Essay

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The commons: Infrastructures for troubling times*

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This essay comes from my forthcoming book, *On the Inconvenience of Other People*, which has three broad aims. The first is to provide a concept of structure for transitional times. All times are transitional. But at some crisis times like this one, politics is defined by a collectively held sense that a glitch has appeared in the reproduction of life. A glitch is an interruption within a transition, a troubled transmission. A glitch is also the revelation of an infrastructural failure.[1] The repair or replacement of broken infrastructure is, in this book's argument, necessary for any form of sociality to extend itself: but my interest is in how that extension can be non-reproductive, generating a form from within brokenness beyond the exigencies of the current crisis, and alternatively to it too. But a few definitional problems arise from this observation. One is about what repair, or the beyond of glitch, looks like both generally and amid a catastrophe; the other is defining what kind of form of life an infrastructure is. These definitional questions are especially central to contemporary counternormative political struggle.

Infrastructure is not identical to system or structure, as we currently see them, because infrastructure is defined by the movement or patterning of social form. It is the living mediation of what organizes life: the lifeworld of structure. Roads, bridges, schools, food chains, finance systems, prisons, families, districts, norms all the systems that link ongoing proximity to being in a world-sustaining relation. Paul Edwards (2003) points out that the failure of an infrastructure is ordinary in poor countries and countries at war, and people suffer through it, adapting and adjusting; but even ordinary failure opens up the potential for new organizations of life, for what Deborah Cowen (2014) has described as logistics, or creative practicality in the supply chain (see also Masco, 2014; Rubenstein, 2010). So the extension of relations in a certain direction cannot be conflated with the repair of what wasn't working. In the episode of a hiccup, the erasure of the symptom doesn't prove that the problem of metabolizing has been resolved; likewise, the reinitializing of a system that has been stalled by a glitch might involve local patching or debugging (or forgetting, if the glitch is fantasmatic), while not generating a more robust or resourceful apparatus. All one can say is, first, that an infrastructure is defined by use and movement; second, that resilience and repair don't necessarily neutralize the problem that generated the need for

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them, but might reproduce them. At minimum resilience organizes energies for reinhabiting the ordinary where structure finds its expression: but that's at minimum.

The glitch of the present that we link to economic crisis, for example, threads through other ongoing emergencies involving the movement of bodies into and out of citizenship and other forms of being-with, occupation, and jurisdiction: so contemporary antiausterity politics point not only to new ties among disparately located and unequally precarious lives, but also mark the need for a collective struggle to determine the terms of transition for general social existence.[2] Terms of transition provide conceptual infrastructures not only as ideas but also as part of the protocols or practices that hold the world up. To attend to the terms of transition is to forge an imaginary for managing the meanwhile within damaged life's perdurance, a meanwhile that is less an end or an ethical scene than a technical political heuristic that allows for ambivalence, distraction, antagonism and inattention not to destroy collective existence. Jeremy Gilbert adapts Georges Simondon's concept of provisional unity or metastability for this matter, allowing us to see transitional structure as a loose convergence that lets a collectivity stay bound to the ordinary even as some of its forms of life are fraying, wasting, and developing offshoots among types of speculative practice from the paranoid to the queer utopian (Gilbert, 2014: 107–118). But insofar as infrastructures are made from within relation, I prefer an immanentist staging of the nonreproductive making of life.

Austerity policies are witnesses to the glitch of this moment, as are the political practices of Occupy and other antiausterity movements, and as are the antiracist and antixenophobic movements across the globe, insofar as they all define the present not just as unjust, but as a scene shaped by the infrastructural breakdown of modernist practices of resource distribution, social relation, and affective continuity, and that includes within communities of solidarity from the nation-state to the grassroots. Given newly intensified tensions, anxieties, and antipathies at all levels of intimate abstraction, the question of politics becomes identical with the reinvention of infrastructures for managing the unevenness, ambivalence, violence, and ordinary contingency of contemporary existence.

So if a glitch has made apparent these conditions of disrupted jurisdiction, resource, and circulation, a disruption in rules and norms is not the same thing as the absence or defeat of structure as such. An infrastructural analysis helps us see that what we commonly call "structure" is not what we usually call it, an intractable principle of continuity across time and space, but is really a convergence of force and value in patterns of movement that's only solid when seen from a distance. Objects are always looser than they appear. Objectness is only a semblance, a seeming, a projection effect of interest in a thing we are trying to stabilize. Thus, I am redefining "structure" here as *that which organizes transformation* and "infrastructure" as that which binds us to the world in movement and keeps the world practically bound to itself; and I am proposing that one task for makers of critical social form is to offer not just judgment about positions and practices in the world, but terms of transition that alter the harder and softer, tighter and looser infrastructures of sociality itself.[3]

In addition to contributing ways to think about structural transformation by way of transitional form, this project recasts the place of nonsovereignty in social life and links it to the postsovereign condition of the nation-state with respect to security and capital.[4] Rather than thinking of the "freedom from" constraint that makes subjects of democracy value sovereignty and autonomy, and rather than spending much time defining the sovereign-who-is-never-a-sovereign (Agamben 1998; Mbembe, 2003), this project looks to nonsovereign relationality as the foundational quality of being in common, seeing, for example, individuality as a genre carved from within dynamics of relation rather than a state prior to it or distinct from it. As a result, this project works against the pervasive critical theory discourse of "belonging" insofar as "belonging" operates as a synonym for being in

social worlds. I am not at all advocating a politics and esthetics of *non*belonging, however. Instead, I want to ask how we create forms and modalities within relation. Just because a space on a grid is shared intends nothing about the affective and material substance or even the fact of membership, just as, in José Muñoz's terms, a racialized and sexualized *dis*identification is not the opposite of identification (Muñoz, 1999). Just because we are in the room together does not mean that we belong to the room or each other: belonging is a specific genre of affect, history, and political mediation that cannot be presumed and is, indeed, a relation whose evidence and terms are always being contested. Belonging is a proposition, a theory, a forensic fact, and a name for a kind of attachment. The crowded but disjointed propinquity of the social calls for a proxemics, the study of sociality as proximity quite distinct from the possessive attachment languages of belonging.[5]

It follows, then, that in this essay the commons concept is not on offer as the solution to the problem of psychic and structural social antagonism, nor a motive for toppling the state and capital, nor a synonym for belonging better: if anything, the essay holds in suspicion the prestige the commons concept has attained in the US and theory-cosmopolitan context, often signifying an ontology that merely needs the world to create infrastructures to catch up to it. Although the commons claim sounds like an uncontestably positive aim, the concept in this context threatens to cover over the very complexity of social jockeying and interdependence it responds to by delivering a confirming affective surplus in advance of the lifeworld it's also seeking.

Politics is also about redistributing insecurity, after all. So whatever else it is, the commons concept has become a way of positivizing the ambivalence that saturates social life about the irregular conditions of fairness. I'm not arguing against the desire for a smooth plane of likeness, but arguing that the attachment to this concept is too often a way of talking about politics as the resolution of ambivalence and the vanquishing of the very contingency of nonsovereign standing that is at the heart of true equality, where status is not worked out in advance or outside of relation.[6]

This essay proposes an alternative use of the object.[7] It proposes that the commons concept is a powerful vehicle for troubling troubled times. For the very scenes in which the concept attains power mark the desire for living with some loss of assurance as to one's or one's community's place in the world, at least while better forms of life are invented and tried out. The better power of the commons is to point to a way to view what's broken in sociality, the difficulty of convening a world conjointly, although it is inconvenient and hard, and to offer incitements to imagining a livable provisional life. The close readings that follow aim to extend the commons concept's pedagogy of learning to live with messed up yet shared and ongoing infrastructures of experience.

This leads to the third aim of the project. Social theory usually derives its urgency and its reparative imaginary from spaces of catastrophe and risk where the exemplum represents structural failure, such as in this image and narrative of the abandoned Detroit public schools book depository (Figure 1). But what if we derived our social theory from scenes of ambivalence, which is to say, the scenes of attachment that are intimate, defined by desire, and overwhelming? (Figure 2) We understand why we are overwhelmed by extreme and exhausting threats and actualized violence, as they menace the endurance of the world and of confidence in ongoingness. What's harder to process is why it is hard to bear the very things we want. The gambit of the longer book, which offers sex, democracy, and life itself as things that we both want and struggle to want, is that scenes of genuine ambivalence will better disclose some matters of managing being in proximity in the awkward and violent ordinary. The commons concept is this book's case of ambivalence about democracy.

What follows is a staging of the commons and the *sensus communis* that queries their prestige. It tracks their placeholder status as a type of the fulfillment of belonging: it thinks

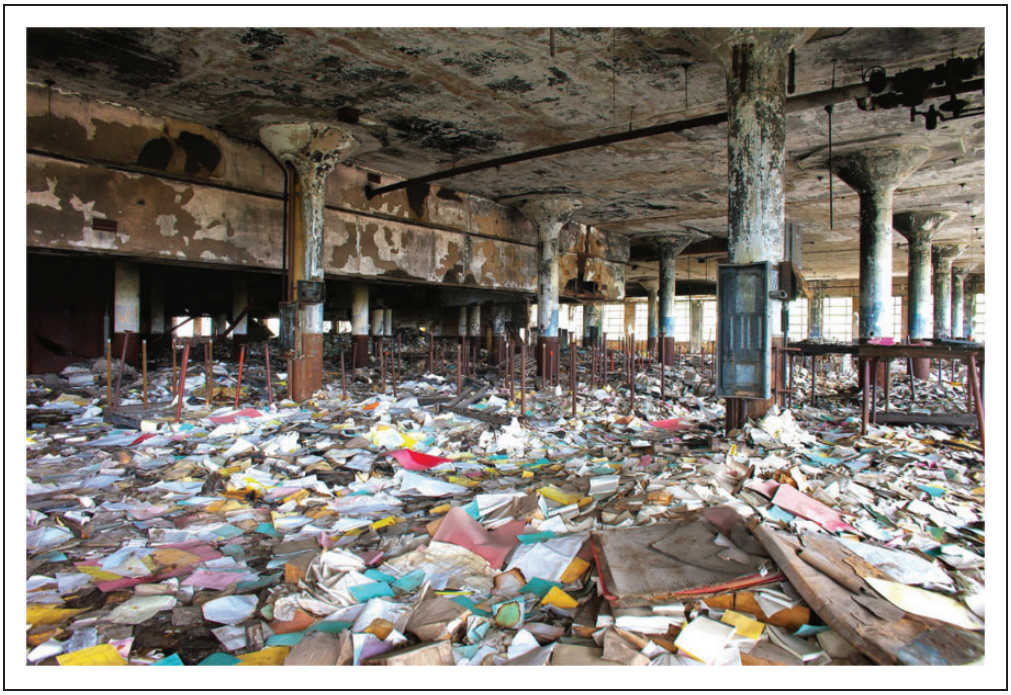

Figure 1. Thomas Hawk (2010).

commons infrastructure as a pedagogy for rethinking structure in constant transition and casts constant transition as involving loss, among other things. Reading with Ralph Waldo Emerson, Juliana Spahr and Liza Johnson, it questions the idealist materialism of the commons concept as it is often floated. It does not look to the undercommons of black study and prophetic solidarity as a solution to the devastating faults of the Euro-white idealist tradition, but asks visceral questions about how the commons as an idea about infrastructure can provide a pedagogy of unlearning while living with the malfunctioning world, vulnerable confidence, and the rolling ordinary.[8] It uses the concept to consider losing good life fantasies that equate frictionlessness with justice and satisfaction with the absence of frustration. It asks what sexuality can do to provide glitchfrastructures for teaching unlearning. In this sense, it is in solidarity with recent arguments by Leela Gandhi that endorse the commons as a tool for breaking postcolonial imaginaries of a better sovereignty; but against her promotion of the concept as a naïve and vague imperfectionist wedge, I propose it as a training in bearing the irresolution of ambivalence against the thinness of a social imaginary that equates democracy with analogical likeness (Gandhi, 2011, 2014).

Second introduction: The commons sense

The recently ''resuscitated'' fantasy of the commons articulates many desires for a social world unbound by structural antagonism (see Žižek, 2009). '''Common' has a multitude of meanings,'' writes Peter Linebaugh, ''common land, common rights, common people, common sense'' (2009: 278). The common usually refers to an orientation toward life and value unbound by concepts and divisions of property, and points to the world both as a finite resource that is running out *and* an inexhaustible fund of human consciousness or creativity; at

Figure 2. Stephanie Brooks, "Lovely/Caution."

the same time, the proclamation of "the common," its manifestic function, is always political and invested in counter-sovereignty, with performative aspirations to decolonize an actual and social space that has been inhabited by empire, capitalism, and land-right power.[9]

This means that the commons is incoherent, like all powerful concepts. Under its name, across the globe, communities tap into legacies of occupation to contest ownership rights and resource justice, and under its name, people project a pastoral social relation of mutual attachment, dependence, or vitality. Concepts of the common attached to "the common sense" also point to irreducibly different angles: from the most normative view of how things are to the Kantian *sensus communis*. For Roland Barthes (1972) and Ann Laura Stoler (2008), "common sense" is merely the bourgeois order of truth standing in for the universal, what Stoler calls "a folk epistemology." For Raymond Williams (1977: 55–71, 1976: 204–207, 210–212), it is a "structure of feeling," which locates affective mutuality in the atmosphere of the common historical experience of class antagonism. In contrast, for Kant (1914) and Arendt (1992) the *sensus communis* involves nothing so referentially specific as the capitalist good life. It refers instead to a sense of what is common above and beyond the appearance of the material world and its norms: the "sense" in this tradition of common sense is exercised in the capacity of humans to achieve the free movement of their faculties toward disinterested, impersonal, nonrepresentational, and yet "universally communicable" judgment on the model of an esthetic attunement to something like beauty.

Steven Shaviro (1998) argues that the Kantian concept of beauty or attunement looks not to any normative sense of symmetry or elegance as a ground for principles like justice or freedom: attunement is a perceptual event that bypasses cognition and hits the subject the

way a song does, as a singular perception all at once that is, at the same time, universal (see also Brodsky, 2010; Cornell, 2000; Johnson, 2011; Zerilli, 2009). This is to say that, in all of its traditions, the *sensus communis* is deemed a higher gut feeling, if you will. It involves the recognition of normative or universal principles of being; it organizes a potential world around them; it moves the body away from satisfaction with the horizon of conventional experience toward a visceral self-experience of freedom that ought to govern the activity of all being in common.

So too the universal appears in *political* fantasies of the commons that structure much contemporary political theory and action: as Slavoj Žižek summarizes it, it involves protecting "the shared substance of our social being whose privatization is a violent act [and] which should also be resisted with violent means" (2009: 91). To clarify, three kinds of referent motivate *this* urgent version of the commons: one, the struggles of disenfranchised citizens and migrants, whether in the undercommons or in appropriated indigenous habitations; two, the substance of immaterial labor, the world- and life-making activity of humans; and three, the being of nature as such, which includes but does not prioritize humanity. This collection of concerns provokes Paolo Virno (2004) to associate the contemporary commons with actual and immanent but affectively concrete global homelessness.

These senses of the sense of the common have also generated a precarious politics in the global Occupy and the European, Latin American, and South Asian antiausterity contranational movements, which ask: is society organized for the flourishing of wealth or the flourishing of life? How do we think about the redistribution of resource vulnerability in relation to the distribution of rest, strength, and enjoyment? What roles should political institutions have in fomenting collective life, or do we need a better structural imaginary to organize the complexities of stranger intimacy? You will no doubt note the unbalanced load of desire that the commons claim now carries. These questions mark a new phase of a serious collective rethinking of what, if anything, attention to the commons can contribute to producing in relation to the wreck of the old good life fantasy.

Precarity talk, Austerity talk, and Commons talk, in other words, try to occupy a different formalism, or patterning on the move, or infrastructure: that's what they're for. In contrast, the commons projects of fugitive utopian performance associated with José Muñoz and Fred Moten extend this problematic not from the position of universal singularity, citizenship, common sense, or a like injury within a scene of violence, but toward a temporally different understanding of how to convert a violently unequal historical inheritance and experience to a space where history and experience already recombine beyond consensus realism. For Moten and Harney (2013) the undercommons, where all condemned to fugitive legitimacy live and move, is prophetic, allowing the mind to be two places at one time, in the space of history and critique and in the scene of black study that makes movement in the fold of the known world, but beyond it. For Muñoz the brown commons is a space where fugitives already meet to receive each other on another a plane thus the centrality of a performative esthetics to his thought. The brown commons is a resource for making folds of relation in the scene of encounter that makes other things happen, and in that otherness, the means for a new attunement, a new history. It's a name for critical queer of color and punk negativity, about turning getting negated into a willful act that also moves the future around. Muñoz writes: "I contend that the clinamen, or the swerve at the heart of the encounter, describes the social choreography of a potentially insurrectionist mode of being in the world" (2013: 97). He leans on Jean-Luc Nancy's image of the touch that preserves the specificity of the Other in the register of a common form that's apprehensible but not representable. The commons concept here too is reparative against the world's destruction

of the life whose labor sustains it while negating the exploited and negated humans who remain who deserve a break, a swerve, and a future that can only be found in the courage to be more interested in than threatened by the commonality of difference.

But what this essay seeks is another side of the spatal productivity of the swerve and the induction of fugitive time through a form of study that uses critique to intensify one's attachment to the world felt but yet unestablished. That is, it sees what's best in the commons concept in its power to retrain affective practical being, and in particular in its power to dishabituate through unlearning the overskilled sensorium that is so quick to adapt to damaged life with a straight, and not a queer, face.

In other words, in contrast to the universalizing yet concrete affective abstraction of the *sensus communis*, this political version of the common requires a transformed understanding of the relation between any version of the *sensus communis* and what embodied human action might do to acknowledge, advance, and represent sociality as something other than a rage for likeness. The commons is an action concept that acknowledges a broken world and the survival ethics of a transformational infrastructure. This involves using the spaces of alterity within ambivalence.

Stanley Cavell comments on "Wittgenstein perceiving our craving to *escape* our commonness with others, even when we recognize the commonness of the craving; Heidegger perceiving our pull to *remain* absorbed in the common, perhaps in the very way we push to escape it" (Cavell, 2003: 64). Many philosophical traditions in relation to the ordinary converge in Cavell's thought: what's important here is that the movement to be together better demands a confidence in an apartness that recognizes the ordinary as a space at once actively null, delightfully animated, stressful, intimate, alien, and uncanny (see Cavell, 1994: 32). In order for the common and the commons to be something other than pure abstraction or compulsive repair that collapses what's better into what feels better, we must see what can be done to the dynamics of attraction and aversion—the dynamics of attachment and attention—that mark and manage the overpresence of the world.

Crossing Boston Common: Or, Emerson's Worm

Boston Common exemplifies the nonexistence of its own name. The oldest Common in the United States, it carries in its various monuments an American archive of crimes against human flourishing along with the affective promise that, even within capitalism, public premises should exist on which to develop a sensorium for a commons to come.[10] The ironies of this fantasy have not gone unrecognized. In "For the Union Dead," for example, Robert Lowell presses his face against the black iron of the Boston Common gate, exiled from experiencing the freedom of relationality that any Common holds out to a public against the world of property values and enclosure (Lowell, 2003). Inside, "yellow dinosaur steamshovels . . . grunting" (63) as they destroy the land are installing an underground garage, as though the biggest problem in Boston is parking – which it is, if parking is a figure for living somewhere. Indeed, looking around, the poem sees the whole system in shambles, the statehouse held together by scaffolding, monuments propped up by planks. But the commons concept still matters, still adds dimensions of alternativity to consciousness of what life can be.

It is not, though, a fantasy of the affectionate body politic at leisure that keeps Lowell at such a park space but its demonstration of belonging to a violent nationalist history. The poem focuses on the Saint-Gaudens monument to Robert Shaw's Massachusetts 54th Regiment, a regiment entirely composed of black soldiers, decimated during the Civil War. This monument was planted there to honor that sacrifice, but also to establish the very pastness of supremacist violence, but the poem refuses the story of Northern racial

blamelessness. The Union fought over what forms of limited sovereignty capitalist democracy could bear: encountering a celebration of this low bar imaginary makes Lowell gratified and sick. He thinks of Hiroshima, not yet monumentalized there, not yet displaceable enough into the past through mourning's convenient screen memories about the costs of liberal freedom.[11]

Lowell devolves in order to not be defeated by his own ambivalence, identifying with "the dark downward and vegetating kingdom" (63) of fish and reptile rather than the dinosaur machines that make visible culture over and over as though to improve it requires drowning out the noise of its previous holocausts. It is too much to pretend that all of human history and activity isn't a choking destruction. In that sense, in the battle of antimodernity he wages, in his refusal of civilization and disrespect for minor sites of refuge and relief, his return to the Common is deeply a return to Emerson and his Boston Common, too. Lowell is unable to disembitter himself enough to reenact the confidence of his ancestor that, with the right orientation, anyone might ride the wave of the *sensus communis*, thereby extending life further into life, beyond the flesh. Devolutionary compost breeds a more honest consciousness about what it means "to choose life and die" (Lowell, 2003: 64). For Emerson, though, the fossil offers a version of singularity that frees him from an obligation to sit with the embodied relationality of collective being.

Famously, in his essay, "Nature," Emerson evoked a Boston Common offering the potential to embody the *sensus communis* against modern capitalism's degradations to consciousness (Emerson, 2003). Paradoxically, though, to achieve this end, Emerson goes to the Common not to be *in common* with others but to push the noise of other men from his head. "To go into solitude," he writes, "a man needs to retire as much from his chamber as from society" (Emerson, 2003: 37). The historical moment of "Nature" is crowded with human precedent so saturating that Emerson finds unbearable the pressure it exerts on his mind's capacity to access the universal and common sense. "I am not solitary whilst I read and write, though nobody is with me. But if a man would be alone, let him look at the stars" (37). Why would a man go to the commons to be alone?

Men in the flesh, sensed as flesh, do not create joy in Emerson, so there's that. As Laurence Buell writes, Emerson never welcomes the appetitive, although he does trust the affections when properly oriented away from worldly ambition (Buell, 2004: 65). Typical men, with their gross materiality, false assurance, and confusion of capitalist wants with rationality, get in the way of the universal common sense's capacity to acknowledge the vital relation among things. So, not surprisingly, on this very same Boston Common Emerson exhorted Whitman to desexualize his poetry. Whitman, Emerson is said to have said, should write about man, not men; ideas and language, not bodies or anything bearing "mean egotism" (Folsom and Price, 2005: 71; Richardson, 1995). Always the Spinozan, Emerson seeks the joyous increase of his powers and, like his heirs Hardt and Negri, he looks for this to the experience of universal singularity and not toward embodied being or beings.

The Common is a place he goes not to possess but to be possessed, to submit to being dispossessed of property in the self by the immediacy of a nature that dissolves the attachment to sovereignty and instrumentality. Emerson figures himself there famously as a transparent eyeball so he can experience a mode of satisfying world relationality that frees his spirit into a space neither personal nor interpersonal, becoming a "nothing." From that figural position one no longer confuses sovereignty for the form of appetitive nonsovereignty that treats the world as a cupboard of things to grab at and fetishize. One no longer confuses freedom with the merely formal and forensic status of the political subject or the chosen intimate: "The name of the nearest friend sounds then foreign and accidental: to be brothers,

to be acquaintances, — master or servant, is then a trifle and a disturbance'' compared to ''the perpetual presence of the sublime'' (Emerson and Plumstead, 1969: 349).[12] This self-dispossession does not feel like loss, though. Yet the presence of the sublime tells us to attend to the affective work of becoming common.

At first achieving a reoriented sensorium doesn't seem like a painful loss. Cavell describes Emerson's desire to destroy the fallen common on behalf of the *sensus communis* through a practice of reinventing analogy: ''the analogy that marries Matter and Mind'' (Cavell, 2003). This seems like a change that rides the wave of higher continuity. Mind, or the idea, releases the body from its feedback loop errors and allows the subject of the Boston Common to practice a mode of world acknowledgment that is spiritualizing and not the movement of an internal state toward an external one. This means, counterintuitively, that the analogical marriage of matter and mind is not a matter of synthesis, mimesis, or the extension of likenesses. It involves a chain of discontinuous continuity secured by the movement of figuration.

Turning from men, Emerson would rather think about worms. The epigraph to ''Nature,'' a poem by Emerson, reads,

> A subtle chain of countless rings
> The next unto the farthest brings;
> The eye reads omens where it goes,
> And speaks all languages the rose;
> And, striving to be man, the worm
> Mounts through all the spires of form. (2003, 35)

On offer here is a logic of proximity that looks like an infrastructure, but an infrastructure of association, unrepresentable except through figuration's intensity of displacement. The eye reads prophetically but without narrative assurance; rings on a chain resonate with nearness across extensive but not saturated space; the movement from eye to rose inters human perception in a wrenching enjambment and metaphorizes ''speaks'' beyond the limit of the sign. Then, the worm. The worm strives to be man simply because moving in form, not because sharing anything like tradition or organs: just nonsubjective intention. This is presumably a reciprocal association. To be free on this commons also requires gliding through the mud: the propping of materiality on continuous movement uninterrupted by possessive ego performance. Branka Arsić claims that such a streaming movement is what Emerson means by ''thinking'': interrupting the ego distortions of ''reflection'' with dynamic projection ''carve[s] out . . . paths on the earth-brain so that its vegetation starts growing'' (Arsić, 2010: 89). This new configuration is linguistic in ''Nature,'' structured by the rhizome of analogy that pushes out the conventional to make room for an original thought, figured in enjambment, lyric leaps, and evocative speaking.

To become worm, then, so to renew becoming man, Emerson's man must take up a position as an aspirational formalist. But in this version form is not a thing to be rested in. The worm creates a space of movement that becomes form. If it is form it is social, that is, of the world; as form it is movement and singular. In the wormhole the worm creates an infrastructure to hold itself in the world: the hole fits the worm, but only as it moves. It reveals an ontological flatness of all matter but more vitally such recognition induces movement into new proximities. This transduction of the natural symbol into a revelation of ontological likeness in movement through analogy makes Emerson ''glad to the brink of fear'' (2003: 38). For the form of the analogy is not a brace or foundation but a sign of world-making action and exposure to risk: what Juliana Spahr calls a zone defined by the sliding that happens in it (2011: 61).

Towards a poetics of infrastructure

Alone, then, the Emersonian man looks at the stars to embody the *sensus communis* that can grasp the world in its immediacy. But the stars do not return the world to Emerson in the shape of a distilled something that is held in common. Instead they provide for him spatially the opportunity for an impersonal affective immediacy through a technical distance that has always and ever to be traversed. For the possibility of accessing the common that subtends all being requires him not to inhabit or possess it but to desire it—to have, one might say, a crush on it.

We will remember that he says to look at the stars to achieve the common sense. He continues, ''The rays that come from those heavenly worlds, will separate between him and what he touches.'' That sensual ''separation between'' suggests an important foundation for Emerson's sense of what analogy can induce for a social theory of the infrastructural common: a new experience of the ontological proximity of things to each other not by way of metaphor's conceptual figuration; nor by anaclisis, the propping of x onto y that reveals the chain links of investment in a psychic economy; nor by parataxis, a catalog; nor by what the flesh feels immediately as touch and impact.

Instead, the separateness between, the singular aloneness that is not necessarily loneliness, *has* to exist for the common sense even to be conceived of. We would not, after all, need the commons concept if alterity weren't moving through the wormholes that structure intimacy, itself a sensed but unrepresentable figural space graspable only in movement of bodies, moods, and atmospheres. It foregrounds the ellipsis of difference in which historical being and technical separateness resonate with and push each other formally, in practices. The space between and the spaces among involve distances created by the disturbance of being close without being joined, and without mistaking the other's flesh for one's own or any object world as identical to oneself. Nonsovereignty is *not* here the dissolution of a boundary. It's the experience of affect, of being receptive, in real time.

The word Emerson uses for the experience of natural immediacy is not *belonging*, but ''detection'': ''Not only resemblances exist in things whose analogy is obvious,'' he writes, ''as when we detect the type of the human hand in the flipper of the fossil saurus, but also in objects wherein there is great superficial unlikeness.'' ''Thus architecture is called 'frozen music' . . . and [a] 'Gothic church' . . . 'petrified religion'' (60). He thinks of metaphor as a subset of analogy. Even if the natural symbol, then, integrates processes to produce models of a world unbound by mortal distortions, the work is to detect, therefore to create spaces within, the image that can assume the likeness of a motile singularity.

In the commons of the ''separation between,'' therefore, a sense of worlding is unimpeded by an economy of loss or a worry about the destruction of what is finally an indestructible singularity. Paradoxically, by putting things into analogical relation Emerson interferes with the mode of likeness that characterizes the narcissism of sovereign-style subjectivity and allows nonsovereignty to feel like the relief from the reproduction of selves. This nonsovereignty does not bind relationality to any specific shape, though. This positive version of dispossession makes the world bearable by way of imminent space paced out by a social, but not mutual, movement in practice.

We have learned all this by following the becoming-man of the worm. As its track is an infrastructure of continuity across the surface of things, it helps us see analogical figurality as a conduit for social infrastructures as well. Susan Leigh Star, the great ethnographer of infrastructure, describes it as a relational and ecological process of sustaining worlds that is mostly visible in its failure. Star, more a formalist, argues that when systems of the reproduction stop working, you can see the machinery of the separation that has induced relations among things and the dynamics that kept them generating the energy for

world-making: when infrastructural things stop converging, she writes, they become a topic and a problem rather than automata of procedure. So we can see the glitch of the present as a revelation of what *had been* the lived ordinary, the common infrastructure. When things stop converging they also threaten the conditions and the sense of belonging, but more than that, of assembling (see Star, 1999, 2002; Star and Bowker, 1999; Star and Strauss, 1999).

This way of thinking infrastructure-making as the convergence scene of various value abstractions, material protocols for metabolizing resources, and socially distributed experience taps into David Harvey's view that the disturbance capital makes in creating dominant class interest infrastructures can also foster countermovements in new infrastructures for life and sociality, despite and in response to the neglect and destructiveness of the state and capital toward the very contexts of life and lives that they're exploiting.[13] Movement is what distinguishes infrastructures from institutions, although the relation between these concepts and materialities is often a matter of perspective. Institutions enclose and congeal power and interest and represent their legitimacy in the way they represent something reliable in the social, a predictability on which the social relies. Institutions norm reciprocity. What constitutes infrastructure in contrast are the patterns, habits, norms, and scenes of assemblage and use. Collective affect gets attached to it too, to the sense of its inventiveness and promise of dynamic reciprocity.

This is why, in contemporary commons talk, social institutions that deliver mass resources are deemed worthy only if they provide an infrastructure for the common rather than privatizing it, along with providing something like what the state does, an exterior-looking focalizing point of material and imaginary survival for its often desperately nonsovereign members. Seeing world building as immanence, as infrastructure-making, starts where the universalist sovereign fantasy is expelled as a primary figure for mass flourishing: it is here that the Spinozan tradition finds its limit. As the Spinozan Transcendentalists and their heirs in Deleuze, Hardt and Negri (2011), and, from a queer perspective, Lee Edelman (2004) and Leo Bersani (2009) demonstrate, it is very hard to move through symbolization without becoming overattached to a primary analogy or figure. Institutions generate the positivity of attachment and protocol even while destroying the livelihood of the attached lives. The notion of structure as calcified, as a thing, also negates the ontology of adaptation and adjustment by casting them as epiphenomenal. The figure—whether of desire's negativity or the positivity of Commonwealth—can block movement, establishing an anchor in a tableau and barring the formal productivity of movement. But institutional failure leading to infrastructural collapse, from bridges to systems to fantasy, here leads to a dynamic way to disturb the old logics, or analogics, that have institutionalized images of shared life.

Even as Emerson modeled a common on which other people could not jostle his idealization of universal movement, he demonstrated an ambition to model without mirroring a figure. Such a practice of communing contingency has been central to Juliana Spahr's practice of the last few decades. Her work's discipline of decolonizing language is processual, labile, and mobile, like Emerson's. The intensity of figuration expresses the sensuality of being in common without attaching it to a particular shape that could serve as a foundation for likeness. But it is radically not limited to the serial perfectionism of singularities, performing instead a mutuality coordinated in time *and* across space.

Here are some examples. Spahr's autobiography, *The Transformation* (2007), takes place in the intimately and politically collective moment between the Hawaii of 1997 and New York in the penumbra of 9-11-01. The text charts the erotic and intellectual love of three people for each other. But Spahr writes of an ambition not to see "relationship" writ

large as "a feedback loop" of desire or something clarifying like a triangle (206). You cannot make a stencil of the transformation. You cannot copy the form, become an analogy of it. The lovers seek what she calls "a Sapphic point" of impersonality that would allow them to think of themselves as a "they," avoiding the way a two person couple conventionally thinks of itself as an "it" that is a fact of life that must be lived within a confused and impotent way. It's not singularity, it's not solidarity; it's a mixture of idioms creating an affective scene intense with form-making noise.

Impersonating themselves as a collective proliferates analogies:

> They just wanted to talk to each other the way that humans talk to each other when they go on long car trips in the country and they have nothing really to say after the first hour in the car but sometimes in the hours that follow they might point something out or talk some about what thoughts came to them as they drove along, mesmerized by the blur of space passing by them. They wanted to be the way that humans might be they with a dog and a dog they with humans, intimately together yet with a limited vocabulary. They wanted to be they like blood cells are compelled to be a they. What they meant was that they were other than completely autonomous but they were not one thing with no edges, with no boundary lines. (207)

"And when they thought rationally they felt that being they in this awkward time should have made them feel more safe" (207). Of course it doesn't, because form is not only a wish for a refuge, a cushion: it is also social, an exposure, a mediation, and a launching pad in relation to which beings can find each other to figure out how to live in a movement that takes energy from the term "movement's" political resonance. As a poet of infrastructure, she writes about enclosures that are located outside and when she's inside there are always open windows and screens, too, such as near the computer. Language measures something about how movement happens across the connected mediations.

In other words, here the infrastructure of the social emerges within, and takes on the dynamics of, an open plan. But it is not a flat plane, because language is a bumpy surface, a hard bed for bodies and the histories they shape, and because they understand that they want to be like what they are not yet like. Despite an esthetic that uses collecting observations to gather up the world, this work's aim to carve out a new common sense of analogy that sees it as a curiosity about the outcomes of the disturbance of a relation's substance. Spahr thus works the linguistic dynamics of form's inevitable pointing beyond itself toward multiple trajectories of history, language, power, and desire that converge in the noise of the present. Theirs is a *sensus communis* that ethically must remain disoriented, open: the eyes are open to the aleatory and receptive, but not unfocused. In her work infrastructure is practice based, but claims no performative truth: it doesn't create a real, it holds statements up in a tensile structure that is always making things different as they course through the material world. To say that Spahr is, therefore, a poet of infrastructure, a queer infrastructure, is to point to an esthetic zone of perverse undefensive expansion in multiple dimensions that risks speculating about everything, even what's threatening and aversive.

But this practice does not become a fetish in later work. In *This Connection of Everyone with Lungs* (2005), she hones this queer reboot of the common by way of a practice of hypernaming and indistinction. In italicized sections prior to each poem, she describes coming to terms with the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan while living far away in a Hawaii where U.S. military operations are also ordinary, everyday; integrated with aural and visual mediations of world destruction, celebrity scandal, birdsong, love and the ocean. Such a willful poetic seems not, at first, to be opening up beyond its desire to be good and do good. But the formal practice itself installs a glitch in virtue.

There are these things:
cells, the movement of cells and the division of cells
and then the general beating of circulation
and hands, and body, and feet
and skin that surrounds hands, body, feet.

This is a shape,
a shape of blood beating and cells dividing.

But outside of this shape is space.

There is space between the hands.

There is space between the hands and space around the hands.

There is space around the hands and space in the room.

There is space in the room that surrounds the shapes of everyone's hands and body and feet and cells and the beating contained within.

There is space, an uneven space, made by this pattern of bodies.

This space goes in and out of everyone's bodies.

Everyone with lungs breathes the space in and out as everyone with lungs breathes the space between the hands in and out

as everyone with lungs breathes the space between the hands and the space around the hands in and out

as everyone with lungs breathes the space between the hands and the space around the hands and the space of the room in and out

as everyone with lungs breathes the space between the hands and the space around the hands and the space of the room and the space of the building that surrounds the room in and out

as everyone with lungs breathes the space between the hands and the space around the hands and the space of the room and the space of the building that surrounds the room and the space of the neighborhoods nearby in and out

as everyone with lungs breathes the space between the hands and the space around the hands and the space of the room and the space of the building that surrounds the room and the space of the neighborhoods nearby and the space of the cities in and out...

In this everything turning and small being breathed in and out by everyone with lungs during all moments...

Then all of it entering in and out. (3-9).

Close reading close breathing, Spahr turns everything into a holding environment that articulates the commons in common but reshapes it too: other verses move across mesosphere, stratosphere, islands, cities, rooms, hands, cells. Not identical, not joined and spaced in a regular net, but copresent, singular, general, and dynamic. A space of collectively encountered information emerges that is not necessarily collectively or coherently comprehended information, performing the speed of encounter and the reality of a

constant processing. Chanting is access to hearing, assuming, and to not hearing too, a force toward and against listening. There's something romantic and humanist about this process esthetics: the fact of mixture at the political, productive, and cellular levels; the historical fact of bodies repairing and disappearing in relation to the universe of things that include each other, in sync and in counterpoint, taking each other on and in but never collapsing the distance that allows for attention. To take something in is to be nonsovereign in relation to it, but that's not equal to being destroyed by it. If we can distinguish mode from method, this mode allows presenting through movement, and not just movement in general but through digestion and extrusion of infrastructure at many material scales, like a worm.

This process of extension clears and cogs mental, affective, and textual space and goes on and on. *This Connection of Everyone with Lungs* (2005) has therefore been called flat, by which a few things are meant: its tone of voice is even and tries not to premediate attention; its sounds hold, without repeating the variations of, content; its syntax is homogenized through rhythm, pushing forth the presumption of linguistic equivalence of all things; it practices an evenly distributed attention that notices discrete disturbances in the sensual and cognitive field but focuses on accumulating what there is and moving across what's being held there suspended.

Rhythm turns out to be key to Spahr's analogical esthetics of the commons infrastructure here, involving listening beyond the situation, attending beyond the object, and following out the disoriented body to unsealed relations. Here flatness is not the opposite of what's dimensional but turns out to be the environment of relationality itself. "How connected we are with everyone," she writes (2005: 9): not just because we have ridden the same catastrophe and the same built environments but also because we have breathed in the dust particles of them. Dust is the effect of the contact between skin and the world, and also what buildings catch and the ground gives up. Pinged and hurt and inflamed by contact we've become disoriented together, and breathed it out jointly, even when overwhelmed by what's too hard, or too embodied (2005: 63).

This dust, that sand, that perturbing grain and the smooth surfaces and soft air too, act as resources for others. They are in us but the space they make is in a new alien zone of inexperience that might become something if we follow its tracks. The tone of the work varies, from a discourse of the commons as the space where being connected meets being collectively doomed to the practice of an esthetics of interruption where any observation releases a pressure both to stay there forever and to refuse becoming absorbed in the mirror of a suspension that refuses time.

Yet this description of nonsovereign nonhomogeneity internally magnetized by the continuity of life in breathing and the universality of infrastructural physicality understates the presence of internal resistance and glitch in *Everyone with Lungs*. The work can be funny, too, maybe unintentionally: its willful mixtures create the breakdown of the machine of sense on the way to expanding it; and its desire to witness complicity sometimes feels like aspirational alchemical hygiene:

> In bed, when I stroke the down on yours cheeks, I stroke also the carrier battle group ships, the guided missile cruisers, and the guided missile destroyers.
>
> When I reach for yours waists, I reach for bombers, cargo, helicopters, and special operations . . .
>
> Fast combat support ships, landing crafts, air cushioned, all of us with all of that. (74–75)

The point is to not use form as self-defense, nor to achieve beauty as attunement to a visceral sense of elevation and fairness. The point is not to homogenize the world as disaster: *This*

Connection of Everyone with Lungs is neither Adorno on the lyric (1991) nor is it *The Wasteland* (Eliot, 1998). The desire in this text is to convert idioms of sensed impact into a patterning that can become a scene of live collective being. If it is graceless, absurd, or willful, the risk of not trying for the common of awkwardness, complicity, and intimacy would be even more ridiculous and deadly. The work is about trying to stay in life gladly extended to ''the brink of fear'' without creating more enclosures or refuges.

Acknowledging pattern, with its constitutive interruptions, as a process of communing, is extended in Spahr's *Well Then There Now* (2011), the title of which is at once an admonition, a call to attention, a therapeutic caring, and another cataloguing of the common as a scene for the destruction of history, structure, syntax on behalf of staging what she variously calls ''sliding'' and gliding, shifting, and ''slipping the analogy of the opening of things'' (61). Here the problem of analogy becomes a project. In this book's version of the common, the Emersonian analogy of the ''separation between'' does not just reontologize likeness into proximities of ingestion and movement (as in *Everyone with Lungs*) but shreds, or what she calls ''approximates'' the ''shapes of things I saw around me,'' the attachment of figuration to its traditions. The work does this by putting things next to other things in ways that emphasizes discontinuous yet ongoing experience.

Like *Everyone with Lungs*, *Well Then There Now* is located in Hawaii: but where in the previous work the land and language expose a common vulnerability in permeability to violence and desire, the following book intensifies and denaturalizes the noise of infrastructure itself, uses a translation program to move the languages of Hawaii back and forth into each other. English remains the scene in the end. But it is an English defined by glitch: a glitch in the reproduction of colonization, migration, occupation, reproduction, nature, and capitalist circulation (2011: 71). Spahr thinks of this enmeshing as in the tradition of ecopoetics, but in this version of it its image of repair looks conventionally just like disrepair.

> what we know is like and unalike
> as it is kept in different shaped containers
> it is as the problems of analogy
> it as the view from the sea
> it is as the introduction of plants and animals, others, exotically
> yet it is also as the way of the wood borer
> and the opinion of the sea
> as it is as the occidental concepts of government, commerce,
> money and imposing
>
> what we know is like and unalike
> one stays diverse with formed packages
> that is what the problems of the analogy are . . .
> analogy from analogy.
> analogy of analogy.
> . . . .It cannot be of another way.
> it cannot be of another way. (56–58)[14]

The problems the text performs and explodes are two: the mechanicity of domination as it is structured, and the relation of the formally normative model of derivation to the figurativity of linkage. It cannot be of another way, repeated, cannot mean that the form of things is only fixed but that there are so many ways to be attached to the world. The multiplication of indices lets us begin to see the diversity of the situation of belonging. Belonging intends property, sovereignty, politics, tradition, being obligated, and sharing qualities: being with intends

proximity and practices of attention not defined by dissensus or agonism. Suddenly we dilute what we called structural by shifting the force of the normative infrastructures from the state and commodity capitalism into the ordinary that also includes the local plural intimacies and associations that make life sticky and interesting for it. But this is a multiplication of forms in movement, not a denial of colonial/racial/patriarchal/class inheritance.

That's significant. For Aristotle, analogy originally pointed to "an equality of relations" in proximity but later it became a broader vehicle for establishing likeness. Spahr breaks apart both models to refuse the presumption that equality involves the distribution of affective comfort and objective equivalency: but this does not mean she is not interested in equality. This poetic performs how difficult and demanding it is for a being who has taken up a position in life within imperial/capitalist infrastructures to move with the inconvenience of equally valued social being. Attempting to decolonize and deprivatize the visceralized, invested archive of likeness creates a different form to return to, putting the flat ontology of being in the world near the materiality of raw exposure and extreme risk that Paolo Virno argues is the ordinary of the contemporary commons, a dispossessedness in its awkward, convoluted, observational, comic, noisy, general, and diversely manifest vulnerability (Virno, 2004). There is no archaic in a crisis politics or poetics. The poetry is a technology in which all objects are granular and moving toward each other to make new forms of approach from difference and distance. This is what I mean by infrastructure.

Revisceralizing the commons

As communal spaces in the US and Europe—town squares, streets, schools, sidewalks, roads, and beaches—are diminished into nonspaces and zoned byways by the ballooning marketplace, and as what used to be called public utilities on the ever more archaic Monopoly board are now sold off to sustain shrinking urban and small town tax bases, a spirit of resistance is taking hold around the world. People are reclaiming bits of nature and of culture, and saying "this is going to be public space." Those public spaces are, like Emerson's, placeholder forms for the commons to come. In other words, through the commons concept the very concept of the public is being reinvented now, against, with, and from within the nation and capital. Through the neoanarchist reinvention of infrastructure down to the body's processual retraining a collective presencing is seeking its genres, which may or may not transform what the sense of the commons is. Negri claims that any such actions are precarious, as on the terrain of the reproduction of life "capital will reduce its opposition to a unity by sucking dry its living power" (Curcio and Zseluk, 2010). Likewise, older forms of populism, state socialism, and religious community are drawing energy from the concept as a way of recasting what the figure of community is that the public can imagine living and attaching affect to. Betsy Taylor, while optimistic, nonetheless reminds us that the commons must enter "through a phase of destruction into a complex process of material transformation that becomes the basis for renewal or 'natality'" (2003). She imagines locality as the solution to the violent fungibility and displacement of all production and life in contemporary capitalism (Taylor, 2002; 2003).

This is to say that what Naomi Klein calls the "radical reclaiming of the commons" (2001) will involve not only debate about the new ordinary to come and transformation of the vast wealth of the world into a part of a thriving sustainable life, but will also involve unlearning the expectation of sovereignty as self-possession, a mechanism for control and evidence of freedom. For the commons always points to what threatens to be unbearable not only in political and economic terms but in the scenes of mistrust that proceed with or without the heuristic of trust.

The commons wants terms in which trust would become more robust. In liberal capitalist contexts, and as our mirror in austerity politics has insisted, this will involve rethinking work as well as labor, and the political as well as politics. It will involve a massive recasting of the relation of economy to modes of intimacy, which is to say to obligations and practices of worlding and care, and in such a way that debunks the productivist ideology that collapses the citizen with the worker.

Meanwhile, in the situation tragedy of the present, we live on the precipice of infrastructure collapse economically, politically, and in the built and natural worlds. Mid-twentieth century forms of expansive world building toward the good life have little or unreliable traction. In a fundamentally unstable economy, planning can be seen as a neurotic reminder of the previous era's optimism that everyone, or anyone, could be significantly necessary to capital: now, what used to be called alienation, a structure that felt alienated, is experienced at once as sensual saturation and physical exhaustion; now, work has taken on a contradictory status as perpetual and impossible, as only an increasingly lucky few can afford to retire and progressively fewer can find economically adequate occupations. When inheritance and planning are up for grabs, when disturbed relations of cause and effect induce the present as a management crisis, time appears as a disturbance of continuity rather than an ordinary ground of anyone's or any institution's control. What ought the reproduction of life involve if life in the near future cannot move beyond superintending its own destruction in a contentious encounter of debt with discipline? What will it take to reorganize constituent power beyond the claim that society should be a club for constant growth, with the vast wealth that there is more justly distributed? What good could happen to personal life, to kinship, to the world of unsaids that house the reproduction of intimate life in the material and fantasmatic ordinary? Will the state's abandonment of its publics lead to abandonment of the state or an intensification of the demand for a sovereign?

Spahr's work slides consciousness of all of this into suspending its judgment without evacuating judgment, absorbing the noise of the world, and breaking the world into noise. This training in unlearning the world through reading it across many profoundly malfunctioning genealogical machineries produces an infrastructure of patience and appetite, an unusual pair. But if there is a flatness to what's evoked in her broken figuration of what also continues, and if the poetry evokes the violence of indistinction as a way to figure democracy, it is also haunted by the universalist desire to mechanize change rather than to stop for or to be stopped by the inconvenient. This was the bourgeois world-wish too, imagining the commons from the position of a rich life that manages the transition into fantasy, desire, and material exchanges that no longer governed by possession. We write out of where we write from. In our final case, the fantasy of losing the world gestures beyond the machinic, though: perhaps because it's already lost the plenitude and the resources of the promise.

In the film *In the Air*, Liza Johnson (2009) documents her hometown, Portsmouth, Ohio, although she doesn't name it: what it films could be many postindustrial US landscapes. Its two dominant affects are distraction and boredom: its central question, posed in different forms every day, is whether the burned out and "wasted" parents, who spend time drunk and antagonistic in cars and bars, will leave for their children what Patricia Williams describes as the inheritance of a disinheritance (1991: 217). The town in this film has been abandoned not only by its elders but by capital. It seems to have one industry, a junkyard (Figure 3); and the aspiration of the junkyard is that there are no events to speak of in it, that it be a silent space with no accidents, as though the world of this town is one punctured membrane away from becoming the scrap it now organizes (Figure 4). There are empty streets and buildings, and they are being maintained as a ghost town in case something returns to refill the infrastructure.

Figure 3. Liza Johnson, *In the Air*.

Figure 4. Liza Johnson, *In the Air*.

Figure 5. Cirque d'Art.

The film is about the neighborhood kids, its current crop of dreamers: they are protagonists in training. The training comes from the only live collective space we see in the town, a circus school that is called, in real life, but not in the film, *Cirque d'Art*. We see the teacher in the front of the room, and she is getting the group in sync, to do tricks. The kids are learning to spin and to fall. They are learning to lean on each other (Figure 5). A little light romance might be starting, but also autonomy and abs are developing so that a person can hold a whole body up in the air while the partner's elevated body swings inverted. None of this feels like the preenactment of fantasies of stardom or love. It does not feel fantasmatic, or allegorical, at all: learning to be awkward, to be graceful, to leap, and to fall is a training in attention and also in revisceralizing one's bodily intuition. It is a training that collapses getting hurt with making a life, but that includes the welcoming of exposure alongside of a dread of it. There can be no change in life without revisceralization. This involves all kinds of loss and transitional suspension.

The circus training changes what threatens and what comforts, it changes the referent of dread and the refuge. It does this by foregrounding the difficulty and pleasure of maintaining footing in conversations, in the world, and in performance.[15] Broken industries, fractured families still leave conversation moderately intact. It is as though the very body of everybody needs to relearn a capacity for the common again, from the Möbius strip of relationality. The high point of the film is difficult to describe because it's so simple, but the point of rebooting the commons is that one has to reinvent life by transforming what reciprocity means from its most simple to most complex and unclear but skilled exchanges.

In this final scene the kids want a ride somewhere. The parents are fighting or they are drunk. They are wasted or aggressively deadpan. Finally, they track a mother down while she is doing her job. For a living, if you can call it that, she sweeps an empty building by herself. She is a maintenance engineer for an abandoned architecture, hired to preserving the hoarded infrastructure of capital just in case it feels like returning for some more exploitation, recourse extraction, and contribution to the live atmosphere an abandoned town can only remember. As the kids approach her, she keeps saying, ''What do you want?'' They refuse to speak. Their sideways glance is of the knowing who refuse to reproduce the conversation that never shifts the scene of living.

This round-robin of the eyeball produces a new infrastructural rhythm: they surround the working mother and make her flip backwards, over them, but it's not over easy. At this point the film shifts the register in which it has been recording. No longer tracing the decay of the harsh real now denuded of the necessary defenses of fantasy interrupted by episodes of relearning how to play, it becomes not allegorical, not analogical, but a convergence of broken intimate likenesses, a prism: everyone who has been in the film on the periphery or in the interstices comes out of an imaginary space in the periphery of the shot and begins to do circus movements on mysteriously appearing launching and landing pads. For the most part they are white working class, but not entirely. For the most part they are strong and skilled, but not entirely.

For the most part their faces are still and composed, so muted as to be inexpressive; except for the one overweight girl who makes a victory sign with her arms when she does a split. She gets her own frame, her own moment of agility an event that compels some pause. But everyone is focused on attempting to become and to stay in synch, ready for next phase of movement (Figure 6). They embody not socially necessary labor time nor normative intimacy, but something simpler and often unbearable in ordinary time—socially necessary proximity. The analogy between all persons in a world abandoned by capital, by public interest, and by any notion of world building that we can see in any of the buildings becomes the condition of this convergence; and the space that someone probably owns becomes the commons made by movement.

The soundtrack to this scene is a 1998 song by the group Alice DeeJay called ''Better Off Alone,'' whose two lyric lines are ''Do you think you're better off alone?'' and ''Talk to me,'' a rhetorical question and imperative phrase. This song has had a major life in clubs and has been remade and remixed a number of times: there's nothing to it except the profundity of the question, its apostrophic address to the ''you'' who hears it, and the political desire to convert the rhetorical into an actual question.[16] Usually it appears in a dance site where people are alone together, singular and various, intimate and mostly anonymous, looking for a minor release from their sovereignty. The song delivers the core message of popular culture, that you are not alone, and challenges its listeners to be able to bear their ontological and material relationality.[17]

Johnson's film's magical realism, locating the destruction of life and desiccation of optimism under late capitalism and neoliberalism alongside of an optimistic pedagogy of mute embodiment and semiconfident intentional proprioception converts the pop to the serious without sifting the pleasure from the situation. It is trying to extend the teaching of the circus to the bread and circus, to the place where the fraying of intimate communication threatens to disperse the social into a singularity that has no energy for self-organization.

What is ''the air'' in *In the Air*? The film's very title multiplies the referent: what is in the atmosphere, world, and song? The film's episodes ask us to wonder, as though joining Spahr's inquiry into the common air, what is in the air, what turns the air between their

Figure 6. Liza Johnson, *In the Air:* the Cirque d'Art.

fingers to circulate the scrap from the junkyard and the humidity from the lake into their lungs and muscles? What is in the air to make new genres of convergence? If the air is the common it requires a minimal beat: of proximity, synchronicity, the world of an intimacy of fractured kinship no less intimate for the ambivalence. If there are limits to the esthetic induction of the invented structure that will govern the transformation, it is also necessary that they unlearn their defenses against each other too: because they are the remaining resource. If they are too beaten down to protest the abandonment of supply chain capitalism, its flight of wealth producing nervous illness from irritation to numbness, they have not yet given up the world. In a funny way this final scene is as powerful an antiwork and antiproductivity performance as you can imagine: but, not in the register of the manifesto, it is also a disturbance of the reparative aim that is always a part of the promise that the political holds out. Whatever makes it possible to bear each other will not come from belief in an abstraction.

Linebaugh concludes that ''the commons [is better seen as] an activity and . . . a verb, . . .rather than as a noun, a substantive'' (2009: 279). Massimo de Angelis (2007) argues that the commons is always a doing that is a decoupling from the reproductive energies of a normative life's standards of value, and not replacement for capitalism, a rhythm of return

that resonates with the project of an affective infrastructure's relative autonomy to structural political imaginaries. This essay is in sync with these claims. Nonetheless, one might respond to my infrastructuralism that any artwork's aspiration toward transforming the aspiration of the *sensus communis* is at best an episode to hang a wish on. That's what an episode is, a goad to rethink seriality, continuity, analogy. But not only that: every transformative example helps to make a broken analogy, a decoupled coupling. André Green writes that when discourse stops binding "word-presentation, thing-presentation, affect, bodily states, (and) act" the unbound affect might "snap the chain of discourse," inducing a "qualitative mutation" (2004, 214). The commons concept seeks out infrastructures for sustaining the mutations that emerge from the chains that are already snapping against those exposed to regimes of austerity.

I've argued that the inconvenient gesture of awkward analogy is prime material for deliteralizing the world of what's common in the commons as we know it through the present's distorting lens. Ian Bogost writes,

> Sometimes there is nothing more refreshing than a startlingly bad analogy. It's like a crisp cucumber bursting from the dip of a bad day's sphincter. Like a restorative rain drenching the vomit of last night's bender. Like a cool breeze tousling the blood-matted fur of roadkill. (2009)

He doesn't mean this in a positive way: I do.

The political and epistemic problem for the politically autopoetic—which is what all world-creating subjects in common struggle are—is that the placeholders for our desire become factishes, fetishized figural calcifications that we can cling onto and start drawing lines in the sand with (see Latour, 2010). What remains for our pedagogy of unlearning is to build affective infrastructures that admit the work of desire as the work of an aspirational ambivalence. What remains is the potential we have to common infrastructures that absorb the blows of our aggressive need for the world to accommodate us *and* our resistance to adaptation and that, at the same time, hold out the prospect of a world worth attaching to that's something other than an old hope's bitter echo. A failed episode is not evidence that the project was in error. By definition, the common forms of life are always going through a phase, as infrastructures will.

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Notes

1. This extends my argument about glitch and impasse throughout *Cruel Optimism* (Berlant, 2011). Further reading on glitch esthetics in media theory, a central place for creative thought around the space and substance of commoning, begins with Peter Krapp (2011).
2. I learned to think about jurisdiction this way from Bradin Cormack (2007).
3. In the longer version I will spend time thinking with Anthony Giddens' work with structuration, episode, world time, and system; for the moment I'll say that this project is playing with many of the same mediations but with a much more porous and labile concept of form (see Anthony Giddens, 1984).
4. This argument about nonsovereign relationality as foundational to being extends an argument I've been developing in *Cruel Optimism* (2011) and *Sex, or the Unbearable*, written with Lee Edelman (2014).
5. On a related but more concretely spatialized concept of proxemics, focused on architectures of labor, see Liam Gillick (2007).
6. I learned to think about the affective insecurity of phenomenal equality from Adam Phillips (2003).
7. I learned to think this way about concepts from reading Donald Winnicott's *Playing and Reality* (1971) but more recently saw the theoretical relevance for critical practice in Juliet Mitchell's "Theory as an object" (2005).
8. This is a shout out to Fred Moten and Stephano Harney (2013). More discussion of their work to follow.
9. These generalizations come from broad and deep reading in the literature of the contemporary common/commons. (For significant impacts on this paper's situation in addition to Linebaugh, 2009, see Alessandrini, 2011; Casarino and Negri, 2008; The Edu-Factory Collective, 2009; Federici, 2011a, 2011b; Hardt and Negri, 2000, 2004, 2009, 2012; Moten and Harney, 2013; Negri, 2009; Ostrom, 1990; Taylor, 2003; Virno, 2004).
10. The current Boston Common webpage includes this amazing sentence: "Until 1830, cattle grazed the Common, and until 1817, public hangings took place here" (City of Boston).
11. Saidya Hartman, *Scenes of Subjection: Terror, Slavery, and Self-Making in Nineteenth-Century America* (New York and Oxford UK: Oxford UP, 1997).
12. Throughout his notebooks and letters, Emerson tips a hat to Spinoza's inspirational effects on him (Mary Moody Emerson was more elaborate in her analysis of Spinoza, though): the point made here is in Emerson and Plumstead (1969: 349). See also Russell B. Goodman (1991: 18).
13. Harvey has been assessing infrastructure as class action and lifeworld-making since his early work in the 1980s, such as *The Limits to Capital* (1982) and *The Urbanization of Capital* (1985) and most recently in the magisterial work on "The Right to the City" (2008). See also Noel Castree and Derek Gregory's (eds.) insightful commentary on Harvey's infrastructuralism throughout *David Harvey: A Critical Reader* (2006).
14. This segment of the poem was published separately, with differences in order and in some lines. The autonomous version begins with "Analogy from analogy. Analogy of analogy." and ends with "We are consequently. We are consequently." The lines in the independently published poem are statements in the sentence form (capitalized and punctuated) but in the book they are in lowercase with no punctuation and more terse and diluted, foregrounding less the certainty of the affect emanating from the grammar and more the fragmentary and distracted cataloging that is not just, in a Latourian way, putting things side by side or making a network from which a public would convene but more like hearing the 21st century in a transferential way, as the noise within sound that produces a sense of a world and a sensorium for a world (see Latour, 1988).
15. On "footing" see Goffman, 1981: 124–159.
16. Thanks to Luis-Manuel Garcia for sending me evidence of this song's credibility as an anthem for a solidarity that calls not on full subjective or affective convergence but concerted practical activity that manifests attentiveness, tenderness, respect, and pleasure: http://www.whosampled.com/sample/view/1427/Wiz%20Khalifa-Say%20Yeah_Alice%20Deejay-Better%20Off%20Alone/

(Physical Stamina n.d.), http://www.whosampled.com/sample/view/112754/40%20Cal%20feat.%20Duke%20Da%20God-South%20Beach_Alice%20Deejay-Better%20Off%20Alone/ (brooklyn4life, n.d.).

17. On the promise of popular culture to develop intimate public spheres to relieve one of one's abandonment to private suffering, see Berlant, 2009: ix. On the intimate public sphere in everyday life, the literature is plentiful: for a focus around dance see Delgado and Muñoz's edited volume *Everynight Life: Culture and Dance in Latin/o America* (1997); Dils and Albright, 2001; Garcia, 2011a, 2011b; Miller, 2012; Thornton, 1996.

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