

Commoning art and culture
OSUN Summer course

THIS IS A WORKING SYLLABUS
MAKE SURE YOU GET THE LAST VERSION (MOODLE) WHEN YOU START WORKING!

Course description:

This course asks how and why art and open societies have sustained each other across history, and how they may continue to do so beyond the crisis they jointly undergo in the current context of rapid technological, economic and political transformation. While focusing more specifically on artistic production, on its present crisis, and its possible futures, this course puts art in the broader perspective of the history of cultural production, and of its social, political and economic conditions of possibility at the modern intersection of state and market. Instrumental in this project is the conceptual lens of the “common(s),” a notion that has always been defining cultural production in the modern era in one way or another (as a common good, as a public good, as a human right, e.g.); one, however, that has recently gained new meanings and dramatic currency since the digital turn in media and the financial turn in economics. Digitization and financialization, commodify, segment, and often alienate ever larger segments of our private lives and democratic public spheres. In response to these threats, theories of the commons and practices of commoning coming from the digital and art worlds are transforming the goals and means of art, politics, and economics on the margins of the old state-market infrastructure.

The course represents a unique endeavor to illuminate the social origins and history, the symbolic meanings, the achievements, and the sustainability of practices and theories of cultural commons and commoning, old and new, collecting knowledge both from scholarship that is well established but scattered across academic niches (media, law, art, critical theory), and from recent advances of practical knowledge, real but poorly known, debated and publicized. The course is based on the involvement of researchers and practitioners and aims to collect a pool of knowledge on practices and theories of commoning and commons in the field of culture with the active participation of the students and teachers of the summer university.

Requirements:

1. Preparation, attendance and participation, in and out of class (incl. blog, slack etc)
2. Optional: Essay, podcast or video to be included in the course web site (<https://commoningculture.wordpress.com/>). The subject can be a short essay on a conceptual or theoretical question; an empirical analysis of a real-life topic; a personal progress report. Podcasts may consist of reports or interviews. (1500 words max; length of podcasts tbd) Due July 31.

Recommended and mandatory readings (selection from syllabus below):

George Caffentzis and Silvia Federici. 2013. [*Commons Against and Beyond Capitalism*](#) Upping The Anti, Issue 15 (September 2013) pp. 83-91.
http://sduk.us/money/sg_commons_againstbeyond_capitalism.pdf

S. Dusollier, Open Source and Copyleft: Authorship Reconsidered? (March 6, 2003). Columbia Journal of Law & Arts, 2003, vol. 26, pp. 281-296, Available at SSRN: <https://ssrn.com/abstract=2186190>

Fabiani, Jean-Louis « Changes in the Public Sphere (1983-2013) », Eurozine, March 2014, <http://www.eurozine.com/articles/2014-06-11-fabiani-tr.html> (translated into French, Russian, Turkish, printed versions in *Esprit* (Paris) and *Salon 55* (Copenhagen)).

Fabiani, Jean-Louis « Cultural Governance and the Crisis of Financial Capitalism », *Culture Unbound*, vol. 6, 2014, p. 211-221.

Gagyi, A. (2019). Solidarity economy and the commons in Central and Eastern Europe. *Green European Journal*, 10-04-2019. <https://www.greeneuropeanjournal.eu/solidarity-economy-and-the-commons-implications-for-central-and-eastern-europe/>. Accessed 27-05-2021.

David Harvey. 2012. "The Creation of the Urban Commons." In *Rebel Cities*. Verso. 67-88.

Hess, C. (2008). Mapping the new commons. Available at SSRN 1356835. Presented at 'Governing Shared Resources: Connecting Local Experience to Global Challenges,' the 12th Biennial Conference of the International Association for the Study of the Commons, University of Gloucestershire, Cheltenham, England, July 14–18, 2008. <https://surface.syr.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1023&context=sul>

Tan, Pelin Practices of Commoning in Contemporary Art, *ASAP/Journal*, Volume 3, Number 2, May 2018, pp. 278-285

Sezneva, O, and S Chauvin. "Has Capitalism Gone Virtual? Content Containment and the Obsolescence of the Commodity." *Critical historical studies* 1, no. 1 (2014): 125–150.

Wallerstein, I. (1990). "Culture as the ideological battleground of the modern world-system." *Theory, culture & society*, 7(2-3), 31-55.

George Yúdice "The Privatization of Culture", *Social Text*, Summer 1999, No. 59, pp. 17-34.

Course schedule

June 21: Jean Louis Fabiani (Keynote) Is Cultural Commonism our Radiant Future?

The idea of commons applied to culture seems to be less developed than in other sectors of social life (environment, land use, urban squats), although all movements oriented toward commoning contain cultural elements (see the zones to defend particularly). I started to work in the sociology of culture almost fifty years ago, in 1972. We were still in the utopian mood of the post-68 era: most of us believed that culture could be de-commodified and de-institutionalized. I strongly remember that after a Sun Ra Orchestra at the quite elitist Maeght Foundation in Saint-Paul de Vence, we projected to dismantle all museums. A few years later, a famous Corsican singer, Ghjuvan Paolu Poletti, publicly said that all his royalties should go to the Corsican people. The contrary happened: we witnessed an unprecedented commodification of

culture, a universal trend to privatization and the consecration of culture as a key element of a financialized economy (particularly in the world art market). Connecting democracy and culture has two meanings: first, bringing “culture” (basically the legitimate one) to more people and giving them access to the masterpieces of humanity (this is well captured in Malraux’s *Imaginary museum*); second, promoting all forms of culture through a cultural democracy that gets rid of all hierarchies and welcomes all types of cultural identities). In both cases, the democratizing process may go without “commoning”, understood as the universally free access to all types of culture. Here, communing presupposes a form of universalism that is strongly denied by identity politics, which questions the false commonalities of dominant cultures. Thus, it is very difficult to equate the universal access to air or water (and the quest for environmental justice) with the universal access to culture (since there is no cultural unity). We must discuss the possibility of a cultural public sphere that who be both universal in character and opened to what Nancy Fraser called “counter-publics”. There is a second obstacle: we note an inherent contradiction between the multi-secular trend to autonomize the artist, to give her or him an exceptional status and protection in society and the idea of a common culture where everybody would be equal as in Marx’s utopia on communism when everyone could be an artist at some point during the day. The quest for celebrity is the consequence of the universal ambition to be seen and admired by a public. However, the aim of “commonism” is to proclaim the end of the public. We may conclude by noting the complexity but also the decisive political importance of the issue. Against false universalism that is often sold as the solution of current contradictions, we can reclaim a cosmo-ning of culture.

Recommended readings:

- Boltanski, Luc and Eve Chiapello, *The New Spirit of Capitalism*, London, Verso, 2017
- Fabiani, Jean-Louis *Après la culture légitime. Objets, publics, autorités*, Paris, L’Harmattan, June 2007, 250 p.
- Fabiani, Jean-Louis « Festivals: Local and Global. Critical Interventions and the Cultural Public Sphere, », ed G. Delanty, L. Giorgi, Monica Sassatelli, *Festival and the Cultural Public Sphere*, London, Routledge, 2011, 94-107.
- Fabiani, Jean-Louis « Changes in the Public Sphere (1983-2013) », Eurozine, March 2014, <http://www.eurozine.com/articles/2014-06-11-fabiani-tr.html> (translated into French, Russian, Turkish, printed versions in *Esprit* (Paris) and *Salon 55* (Copenhagen)).
- Fabiani, Jean-Louis « Cultural Governance and the Crisis of Financial Capitalism », *Culture Unbound*, vol. 6, 2014, p. 211-221
- Macrì, Emanuela, Morea, Valeria, Trimarchi, Michele (Eds.) *Cultural Commons and Urban Dynamics. A Multidisciplinary Perspective*, Berlin, Springer, 2020.
- Menger, Pierre-Michel *The Economics of Creativity. Art and Achievement under Uncertainty*, Cambridge (Mass.) Harvard University Press, 2014.
- Negri Antonio and Michael Hardt. *Commonwealth*, Cambridge (Mass.) Harvard University Press, 2009.
- George Yúdice “The Privatization of Culture”, *Social Text*, Summer 1999, No. 59, pp. 17-34.

I. Culture as public good and as commodity: historical context

June 22 Session 1

Discussion in this session will be based on the two following recorded lectures and attached readings:

–**Alex Kowalski, The social life of cultural goods—between commodity, public good and commons (recorded lecture)**

This lecture offers an overview of the modern history of cultural goods (artifacts and “intangible heritage”) between production/exchange on the one hand, and the public sphere on the other. Following the lead of historians and sociologists of art, museums, and heritage, we reflect specifically on three distinct social identities (meaning and value) that art and culture have assumed since the beginning of global modernity and that still define them for us today. One is art/culture as a commodity, rooted in the growth of global markets of cultural goods since the 15th Century. Another is art/culture as public good and shared heritage, rooted in the public policies of national and international organizations since the turn of the 19th century. And the third one is rooted in the utopian imagination of the common/s, a critical discourse that is mobilized against both market- and state-supported cultural forms, and that can be dated to the second half of the 19th century. The lecture will offer several possible theoretical frameworks to grasp the sociological dynamics at work in the formation and confrontations between these identities: the theory of social fields (Bourdieu); the sociological theory of critique and worlds of worth (Boltanski/Thévenot); and the historical anthropology of things (Appadurai).

In class we’ll discuss and debate recent controversies that illustrate the various outcomes produced by the generative contradictions of these social identities and discourses. We will try to identify the actors, interactions, and types of contexts that bring them (and clashes between them) about, paying special attention to voices within the field of art/culture. Through lecture and class we will clarify the notions of public sphere, public good, public space/domain, private space/ownership. We’ll also review the meaning of “commons” in academic discourse.

Readings and prep materials:

- [Mexico vs Zara](#) and other news stories tbc (Moodle)
- Arjun Appadurai. 1988. The social life of things (introduction, excerpted)
- Joseph Stiglitz. 1999. [“Knowledge as global public good”](#)

As well as:

–**Séverine Dusollier, Copyright and creativity (recorded lecture)**

Creative works are protected by copyright that regulates their use and public circulation, hereby constraining conditions of creation, access to culture and its making available, while securing rights and remuneration to authors. This pre-recorded lecture will provide a basic explanation of copyright and how it applies to creations. It will also look at the history and roots of copyright law to expose its individuality and exclusivity dimensions, which commodifies works in opposition to culture considered as a commons. But traces of commons features in copyright law will also be highlighted to provide for a more balanced perspective on copyright.

June 22 Session 2 (double session)

Dorothea von Hantelmann, The Museum and recent institutional models (lecture and discussion)

Art museums and exhibitions are deeply linked to the values and categories that constitute a given time. We can retrace the entire history of individualisation by following the increase of wall space between paintings in 19th and 20th century galleries. We can comprehend the transition of early market societies into consumer societies alongside the transformation of 19th century museums into white cubes. And we can analyse the contemporary experience society on the basis of the way it transforms the white cube into time-based experiential spaces. Seen in that regard, art institutions constitute modern ritualistic spaces, in which core aspects of the modern socio-economic order are cultivated, embodied and enacted. What does that mean for

the way we conceive of the arts institution for the 21st century? How do new institutional models today reassess the idea that the museum experience should be ‘for everyone–’ an idea that is integral to the historical emergence of museums and exhibitions? Drawing from utopian institution models of the 1960s and a selection of contemporary approaches, we will discuss the parameters of new arts institutions for today. Looking at art spaces historically as a series of decisive moments of transformation, we may find that the transformations of our epoch are asking for a new kind of ritual, after that of the exhibition.

Readings:

– Mathews, S. (2005), ‘The Fun Palace: Cedric Price’s experiment in architecture and technology’, *Technoetic Arts* 3:2, pp. 73–91, doi: 10.1386/tear.3.2.73/1 <https://www.bcchang.com/transfer/articles/2/18346584.pdf>

– Hal Foster, *After the White Cube*, London Review of Books, Vol. 37., No. 6, 19. March 2015 <https://www.lrb.co.uk/the-paper/v37/n06/hal-foster/after-the-white-cube>

– Dorothea von Hantelmann, “Art Institutions as Ritual Spaces: A Brief Genealogy of Gatherings”, in: , Tristan Garcia and Vincent Normand (eds.), Berlin: Sternberg Press, 2019, pp. 251-259.

II. Un/common heritage, de/colonial approaches

June 23 Session 1 Culture as enclosure and as common good (double session: lectures and panel discussion)

Olga Sezneva, Uncommon German architecture (lecture, Part 1 of session)

As part of “Culture as Enclosure and Commons: the case of heritage”, Olga Sezneva will present her research on the social life of German architecture in two contexts defined by the varying kinds of ‘post’: the post-WWII and post-socialist Kaliningrad (former Königsberg) in Russia, and the post-colonial post-apartheid Swakopmund in Namibia. In both places, paradoxically, the same type of architecture and urban infrastructure is being re-valuated as ‘heritage’, but differently by different groups. What can these re-valuations and claims on and about German architecture reveal about fostering new, and different, un/commonalities in the post-colonial and post-socialist settings? What can be learned about the ‘post’ as a setting and a moment, when the optic of un/commoning is deployed?

Paul Basu, Un/commoning heritage (recorded lecture and panel discussion with O. Sezneva and A. Kowalski, Part 2 of session)

Who owns cultural heritage? Is it the property of particular nation-states or ethnic groups? Or is it, somehow, the common inheritance of all people? Something of universal value? In this lecture, we explore the idea of ‘cultural property’ and the way in which different entities lay claim upon heritage, including in current restitution debates.

This second part of the session brings together P. Basu, O. Sezneva, A. Kowalski and the student group to discuss issues brought up in P. Basu’s lecture.

Readings and study materials TBA

June 23 Session 2 Pelin Tan, Ecofeminism and Decolonial Practices (lecture)

How radical gardening, foraging and cultivation are becoming also a metaphor beside everyday survival for commoning practices? How female labor is a methodology in understanding the scale of commons? Many thinkers and practitioners written on critical thoughts about life and non-life division and spatial colonialism (E.Povinelli 2016, K.Yusoff 2019), posthumanism from queer feminist perspectives (R.Braidotti, S.Ahmed, K.Barad) and questioning field engagements for the sake of empowering indigenous knowledge and decolonization methodology (E.-Tuck). These theoretical contexts are vital in shaping a multiple understanding of queer knowledge that also concerns artistic research methodologies, which most artists and artist collectives are dealing since long time. But more important is the radicalism of responsibility towards non-human ethics and the shared vulnerability in space-based solidarity practices within unpacking the space-based indigenous knowledge and definition of the practice of commons. This presentation will be focusing on such practices in emergency spaces of refugee camps to precarious urban collective radical gardening. Thus it will open questions of degrowth, scale of commons, interdependency of labors and indigenous worlding that are topics of a deeper issue on contemporary discussion on commoning.

“Most of the land that women farm is public or private land that they have appropriated along roadsides, rail lines, and in parks, without asking anyone’s permission or paying anyone a fee. In this sense, we can say that this land is the beginning of a common, in that its appropriation produces a different relationship to public space—a relationship of direct management and responsibility, restoring people’s symbiosis with the natural environment.” Excerpt (From: Silvia Federici. *“Re-enchanting the World”*. p.367)

III. Defining “the commons”

June 24 Session 1 Digital commons

Séverine Dusollier, The digital commons (lecture)

The revival of commons in the 21st century is largely due to digital networks and technologies that have provided, in an unprecedented way, means of communicating, sharing and playing with creative content. One answer to this technological promise has been a strengthening of copyright law to fight against any unauthorised copying or communication in this new digital environment. Another reaction, prompted by hackers, creators, internet users, has developed collective creation, sharing, critical comment, fan fiction and memes, peer-to-peer innovation, and has developed a thriving culture. This lecture will retrace the development of digital commons, its extraordinary culture, and the legal tools, such as Creative commons, open source licenses, that have supported it and re-invented authorship.

Readings :

--[J. Boyle, *The Public Domain - Enclosing the commons of the mind*](#), Yale university Press, 2008, chapter 8 – Creative Commons

--[Y. Benkler, *The Wealth of Networks*](#), Yale University Press, 2006, chapter 1 (to go further (optional) , you can also read chapter 3).

—S. Dusollier, Open Source and Copyleft: Authorship Reconsidered? (March 6, 2003). Columbia Journal of Law & Arts, 2003, vol. 26, pp. 281-296, Available at SSRN: <https://ssrn.com/abstract=2186190>

Olga Sezneva (response)

One characteristic feature of the information sector today is the increase in nonmarket and nonproprietary production (beyond even what is referred to as the “digital commons”). A terri-

tory autonomous from the dominant logic of commodity circulation clearly expands with the growth of electronic technologies. Students are invited to raise questions and/or discuss the following questions: What novel challenges does the knowledge-based economy present to critical analysis of commons and commoning? Can piracy and other forms of unauthorised reproduction of digital contents be considered 'commoning'? In what relationship do 'creative commons' and 'piracy' stand to the market, commodification, and 'cognitive capitalism'?

Reading:

Sezneva, O, and S Chauvin. "Has Capitalism Gone Virtual? Content Containment and the Obsolescence of the Commodity." *Critical historical studies* 1, no. 1 (2014): 125–150.

June 24 Session 2: Panel session and seminar discussion

Mary N. Taylor, Commoning, the verb

In order to think about the process of commoning, I will discuss the following topics with the students themes that are touched on in the resources (required and secondary): commons (fetish) and commoning (process), public and commons, value, enclosure and common enclosures, scale, space/time. This will be an active session in which I ask students to contribute to the discussion of these themes based on the resources.

In order to go beyond shared readings, students will be split into groups with each group taking responsibility for an additional reading/resource or two.

Pelin Tan, Spaces of Commoning in Contemporary Art

How do displacement, migration, and contested spaces affect the notion of the commons? In recent years the discourse of public space in art transformed into discourse of commoning and commons because of the migration, labor, ecological and other struggles happening in various parts of the world. Defining space *collectively* means problematizing the term of "public space," an originally European concept based on the division between private and public space. Socially engaged art and curatorial practices protesting neoliberal state policies, European Union citizenship policies and racist institutional governing practices blur and question this dichotomy of two spaces. The commons perspective seeks to inscribe creation in everyday life instead of reinscribing the institutional separation between private/public spaces. Art and curatorial practices and methodologies contribute commons in producing critical discourses on activism and imaginative counter-strategies.

Readings:

— Tan, Pelin Practices of Commoning in Contemporary Art, *ASAP/Journal*, Volume 3, Number 2, May 2018, pp. 278-285

— Gibson-Graham what is to be done video https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wPo_r3Xdza0

— George Caffentzis and Silvia Federici. 2013. *Commons Against and Beyond Capitalism* *Uprising The Anti*, Issue 15 (September 2013) pp. 83-91.

http://sduk.us/money/sg_commons_againstbeyond_capitalism.pdf

— David Harvey. 2012. "The Creation of the Urban Commons." In *Rebel Cities*. Verso. 67-88.

— DeAngelis and Stavrides. 2010. Interview.

<https://www.e-flux.com/journal/17/67351/on-the-commons-a-public-interview-with-massimo-de-angelis-and-stavros-stavrides/>

— Doina Petrescu, | Constantin Petcou, Maliha Safri, Katherine Graham. *Environmental Policy and Governance*. 2020. the value of the commons: Generating resilient urban futures. 1-16. <http://communityeconomies.org/sites/default/files/2020-12/Calculating%20the%20Value%20of%20the%20Commons%20final.PDF>

— Supplemental videos for optional viewing to be shared later.

IV. Commons&culture in practice

8. June 25 Session 1:

Agnes Gagyi, *Culture and solidarity economy* (lecture)

Respondent: **Mary Taylor** (respondent)

This unit serves to introduce political economy and institutional aspects into thinking about the role of culture in creating economic structures controlled from below. I will speak about main traditions and challenges of building alternative models of economic democracy within capitalist structures, and about how moments of crystallization of solidarity economy ideas have been connected to broader processes of systemic cycles, informal reproductive responses, and policy steps for crisis management. Against this background, we will discuss how a “culture” of solidarity economy can be conceived as part of a material and institutional struggle for social transition.

Readings

Gagyi, A. (2019). *Solidarity economy and the commons in Central and Eastern Europe. *Green European Journal*, 10-04-2019. <https://www.greeneuropeanjournal.eu/solidarity-economy-and-the-commons-implications-for-central-and-eastern-europe/>. Accessed 27-05-2021.*

Kane, L. (2000). Popular education and the Landless People's Movement in Brazil (MST). *Studies in the Education of Adults*, 32(1), 36-50.

Merli, P. (2013). Creating the cultures of the future: cultural strategy, policy and institutions in Gramsci: Part III: Is there a theory of cultural policy in Gramsci's prison notebooks?. *International journal of cultural policy*, 19(4), 439-461.

Sahlins, M. (1999). Two or three things that I know about culture. *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute*, 399-421.

Wallerstein, I. (1990). Culture as the ideological battleground of the modern world-system. *Theory, culture & society*, 7(2-3), 31-55.

June 25 Session 2: **Collective and break-out room discussion (all faculty)**

V. Students' time

June 28: Afternoon workshop with student presentations.