely hugely important in terms of this, and there are all sorts of things that I've got out of this as well.

Anthony: Did we become erased or did we just become equal to 'that guy there who did that?' or 'that girl there who did that'?

Emma: I think that was the thing we were always fighting against, do we just add something to this and then leave it at that?
Like, how do you…

Anthony: Are we more special than that?

Emma: I think we've just been constantly been looking for some kind of validation.

Anthony: Because we're so needy! [laughs]

Sofia: I was reflecting about this but I think that the structure set the difference, because people wouldn't be allowed to come here and destroy something made by an artist but people were allowed to destroy work made by other people, and that set value system there. Yeah, the artist is here, you know, it's in the other galleries as well. This can be destroyed because it's not made by an artist, it's just people who came here. And, we have given it value. I mean, it's exhibited here, but still, it can be destroyed and nothing happens. Nobody's crying about it, and nobody losing money by it as well.

Emma: Yeah, nobody cried, did they? Did anybody cry? Because I was anticipating some crying.

Tara: It was fairly complex.

Anthony: Shhh, Katie almost cried… (laughs)

Katie: Yeah…. No, there was the odd… I remember…

Anthony: There was a bit.

Emma: I felt quite shocked…

Katie: There was a bit of a shout when somebody something that somebody thought they'd saved. I think there was that, and there were people trying to save things and if they turned their back.

Tara: But it was like a squad! A protection squad!

Emma: It was, yeah…

Tara: That for me was fascinating! Like, really, yeah. That was really fascinating, there was an entire… there was a group of them!

Anthony: Did you know that none of them had actually been here before? They'd known that… all they wanted to do was protect art work. That's it, they didn't know anything else. I thought that was fascinating.

Emma: I think one of the guys was in my Philosophy class in undergraduate. I remember him. So I don't know if they were all just really philosophical, you know here on ethics! (laughs)

Anthony: Whereas we artists, not so clear on ethics!

Tara: I'm hoping some of them will come back on Tuesday actually.

Katie: They might…

Anthony: This is amazing. What is amazing is that they had borrowed a whole bunch of plastic folders from work, and they were literally going up with folders, peeling off things, putting them in folders and taking them back to the fort. Like, this was one of them, that's why I remember!

Tara: In bubblewrap?

Anthony: They peeled that off, put it in a folder, protect it in

there and when, at the end of the night they came back, they were taking them from the folder, peeling it and putting it back on the wall.

Audience: What were they using to decide which things they would save?

Anthony: Everything, everything.

Emma: If something was quite big and easy to pick up, then they were just grabbing it and running away with it as quickly as they could. It was about the speed of the operation more than anything else.

Audience: So it was completely indiscriminate? Trying to save everything they could?

Anthony: Much like we were trying to destroy indiscriminately (laughs).

Emma: But they managed to really get in quickly before people started to stamp on things.

Anthony: They arrived half an hour before the doors opened!

Emma: Yeah, yeah. But what you were saying…

Sofia: It seemed to me it was more part of the dynamic, part of the play in protecting something from the others, rather than the value of the piece itself, you know? It was more about the game, about engaging, about…

Anthony: …the challenge.

Sofia: It wasn't that this is made by this artist and I want to preserve it, because it was even anonymous, we don't know who made this. Maybe in some cases, someone could have been the person protecting something they made themselves but it wasn't the general thing.

Emma: I think the one thing that everybody has maybe had in common has been the fight against the anonymity of the space, because everybody that has come in and done stuff. I mean they've got their names and dates and stuff, they want it to be remembered that it was them…

Katie: A lot of people have been photographing their work before they leave. I think there's that sense in gifting…

Emma: And then when Alex (Hetherington) said he couldn't do the production in here, it's too much in here. You know, it's not.. you couldn't have enough of what he wanted to be there. The tension between this wanting to exist and him wanting to exist was too much and so I think that's why there has been a lot of a step back from the invited participants because there's a certain part of your engagement in a project where your name is part and parcel of how things go, and your visual presence is very important in a gallery space. So, even for me it was a very confusing thing for my name to be really big inside of the GI guide, and I had no idea. People kept coming to me and going "you're in a show in the GoMA, what are you doing?"… and I was like "I don't know"! And then when I finally saw it I was quite surprised. It did feel a bit wrong to me that we were listed there in the same way as artists were listed for normal art shows. It felt strange. There are many people that have passed through this space.

Katie: The marketing of this has always been problematic around it because deadlines work so differently, that that went in some time in January when I was still confirming the artists and got changed slightly, and then even when it was updated nothing was kind of updated. It is that funny thing, what people are going to try to come and expect. And I suppose it's that institutional exhibition festival model, and actually… the things I was asking of this exhibition was to sit within an exhibition programme which I actually think… You ask if this could happen without me but I also think that it couldn't happen without the other curatorial presence in this building as well. Because I think the way that the programming… the way the other curators work in this building. This exhibition exists because of the way that our team works and the way that we think about programming as a whole. It might not be that we all think the same way, so you don't get a whole building of say radical curating or a certain point of anarchic curating. But what you do get is playoffs between curatorial practices within this building that actually allow each other to happen, and question and challenge visitors that will come to see one another in different ways. So I think there's something interesting in that, and I've asked this studio model which was quite open to sit within an exhibiting programme model, to sit within a festival model, and each of those marketing circles and those expectations which were trying to pull out what they need from it.

Anthony: It doesn't really work…

Katie: No, there's a huge conflict in all of that, but then at the same time because of the nature of this and because of different organisation's desires for what they were doing. There was an element of this that appealed to them that they felt would work within a curatorial exhibition programme, that feels that

it works within a museums… challenged itself or institutional boundaries or that notion of if we say rhetoric around participation, what does that mean when we bring it into the gallery? And play, the ludic museum, what does it mean when we actually play in the gallery?

Claire: I was just remembering, with that change in marketing. People were invited in again as participants with the card…

Katie: The marketing was meant to be part of it, the leaflet that you were meant to be able to bring in and make work. We had that meeting and it sort of never really happened.

Anthony: It's almost like there's different spheres of influence. There's diifferent spheres of institutions in some way, that marketing kind of group is a different sphere of an institution, they kind of go out and have their own remits and ideas and notions and that's just what they'll do regardless of what's happening somewhere else. So even if you're here in this sphere and you're trying to do something different. There are all these other spheres that will always look at this and go, that's an art gallery and there's art that happens there, whatever. So in some ways even the people who are walking into here, aren't necessarily that much challenged by it because this is just art, it's not really challenging the system.

Katie: No, I think people have been challenged. I've answered the complaints…

Anthony: That this isn't art?

Katie: No, the formal complaints about…

Emma: Can you tell us about the formal complaints?

Katie: Yeah… freedom of information act. We've had about five formal complaints we've had to reply to. All of them question the curatorial decisions and do we not go to visit other major art institutions and look at their exhibitions and why aren't we doing the same? Of that ilk.

Anthony: I don't get it. Sorry I don't understand. So there's been complaints about this space in that it's… what information?

Katie: That it's rubbish…

Anthony: Well yeah, but you get it all the time… (laughs)

Katie: But also compare yourself to other institutions as well, they don't do this. So, I think that gallery, when you put the Gallery of Modern Art outside a building, what people expect when they come in a Gallery of Modern Art. So you are challenging visitors and again, I suppose what we're not seeing is you see the joyousness of people just going for it and creating and just doing it. Here, the comments book has some of those complaints, but it's a shame Alex Stephenson isn't here because he spent nine solid days in here recreating works from the wall and watching people get up and leave or watching people utterly absorbed, spending and hour or two hours making work. That different level…

Emma: Is the comment book still over there?

Anthony: Shall I go and get it?

Katie: There's two of them. Yeah, you can go and get it.

Emma: Because I haven't even looked at it.

Katie: I suppose, I was trying to work out where to bring in Alex Stevenson's work because he kind of thought he was doing a very… His idea was to try and be very controversial and to steal people's ideas and remake them.

Anthony: But in some ways it's the least controversial aspect of it, because it's been validated as art in a specific place.

Katie: Which, you know, if you think about the replication of artwork… but it was actually the most institutional piece of work. But it started out from very fundamental ideas of theft, and actually the idea of copying works in museums and art galleries to the letter, you just need to look back at reams of people sitting there copying works and ways of learning about work…

Arthur: [looking at comments book] …and then this side is the complete opposite.

Anthony: [reading from comments book] "This is getting out of hand now!" (laughs) "It was fun to start with but now the beautiful gallery is just a mess!"

Arthur: But then the one straight underneath, in capitals, just "I WANT MORE MESS!"

Emma: These ones are all positive.

Katie: That's the one that's just came in.

Arthur: I think most of them are positive and occasionally there will be one which is… they'll spend a good few minutes to say

all the reasons they don't like it.

Anthony: "Great art!" How great thou art!

Tara: I think one of the things that I was most interested in was how exuberant it all feels, and how the shifting of what's in the gallery. I think there's definitely tropes or themes, or certain kinds of actions that are repeated again and again, like names and dates, or phrases. I guess, for me, that was one of the things that I thought about the most was how exuberant the space felt and how easily I noticed people being absorbed in the making of things. And also not wanting, as an artist, whatever that means, to come in and like create structure or I dunno, do something that inserted my own ideas about what is useful or worthy or all that stuff that I come into a gallery with. About what the purpose of art is, about what the function of creativity is within… you know, those are all the things. So when I think of a lot of those things that I think about from my own process of making, I guess what I would say is that I really thought about how all of those things that I use to judge my own working practice or to think about how I wanna work with and within communities for example, that those kinds of criteria weren't necessarily, they weren't directly applicable or they weren't relevant at all in the same way and that for me to kind of come in and I dunno. I think it's completely different from Alex Hetherington's experience but also in some ways exactly the same, in that he was sort of wanting to work in a particular kind of landscape, or with a certain kind of ground, but the ground that is here is different, you know. I mean, I'm fumbling towards the thing that you said really succinctly and wonderfully. What I was intending to do was completely taken over by the language that was already here. I think I found that also in the criteria that I used to think about making work and what work is, what does the

work mean? (laughs) That's also a good one. What constitutes "the work"? Where's "the art"? Which I get asked a lot actually… so what is this?

Anthony: But I mean, where is the art, I guess?

Tara: Yeah, I mean it does and it doesn't matter. It doesn't matter.

Anthony: It's here, it's definitely here but I think it's actually an interesting question. Is it a good thing because it exists in so many different places? (laughs)

Tara: [Looks at the comments book] Can you read it? That's perfect (laughs).

Emma: Anthony… [points at comment reading "Does this mean I can trash all of the other shit exhibitions?"]

Tara: If only…

Anthony: Why not? Why not? Go for it! But I mean, is the fact that the art exists—which I mean for me is the reason I like it—is that it challenges on many different levels and different places? Is that where the art lies? Or is there a critique to be made because it's kind of nebulous, it exists in so many different places? I mean, you talk about the fact that you have to write a case study, but what are you studying? What would be the case? Would it be how all of these different levels of us, the public, yourself, the institution, the marketing… how all of those interacted? Or was it just the things that happened, the events and the things that happened? Easy questions…

Curator: Katie Bruce
Invited participants: Emma Balkind, Tara S. Beall, Anthony Schrag, Claire Docherty (Sonic Bothy)
Students working with GoMA: Arthur Dimsdale and Sofia Rodriguez

Some Assembly Required

Discussion as part of Tessa Lynch: Raising

Emma: Me and Tessa have been meeting up quite a lot to chat about the project, from before the point you [Tessa] got anything fabricated, hey? So it's been very interesting for me to be chatting with her on such a regular basis, to see it go from just an idea of what it could be to the actual physical structure. I think Tessa asked me to speak with her because my PhD is about the idea of the commons. The commons was an idea from around the 16th century, which was part of a charter that went with the Magna Carta called the Forest Charter. The commons is something which can be set out by someone, when they give a piece of land to people to use as are their needs. It was sort of an early form of addressing social inequality I suppose. There was one particular part of a Common law called an Estover, and they would give Estovers to widows in particular, so that they would be allowed to go to gather wood on the commons in order to heat their home and fix their roof and things like that.

So, we ended up coming together because a mutual friend had known that we were each doing this work and had heard about Tessa's idea being to do with bringing together a group of people on a commons to build the project within a day. I think you all know what Raising is about now, do you want to give a bit of background to what started off the project?

Tessa: Yeah, there's a couple of things. I think as an artist you often have these ideas that are things you want to do in your head for a long time, and then it almost seems like the right place and the right time and that idea comes back to the front of your head. And I'd actually, I think it was in 2010, I'd been doing some research into the Meadows (that probably everyone knows) in Edinburgh, and the fact that you can't have permanent buildings on the Meadows. But, if people are familiar with it, you will know that there is a big jawbone and a couple of columns, and they're left over from a world fair that was in the Meadows in the 1800s. So, there was a Crystal Palace like structure, that housed all of these exhibitions from all over the world, and in part of it they rebuilt part of Edinburgh Old Town within this glass structure and then it all got taken down again. So I had it in the back of my head the idea that when there are festivals or short term things, people come together to build these crazy structures and then they can actually change and come down quite quickly. That was something that I'd been thinking about for a while, this idea of achievement and human endeavour and what you can do in a short period of time.

Then I think when I came here the rural setting and the farmland setting, and the family home made me think more about the idea of a "raising", and this outdoor communal activity. The terminology of Raising I really liked as well because "raising" is something going up, but then also to raze something to the ground is going down. So I was also thinking not only thinking about the act of building, but also the act of dilapidation and the way that buildings change so quickly from being these fully formed things to being maybe ruinous or being… I guess in the UK things, especially in social housing, becoming not fit for purpose any more and not fit for the people that live there. So, there's quite a lot of ideas, but the actual physical Raising I think

initially came from this idea of thinking of human endeavour and of coming together to build quickly.

Audience: You mentioned Vatersay, could you just say a little bit more about Vatersay?

Tessa: Well when I had the idea for the raising, I was speaking to a friend who—I want to cal him a folklorist, I'm not sure if that's the right terminology—but he told me about these assumed laws down in Dartmoor, and then I was in holiday in Vatersay and I think it was at an old croft site. I basically read exactly the same law in Vatersay, that happened in the time of the Vatersay Raiders, I think the construction was slightly different, but it was still this idea of bringing in the hearth sort of settled your right to be there. But, I think with the raiders a lot of it was the taking on of old croft houses, places that had existed before and reclaiming them. So a lot of it wasn't building from scratch, it was claiming back, almost.

Emma: I think that's a good point to talk about how there's a mixture of reference points in history that you've got for the project, because you've got this barn raising idea that is a pre-capitalistic, feudal kind of idea. So, it's non beaurocratic, because I guess that's the difference between a commons and a public realm is that something that's common, the bureaucracy is all one to one. Whereas with something that's public there's a structure there that supports that, and there's people who manage particular things. So you've got this feudal idea that's non beaurocratic, and you're working together as a community, in-common, to make something but you've built it on this private land that has been given over to you for this project. I was thinking a bit about how with historical references to the commons, it was quite often the case that when the King would give over a piece of land

in common to people then it would be written into the law that the land was the people's but the soil was the King's or vice versa. So it's just that there's always these slight things…

Audience: Get out clauses! (laughs)

Emma: …that keep it theirs, so that you can have it, you can use it, but there's a condition to it. I was thinking about whether there were any conditions to your stay here, because this is a performance commission?

Tessa: Yeah, so it is temporary, and I think when you are asked to do a performance that sometimes the expectation is that you'll come and do something ephemeral or something not lasting. Obviously I have the consensus from Nicky and Robert Wilson that run Jupiter Artland but it is a bit of a… there is an element of, these people have so much land and most artists I know can't even get the rent together each week to pay to live in their houses. I felt like there was a slight anarchic, something to do with trying to get a bit of this for my own or question the amount of land that on this tiny island some people have and other people don't have. So there is that conversation, but I think that the Wilsons are really aware of that and I think that when we first met up they talked a lot about buildings that were going up in Kirknewton and their ideas of planning.

Audience: But there would have always been some land owners who were very negative to their crofters and their tenants, and others who were much more beneficent and paternal and supportive.

Tessa: And I think that's the thing with Jupiter Artland, they probably fall into that latter category from being a charitable

foundation and their basis on education, so I think that also this does feel like an education tool as well rather than a lot of the other outdoor sculptures, these inert things that are there. Whereas this is more of a learning experience.

Emma: The project itself has been conditional on it being removed at the end…

Tessa: Yes. But also, theres the thing as well that they've paid for it. They've paid for this house to be built.

Emma: And they've watched it from outside their window.

Audience: (laughs)

Tessa: Yeah. I could take those elements and build a house out of them, it's all external timber, so I could go and find somewhere to do that. I won't but…

Emma: The second historical reference point that I picked up on was within the modular nature and the overall image of the project being a modernist idea, and I guess we've talked quite a lot about that relation to mass building projects as a public initiative to house people. I suppose I'm aware of the fact that at this point in time we're probably at one of the lowest points of that kind of public house building in history really, since it was brought in. I guess you've talked quite a bit about right to build, so I was wondering if you could talk a bit more about that part of the project?

Tessa: I guess when I was thinking about how to design it, I wanted something that every time it got built was different and that was important to me because it'd be the community coming

together and it'd be a group decision. So I was thinking anything that had to change, I was thinking of a modular system, which then when I researched it goes down that modernist route of having panels on things that can be manipulated and changed, and I was looking a lot at Walter Segal's building that he made down in the South East. He basically built a garden shed-cum-house, whilst he was redoing his own house. So, it was like in Grand Designs when they live in the caravan, it was that sort of thing. He basically built it all out of sheet material that already existed as the sheet size, so then it could be reused, and I really liked that idea of having…

Audience: Is that the one he turned into a boat? Somebody turned their garden shed into a boat.

Tessa: I don't know. Simon Starling, the artist, had a work where he changed a shed into a boat and then a boat into a shed.

…but yeah, thinking about having this one thing that could be moved, and thinking about things that could be really recognisable materials. Someone described the other day, the pieces of CLS wood almost being like A4 paper. They're almost something that you feel familiar with, that you know what to do with. So, that's sort of how the modernism idea came about and then I guess looking at the idea of how modular systems can be a sustainable way of building because you can change one area. I was looking at the architect group Archigram from the 1970s that develops an idea called the plug-in city whereby you would have a framework and the only thing that would really be permanent were the cranes that moved everything in and out. You'd have pods that'd each be a house and in that house there'd be pods that'd be different rooms, so when one part broke you could take it out and replace it. So, basically it was the ultimate building, but

I think in the world that we live in you have obsolescence built in so that these things break so that they can fuel the economy.

I found this particularly interesting, in researching the project I went to a Robert McAlpine building site in Glasgow. They're building a new Glasgow City College and they're actually building it in a really similar method to what Archigram talked about. They've got this structure in the middle made of steel and concrete, and then these modular rooms that are built on the sides and everything is made so it could be replaced. The corridors are big enough to pull the bathrooms out and totally refit new bathrooms back in, but when I asked if they would change them they said there's no way they would. Even though we are building in this modular way, that things could be changed and updated, it still isn't a reality that we're able to yet… we're still living in a time where obsolescence helps the economy.

I think also chiming in with the idea of social housing, when I went round on this trip round the building site, I was with apprentices that are studying with a social housing construction company within glasgow. They are a brilliant set of young people, and they were so questioning of these building methods, because they are being taught how to build in a very old-fashioned way, building social housing and it's very very slow. It's maybe slightly cheaper than this modular type of building, but they are being very questioning why these quick methods aren't being used in social housing where people actually need the buildings. So that was a really nice thing to see, these young people being really questioning, and also a lot of the modular elements were fabricated overseas or down South. A whole bathroom would be made on a conveyor belt in Bristol and brought up to Scotland, and these are all people living and training in Glasgow and they are like 'well I've just learned all this plumbing, and am I even

going to be able to get on these builds because I'm not going to be able to use those skills'. It made me question as well how modular systems and self-builds may also put people out of work.

Aideen Doran: It made me think of Buckminster Fuller's Dymaxion House, where everything was prefabricated in a way where the pieces just slotted together and anyone can build it. It was supposed to be a revolutionary kind of system, and with Archigram as well all these kind of ideas of modularity are sort of protean, they are kind of revolutionary. This building could be anything, you could take bits away and put bits on, and it's constantly unfixed and changing. But those ideas have been adapted more for their convenience, for the speed, rather than for the actual essence of the modularity, the unfixedness and that's what's keeping that system going and popular with house builders. What could be revolutionary about this kind of housing is lost, you know. I sort of found that in the build as well, it could be anything, but we still made a bedroom and bathroom and an in-and-out, but we could have built a big hexagon if we'd wanted to.

Emma: We've been reading this book called Estates by Lynsey Hanley, which I really recommend, it came out a few years ago on Granta and I had recommended this because it talks a lot about the methods that social housing was actually built with. One of the methods that they talk about is a modular system which was the Larsen-Nielsen method which pioneered in Denmark, and there's one particular story in the book from 1968 about a building called Ronan point which, because the men who were putting together the building were Phillips engineers —so they were just kind of technicians rather than people who were architecturally trained—and when the building had been spec'd then they removed a lot of the things that were integral to

the building being structurally sound without actually realising that they were compromising it. So, what happened was there was a nut that had been put in that was the wrong kind of nut on the gas stove, and a woman came in and lit her match for the gas stove and the whole of one side of the building burst off and four people died. Actually the majority of people were ok, because the bedrooms were on one side of the building and the kitchens were on the other, so because the kitchen blew off and the woman had got up so early in the morning the casualties were quite low considering. But because of the modular system, it meant that the load bearing wall could just burst right off when something went wrong, and I think that that is part of the reason it has been less popular since the 60s is if you see something like that happen. This building was knocked down almost immediately after even though it was a new building.

Audience: I remember it.

Aideen: There's an amazing image of it, it looks as if someone's just taken a bite out of it.

Audience: Yeah, one corner has just come down like a pile of cards. Flip, flip, flip, flip all the way down!

Emma: So I guess when you see something like that and it seems like such a new idea, everyone can get behind it when it is positive but when it's negative everyone just wants to go back to what came before that. The other thing I was thinking about is this great discussion between Patrick Keiller and Cedric Price, and this image here (it's not a very good image) but this is Charles Dickens' summer house which was delivered as a modular system from Switzerland in 1864 as his Christmas present from Charles Fechter and that's still in Rochester in Kent on his land,

so you can go and see it. I thought that it was quite a nice way of showing that actually modular systems are not as new as we thought that they were, and they can be quite kind of baroque looking. But, your system has been made in AutoCAD or some other design system?

Tessa: Well actually it was made on isometric paper, by me! Isometric paper and then tracing paper over the top, so it was a very lo-fi. But then when it went into fabrication there was a translating of that into a CAD…

John Heffernan: It was Sketchup and then redone again in Auto CAD software.

Emma: So you've got three layers of design?

John: Yeah.

Tessa: So now the designs look like the plan for a house, they exist as a thing that could be rolled out essentially.

John: There's a template basically existing for that...

Tessa: ... that they put online—the fabricators, to advertise their fabrication—but they've taken some of the measurements off so that people can't do it exactly. I'd be quite interested if somebody did take it.

Emma: Or maybe 3D prints it in the future.

I was thinking a bit about who came to build the house with you, and I think so far it's been quite a familial group of people hasn't it?

Tessa: Yeah, the first build that we did was with Jupiter Artland staff, so that was interesting because I'd been at Jupiter for about a month preparing for the project and I'd seen all of the people job roles like finance and PA's and groundsmen so that was a really nice bringing together of people that hadn't worked together directly before. Then at the opening it was family and friends, and again that felt really personal. The weather was so bad that me and my boyfriend made the design first, and then basically our families built it for us. So that felt more like the idea of a rearing or a "raising" of a family home.

Emma: I guess the thing for me with it, because I saw photographs of it before I came up then I've never really felt like it was a home until you said about the familial nature of building it and that it was going to be your house on the day of the opening. I've always kind of thought about it as a placeholder or something that's on the landscape that is the idea of a house.

Tessa: I think going back to the idea of researching into different architecture and looking at concept drawings, I was really thinking that on the landscape you know the reason that it's black is because I was thinking of it as a concept house or the idea of a house on the landscape. But then obviously in reality then that looks like a framework or a beginning so I think again, I feel like it looks like the beginning and the end of something. It looks maybe burnt out, and it also looks like an idea rather than the thing itself. I guess that was also so that people can pin things onto it, their own ideas, because when you walk through it you do get the sense that things are room-like without there being rooms with a roof and four walls.

Emma: But if it was to be a real house then you would have to have certain kinds of planning permission, which you haven't

had to have for this project.

Tessa: No.

Emma: So, we talked a little bit about this before but do you think that if the project wasn't an art project then it could be something real - that exists in the real world?

Tessa: I think… I think it could be. In one of the groups that I worked with there were two guys that had been building houses in Kazakhstan and Malawi and the way that they built in Kazakhstan they said was really similar. It was all about locking in corners together, and the height of the building was the same, so I don't think it's a million miles away from something that could be real. I think it's interesting, I feel like I'm sort of playing at being an architect. I think everyone almost has these skills or ideas of what a house is and how it can come together which was quite interesting. But I think yeah, I think it could definitely with a few adaptations.

Emma: I think the interesting thing about the plan is everybody takes a real sense of ownership over it as soon as it's there. It's like, where do you want your bathroom? You're like "Oh, where will I put my bathroom? Does anyone want a hot tub?" That imagination with it is quite interesting, and how quickly that everybody just assumes the roles and says "Hey I'm gonna do this now!"

Tessa: It's like playing house. I think probably everyone at school had to do a dream house, where you'd want to live. So I guess it's that, but it's maybe also promoting the idea that house building could be more of a normal option rather than… I guess you could price this up and think how much it would actually be to

be a real house, and maybe there could be kit houses that are cheaper than building a house on the land.

Emma: It's the land prices that are big costs. But, you'd mentioned before that if it was a different site that it could be an activist project?

Tessa: Yeah, I think that if it was actually on, if it was a community that came together on land somewhere that there was a landlord. Properly reenacting the law, then it would be an activist protest, an active doing.

Emma: So with that idea of it being active, can you comment a bit on the project being a performance? I think that there does seem to be a futility or an anxiety about the fact that you repeatedly build this. You've been doing it every week or two weeks, and it did get taken down when you're not there. I was wondering if you could say more about that, and how it is unable to be a home… it can't be a home.

Tessa: Could you say the beginning bit again?

Emma: I was thinking about it being a performance and how it does seem like quite an anxious project, that it does have to be repeated over and over again and taken down and then you come back and do it again.

Tessa: I guess that there is the idea of labour involved in the performance of it and I think that the idea of human endeavour. I get really anxious every time I build it because I think that it's not gonna be able to be built but every time I've got a group they prove me wrong because I think I was maybe trying to prove in the project that you could come together and do something

and pull together in that human endeavour so every time my anxieties have been proved wrong. Which is a good thing, because that was my intention with the project but I still can't quite believe that it happens each week and people are able to do it I guess! Yeah, I think the thing of it being a performance as well, it is a performance but it feels like the performance is the build. So initially I had thought of it as a performance to audience, but it's definitely not. It's definitely a participatory project.

Emma: It did feel quite strange to stand there as an audience today and not participate, to just watch.

Tessa: Yeah, I think that I thought there'd be different levels of engagement. You'd have the people building, the people watching and then the people that would just be coming to Jupiter Artland in between, I don't think that middle audience of people watching is there.

Emma: It feels a bit nosy standing there, because you wouldn't stand in front of a building site for to long going "oh, what are they doing there?" Maybe if it was outside your workplace or something you might stop outside to have a look but there's a point at which it feels a bit too much that you're standing there with your hands in your pockets while everyone's humphing stuff about.

Aideen: Usually It's so slow as well. You could be sitting watching for ages and all you'd see is a tea break….

Tessa: Yeah, I think at Jupiter you might come there in the morning and there's nothing there, and you leave and there's something there which I quite like. So I think that's a real performative thing, seeing something happen when you've just seen these

big fixed objects, the sculptures around the park, and then all of a sudden there's something there. They're up for two weeks at a time, when you come in between - the weather's totally got it, it was black and now it's grey, it's got bird poo on it. It feels like it is becoming more dilapidated, and it almost feels like that slightly sad thing where something's happened. To me the point at where the project ends is where the fire is brought in that feels like the pinnacle of it, so when people come in between it does feel like a left-over, or the beginning or the end of something.

Emma: Which means that the participation and the ownership of it is really integral to what it is.

Tessa: Yeah because once those participants have gone it's almost like they've left the land.

Emma: You've got another exhibition coming up quite soon at the Glasgow Sculpture Studio which is about Art and Logistics, and I was wondering if you wanted to talk a bit about that and whether that is a follow on from this?

Tessa: I think part of it is that when I built this, it was fabricated in Glasgow and then it had to come to Edinburgh along the M8, and it made me think about the size of the lorry that it was on, and that everything we depend on is the logistics of the city. Even the size of the lorry is sort of equal to the footprint of the average UK house, so I've been thinking about depending on transport systems to facilitate artwork. The show I've got coming up, it feels a bit like a self portrait of me and what I want out of being an artist, and it's based around the idea of the artist as flaneur in the city, wandering through and it's quite a poetic thing. But it's undercut by this idea of the practicalities of getting about and that you can't actually live outwith the logistics of

society. It's quite hard to articulate it all…

Audience: Is it going to be participatory as well?

Tessa: It's going to be performative, and I think that it'll be participative in the sense of how the works will play out in the space, but it is in a much more traditional gallery setting. I'm sort of using the idea of a footprint again, the way that I lay out the gallery space will be as equal as it can be to the size of an HGV lorry. I don't know why the idea of logistics keeps coming in, but it's maybe about how things get from a to b and how things get built.

E
B

How Near Is Here

Emma Balkind responds to Eastern Surf ‘Facing Detection’

[Audio recording begins as Emma is describing the idea for the Union Terrace Gardens gallery development in 2008 with an image pulled up on the projector screen by Shona Macnaughton.]

So, it was a really unintrusive kind of development and I think they got a large percentage of their funding at the point that I was there and within two months of me starting my job, Iain Wood who was the second richest man in Scotland came in and made an appointment to speak to the Director and the board and he basically said “you’re not going to build on this, we’ve found a loophole in your paperwork and now we’re going to tender for this land”. The long and short of it is that actually nothing happened in the end but it was a really protracted situation and maybe 40% of us that were working at Peacock eventually left our jobs because of the instability of the situation.

So, when I was doing my Masters a couple of years later and I hadn’t put to rest the fact that this had happened to me and happened to Aberdeen. It just seemed like a real waste because they’d got caught up between… if they’d been able to break ground to start building then they would’ve received all their funding from the Scottish Arts Council but they didn’t make it on time because of all the stuff with the Wood Group, which meant that it moved over to being with Creative Scotland. The Scottish Arts

Council was an arms-length organisation, but Creative Scotland is part of the government, so none of that funding could be transferred and that was ultimately one of the things that destroyed the plans in the end.

When I started writing my Masters thesis I sort of got interested in what a commons is and what a common good is and the Observatory next door to us, that's also a common good. There's a slight difference in distinction between a commons and a common good in that a common good is more of a civic and philanthropic thing and it's about keeping something for future generations. So, I'm just going to read you a quote from Hannah Arendt that I thought was quite useful on this (p.35). It says:

> The medieval concept of the common good, far from indicating the existence of the political realm, recognises only that private individuals have interests in common, material, and spiritual and that they can retain their privacy and attend to their own business only if one of them takes it upon himself to look out for this common interest. What distinguishes this essentially Christian attitude towards politics from the modern reality is not so much the recognition of a common good as the exclusivity of the private sphere and the absence of that curiously hybrid realm where private interests assume public significance that we call society.

What she says here about an individual recognising the needs of others, that's really the basis of the common good. It's a decision that's made by somebody who has power, to give other people the ability to operate in their lives in a way that they wouldn't if that person had complete power over that situation. Whereas the idea of a commons is more a grassroots thing, so it's a much more active thing, because a common good gets set out in law

or at least in local law when something's a common good. So, you'll find a lot of the time that civic buildings in cities are common good, and the text that I chose for this afternoon is a chapter from Andy Wightman's book [The Poor Had No Lawyers]. The chapter is called Three score men with clubs and staves: the struggle to protect common land. Andy Wightman is a land reform campaigner in Scotland and he really wants for there to be new laws made that allow not only for public buyouts of land which are possible at the moment but also for just a more egalitarian division of land and resources in Scotland, because at the moment there is only actually a couple of hundred people that own the majority of rural land in Scotland, and a lot of those people don't even live in Scotland.

So, the idea of a common good I guess is coming onto the table a lot more with ideas of Scottish independence and also with people like Andy Wightman campaigning for this change in law and for a more equal situation. But basically, the problem with common good and commons when they are put into law is that it's a pre-capitalistic idea, it's a feudal idea, and the first time really that commons were written into law was with the Magna Carta.

If you think about this thing, that has been retained over time but the actual idea of it has to be retained in the hearts and the minds of the public in order for it to be retained [in reality], which unfortunately over time erodes a little bit as large private interests take over pieces of land. So, although there is this sort of link to buildings and land, the commons itself is an idea which changes over time and so you get ideas of digital commons like Wikipedia and other types of open source software, you get ideas of ecological commons.

Elinor Ostrom, who was an ecologist (she just died, last year was it?) but she talked about commons as an alternative to private interests taking over resources such as clean water and shared arable land and things like that. So, what you found basically was that in the early 2000s with the advent of the internet being a lot more available to everyone - I think creative commons licensing was registered in 2000, but also there was a lot of World Trade Organisation protests and things like that around that time. So I think that the early 2000s were really the point where the notion of what commons means and what it can be applied to just became much more vast and multiple, so it makes it a very difficult thing for me to explain even though I'm doing a PhD on it, what it actually means (to talk about a commons) because ultimately it comes down to these ideas of ethics and basic needs that people have.

But, to go on to talk a little bit more about artworks that deal with ideas of the commons. I think the thing with the commons is you can't think of the commons and the public without thinking of the private sphere and I think that is one of the key things that sometimes gets missed out a little bit in a description of the commons because you think of it as being a very open and flexible idea but actually the commons do exist within boundaries and there are crossovers of the idea of being in common with other people… If you look in the dictionary for a definition of what commons means, it talks about this idea of eating at a common table and being together in common, so it's not just about the actual space itself but the relations that you have within it and the relationship that you have to it.

I'm going to read another quote from Hannah Arendt that I think is helpful here and then I'm going to go on to talk about artworks. This chapter of The Human Condition is called The

Public and the Private Realm and I really recommend it if you want to kind of get the basics on what commons means in a broader sense. She talks about Ancient Greece, where if a man lived a private life like a slave and was not permitted to enter the public realm he wasn't considered to be a full human being (p.38):

> A man who lived only a private life, who like the slave was not permitted to enter the public realm, or like the barbarian who had chosen not to establish such a realm was not fully human. We no longer think primarily of depravation when we use the word privacy and this is partly due to the enormous enrichment of the private sphere through modern individualism. However, it seems even more important that modern privacy is at least as sharply opposed to the social realm unknown to the ancients who considered it's content a private matter as it is to the political properly speaking. The decisive historical fact is that modern privacy in its most relevant function to shelter the intimate was discovered as the opposite not of the political sphere but of the social to which it is therefore more closely and authentically related.

So I've been thinking a lot—partly because I've bought a place of my own now—but I've been thinking a lot about housing and partly I've been thinking about housing because I've been working with Tessa Lynch who's been doing a Generation project at Jupiter Artland called Raising. Jupiter Artland is a sculpture park just outside of Edinburgh. They have mostly sculptures that are there all the time but this was a performance commission with Tessa Lynch, and what she decided to do was to enact a sort of barn-raising. So, she asked me to come and have a conversation with her about that because there were some common laws in

different parts of the UK where if you could go to a piece of common land and build your house with everyone else that was part of the community of that area, and if you have it finished by the end of the day and light a fire in the hearth then the building could stay. It was a really early form [ref. onscreen]—that was our hearth—of planning permission because it meant that you had to have the permission of everyone else and they really had to believe in you staying there because they all had to participate in it being built. If you couldn't get participation of everyone else then you'd have to build a very very small house.

Tessa's work is based on the average square meterage of a family house in the UK and it's modular, so that's the maquette [on screen]. So she basically invites people to come out to Jupiter Artland with her and build a house, and they have all of these panels and you get together the group and you find out who came from the furthest away, who's the newcomer to the area, and then they get to decide what they want the house to be like. So, everybody takes a lot of care and personal ownership over this moment and starts talking about "Well, do you think that you'd want a porch? Do you want a barbeque? Maybe you'd want a hot tub in the back…" and it's this process where—can you go onto one of the ones where they're actually carrying the pieces, maybe?—They build a little maquette that's this size and then they build the big house, and it's the process of actually building the house that's the performance and it's going to be there for another few weeks I think, until Jupiter Artland closes for the season.

So, I think the links between what Tessa does with her work and what Eastern Surf have done in their work is this idea of 'inhabitation' - and our theme today was Inhabitation. How do you inhabit a space today as an artist in Edinburgh? Because all

of you guys have been trained in Edinburgh at some point. Tessa was an Edinburgh College of Art graduate to start off with. So, there's this juxtaposition of performance and then a sort of CAD design of a building and then trying to fit together conceptions of work, whether that's physical labour or immaterial labour with this sort of domestic sphere. I guess the way that I see it at least is the reason that these works are coming about from artists that have been trained in Edinburgh is that Edinburgh has a really… it's a very difficult place to make your own mark because you've got the student population that sweeps through every year and then as soon as it gets to the summer holidays everybody has to bugger off again for the festival. So there's not really a permanence there for anyone who is unable to afford to buy a place in Edinburgh, and it's a very expensive place to buy.

It's a way really that I think that artists are actually… they have to create this imaginary realm in order to act out living in a community and living with other people and bumping against the problems of what does privacy mean in that situation? Whether it's an overbearing act of a private sphere adopting bits of the city that actually should be public. Them [Eastern Surf] being kicked out of particular streets just for standing there basically, vs. the ability to actually have a private moment to yourself in your own space and not have to share with other people in a student flat, things like that.

Also, I think the other thing that's apparent as a link between the two artists works is that there is a sort of transposing of the real into the digital and then back again and I think that happens all the time in our day to day lives now but it's done in a very noticeable way. In Tessa's part, her work is very much about you know, linking in with the kinds of things that Andy Wightman is looking at, trying to allow people to have their own land in

order that they can build their own house and to have the right to build basically. Whereas I feel like the inverse is happening with Eastern Surf where you're actually inhabiting the forms that Capitalism has given you in the first place… uh, as is shown by your [Shona's masked] face right now (laughs).

Shona: this is not a hopeful work!

No it's not! So, I guess there's this polarity of juxtaposition you find with it and I think that the juxtapositions are the thing that ultimately describe the commons and allow us to try and make sense of what it is. So, generally, at the basic level when you start learning what a commons is then you would juxtapose it against public and private because it's neither of these things. It's a space that is at one without ownership and also with complete ownership at the same time. There's a collectivity to it and there is a void to it at the same time.

I mentioned before that the idea of commons vs Common Good, what differentiates them is that the commons is an active and grassroots force and the reason that I say that is because a commons always has to be active against it's antithesis, which is enclosure, and enclosure is basically the subsumption of a commons into being a private sphere that's owned by someone. The idea of enclosure has been taken up by activists a lot over say the last decade and especially during Occupy Wall Street, the idea of enclosure has really been at the forefront of people's discussions. That's due to both Hardt and Negri and David Harvey's right to the city kind of stuff.

The other juxtaposition that you have I suppose is about an urban and a rural realm, and I think that it's quite obvious if you look at photographs of this patch that it was rural at some point

and that you can see where the city has encroached around it. Fran, we talked about that a bit when I came up, you were talking about how Edinburgh was a port city and then the train lines stopped that.

Frances Stacey: Yeah, so there's a moment where the New Town is built and they're building at the shore, and there was a plan for it to join up. But that was when most of the trade was coming through at the port, and actually at that point you then get the introduction of the railway and that stops the development. So, actually either side of Calton Hill is then quite broken or that development kind of ceases.

I think that commons, if you try and find the green commons within cities, it makes very apparent the process of development and how they've kind of got smaller and smaller. Union Terrace gardens originally was a hunting forest that was given to the people of Aberdeen by Robert the Bruce and it was the Forest of Stocket. It was the freedom lands of Aberdeen, and it was a much much larger space and really the only thing that's kept it in the shape that it is now is that the Victorians made it into this park space with trees and everything when the Viaducts were built (around it), because it's a bit like Edinburgh where a lot of the roads are actually raised off the ground.

I guess the other thing about commons is that if you are looking at them as a digital realm you can't really look at them as being seperate from your day-to-day life because the idea of a stack or a cloud where your data is always an additional layer over where you are at every moment and I suppose that idea is what Eastern Surf are really exploring. I think the thing with the stack is that there are things that are apparent in the digital nature of what's going on and then there is all of this other infrastructure that is

completely invisible to you (the user). So, I think that it's kind of an odd thing to try and make public and make visible, it seems incongruous in a way but I think it is actually really important.

‘a construction of temporary social spaces, and how to produce and distribute a permeable document of the processes and labour embedded within these experiences’

On the Dreams of Machines blog, there is a text by Deborah Sielert called ‘Commons that Care Feminist Interventions in the Construction of the Commons’. For a while, I’ve been trying to make sense of the connection between my PhD and a reading group I ran last year with Laura Edbrook ‘Sick Sick Sick, The Books of Ornery Women’. My thesis is on the concept of the commons, while the reading group was about a particular kind of ‘bludgeoned’ subjectivity of female writers. In some senses they are completely opposite forces, and in some ways there are points in which they come together.

The commons is something which historically is given to a group of people as a restorative gesture. It is a formal recognition of a lack. My thesis is shaped by the concept of the estover, which was the law permitting widows to collect branches of wood (and sometimes other things like honey) from the commons. The commons in itself was not always a wild space, but sometimes a semi-cultivated piece of land. In this circumstance, the woman as a subject in need of recognition and in receipt of some kind of allowance is often the most visible figure and the key to an understanding of the commons. A woman without a man (and therefore without resources) who otherwise would have been confined to the domestic space.

Last summer I bought a flat in the South side of Glasgow. It is on a modernist estate. The thing about modernist buildings is that they often were built with women in mind, but perhaps not always considering women directly (in that they didn't always like what was created for them). After the wars, there were many widows and so many small flats were built in turn to house these younger widows, sometimes alongside their own mothers.

The modernist estate developed out of the idea of the garden city. The garden city would often build on or around commons, to retain large patches of green space away from cars. Good modernist estates tried to advance this aim with landscaped gardens. On our estate the factoring fees include the wages and pension for a full-time gardener. Thanks to his hard work, the cherry trees are flowering and the whole estate of grey-brown brick and concrete is offset with marshmallow pink blossom.

When we renovated the flat we put in princess grey linoleum and painted all of the walls white. I suppose as a non-artist and ex-gallery worker I wanted to be able to feel like there was a clean space to think and to live. Before we put the furniture in it looked like an architect's office or a dance studio. Amelia and Emma brought this domesticity into Transmission for the course of the show, as the gallery became an extension of their homes. Hints of this come from little windows onto shelves of plants and feminist books, a drinks recipe on the blackboard, and diaristic writings across the front windows.

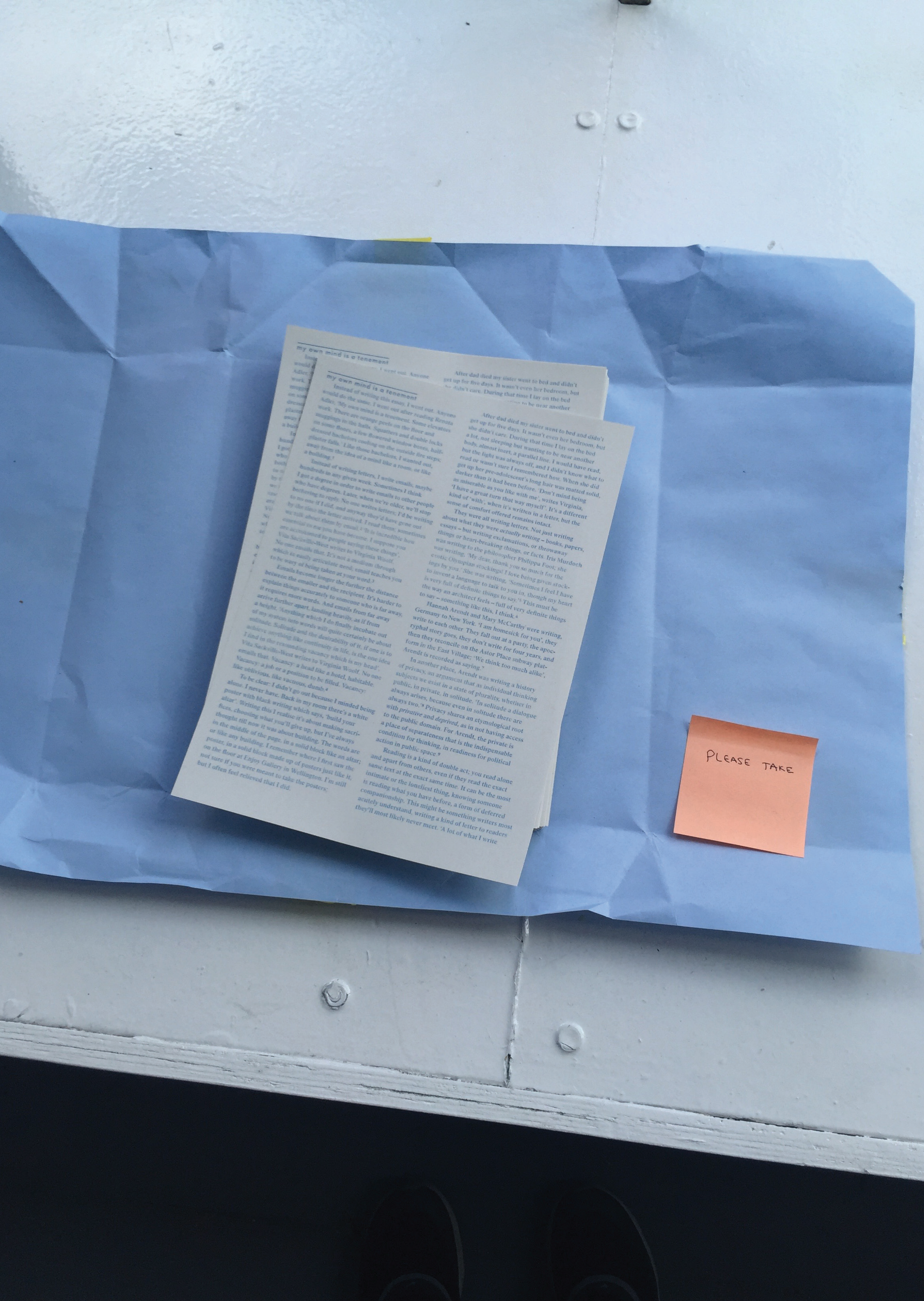
Ash and Liene's chats were like Chinese whispers. I can see Liene's flat from my front window. When she is at home at night I know because I can see the red light from the kitchen. We aren't close friends, but she and Ash went on holiday with some of my other friends who live on the estate, and I saw their photos on Face-

book. Listening to them speak I liked the inhabiting of one another's character in the reading and the flipping and re-reading of one another's voices. Art is something which allows for more proximity to another person's thoughts than might ordinarily be allowed in a social setting. Outside of this I might hear some tender things about you through a friend who you briefly dated, and we say hi sometimes but we don't know one another really.

When I was running the reading group Amelia and Emma came to some of the sessions, but I don't remember which books they read along with us. I only know that a lot of their references cross with things we talked about there, like Chris Kraus. We are each investigating archives of other women's work. In the process of you reading the books I picked, and me reading your readings of books you picked, there is something mutually referential happening across our discursive practice, and I notice this happening more often. There's a comfortable feeling to moving dialogues along in this way. We examine some of the same things across exhibition spaces, and platforms with quotes and references. In this way our feminism presents as a kind of autodidactism.

On the gallery text there was a nod to the items in the space. I thought the bag might be something to carry estovers around in, and by estovers I suppose in this case I mean books. The branch and the piece of paper relationally are primary and secondary product. The text as a gift from one woman to another. The bag, the structure, the notes. I like this idea of the gallery as a place for research. Revealing only small hints of work undertaken.

equivalent to self-destruction. The
company which I need is the company
which a pub or a cafe will provide.
I have never wanted a communion of
souls. It's already hard enough to tell
the truth to oneself. Reading is a
constant, a kind of labour which is
fundamentally independent. 'What makes
me feel strong?', Susan Sontag writes
in the quiet of her journal,
'being in love and in work.'
I went out to find companionship,
away from the aloneness of a room.
Somewhere in conversation I reacquainted
myself what I thought. I came back
I wrote this letter, to an exhibition
Abby Cunnane, 2015.
KING STREET



my own mind is a tenement

Instead of writing this essay, I went out. Anyone would do the same. I went out after reading Renata Adler, 'My own mind is a tenement. Some elevators work. There are orange peels on the floor and muggings in the halls. Squatters and double locks on some floors, a few flowered window boxes, half-dressed bachelors cooling on the outside fire steps; plaster falls.' Like those bachelors, I wanted out, away from the idea of a mind like a room, or like a building.[1]

Instead of writing letters, I write emails, maybe hundreds in any given week. Sometimes I think I got a degree in order to write emails to other people who have degrees. Later, when we're older, we'll stop bothering to reply. No one writes letters; I'd be writing to no one if I did, and anyway they'd have gone out by the time the letter arrived. I read them; sometimes we talk about them by email.[2] 'It is incredible how essential to me you have become. I suppose you are accustomed to people saying these things', Vita Sackville-West writes to Virginia Woolf. No one emails that. It's not a medium through which to easily articulate need; email teaches you to be wary of being taken at your word.[3]

Emails become longer the further the distance between the emailer and the recipient. It's harder to explain things accurately to someone who is far away, it requires more words. And emails from far away arrive further apart, landing heavily, as if from a height. 'Anything which I do finally incubate out of my system into words will quite certainly be about solitude. Solitude and the desirability of it, if one is to achieve anything like continuity in life, is the one idea I find in the resounding vacancy which is my head', Vita Sackville-West writes to Virginia Woolf. No one emails that. Vacancy: a head like a hotel, habitable. Vacancy: a job or a position to be filled. Vacancy: like oblivious, like vacuous, dumb.[4]

To be clear: I didn't go out because I minded being alone. I never have. Back in my room there's a white poster with black writing which says, 'build your altar'. Writing this I realise it's about making sacrifices, choosing what you'll give up, but I've always thought till now it was about building. The words are in the middle of the page, in a solid block like an altar; or like any building. I remember where I first saw the poster, in a solid block made up of posters just like it, on the floor at Enjoy Gallery in Wellington. I'm still not sure if you were meant to take the posters; but I often feel relieved that I did.

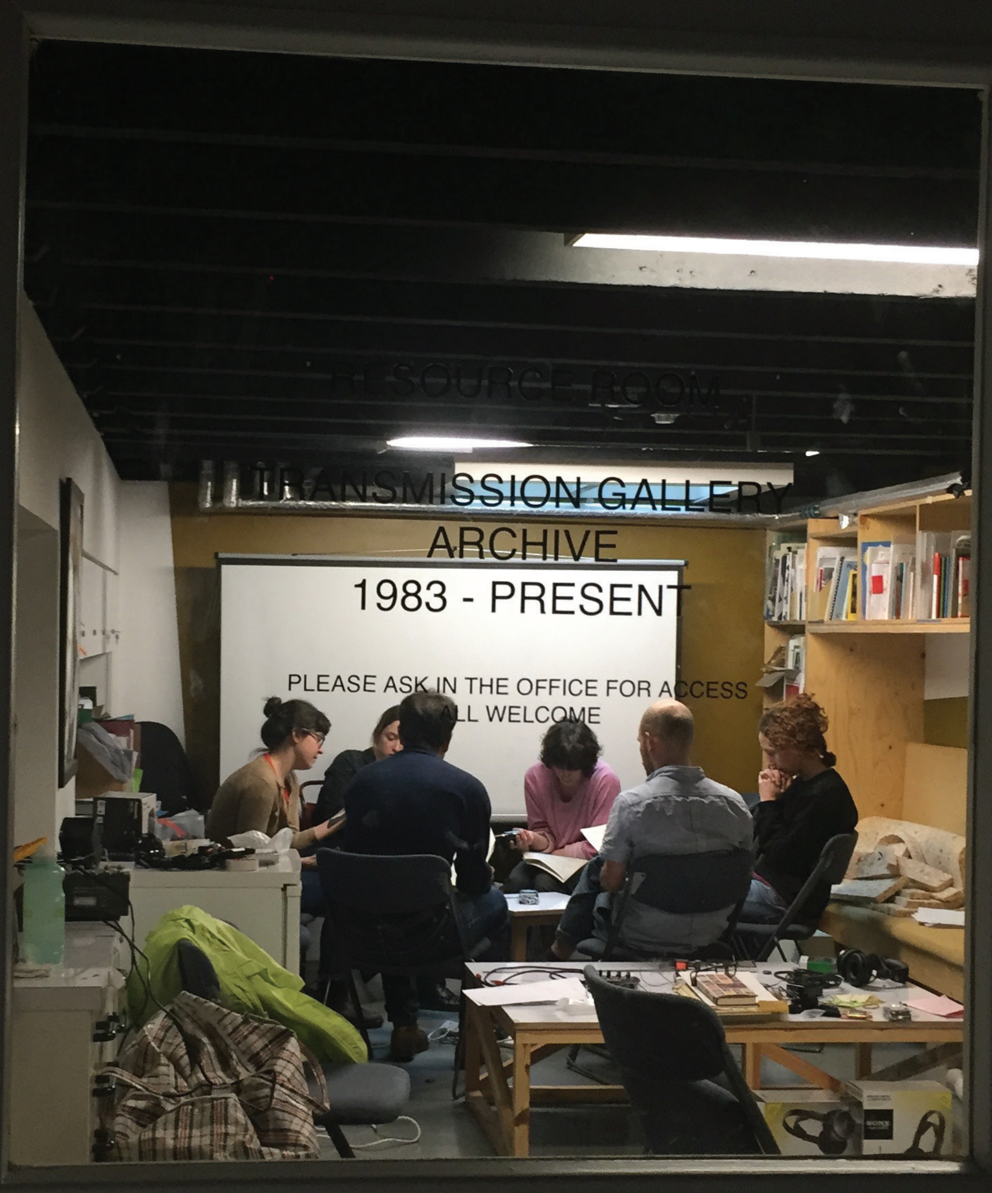
After dad died my sister went to bed and didn't get up for five days. It wasn't even her bedroom, but she didn't care. During that time I lay on the bed a lot, not sleeping but wanting to be near another body, almost inert, a parallel line. I would have read, but the light was always off, and I didn't know what to read or wasn't sure I remembered how. When she did get up her pre-adolescent's long hair was matted solid, darker than it had been before. 'Don't mind being as miserable as you like with me', writes Virginia, 'I have a great turn that way myself'. It's a different kind of 'with', when it's written in a letter, but the sense of comfort offered remains intact.

They were all writing letters. Not just writing about what they were *actually writing* – books, papers, essays – but writing exclamations, or throwaway things or heart-breaking things, or facts. Iris Murdoch was writing to the philosopher Philippa Foot; she was writing, 'My dear, thank you so much for the exotic Olympian stockings! I love being given stockings by you.' She was writing, 'Sometimes I feel I have to invent a language to talk to you in, though my heart is very full of definite things to say.'[5] This must be the way an architect feels – full of very definite things to say – something like this, I think.[6]

Hannah Arendt and Mary McCarthy were writing, Germany to New York. 'I am homesick for you', they write to each other. They fall out at a party, the apocryphal story goes, they don't write for four years, and then they reconcile on the Astor Place subway platform in the East Village; 'We think too much alike', Arendt is recorded as saying.[7]

In another place, Arendt was writing a history of privacy, an argument that as individual thinking subjects we exist in a state of plurality, whether in public, in private, in solitude. 'In solitude a dialogue always arises, because even in solitude there are always two.'[8] Privacy shares an etymological root with *privative* and *deprived*, as in not having access to the public domain. For Arendt, the private is a place of separateness that is the indispensable condition for thinking, in readiness for political action in public space.[9]

Reading is a kind of double act; you read alone and apart from others, even if they read the exact same text at the exact same time. It can be the most intimate or the loneliest thing, knowing someone is reading what you have before, a form of deferred companionship. This might be something writers most acutely understand, writing a kind of letter to readers they'll most likely never meet. 'A lot of what I write


RESOURCE ROOM
TRANSMISSION GALLERY
ARCHIVE
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PLEASE ASK IN THE OFFICE FOR ACCESS
ALL WELCOME

Text written for Transmission Gallery mailout, May 2015
in response to Dreams of Machines by Victor and Hester

Emma Balkind