



PROJECT MUSE®

Editor's Forum: "The Commons as Network"

Amy J. Elias

ASAP/Journal, Volume 1, Number 1, January 2016, pp. 35-50 (Article)

Published by Johns Hopkins University Press

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1353/asa.2016.0002>



➔ *For additional information about this article*

<https://muse.jhu.edu/article/608577>

Moderator: Amy J. Elias

EDITOR'S FORUM: "THE COMMONS AS NETWORK"

As shared public space in which everyone has an equal stake, the commons has undergone radical transformation and redefinition in the twenty-first century. The arts have taken up the cause of commons preservation in a variety of ways, from the creation of media commons to the exposure of commons destruction in protest art to the enactment of commons principles in certain forms of participatory art, accelerationist aesthetics, and affect theory. But the arts may be being redefined as forcefully as the commons itself, forced to collude with a globalized market environment or marginalized as a harmless entertainment through variegated social, political, and economic mechanisms.

Q • *I asked a group of artists and scholars in different arts fields to consider what the “networked commons” means for art and artists today—when “networked” is defined not only in terms of technological connections but also in terms of affective and social relations. Does the commons become redefined, reanimated and re-politicized if conceived not only in terms of spatialized geographical and legal territory but also in terms of timely networks, broadly defined? Might the arts intervene to redefine the commons—beyond copyright law and jurisdictional legalisms—and shift paradigms for shared environments from geography to flow, group to network, statement to dialogue, space to time, mind to body, solo to chorus, self to networked community?*

SUSAN LEIGH FOSTER

In his book *The Undercommons*, Fred Moten describes a process of social gathering, based in the improvisatory, that holds out the promise to affirm and share the tacit knowledges of the disenfranchised. They know—because they experience it on a daily basis—the violence, both physical and psychic, embodied within a profusion of discriminatory practices. Throughout the fluid and protean coming-into-connection of the undercommons, alliances are forged, critique is formulated, survival given hope. In his reenvisioning of Marxist explications of the workings of power and economy, Kojin Karatani argues that Marx's theories failed to predict the current organization of world power because they focused on modes of production rather than modes of exchange. Whether in the form of the gift, plunder and re-distribution, or commodification and capitalization, our modes of being in relation to one another are constructed from the transfer more than the creation of things, feelings, thoughts, and beliefs. In her book *Performance*, Diana Taylor asks, "How would our disciplines and methodologies change if we took seriously the idea that bodies (and not only books and documents) produce, store, and transfer knowledge?" Although all three scholars launch their inquiries in order to elucidate substantially different aspects of human experience, strikingly, all three of these interventions share an apprehension of the bodily motion through which the social is constituted.

To consider human movement as central to an analysis of commons, or any other social formation, is not to shift focus from mind to body, or from space to time, or from self to community, but instead to recognize the unity of mind and body, the relationality of space and time, and the interdependence of self and community. Such an analytic perspective also focuses our attention on process and on the changingness of the events we hope to understand. So, what if we all practice thinking about moving as a form of thinking, and, at the same time, reflecting on the moving/thinking we are doing as we do it?

//

SUSAN LEIGH FOSTER is Distinguished Professor of Choreography, History and Theories of the Body in the Department of World Arts and Cultures/Dance at UCLA. Her research areas include dance history and theory, choreographic analysis, and corporeality, and she is the author of three anthologies as well as *Reading Dancing: Bodies and Subjects in Contemporary American Dance (1986)*, *Choreography and Narrative: Ballet's Staging of Story and Desire (1996)*, *Dances That Describe Themselves: The Improvised Choreography of Richard Bull (2002)*, and *Choreographing Empathy: Kinesthesia in Performance (2011)*.

KIMSOOJA

My interaction with common spaces has been guided by my instinctive response to exhibition spaces, nature, and urban fabrics when I have had the chance to work on public commissions. When approaching a space, I never make assumptions about it. Every space has its own energy and flow; I must visit and walk through it, examine how the light changes, how the air affects the rhythm of my breath-

ing, and I must feel my presence in it. This is in part what my work has been about: making people aware of what they share beyond mere ownership or beyond subjectivity and objecthood. Laying out diffraction film on windows, diffracting light into colored spectrums, installing mirrors on the floors to walk on, or simply inhabiting a space with a sound piece goes a long way. If I feel, when an audience enters the space, that they become suddenly aware of light, of air and sound—if their bodies are inhabited by a sudden presence that transcends the need to “own” a space, or own an object or a person—then I feel that I have fully investigated the poetic potential of a space.

What we share, and how we share it, has also been defined by the migratory experience in my native country of Korea. To think of commonality is first and foremost in my practice to think of migration, to think of property as a flow that never attains to a stable form, or to a stable state of being. In pursuing video performance work I have often established my body as a transient element of nature, which I always envisioned as the passing of a needle, and only through movement or the act of passing through did I experience conformity between being and time. Our energy is mostly dedicated to making our resources and our living spaces a permanent and definitive object. I have always felt the concept of ownership to imply a certain violence: that which possesses a thing—or worst yet, another being—cannot fully grasp a greater domain of the sensible realm we inhabit. I have often

experimented with lending my body to public spaces: I became a static object, or simply an eyewitness; I tried to refute the idea of “making” as an essential proponent of artistic engagement. Little is required for being in space; little is required to make a full use of it. Standing and breathing alone, if they are well attended to, can perform the full premise of an experience of being in space. It is in such a state of being, which for me translates into a state of non-doing, that one can also raise a greater awareness and greater respect for what we commonly share and imagine to be our space and time.

//

KIMSOOJA is a South Korean multi-disciplinary conceptual artist based in New York, Paris, and Seoul. She represented Korea for the 24th São Paulo Biennale in 1998 and the 55th Venice Biennale Korean Pavilion in 2013 and has participated in more than thirty international biennials and triennials. She has had solo exhibitions at the Guggenheim Bilbao, Spain (2015) and Centre Pompidou-Metz, France (2015); MoMA PS1; Kunsthalle Bern; Padiglione d'Arte Contemporanea, Milan; the Museum of Contemporary Art Lyon; and numerous other venues. In 2015 she won the Ho Am prize for the arts.

CLAIRE TANCONS

African American spatial practices belie the notion of a static commons. Among these, none do so more than parading traditions in New Orleans. Historically descended from the mutual aid organizations and benevolent societies of enslaved Africans and mixed Indian and African maroon communities, contemporary Social Aid and Pleasure Clubs and Mardi Gras Indian tribes have upheld second line parades, jazz funerals, and street masking

as territorial assertions of a transient commons. Year-round and nearly daily, parades in New Orleans celebrate community and display creativity across downtown wards and uptown neighborhoods, often through back-of-town alleys but also along main streets, during daytime and nighttime. In so doing these parades and processions, whether in the context of carnivals or festivals or as everyday life practice, innervate the city with a network of parental filiations, social affiliations, and political affinities as a commons in motion and, sometimes, as a commotion. Resistant and remedial practices against the encroachment of gentrification and the threat of further displacement, parading has all but reemerged from the floodwaters and oil spills of the last decade to provide time-space linkages for New Orleans' African American working class communities and cultural bearers.

My research in and practice of processional performance is imbued with these immediate examples and their immemorial antecedents. Whereas processional performance was a dominant mode of public display in Europe until the seventeenth century, its marginalization paralleled the destruction of the commons. African diasporic performance aesthetics—processional performance in particular and public ceremonial culture in general—have used mobility as a placemaking device, a practice in which place is not a fixed locale but a mobile network, and sites are nodal points within it. Peripatetic and circumambulatory, ranging from marching to stepping, parading, and demonstrating, processional performance

offers a vast array of territorializing tactics to reclaim public space, cultural strategies to make visible marginalized communities, and creative tools for participatory experiences. Largely unstaged and minimally rehearsed, open to improvisation and inclined to disruption, the processional performances that I co-elaborate with both invited and self-selected participants are a testament to the fact that there is power in numbers and that the street remains a sustainable arena for the formation of a temporary and mayhap more spatially integrated commons.

//

CLAIRE TANCONS is a curator and art historian who experiments with the political aesthetics of walking, marching, second lining, masquerading, and parading in participatory processional performances. She has curated for international biennials including Prospect New Orleans (2008); the Gwangju Biennale (2008); the Cape Town Biennial (2009); Biennale Bénin (2012); and the Göteborg Biennial (2013). She also was a guest curator for the BMW Tate Live Series at Tate Modern (2014). Her work has appeared in NKA, Small Axe, Third Text, and e-flux Journal. Tancons initiated EN MAS', a multi-year, cross-Caribbean project for CAC New Orleans and ICI New York (2015); this won an Emily Hall Tremain Exhibition Award. She is currently the artistic director of the opening ceremony of Faena Forum Miami Beach, to open in Fall 2016.

HSUAN L. HSU

The recent surge of interest in Paleo diets and other hunter-gatherer-inspired practices is grounded in an argument about the common health practices of the human species: contemporary diseases and health problems supposedly arise from humanity's tendency to neglect how we're (supposedly) optimally evolved to live and eat as hunter-gather-

ers. Influenced by Progressive Era ideologies of wilderness as a cure for over-civilization and propagated by novels like Jack London's *The Call of the Wild* (1903) and Edgar Rice Burroughs' *Tarzan of the Apes* (1912), Paleo diets imagine a virtual commons—individual dietary and health practices—that might inoculate individual practitioners against the risk factors that proliferate as the material commons of air, ocean, soil, and climate deteriorate.

Like many other efforts to frame a deterritorialized commons, Paleo diets often take the form of appropriative, settler-colonial practices. In positing a “common” universal diet modeled on the diets and behaviors of indigenous hunter-gatherers past and present, these diets obscure racially uneven access to land, unprocessed foods, clean water, and other health determinants while supporting food practices that would be environmentally unsustainable on a large scale.

By contrast, indigenous and decolonial food sovereignty advocates emphasize the uneven impacts that settler colonialism, imperialism, and global capitalism have had on food practices. While they respond to many of the same risky foods that Paleo diets (which after all are inspired by indigenous diets) avoid, decolonial cookbooks, novels, poems, and pedagogies highlight the historically and spatially sedimented inequalities that make specific food practices more or less accessible to different populations. For example, the Chamorro poet Craig Santos Perez has discussed the cultural

and corporeal effects of the colonial introduction of SPAM and white rice as staple foods in Guam (“Rice Matters” and “I Eat Therefore I SPAM”); Robert Barclay's *Melal* (2002) describes how Marshall Islanders' fishing practices were largely eradicated by nuclear contamination and the erosion of traditional navigation. Other works, such as Leslie Marmon Silko's *Gardens in the Dunes* (1999), Joni Adamson's “Seeking the Corn Mother: Transnational Indigenous Organizing and Food Sovereignty in Native North American Literature” (2012), Luz Calvo and Catriona Rueda Esquibel's *Decolonize Your Diet* (2015), and Nanobah Becker's science-fiction film *The 6th World* (2012), highlight efforts to recover traditional foods and food practices. While it shares many of the aims and nutritional principles of Loren Cordain's “Paleo Diet,” the Native Wellness Institute's “Native Paleo” movement focuses on improving the health of indigenous communities with a dietary “program designed by our ancestors.” In “Land as Pedagogy: Nishnaabeg Intelligence and Rebellious Transformation” (2014), the Michi Saagiig Nishaaben writer and activist Leanne Simpson lays out the broader social and philosophical importance of recovering and sustaining indigenous foodways by describing how Anishinaabe stories and practices of maple syrup harvesting convey an entire system of ecological and social relations.

Although they intersect with the Paleo movement's emphasis on the risks associated with industrial food production, food sovereignty

movements emphasize not a universal “commons” consisting of practices optimized for the entire species, but traditional food practices that rely on indigenous models of the commons. Decolonizing the food commons would thus require reconstructing distinct indigenous common spaces that materially support traditional food practices, rather than an exclusive emphasis on deterritorialized and universal hunter-gatherer food practices that many descendants of hunter-gatherers no longer have the resources or land rights to enact.

//

HSUAN L. HSU is Professor of English at the University of California, Davis. His interests include 19th- and 20th-century U.S. literature, Asian American Literature, visual culture, cultural geography, comparative racialization, and environmental justice literature. He is the author of *Geography and the Production of Space in Nineteenth-Century American Literature* (2010) and *Sitting in Darkness: Mark Twain, Asia, and Comparative Racialization* (2015). His current research focuses on the influence of Naturalist fiction on contemporary literature and art that addresses environmental injustice.

IMRE SZEMAN

At its core, “the commons” challenges two powerful social forms and forces that support the hard-to-shake commonsense of fixed space: *ownership* and *property*. These are, of course, related concepts and practices. It is difficult today to imagine forms of ownership that aren’t always already related to property; property, on the other hand, generates practices and categories of access to space, things, images, words, sounds, and even beliefs that play a deep and determinate role in positioning having or not-having at the core of almost

all social relations. Physical property divides up space, directing and prohibiting movement, experience, and belonging; intellectual and creative property—which is becoming increasingly important to the operations of economies and societies—divides up everything else. Ownership and property are about possession, dispossession, and accumulation; about separations and divisions; about violence and exclusion. Friedrich Hayek believed that the only way to create radical egalitarianism and individual rights was “to install inviolable private property rights at the heart of the social order.”¹ Everything in our experience tells us the opposite: property impedes democracy and the development of human capacity, ensuring a life of endless labor and ceaseless struggle for most of the planet’s inhabitants.

Against the presumptions of property and ownership, the commons names the fundamentally shared character of social life: that everything from language to education, from nature to our genetic inheritance, from images to knowledge belongs irreducibly to all of us. “We can communicate only on the basis of languages, symbols, ideas, and relationships we share in common,” Michel Hardt and Toni Negri write in *Multitude*, “and in turn the results of our communication are new common languages, symbols, ideas and relationships.”² One of the key places where the arts can intervene to unnerve the hegemony of property is by insisting that there no longer be intellectual property—no ownership of ideas, images, words, and con-

cepts. In addition to highlighting the ways in which the commons are appropriated for profit, such a challenge would raise awareness about the labor discount that has long accompanied artistic and cultural activity. Free ideas and images do not mean that the arts can't flourish. Rather, a demand for free, unfixed spaces of creativity brings to light the degree to which we think of life and labor as of necessity connected to regimes of property and ownership; it shows, too, the work we still have to do to create new forms of collective being and belonging.

/ Notes /

¹ David Harvey, *The Enigma of Capital* (London: Profile Books, 2011), 233.

² Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, *Multitude: War and Democracy in the Age of Empire* (New York: Penguin, 2005), 197.

//

IMRE SZEMAN is Professor and Canada Research Chair in Cultural Studies at the University of Alberta. His books include *After Globalization* (co-written with Eric Cazdyn, 2011); *Cultural Theory: An Anthology* (co-edited with Timothy Kaposy, 2010); *Popular Culture: A User's Guide* (co-written with Susie O'Brien, 2004); *The Johns Hopkins Guide to Literary Theory and Criticism* (co-edited with Michael Groden and Martin Kreiswirth, 2005); and *Zones of Instability: Literature, Postcolonialism and the Nation* (2003).

DORIS SOMMER

Think of the Commons in a ripple effect, from one workshop of future facilitators to the next. Then the private activity of art-making generates a public effect of

enhanced perspectives and opportunities for collaboration. Augusto Boal, originator of interactive Forum Theater, is the *maestro* here in the double sense of artist and teacher. When initiated participants invite new actors to stage a tragedy and then animate the public that Boal renamed “spect-actors” to intervene with plausible adjustments in the script, everyone involved learns to facilitate in the future, thanks to an easily replicable protocol that enables profound creativity. Interventions on stage prompt actors to improvise beyond predictable tragic endings, and the Commons becomes a space for multiplying options for activism in a dynamic that explores solutions, or at least opens up clogged systems for experimentation. Toggling between the convergence of shared problems and the divergence of particular interventions grounds a philosophy of aesthetics that, since Kant proposed his *Third Critique*, has promised to support the development of democracy by complementing single-track Reason with flexible Judgment.

Teachers have regular opportunities—read obligations—to facilitate the development of creative and critical Judgment as well as the imagination for change. Here, Friedrich Schiller's *Aesthetic Education* complements Kant's contribution with the urgency to create new forms. The world needs us all to access our innate “Play-drive” to rescue humanity from the double danger that exploded during the French Revolution: barbaric Reason run wild on the one hand, and savage Nature on the other. Coining the Play-drive for a general

capacity to create has made Schiller the mentor of many educational reformers, including John Dewey and Jacques Rancière. As educators today, we face a moment of Judgment, beyond reason: a choice between acknowledging only what Gramsci called “the pessimism of reason”—as we have for the past two or three generations—or complementing that desperate and paralyzing conclusion with an unreasonable but inextinguishable force that Gramsci named “the optimism of the will.” That optimism keeps underprivileged people eager for change and it obliges the rest of us to explore the options for agency, beyond the determinism of structures.

My response has been to propose an antidote to the kind of cultural studies that either denigrates existing elite practices, or that celebrates grass-roots alternatives; either way “studies” remain descriptions rather than contributions. “Cultural Agents” assumes a responsibility to contribute what we can, as academics, artists and intellectuals. One service we can offer, all of us, is to promote literacy, since we know that development (economic, political, psycho-social) depends on critical and creative reading and writing.

To this end, I am currently working on Pre-Texts, a simple protocol that delivers profound pedagogical results. It derives from popular Latin American practices, starting with the tradition of the ‘Lector’ (oral reader) in tobacco factories, and continues to use local arts to access universal classics. Take a challenging text as raw material, a pre-text, for

art projects, and you will turn even reluctant readers into fans of complex material. This teacher-training program seamlessly combines high-order literacy, innovation, and citizenship. When complex texts are used as prompts for making a new choreography, or a painting, or a story-board, a spoken word poem, etc, students stay intensely engaged in mining elements of the text for vocabulary, grammar, concepts, inferences, multiple interpretations, and references to their most intimate concerns. Admiration for the work of others and for the sheer richness of variety among the creative responses is valuable preparation for citizenship, with more staying power than most lectures on the topic. Academic and classic texts in the hands of students who recycle them offer cultural capital, along with the expanded vocabulary and grammar that schooling values but seldom achieves. (See a description of Pre-Texts at <<http://www.pre-texts.org>>.

We welcome you as site coordinator for a new Commons where art and education ignite one another and spread like wildfire.

//

DORIS SOMMER is Ira and Jewell Williams Professor of Romance Languages and Literatures and African and African American Studies at Harvard University, where she is Director of the Cultural Agents Initiative. Her academic and outreach work includes “Pre-Texts,” an arts-based training program for teachers of literacy, critical thinking, and citizenship. Among her books are *Foundational Fictions: The National Romances of Latin America (1991)*, *Proceed with Caution when Engaged by Minority Literature (1999)*, *Bilingual Aesthetics: A New Sentimental Education (2004)*, and *The Work of Art in the World: Civic Agency and Public Humanities (2014)*.

GRANT KESTER

The commons is defined by the promise of two things: plenitude and community. The plenitude, provided by the abundance of nature, is the precondition for the community made possible by the absence of scarcity. Modern philosophical concepts of the commons have always been temporal as well as spatial, whether anchored in the distant past or projected into a utopian future. As the actual commons were being enclosed in early modern Europe, we observe the emergence of a temporal concept of the commons as the “Original Community of the Land” in the work of figures such as Locke and Kant. If, despite our ostensible commitment to principles of political equality, we exist in a society divided into haves and have-nots, it can only be because at some point in the mythic past “all” of humanity (the ancestors of both the haves and the have-nots) agreed to impose the principle of private possession onto the abundance of the *Communio Fundi Originari*. This prior *apprehensio*, or “original acquisition,” provides the moral justification for all subsequent acts of private possession. It also lays the foundation for the persistent attempt within liberal political discourse to uncouple systematic forms of economic control (and domination) from mechanisms of democratic will formation.

The alternative framework for the temporal commons involves its projection into a utopian future. In the Communist tradition the full realization of the commons awaits

the aftermath of a revolution that will overthrow the capitalist system, which is defined as a pernicious, externally imposed force that contaminates our otherwise natural propensity for conviviality and generosity. Following the violent purging of this alien mindset, society will finally exist in total freedom from inter-subjective violence. In the absence of this revolutionary event, any form of action that makes use of existing mechanisms of political or social change (democratic systems of governance, NGOs, local or situational resistance, etc.) does nothing more than feed the exculpatory logic of the capitalist system. This analysis extends from the belief that the de-politicization of the economy under liberalism has been so effectively imposed that nothing short of the absolute overturning of the capitalist system in its entirety will produce any meaningful change. As a result, the only appropriate attitude towards existing social, cultural and discursive systems (and even to the principle of community itself) is radical negation and tactical subversion.

The revolutionary realization of the commons thus compels us to reject the community it promises until the abundance on which this community depends is fully universalized. Any collective or communal action now only serves as the degraded and abject shadow of the true community to come after the violence of total revolution. This entire system hinges on a hyperbolic account of the nature of political domination and the impossibility of meaningful resistance, as the result of an all-pervasive system of ideological control and habituation.

It assumes as well that the depoliticization of the economy is an accomplished fact, rather than a process that is subject to ongoing contestation. The residues of this mindset continue to haunt our concept of community to the present day (for example, in the casting of community-based forms of art as the reviled Other to an artistic practice premised on ritualistic forms of disruption and provocation, or in Slavoj Žižek's resuscitation of the "dictatorship of the proletariat"). We might note a curious parallel here between bourgeois philosophy and the traditions of Marxism (specifically Leninism). In each case, substantive inter-subjective exchange (the consensual agreement to accept the institution of private property or the un-coerced inter-subjective exchange that will finally flower with the universalization of the proletariat) is always elsewhere. I would suggest that this tendency, associated with what Mikhail Bakhtin terms "theoretism," has effectively limited our understanding of the nature of the political, and the agency of practice and resistance in our own time.

//

GRANT KESTER is Professor of Art History at the University of California, San Diego and the founding editor of *FIELD: A Journal of Socially Engaged Art Criticism*. His books include *Art, Activism and Oppositionality: Essays from Afterimage (1998)*, *Conversation Pieces: Community and Communication in Modern Art (2004)*, and *The One and the Many: Contemporary Collaborative Art in a Global Context (2011)*. He has recently completed work on an anthology of writings by art collectives working in Latin America, *Collective Situations: Dialogues in Contemporary Latin American Art 1995-2010*, which was produced in collaboration with Bill Kelley Jr. and is under contract with Duke University Press.

PETRA KUPPERS

I grew up in Europe, so when I read the word "commons" on my Facebook poetry/art feeds, I think of the green spaces set aside by feudal structures, the places where the cottage tenant's sheep can roam, a part deemed apart from the dominant economic relations but still governed by the same logic of ownership. I think of spaces where one can search for and stack one's firewood, of common rambling-paths across agricultural land. I think of archaic, closed communities, before people travelled much from one village to the next. I think of the space where one can just about eke out a life, under the shadow of the feudal lords that surround the "common" resource. Because it's an old word for me and associated with clear images of particular spatial arrangements, the word does not hold the same sense of freedom and unfetteredness it seems to have in the US, a place with a very different relationship to personal land ownership and erasures. So I have to find new swing in my imagination to reanimate "the commons," to get on board.

I find juice in a reimagining of the welfare state, of common bonds. I find it in the minor keys of the firewood gathering: of a community bringing a cord of wood to an elder widow or to the village cripple. I imagine methods of exchange and consideration that are not spontaneous, but governed by logics of value and appreciation that drift out into time and space. Maybe the labor is a form of *metta* or *seva*, an offering, or a kindness to shore up

value in an afterlife. Or maybe it's a sense that community needs all kinds to make a viable whole, and that there's value in slowness, non-productive labor, in non-immediate exchange. Interwoven, interdependent, non-bounded: these words drift over my mind as I plumb "the commons." Wool-gathering, I hear myths and stories and feel the boundaries of modern life and art give way, pressed by extra-rational forms of relationality, when I think of the wolf's space in the commons, the lamb's space, the river as a protecting and to-be-protected entity, or the raven's voice. Pretty soon, I am pretty far out—although how far this is, exactly, in terms of contemporary spatialities might say more about a reader's position than the urgencies of the contemporary world.

"The commons": as we explore new conceptions of relationality and engagement at the edge of the Anthropocene, how large can we make the fire circle, the Facebook group, the boat on the expanding ocean? That's the challenge, here, to listen to old and new stories, and to weave the web of relations beyond modern normalities into wider swing, where value might accrue in new forms, in energies not accounted for in post-feudal, modern times. Performance and community artists are well equipped to help birth such new relations, with fine antennae for energies and exchanges in fine ether. To listen to these echoes of "the commons" means to undo the boundaries that hold up the edges of "art" and "life" as well, and that's the real challenge and the real opportunity.

//

PETRA KUPPERS is a community performance artist and a disability culture activist, Professor of English, Women's Studies, Theatre and Art and Design at the University of Michigan, and faculty of Port Townsend's Goddard College MFA program in Interdisciplinary Arts. She is the Artistic Director of The Olimpias: Performance Research Projects, an artists' collective that creates collaborative environments for people with physical, emotional, sensory and cognitive differences, and her books include *Disability and Contemporary Performance: Bodies on Edge* (2003), *The Scar of Visibility: Medical Performances and Contemporary Art* (2007), *Community Performance: An Introduction* (2007), *Disability Culture and Community Performance: Find a Strange and Twisted Shape* (2011), and *Studying Disability Arts and Culture* (2014).

ANDRÉ LEPECKI

In the current conditions of living in the age of perpetual personal entrepreneurship, one thing is clear: networking has become the *behavior* through which the ever-increasing destruction of the commons is taking place. Utilitarian, person- or project-oriented, self-promoting, self-perpetuating networking can today be defined as any act of logistical enclosure and personal control geared towards the total abduction of any movement-that-matters. The reworking of networking as utilitarian neoliberal act is the kinetic-affective taming of all unexpected movement; it is the capturing of the wild movement of things, of any movement-affect that disbands conformity. The wild movement of things is reworked and resignified in neoliberal contexts, pushed through the conduits of networking so as to reify and re-confirm self-centered nodules looking not for the occasion of an encounter but rather for an *interesting connection*.

In other words: today networking only reinforces self-interests. Thus, hard monads of personhood, self-interested *selfies*, and entrepreneurial subjectivity all engage in networking only to deny what had been its major political-aesthetic promise: the potentiality of an encounter. In its self-positioning as hub of useful information and interesting contacts, the networking subject turns networking into an instrument for the absolute privatization, and eventual monetization, of all aspects of life, including the life of love and the life of sex, increasingly managed through algorithmically networked ‘matches’ of personal preferences and self-interests. It is in this sense that networking has become one of the major affective-kinetic forces in neoliberal psychopathology. Its only purpose: to match (stereo) types in search of maximal (self or private) profit. Thus, networking establishes meeting times; it sets up dates and establishes fixed coordinates for the exchange of information and more coordinates. It gets faces to chat with other faces. It sifts through lists of personal tastes in order to find symmetrically shared tastes. Meanwhile, it frantically feeds the photon-driven capture of attention and subjectivity going roundabout its circuitries only to keep at bay its now-forgotten fundamental promise: the political-affective-aesthetic event which is an *encounter*. Networking is both the capturing and the butchering of any encounter.

And what would an encounter be? An encounter is not a meeting, nor a get-together, nor a date. It is rather a promise—of the totally unexpected taking place through (and thanks

to) what, in every situation, is already beyond, beside, beneath, ahead, and behind the situation’s given coordinates, including personal coordinates: identities, facialities, personal preferences, private tastes, individual projects, personal ambitions, personal wishes. An encounter is always the expression of an unforeseen singularity coming into the world. In this sense it is synonymous with an *event*—the coming of a joyful, fugitive, vagrant, yet decisive and extraordinarily powerful assembling, a momentary and surprising mutual, yet never totalizing, never self-enclosing, prehension. As it sides with the notion of event, an encounter then must always be supra-personal, even impersonal. This is what makes it akin to the open potentiality of the commons. And, if it is true that one cannot set up an encounter as one sets up a date or a meeting, it is also true that one can nevertheless prepare oneself for its arrival. To be open to the unforeseeable promise of the encounter is to be open, receptive, attentive, to its always unannounced, always unaccounted, occurring. This openness is less about a smart skill or utilitarian anticipation than about a radical unenclosedness, since an encounter is never about private goals, but about a desire towards what, out there, is always beyond the capture of my private wishes, of my instrumental reasoning—what takes me beyond myself, my *selfie*, my self-interests. Love of what I have no idea of, loving what in the encounter is revealed beyond myself, and yet in that beyond communing, co-making a singularity that pertains to a shared zone of affectations. Receptivity to what, in being of the world, is

also not (only) of it. Desire for what, in being of the world, also fights against the enframing and the enclosing of an understanding of the world as mere instrument for more private interests. This is why one does not in fact encounter some object, or some person. One only encounters the encounter. That which, in and through an open commons, will never belong *to* anyone, will never be *of* anyone (not even *of* one community). A commons, an encounter: life as the art of vagrancy towards its events.

//

ANDRÉ LEPECKI is Associate Professor at the Department of Performance Studies at New York University. He is also a curator, writer, and dramaturg and the author of *Exhausting Dance: Performance and Politics of Movement* (2006) and the edited anthologies *Of the Presence of the Body* (2004), *The Senses in Performance* (with Sally Banes, 2007), *Planes of Composition: Dance Theory and the Global* (with Jenn Joy, 2010), and *Dance* (2012). He has curated festivals and performances at the *Haus der Kulturen der Welt* in Berlin, the *Haus der Kunst* in Munich, the *Hayward Gallery* in London, and in *Rio de Janeiro*.

DAVID RASKIN

At *caa.reviews*, our goal is to create a community of artists and scholars by publishing open-access, online, commissioned book and exhibition reviews. Available to everyone, we push publication notifications beyond our professional membership to potentially interested readers in other disciplines; we have more than forty field editors and value their reach. For example, when we publish a review of an exhibition of Chinese vases, we inform professional societies for Chinese history, decorative arts, Asian studies, and so forth. The goal is

broadness because we want to overcome perceived disciplinary boundaries and engage with scholars holding different perspectives. We hope to overcome our own limitations – those of familiarity and self-selection. Our intention is to become livelier and broader. We recently appointed our first field editor for Australia and New Zealand, and have a new budget for translating foreign-language reviews into English. Early next year, we plan to implement a conversation feature to our reviews along the lines of that of *Inside Higher Education*. The ambition is communion.

//

DAVID RASKIN is Editor in Chief of *caa.reviews* and Mohn Family Professor of Contemporary Art History at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago. He is the author of *Donald Judd* (2010) and co-author of another book of the same title; *Midwestern Unlike You and Me: New Zealand's Julian Dashper* (2005). He has contributed essays to catalogs of exhibitions at the *Tate Modern*, London; *Moderna Museet*, Stockholm; *Museum of Contemporary Art*, Chicago; *Ludwig Museum*, Cologne; and the *Stedelijk Museum*, Amsterdam.

PATRICK JAGODA

Too often, the concept of “network” conveys a totality, though one that already departs from the particular unity of “globalization.” Networks may suggest an interconnected infrastructure that, through informational layers, generates a proliferation of coexisting worlds. The numerous computer networks that are integrated into a single whole through the designation “the Internet” convey boundless scales and unthinkable processes. In 2012, it was reported that players had collectively

spent the equivalent of nearly 6 million years playing the massively multiplayer online role-playing game *World of Warcraft*. In 2014, YouTube users uploaded an average of 300 hours of video per minute. In such ways, networks stretch spatially and temporally beyond the bounds of individual human thought. Simultaneously, though, material communication infrastructures evoke a network imaginary (one that we cannot help but think) that becomes the measure of our contemporary social world. This decentralized and distributed imaginary has become so pervasive in our time that it is now difficult to conceive of an outside to it. What, we should ask alongside thinkers such as Alexander Galloway, is *not* a network? Let us be honest: networks are no longer the radical alternatives to trees that they were for Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari. They are a dominant cultural form that marks an episteme: a historical and technological *a priori* that characterizes our present and informs all of our most crucial concepts, including that of the commons.

Complicating the repeated refrain of interconnection, network art thus sometimes reminds us that collective life and collaborative projects are founded on missed connections, disconnections, defections, and various aspirations that do not work out. Literary, visual, and media artworks influenced by networks sometimes make visible such precarious experiences that we share in common. In network narratives such as Walter Mosley's 2002 interlinked short story collection *Futureland*, network films such as Stephen Gaghan's 2005 film *Syriana*, and the

Wachowskis' and J. Michael Straczynski's 2015 television series *Sense8*, assemblages of strangers around the world share little in common except for their marginality and intense struggles to connect with others.

It may be naïve (or premature) to overstate the impact of the arts, as they take up network form, in transforming conceptions or realities of the commons. Artworks can only contribute what their forms, affects, and cultural and political contexts will allow. But the media that define and differentiate such works are equally important. Some artworks, for example, do not simply thematize networks but also use networked computer connections to evoke thought about those very networks. Some pieces celebrate the possibilities that networks open up for collaboration, as in the case of Roy Ascott's 1983 telematic fairy tale *La Plissure du Texte*, which used the ARTEX computer network to connect participants in Australia, Europe, and North America. Other works emphasize the scale and real-time variability of computer networks, as in the case of Jason Salavon's 2013 networked software piece *Rainbow Aggregator*, which displays updated trending topics from Google and Twitter. Still other works set constraints on communication between people, as in comparatively populist art games (such as Coco & Co's *Way*, Jason Rohrer's *Between*, and Thatgamecompany's *Journey*) that reveal common understandings and uncommon improvisations that emerge from frustration, difficulty, and lack. In numerous ways, such artworks experiment with network aesthet-

ics, affordances, effectivities, and processes. In many cases, such pieces imagine or evoke a commons by making us feel that networks are not totalities. They remind us that networks are also ordinary and pervasive infrastructures with inherent limitations and proclivities toward lag, noise, link rot, breakdown, failure, and myriad errors. The work of creating commons—perhaps the most crucial task of ethical thought and political action, not to mention the continuity of human life *as such* in our time—cannot assume the radical or saving power of networks. Instead, we must continue to think (in the many senses of this preposition) *through* networks.

//

PATRICK JAGODA is an Assistant Professor of English at the University of Chicago. He is co-editor of *Critical Inquiry* and co-founder of the *Game Changer Chicago Design Lab*. His book *Network Aesthetics* is forthcoming from University of Chicago Press. The author of numerous articles, he has also co-edited two journal special issues: “*New Media and American Literature*” for *American Literature* and “*Comics and Media*” for *Critical Inquiry*. Jagoda has also worked on several creative projects in the areas of digital storytelling, game design, and new media learning. For more information, see: <http://patrickjagoda.com/>

TOM LUTZ

This is not a question that calls for a short answer, but I’ve been called upon for a short answer, so: yes, the commons as previously understood—say a set of *Encyclopedia Britannica* volumes at a public library—is not the same as, say, *Wikipedia*.

But I don’t see how the oppositions offered here (geography/flow, statement/dialogue)

hold up very well: what we are witnessing is not a move from solo to chorus, but of one kind of chorus to a different kind of chorus. The 40,000 books published in 1903 were already a mighty chorus of solos.

The Britannica, too, was the result of much dialogue (lots of collators and editors in conversation, editing lots of experts who became experts through lots of conversations), though it presents as a singular statement. The traces of the dialogues that result in *Wikipedia* are more easily trackable, but it, too, presents as statement.

The flow in the case of the library encyclopedia consists of people flowing into the reference room and out, while the online flow of electrons goes the other way, from server to user. But in other ways the geography is similar—people who live in different places contributed to each, and people who live in different places use each, even if, in the old geography, the users were less widely dispersed.

The differences between the two platforms are both spatial and temporal — that is, we are not witnessing a shift from space to time, but watching both in flux. The space of the new commons is nearly, but not exactly, global, while the space of print tended to be more constrained, primarily national, or based on global language communities. The time (of change, of access) is radically faster in the new commons. But for the villager along Lake Malawi or a thousand kilometres from Lhasa on the Tibetan plain, neither

encyclopedia is more or less accessible. The time required to access either, for many people around the globe, is virtually identical: they need to get to a library first, or at least an internet café.

To me the salient fact always missed by theorists of the new commons is that information is not free, or at least wishes that it wasn't. Information wants to be paid. If we think culture is something people should be able to devote their lives to creating, we need to figure out how to help them survive while they produce it. In this sense, yes, flow rather than geography. Geographical commons could grow grass for a community's grazing animals—land held in common could sustain a community. What we now need, instead, is a new flow (most importantly the flow of cash)

so that our writers (and artists, and editors, and programmers) can find, like our ancestors' sheep, something to eat. My writers and editors are thrilled to provide their contribution to the commonweal; the challenge for the rest of us is to ask how, in the material world beyond the electronic commons, we can provide for them.

//

TOM LUTZ is the founder and editor-in-chief of the Los Angeles Review of Books. He is also a writer and literary critic, the author of *Doing Nothing: A History of Loafers, Loungers, Slackers, and Bums in America* (2007, American Book Award), *Cosmopolitan Vistas: American Regionalism and Literary Value* (2004; *Choice Outstanding Academic Title*), *Crying: The Natural & Cultural History of Tears* (1999; *New York Times Notable Book*), and *American Nervousness, 1903: An Anecdotal History* (1991, *New York Times Notable Book*). He is currently Professor in the Department of Creative Writing at University of California, Riverside.