The Commons

COURSE DESCRIPTION:

The Commons is not a *theme* for this seminar. Rather, it should be understood as a little grit to gain some traction on some quite fundamental, recurring, and usually slippery questions about artistic practice: What is an artist? What is the pertinent unit for thinking meaning in art? What are meanings? Values? Knowledge? Truths? Do they necessarily coincide? Do we care?

In recent years, the political geographical concept of the Commons, long languishing in obscurity, has been refitted and put back to work in describing momentous shifts in the manner in which value is produced and extracted in societies across the world. Although initially re-introduced into the sphere of art through digital culture in the 1990s, mobilizing the tension between the anachronistic and the techno-fetishistic, acquiring something of an avant-gardist tone in the process, its use has steadily broadened to the point that it is now the contested ground for widely divergent interests, ranging from extreme, atavistic rightwing politics, through neoliberal developments in the West, to the anarchistic politics of global anti-capitalist protest.

With the waning of the latest round of artistic inquiry into the relation between art and life, it appears that neither the vaunted dispersed authorial subject of Relational Aesthetics, nor the individual biological author that it displaced generates much contention. Is this an indication that art and authorship has finally arrived at some neutral post-ideological settlement, or can we bind these questions to the movement of questions of value at large in order to reintroduce a little militancy into these questions?

In this seminar, we will read and discuss together various recent theoretical texts around the subject of the commons, recent affect theory, and aesthetics, combined with individual and group critiques of the participants' practices. As a seminar, rather than a lecture course, participation in discussion is crucial: in order to facilitate this, the reading group sections of this class will be initiated by two student representatives. Their task will be to review the previous week's discussion, and a look forward to that day's material for discussion. The rest of the seminar will be encouraged to intervene into this question and answer session.

Final papers: a 2,500 word position paper will be required on the last day of semester. *Final Papers will be presented to class at beginning of Term 2.* You are encouraged to re-evaluate your own positions at that time. *These papers will be highly influential on the direction of the second semester of this class!!*

REQUIRED READING:

Readings will be handed out either on paper or as emailed pdfs each week in advance. Readings are listed in the course schedule. This schedule is subject to change in order to allow us to react to the development of our discussions.