

**Tragicomedy of the Commons:
*Alga Bolokh – A Guided Tour to the Wasteland***

Alga Bolokh (in Mongolian roughly meaning “On Disappearance”) was a set of two different, but interrelated installations/performances coordinated by Claudia Heu /CABULA6 in collaboration with Gerhard Fillei/ finnworks and created collaboratively by artists from Ulan Bator, Mongolia and Berlin, Germany. The first iteration took place in Ulan Bator in February 2014 in the last significant public park remaining inside the boundaries of the city; the second in Berlin, Germany in June 2014 at Radialsystem V, a major dance and performance venue in eastern Berlin and former site of one of the late 19th-century city’s twelve pump stations for urban waste.

In both cities and both instantiations of *Alga Bolokh*, ecological themes are manifest – disappearing green space in Ulan Bator, traces of a subterranean history of forgotten sewage in a performance venue in Berlin. And yet, these themes emanate from the pieces’ basic exploration of how humans are situated in their histories, rather than necessarily being the motivation for the pieces themselves. That history is embedded in a human relationship to the *Umwelt*, the environment, elicits a need in *Alga Bolokh* to bring to the fore the omnipresent, and hence easily submerged, relationships that arise between humans and ecological systems.

Beyond the histories of the two sites for performance, the elements within each performance installation – broadly characterized: twelve different artist-led tours in the park in Ulan Bator; a series of sound and video installations in Berlin – also consistently evoke this human-environment relationship. To generalize about these experiences and to offer a critical frame for understanding them, we propose to apply a series of theoretical frames commonly associated more with sociopolitical and economic models than with performance studies, but in the hope of yielding a potentially useful interdisciplinary dialogue.

In economics, a common way of trying to distinguish between types of ecological and social resources entails differentiating public and private goods into a 2x2 grid, with excludable versus non-excludable property rights intersecting with rivalrous versus non-rivalrous consumption rights. Given serious historical environmental damage to the category of rivalrous and non-excludable “common goods,” such as the climate or the world’s oceans, a vigorous debate has emerged about how to govern these. Associated with, but not perfectly equivalent to this debate has been a quasi-philosophical debate about the “Tragedy of the Commons,” spurred on by a seminal 1968 essay by the ecologist Garrett Hardin. In brief, Hardin worries that the non-excludability of the “commons” is bound to end in a tragedy of over-consumption. Against this, one might pose communitarian aspirations that would see a happy “comedy” or cornucopia in the proper marriage of human and environmental concerns.

Themes of waste; overconsumption; what becomes externalized onto the commons of the environment by humans recur in the various parts of *Alga Bolokh*. And beyond thematics, it may be useful to consider in what ways the different models of governance associated with the commons also relate to different models of aesthetic governance: how different kinds of performances/installations (end-stage with one vanishing point; single viewer across from single video screen; intersecting guided tours with one performer and one audience-member, where no holistic view of all the tours is possible) can evoke different versions of the social contract. Some of the questions to be posed: What do models of economic goods have to say to performance studies about the way social arrangements are created between artists and audiences? But also, why might social theories come back to aesthetic notions like “tragedy” and “comedy” in trying to describe forms of social dis-/agreement? In *Alga Bolokh*, is the wasteland the disappearance of the natural? The social? A voracious/voluptuous capitalistic forgetting that “mimics” in an accelerated way nature’s own “creative destruction”? A space thankfully forgotten and left to yield fruit?

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