



## **The Shrinking Commons Symposium, 8-9 September 2014**

### **Symposium**

**The Scott Polar Research Institute, Department of Geography, University of Cambridge**

### **Public Lectures**

**Queen's Building Lecture Theatre, Emmanuel College, University of Cambridge**

### **Synopsis**

The commons have been described as a drama, even – famously – a ‘tragedy’. Their fate, their future, has never seemed more parlous, with climate change, population growth, and competition for scarce resources seemingly threatening our greatest common property, the planet itself. Enclosure – once seen as the end of the commons – is touted by some as the only way to protect precious environments subject to encroachment. At the same time, undergirded by a general anxiety that the natural, social and political commons are at risk from the encroachments of capitalist expansion, hyper-consumption, and corporatist politics, critics of enclosure grasping for a new counter-narrative, propose a new global commons as the only solution to pressing global problems. The commons, far from disappearing, and irreducible to merely ‘public goods’, remain central to material struggles and utopian imaginaries of collective ownership and wellbeing.

Yet what exactly is meant by the commons today? How do we define them? How are they formed, and for whom? What are the prospects for new commons and new forms of ‘commoning’? What political languages and narratives about what is held ‘in common’ should we seek to endorse? This symposium addresses these questions, following developments across three historically vital ‘passage points’: the ownership, availability and condition of land and nature; the technologies and infrastructures of collective provisioning; and the structuring of publics and their rights. Participants – drawn from the natural and social sciences, and from diverse disciplines ranging from architecture, anthropology, geography, environmental science, urbanism, sociology, and philosophy – will explore the processes behind the shrinking commons, but also demonstrate their survival and expansion, as well as the development of new and emergent commons. The Symposium also features four public lectures with keynote speakers reflecting on the loss and the promise of global commons.

Throughout, we consider the material, discursive and ideological implications of things being held, managed, and imagined ‘in common’. Our ultimate aim is to encapsulate the breadth of contemporary change and to find within it the terms and sites of a new language of collective presence and shared returns.

## Programme

### 8<sup>th</sup> September 2014

8:30 – 9:00 *Registration*

9:00 – 9:15 **Welcome**  
Ash Amin

#### 9:15 – 10:30 **Session 1 Parallel Commons**

Bruce Lankford  
*Scarcity, efficiency and the paracommons of natural resource losses, wastes and wastages*  
Keith Richards and Bojana Bajzelj  
*Feed the world: food security and the global commons*  
Discussion

10:30 – 11:00 *Coffee*

#### 11:00 – 12:15 **Session 2 Rights**

Nicholas Blomley  
*The right to not be excluded: common right and the struggle against displacement*  
Alex Jeffrey  
*Transnational Courts: A New Legal Commons?*  
Discussion

12:15 – 13:15 *Lunch*

#### 13:15 – 14:30 **Session 3 Politics of Nature**

Sarah Whatmore  
*Reclaiming environmental knowledge as a commons*  
Kathryn Yusoff  
*Politics of the Anthropocene: Formation of the Commons as a Geologic Process*  
Discussion

14:30 – 14:45 *Tea*

#### 14:45 – 16:00 **Session 4 Neoliberal Commons**

Filip de Boeck  
*Place-making and Neoliberal Urban Expansion in Kinshasa*  
Sarah Radcliffe  
*The Shrinking Commons and Uneven Geographies of Development*  
Discussion

#### 16:30 – 18:30 **Public Lectures**

John Urry  
*Offshoring as a way of undermining the commons?*  
Natalie Fenton  
*'Politics in common' in the digital age*

19:00 – 22:00 *Drinks and dinner at Emmanuel College*

## 9<sup>th</sup> September 2014

8:30 – 9:00 *Tea and coffee*

### 9:00 – 10:15 **Session 1 Urban Commons**

Edgar Pieterse  
*Shaping the Urban in South Africa*  
Henrietta Palmer  
*Emerging Commons*  
Discussion

10:15 – 10:45 *Coffee*

### 10:45 – 12:00 **Session 2 New Urban Commons**

Denise Morado  
*Accessing the commons: Brazilian urban occupations*  
Colin McFarlane  
*The metabolic urban commons: informality and everyday Life*  
Discussion

12:00 – 13:00 *Lunch*

### 13:00 – 14:15 **Session 3 Humans/Animals**

Eduardo Mendieta  
*City Animal: Interspecies Cosmopolitanism and the Rights of Animals to the City*  
Adam Reed  
*The Right to Roam: human and non-human access to the land*  
Discussion

14:15 – 14:30 *Tea*

### 14:30 – 15:45 **Session 4 Bio-commons**

Maria Fannin  
*Revisiting a bodily commons: enclosures and openings in the bioeconomy*  
Marilyn Strathern  
*Inroads on altruism*  
Discussion

15:45 – 16:15 **Concluding remarks**  
Ash Amin and Philip Howell

### 16:45 – 18:45 **Public Lectures**

Alun Anderson  
*Who can own the Arctic?*  
Kathy Gibson  
*Postcapitalist practices of commoning and a performative politics of assemblage*

19:30 – 22:00 *Dinner at Emmanuel College*