

# Crisis in City Space: The Commons as an In-between Zone and Pinecone Commons

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## Abstract

Critiquing discussions of the commons as an action, resource, or value, this study argues that we need to rethink the commons by noting that it is a place. Places are bodily spaces that have their own materiality and narrative. Places are both rooted and constructed, unlike ordinary objects. Being both rooted and constructed means that place is never free from history, but it also means that place is produced by the heterogeneous elements that make it up. In particular, this discussion will consider the commons as an in-between zone and explore its implications. Also, it will examine the Pinecone Commons as a case study to emphasize the non-representational nature of the commons as an in-between zone.

**Key words:** Commons, Place, In-between, Contact

*Perhaps it is time we moved beyond modernism's utopianism and postmodernism's dystopianism to a topanism that recognizes that human beings, as creatures of history, consciously and unconsciously create places (Olwig, 2002: 52).*

## I. Introduction

Recently, with the advent of the climate crisis, the intensity and severity of natural disasters have increased, and the scale of damage has increased. In addition, man-made disasters and technological disasters occur in various forms depending on regional characteristics. Large scale disasters, such as Haiti's earthquake and Japan's biggest earthquake, tsunami and nuclear reactor meltdown in 11 March 2011, happen suddenly and cause large casualties and significant damages to society. When a large-scale disaster occurs, immediate emergency responses are needed in order to save lives and relieve and control the damages (Jiang and Yuan, 2019: 1) In South Korean academia and social movements, the concept "commons" runs into difficulties as soon as it is used. The question is: What does it really refer to? Commons researchers, or those who call themselves 'commoners', are asked for the right definition of the commons. They develop their discussions and practices in their own ways, but at some point, they are repeatedly exposed to having to answer the question, "So what is the commons?" again and again. At times, the commons seems clear and easy to grasp, and the commons is seen as an important practical tool for social change. But at other times, the commons is hard to understand, and its usefulness seems tenuous. In this case, the commons seems to be everywhere or nowhere. The researcher writing this paper confesses to getting lost in the former and the latter, and I'm sure many of us who love the commons feel the same way.

Despite the new vision that the term commons offer, why have researchers gotten stuck in the commons “maze”? First of all, the problem is not only because the commons are a foreign word. Rather, the term itself is inherently esoteric (Bollier, 2015; Berlant, 2016). Anecdotally, commons activist David Bollier has found himself having to explain what the commons is when he introduces the commons to strangers, as is the case in South Korea (Bollier, 2015). However, rather than attempting to clarify the abstruse nature of the commons, this study suggests that abstrusity is an important characteristic of the commons, and that we need to reexamine the commons from its most basic properties.

The fundamental property of the commons is that it is a place. This is not a unique perspective, as many studies have already distinguished between commons and common goods (communal good, common resource, common goods) and discussed how commons function as a kind of place (Kwon, 2024). However, there has been relatively little discussion of which kind of places the commons is. In this study, place is not just a material base, but also has a relational meaning that is inseparable from assemblages, experiences, and narratives of heterogeneous things (Malpas, 2014; Bashar, 2023). Furthermore, places are not fixed, they occur in the process of movements of beings from one place to another (Ingold, 2024). Place-making is a political action which involves the non/voluntary mobilization of more-than-human things (Robertson, 2018). A fundamental premise of seeing the commons as a place is that it is not a resource. The commons is often translated as common-pool resources in Korea, but if common-pool resources imply things that can be moved, then places, such as pastures, the archetype of the commons, are not things in the usual sense. Furthermore, places are neither social behaviors nor moral principles. This discussion criticizes any reduction of the commons to a resource, action, value, or even system because it cannot be explained by operational closure or autonomy alone.

It is commonly argued that commons are historically divided into 'past' and 'contemporary' commons, and that the temporal difference between past and contemporary commons has changed the way we understand commons (Park and Ahn, 2023; Han, 2022). In the past, the commons was understood more as a place than the modern commons: the place of the 'commons' was a zone of inseparable economic and ecological activity, the foundation of life that sustained small communities: the forest, the river, the sea. However, the modern commons are often seen as disembodied or placeless. The common examples of the latter are commons related to intangible resources, such as knowledge commons or information commons. These kinds of commons, especially when combined with the digital world, often negate the idea of place. However, if we recall that the main issue of knowledge and information commons is the place of the 'platform' (Park, Seo-Hyun, 2020), commons still refer to place. While there are obvious differences in the landscape when knowledge is circulated through libraries and when it is circulated digitally, knowledge is still located in a specific arrangement and location, a place. Platforms in the digital world seem to allow simultaneous access to a wider space, but they are clearly a finite kind of place, and there is a phygital element to them that is affected by the physical as well as the digital world (Lee, Kwang-Seok, 2021).

Ironically from a critical geography perspective, the commons as place has been largely ignored because it is so naturally linked to spatial discussions. Especially in discussions of urban commons that embrace planetary

urbanism, where the entire planet is under the field of the urban sphere, place seems to have become reified and remains only as a kind of relationship. In critical geography, the emphasis is more on the agency or movement of the subject (although the question of which subject is debatable) (Han, 2022; Park, Baekyun, et al., 2021). These discussions have rarely asked what kind of "place" the commons is becoming, even though it already implies the spatiality of the urban.

However places are bodily spaces with their own materiality and narrative, and unlike ordinary objects, they are both rooted and constructed. Being both rooted and constructed means that places are never free from historicity, but on the other hand, they are produced by the many disparate elements that make up a place. In particular, this study seeks to broaden our understanding of the commons by thinking about it as a place that cannot be clearly represented linguistically, i.e., by thinking about the non-representational commons and what significance we can derive from it. The notion of non-representation does not negate representation, but leaves us with the challenging task of how we can think within the limits of representation and beyond the boundaries of those limits (Vannini et al. 2023). Specifically, in this study, we consider the commons as an 'in-between zone' in the sense that there is a commons between here and there, past and future, being and becoming, and explore the meaning of the commons as an in-between zone. We will also discuss how the sense of place of the commons is experienced concretely through the case of the Pinecone Commons.

## **II. In-between zone which opens on either side of the time**

In-Between is relational in that it is always between something and something else. The image of the in-between suggests a liminal process of moving from one place to another, such as a passage, corridor, or waterfront (Park, 2016). In-between spaces can be defined as "empty spaces and cracks between two heterogeneous spaces" (Jeon, 2020), and Park (2016) characterizes in-between spaces as performative relationality, indeterminacy, and relational scale. In other words, in-between spaces are filled performatively each time, rather than reproducing predetermined meanings. The reason why this study does not borrow the concept of in-between space and defines the commons as a 'zone' is because the commons is a temporary place formed by political and economic arrangements, which implies a territorial meaning. So, what is the zone between what and what is the commons?

First of all, the commons acts as a time 'between' the past and the present, producing both simultaneously. In this case, place is inextricably linked to narrative; it is not independent of time, but is the accumulation of time and produces time (Massey, 2015). Interestingly, the commons suggests a mythical space that simultaneously produces both the past and the future. Lévi-Strauss explains mythology as follows.

*Myths legitimize social orders and notions of the world, and seek to explain something in terms of how it was in the past: they look back to the past in order to rationalize the present state of affairs, but they also imagine the future in light of this present past (Lévi-s Strauss, 2018: 101)."*

Commons that produce the past and the future are often framed in four narratives. This study is not intended to be a definitive study of the commons debate, so we'll discuss the commons narrative as simply as possible and explore what it means to produce the past and future.

It's worth noting that the commons starts with a specific allegory, a "tragedy" designed by ecologist Hardin that is used to justify modern rationality (Hardin, 1968). The reason Hardin's story works across disciplines is because it is so simple and fits the modern narrative. In the eyes of rationality, or modernity, resources, including land, must be regulated and managed in order to maintain the mortal commons. But there is something impoverished about this narrative. Hardin mistakes a particular (economic) rationalism for a universal rationalism, and interprets the world through the lens of his rationalism. There is always the possibility that the commons could survive in a world where that view does not prevail.

The second story is a bit more complicated, but it is full of small-scale examples that teach us lessons without violating modernity. Ostrom and his colleagues have largely generated this narrative (Ostrom, 2010). They look at the commons that are still "maintained" around the world, and they organize them in a modern way. Commons that rely on informal or formal institutions are either successfully managed or unsuccessfully managed with appropriate oversight and self-governance. Commons are not the *terra nullius* of Hardin's story, but places that people actively use, manage, and reproduce. Unlike the users of Hardin's commons, the people who regenerate the commons are able to share information, so the commons can be continually regenerated. While the modern rationalist perspective is maintained in this story, the complexity of the relationships surrounding the commons makes the story of the commons a drama capable of both tragedy and comedy (Ostrom et al., 2002).

The third narrative connects 'forgotten histories' or the 'periphery' to the present. Here, the commons is understood as a 'universal' way of life that can be found in the non-Western world, not just in relation to the British Great Charter or the colonial experience (Linebaugh, 2012). Examples from the past and periphery where ordinary people have utilized resources for their daily sustenance are being restored and reinvented. Chang has summarized the commons of the "non-Western world" as universal examples of the commons, where, as he aptly points out, examples are unearthed and redefined as commons "at the level of the universal experience of human history" (Chang, 2022: 97). In a sense, examples from the periphery tend to be equated with the past, as they are presented as something that has not yet been corrupted. Whether in the past or via the present periphery, the commons is talked about as an exemplary basis for life. This involves projecting the past through the eyes of the present, reimagining it as something new. While this attempt places the commons in a universal history, it also risks labeling them as pre-modern or underdeveloped.

The fourth story is the one that produces the future. This often goes hand in hand with the third narrative, in which the commons as history is once again projected into the present and becomes the basis for judgment of the current situation. The restoration of what has been 'taken away', especially in the context of enclosure, is an important practical basis for the commons narrative (Linebaugh, 2021). The practices of

producing and sustaining the commons, called commoning, serve to open up futures that have been captured/enclosed in the present and allow us to imagine other futures. In fact, it is often this futuristic desire that is the "real" desire that draws many of us to the commons, noting the absurdity of the current situation. The political economist de Angelis says that he became interested in the commons because he "desires the conditions necessary to promote social justice, sustainability, and a happy life for all" (An Architektur, 2010). This futuristic imagining can go in many directions, as discussed by Hong (2019; 2022), Baek (2017), Lee (2020), and others. As a kind of political project, the commons invites us to imagine institutions, negotiations, and politics that can open up enclosures. These hopes and expectations are common to researchers and activists in different lineages, including neo-institutionalism, collaborationism, and autonomism.

As these four narrative structures are varied, we encounter the commons with thousand faces. The commons only exists in the arrangement of these stories/topics. This is why the commons is a work that involves a shift in worldview (Bollier and Helfrich, 2012). Before following the story, there is no commons, but after following the story, everything in the world starts to look like a commons. In other words, the commons exists in the placement of the story, which is, in Karen Barad's terminology, onto-epistemic (Barad, 2007). The commons is present and meaningful when we follow the story, stay in the story, and create the story again.

The commons in the story grows out of different roots, and without knowing those roots, it's hard to know what the commons means. The commons is an unfolding story that connects the past to the present and produces a future that is different from the present. As Lévi-Strauss said earlier, commons explain the past, rationalize the present, and imagine the future in light of this past (Lévi-Strauss, 2018). Lévi-Strauss adds that "our civilization" also has something that serves this function, and that is history. The difference between the two, he says, is the "belief" that there are multiple myths, but only one history, and that we are willing to believe that there is only one history. In this respect, Lévi-Strauss sees history and myth as symmetrical, which is a rebuttal to the asymmetry that places myth as fictional and history as real. Within the structure of thought, myth and history are functionally equivalent. Myth and history serve to impose order on a sporadic, indiscriminate, and chaotic noise. It is through them that we "make sense" of the past, present, and future. In this sense, the commons functions as a story, a myth (=history). It becomes history not because it really exists uniquely in the past, but only as a present invention. The commons as something universal is invented, and in doing so, it gains the power to create the future.

Furthermore, the commons invokes other times that reflect on the present time of modernity. Pre-modern, a-modern, and post-modern temporalities are invoked in the narrative of the commons. It would be incomplete to draw a single dividing line between modernity and a/post/pre/modernity here, and it is not as if a/post/pre/modernity does not exist in the time of modernity. Nevertheless, it is hard to deny the dominant nature of the order and rules of the 'here and now' world. Latour, for example, summarizes modernity as entailing the division of a heterogeneous collection of things into nature and society, and the purification

of both into something pure (Latour, 2009). Of course, Latour's interpretation is by no means the only one, as explanations of modernity and value judgments about modernity have been at the heart of the disciplines of sociology and anthropology. Parsons (1999) explains modernity in terms of functional differentiation, while anthropologist Paul Connerton (2009) describes it as a "cultural amnesia" related to spatial memory. Similarly, but in a different way, anthropologist Tim Ingold (2024) tries to explain modernity in a specific way. In short, he is concerned with the way in which lines formed through movement are no longer perceived as lines, but as points, which have become materialized and separated, so that lines are no longer perceived as moving, but as straight lines of connected points. An active interpretation of this modernity is beyond the scope of this discussion. However, this study notes that in this way, the commons is signified as an uncanny passage between modern and amodern, this and that.

The commons is not well-established and static in any one place, but moves in both directions of time. To remember the past is to follow a trail, and in that sense it is the act of leaving new footprints (Ingold, 2024). If movement into the past is a creative process, movement into the future is likewise produced by the process of retracing traces. This is why the reified commons is inert. The in-between zone is not a place where meaning is complete in itself; it is only through performance that meaning is formed. The materialized commons, on the other hand, is no longer an in-between zone that connects time because movement is erased. The performativity of commoning is crucial to the commons, not because the commons is simply free or a resource that anyone can take and use, but because the commons is a space in between that is filled with performances. But commoning alone doesn't define the commons. Commons is an in-between zone where heterogeneous things meet and intertwine.

### **III. The zone between heterogeneous bodies in contact**

Whereas the main thrust of section 2 was about the commons as a space between time, between past and future, this section is about the commons as a space between bodies. Bodies are not merely biophysical objects, but symbolic and political substances, and the various practices of regulation and resistance surrounding them have long been the subject of research (Butler, 1993; Nast and Pile, 1998; Grozs, 2019). Bodies are also constantly exchanging material, traversing and constituting each other's bodies (Alaimo, 2018). The study of bodies is not necessarily limited to humans, as all beings in the secular world have bodies, and the body can be considered a place in itself. Indeed, the human body is home to countless microorganisms (Ironstone, 2019). With this perception in mind, this study focuses on the commons as the in-between zone where disparate bodies come into contact and translate.

Han (2024) borrowed the concept of middle voice to describe commoning as the act of re/producing together beyond the dichotomy of subject and object, suggesting that the distinction between human and non-human is not so important in such discussions. Furthermore, Bresnihan (2015), Metzger (2015), and others have more fully explored nonhuman beings actively co-producing the commons. The commons is

the intertwining of all these heterogeneous beings to form a specific place. In a situation of 'together', pre-established subjects and objects are meaningless. To return to Hardin's fable, what is the relationship between the shepherd, the cow, and the grass? They make each other exist in a certain way. In that they bring each other into existence, the commons is both the production of those disparate beings, the result of their entanglement, and the in-between zone that makes that entanglement possible. This interpretation resonates with Haraway's notion of becoming-with or sympoiesis (Haraway, 2021). This study argues for the existence of the commons as a "place" of co-production.

Because the commons is a place, the products of common production in the commons (common goods) are not attributed to the producers themselves, but to something that is never attributed to them: the commons continues to produce. For example, when Haraway and her dog Cayenne co-produce each other (co-production), and when they form a trail, the trail is the commons, not Haraway or Cayenne. This view of the commons as a set of resources, communities, and institutions (Bollier, 2015) is problematic because it reduces what is made to the sum of the materials that make it. The sum of materials and the thing made are qualitatively different. In the commons, there is no hierarchy among the producers, but there is a difference in the status of A and B, which arises from the circular relationship between beings who produce (A), the place where it is produced (B), and the place where it is produced (B), which in turn produces being who produce (A). While it is tempting to reduce A to a subject and B back to an object because of this difference, the beauty of the commons story is that the produced place produces multiple producers. The produced commons makes life possible for the producers (=materials) of the commons. Just as the pasture made the existence of the herdsmen, cows, and grass possible. It is also worth noting that in this structure, use is another form of production.

In this study, A is called the commoner, B is called the commons, and the production process is called commoning. The commons is not considered to exist independently of the commerce of the commodifier, but only as a historical event of commerce. However, this structure of commons production is reminiscent of the circular structure of gift giving in terms of circulation. Giving is a circular structure in which what is received must be given back, and in the cycle of giving, the gift (what is given) circulates between the giver and the receiver, creating a circular structure (Mauss, 2002). But commons are not "mobile objects" like gifts. Commons are "forests" with trees, "pastures" with grass, "oceans" with fish, "libraries," "galleries," or "platforms" with knowledge, information, images, etc. In other words, commons are more like infrastructures that produce life, the basis of life that enables movement and immobility (Berlant, 2016). Furthermore, while in the cycle of gift-giving (<self-gift-other-gift-self>), the other exists as an independent term of the basic structure, in the cycle of commons (<commoner-commons-commoner>), the other is potentially present within the commons. Because the commoner is always plural, the other and the self exist as commoners mixed together, i.e., the other can be seen as a commoner as a co-production partner/interferer/oppressor/bystander, and the interference/oppression/indifference can be seen as internal types of the commoner because it can be one of the forms of the commoner's behavior. In other words, the

commoner itself is a concept that contains a heterogeneous other. If the commons is taken away, it is either because the commoners are no longer diverse enough to be called heterogeneous, or because the commons supports only a few forms of life. Traditionally, this phenomenon is referred to as enclosure: the commons must be sufficiently heterogeneous that so-called club property land or sea owned by homogeneous members does not qualify as a commons.

The commons is also an in-between zone in that it enables their 'contact' between disparate things. Kim (2015) borrows from philosopher Irigaray's discussion of what it means to be in-between, which suggests that in-between is not only a "passage that connects polarities and blurs their conceptual boundaries," but also "a space in which one term is transformed into another," a space that "connects the two while simultaneously separating them, constantly protecting their otherness" (Kim, 2015). What Kim (2015) notes is that an important sense in this encounter is the sense of touch. If sight enables the distancing of subject and object, contact can only occur when different polarities meet in the middle, experiencing intersubjectivity where it is impossible to know who is the object and who is the subject. Contact disrupts and rebuilds the boundaries between the two at the same time. Here, the space of contact, as a space of encounter, is seen as "a space of *to*, a space that is neither fully occupied nor completely empty, a space that allows the other in the encounter with the other" (Kim, 2015: 244). Interestingly, this interpretation aligns with the discussion of the commons: the in-between is another way of saying contact zone. Just as cattle, herdsmen, and grass meet in the pasture, the commons is where the moral economy (Scott, 2004) of the upper class and the codified law, the Great Charter (Linebaugh, 2012), meet and are transformed.

Mary Louise Pratt describes contact zones, in a general sense, as "social spaces where cultures meet, collide, and contend with each other as a result of extremely asymmetrical relationships" (cited in Park, 2021: 160). Contact is clearly conducted in an unequal power arrangement, but it is not a one-way street. It presupposes a process of give and take, or reciprocity. Because heterogeneous things come into contact, how they are transformed is undetermined and contingent.

At this point, one of the difficulties of the commons is connected to the discussion of who constitutes the in-between. All the heterogeneous things that produce a place exceed the realm of recognition. Here, the commons for "everyone," often proclaimed as an ideal, is a fiction because everything cannot be in contact with everything at the same time. In other words, the commons is a site of political struggle because it is the zone between exclusivity and total openness.

#### **IV. The zone between the 'Pinecone Commons'**

Now that we've talked about what it means to see the commons as an in-between place, let's take a look at the Pinecone Commons movement as an example of a commons. The Pinecone Commons is a commons movement that was intensively active from 2019 to 2021, with activities surrounding "wilderness" in Songhyeon-d



ong, Jongno-gu, Seoul. The researcher participated in the planning and activities of the group, so this study is more of an action research or autoethnography. However self-descriptions of the initiation and activities of Pinecone Commons can be found in Kim and Choi (2021), and Yoon, Yeoil (2022) discusses Pinecone Commons in terms of comparative research. In particular, Yoon (2022) illustrates the characterization of the commons as an in-between zone, starting from the commonality that the Pinecone Commons, Gyeongui-line Commons, and Baedari Commons were all movements against “vacant land”. At first glance, the in-between zone appears to be an empty space, a pause, but as Yoon (2022) points out, it is precisely because it is empty that it can be filled with a variety of practices. However, Yoon (2022) focuses on finding the meaning of reappropriating publicness or public interest at the level of a movement, evaluating the commons as a resistance to the outside world. While it should not be overlooked that placemaking is a political act, it is fundamentally a creative act. In order to avoid repetition of previous research, this study does not discuss the legitimacy of Pinecone Commons, its activities, and its limitations. Instead, this study discusses the Pinecone Commons from the perspective of the commons as an 'in-between zone' and attempts to explain why it quickly lost momentum.

Songhyeon-dong is not an administrative building, but a court building that has been used and recognized since the Joseon Dynasty, and most of Songhyeon-dong is now open to the public as Songhyeon Neighborhood Park. The land area of Songhyeon Neighborhood Park is 36,642 meters<sup>2</sup>, or just over 11,000 pyeong, and because it was located between Gyeongbokgung and Changgyeonggung palaces, a pine forest was established as the hinterland of the palaces, hence the name Songhyeon. After the Imjin War, it served as the residence of the royal family and then as the private residence of Chosen Siksan Bank during the Japanese occupation. After liberation, it became a U.S. territory and was used as a residence for the U.S. Embassy. When the U.S. returned the land to Korea in 2000, Samsung Life Insurance acquired the property for 140 billion won, and the company wanted to build an art museum on the site, but failed to do so. With the possibility of development gone, Samsung Life sold the land to Korean Air in 2008 for more than double the price. It had been eight years since Samsung Life owned the land. Korean Air had planned to build a cultural complex including a hotel, but was unable to get approval for the project due to a review of the educational and environmental protection zone and deteriorating public opinion. The airline's financial deterioration during the pandemic made it more willing to sell, and the deal was finalized in 2021 for KRW 557.8 billion after negotiations with Seoul, which wanted to turn the space into a park. The purchase of Songhyeon-dong was also justified by the fact that when former Samsung Group CEO Lee Kun-hee died, her family donated her art collection to the country, so there was a need for a "Lee Kun-hee Gallery" to house the art. Interestingly, the plan to build the Samsung Museum of Art in the 2000s will be publicly funded with the establishment of the Lee Kun-hee Gallery in Songhyeon Park, which will display the former Samsung Group CEO's artwork (scheduled for completion in 2028).

Pinecone Commons was primarily active when the land was owned by Korean Air before it was sold to the city of Seoul and opened as a park. It is important to note that even before Pinecone Commons was active, the space had been the subject of efforts by various civic organizations to make it a public park (Hong, Sun

gtae, 2014). In particular, Korean Air was planning to build a hotel on the space, and there was active resistance to the development plan by parents from the surrounding schools. This space was already considered an important piece of land for various actors and was considered a red zone for urban development, even being referred to as a 'gold mine' in the real estate industry. However, due to the tense balance of power between institutions and civil society, local governments and corporations, Songhyeon-dong was paradoxically able to temporarily exist as a wilderness, or an idle site 'between' other spaces.

Pinecone Commons has drawn attention to the imaginative power of "planning" in the in-between zone. Planning is a speculative act of making the absent present through the act of speculating on the future. It presupposes expectations, desires, and imagination that cannot be explained by rationality. Pinecone commons emerged as a response to the problem that the imagination of urban planning around Songhyeon-dong was limited to the perspective of someone specific (corporations, the government, and the building owners of the surrounding area) (Kim Jihye and Choi Heejin, 2021). In short, theirs is a rather strange claim to the 'right to imagine'. The core members of Pinecone Commons were between six and eight people, but the number fluctuated depending on the time, and their activities often crossed the boundaries of art, activism, and research. They explored the dynamics of the space surrounding Songhyeon-dong through writing, artworks, exhibitions, and seminars. The activities of the Pinecone Commons are revealed through their coined word, "Pinecone," which they created as a neologism after considering other words to replace the word "commons" because they thought it was too difficult. Pinecone has been described as "1. the act of tracing the value of communal creations historically, 2. the act of collaborating to keep communal creations from being monopolized, 3. the act of sharing communal creations, 4. the act of creating something without any hierarchy," and they call themselves Pineconers (Pinecone Commons website). In the process, they traced not only the human history of Songhyeon-dong but also the history of non-humans, such as the paulownia tree that stood tall in the stone wall surrounding Songhyeon-dong wilderness, which served as a reminder that empty space is not empty at all, but full. From these points, the activities of Pinecone Commons were an act of recognizing and creating an in-between space, a place that is open to both directions of time, a place where heterogeneous bodies come into contact.

The description of the event organized by Pinecone Commons, "Songhyeon-dong Real Autonomous Community: Songhyeon-dong is happening" event description shows that the in-between zone is a gap. A gap is a possibility for creation, and the act of noticing, exploring, and creating new gaps demonstrates the performativity of the in-between.

*Song Hyun-dong cracks. Songhyeon-dong cracks, rises, bursts. Songhyeondong opens up. Where it is closed, all imagination is open. The harder the wall, the more invisible the inside, the more it becomes a stage for our movement. Here, Songhyeon-dong is already open, and we are in it. Songhyeon-dong Community Center is a community center without residents. There are no legal residents in the area. So paradoxically, it is a space where everyone can become a resident. We open a community center in this space, we meet you by chance, we open a community center program with you, we make Songhyeon-gye, we dance (Pinecone commons exhibit)*

on, 2020)."

At the event, Pinecone Commons attempted to uncover the residents of Songhyeon-dong, which has no legal residents, including paulownia trees, residents of Gahoe-dong, a near district, tenants, people who speak different languages such as Seoul and Siamese, an old man watching pigeons in front of Tapgol Park, people passing through Songhyeon-dong in 2070, and people who aspire to develop the neighborhood. The participants shared their hopes for more human and non-human beings to become residents of Songhyeon-dong, while at the same time realizing that many beings have already played a role in creating Songhyeon-dong. The final event of the project was called 'Creating Songhyeon Gyemeong,' and one of the comments that came out of the program, which was attended by about twenty people, was that Pinecone Commons should not invite people to Songhyeon-dong, but should seek invitations from the beings who have already created Songhyeon-dong, and an atmosphere was formed that resonated with the meaning (Songhyeon Gyemeong field data, 2020.10.31.). In these activities, Pine Blossom Commons sought to break free from the magnetism of modern conformist citizenship and crack the existing order.

However, Pinecone Commons has not been active since the event, with members intermittently attempting to publicize their work and make new connections in various venues (Choi, 2024). For example, they intervened in other artistic and commons activities, and continued to engage directly with the local community. Crucially, from this point onward, Korean Air was in a rush to sell Songhyeon-dong as a pretext for closing its financial deficit in the aftermath of the pandemic, and the donation of Lee Kun-hee's artwork in early 2021 made Songhyeon-dong a likely candidate for a museum. As a result, in the winter of 2021, the cash-rich Korea Land and Housing Corporation purchased Songhyeon-dong, and Korea Land and Housing Corporation in turn exchanged Songhyeon-dong for the southern site of Seoul Medical Center, a municipal property of the city of Seoul, in a "swap" (Seoul Economic Daily, Dec. 23, 2021). The site was opened up in the form of a 'green square' and the wall that surrounded wilderness abruptly disappeared. While Pinecone Commons sought to open a gap by intervening in the plans and desires surrounding urban space, the momentum of Pinecone Commons quickly faded as the land was purchased by the city of Seoul and spatial plans converged on a park with an art museum. The performative significance of the space between the two was also neutralized. Despite Songhyeon Neighborhood Park's nickname, 'Open Songhyeon Green Square,' it was perceived as a 'closed' space. There were disagreements within Pine Needle Commons about whether or not to make their political voices heard more directly in the process, but they simply watched as Songhyeon Neighborhood Park was opened. The voice of Pinecone Commons that said, 'Let's open the fence slowly after enough discussion' remained a minority view.

The Pinecone Commons case may not lend legitimacy to the argument that the commons is an in-between zone. It could be argued that many other examples of commons are not applicable to this argument. However, it's worth noting that the knowledge commons, care commons, and even energy commons currently being discussed are all efforts to recognize and create in-between spaces. Most of these discussions are about the need

for a middle ground that is neither completely private nor completely total. In a material and symbolic sense, the "zone" is never a system, value, or behavior. Because the commons is not just another term for reclaiming publicness, it is indeed a place, and heterogeneous things exist and are done in the commons that cannot be captured by publicness or democracy. This leaves the commons as an uncharted territory that cannot be clearly defined. Attempts to capture the commons precisely only add to its confusion, but that confusion is another name for the undefined meaning of place.

## **V. Conclusion: Non-representational commons**

This article argues that the meaning of the commons is indeterminate and temporally constructed among many disparate entities. This interpretation of the commons has similarities and differences with those who view the commons as a plan to overthrow the absurdity of this world. However, the real, or latent, commons (Tsing, 2023) are far from being subverted on a totalizing level. Such a project may require a different conceptualization.

The argument from Park and Ahn (2023) is interesting because it implies that the commons is a value "between" systems, in the sense that it is a common ground between appropriately distinct systems. They define the commons as "a value/assertion that a situation should be open to the common operation of different social systems, so that no one social system should have exclusive control over it" (Park and Ahn, 2023). This discussion implies a judgment that when beings at different, distinct levels of a social system hold different, heterogeneous perspectives, neither of which is superior or dominant, they need to compromise and deal with the situation appropriately. In other words, they recognize the common ground between disparate social systems that are not necessarily inclusive of each other. But because their research only addresses the commons at the level of those very social systems, it leaves out the aspirations of the commons and the different dimensions of the commons. The researcher believes that this is because they do not discuss the role of the commons as a mediating place between time and time, body and body.

This research denies that there is any inherent moral value in the commons, but it does see a "virtue" in the commons, not because it is a concept that aligns with a particular reality, but because it is a concept that is out of alignment, a concept that is in-between, and can open up a space of possibilities. By reviving the storytelling of the commons, the researcher seeks to place the commons at the risk of worlding (Haraway, 2021). The commons in this case is not a solution or panacea waiting to be discovered to solve the problems of modernity, nor is it the engine of a 'progressive' path; it is more of a making process that takes given materials and creates something qualitatively different (Ingold, 2010). In this process, this research is not an attempt to capture the commons, but rather to keep an eye on its non-representational nature and find possibilities there. The non-represented commons, in the noise of the unseen, are not captured by such enclosures, but move across the landscape. Commons show the world in different ways, but the stories they

can tell are very different depending on the narrative they are placed in and the perspective of the observer. Which stories are followed and what traces they leave behind depend on how the traveler chooses to correspond with the landscape (Ingold, 2017; 2024).

The commons is also often dismissed as "already a thing of the past" or "too idealistic". The researcher believes that this is because we are often caught up in a modern gaze that fixes the commons on a certain axis of space and time, and thinks of it as immovable. If the commons is a present practice, a practice that begins in the present and creates pathways in both directions, past and future, then it can be shed of the stigma that it exists at the very poles of pre-modernity and post-modernity. It is also a place of encounter, where all kinds of disparate things come into contact, mis/understand each other, and are transformed. In this sense, the commons is topos, and it is in line with Olwig's place-oriented outlook at the beginning of this article. The commons is neither a closed place for particular beings nor a wasteland open to all beings with nothing in common, but a place created by the overlapping, intersecting, and intertwining paths of moving beings. As an in-between place, the commons begins by leaving space.

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