



*The Paths to the Common(s) Are Infinite* is an attempt by the New York-based artists Ayreen Anastas and Rene Gabri to situate and share various inquiries, experiences, and material traces of encounters, which have brought them to questions of the common(s). The commons have historically referred to shared ownership and care of land and water – for example, in Medieval England - but what is commonly held today is much wider, encompassing the cultural sphere, software, and public goods such as public education, health care, and infrastructure. For the artists, the practices of commoning and struggles for common(s) in an ever more privatized and economized existence are everywhere today. But unnamed and unperceived as such, they continually lose coherence and are often reabsorbed into a logic of capital accumulation or reforming an increasingly neo-liberal state.

The artists write: “Common(s) can be thought of as the shared premises of life, extending from ideas, knowledge, languages and histories to seeds, forests, and seas. For others common(s) can be thought of as the means of our everyday reproduction and subsistence (e.g., everyone needs non-toxic food, clean water, unpolluted air, a place to live, open access to knowledge, a basis for a livelihood). But in a paradigm of ownership (public and private) and with the increasing power bestowed to money in every facet of life, these shared premises are being enclosed, privatized, monetized, and rapidly deteriorated. Even as increasing protests, riots, and disagreements foment globally against these processes of enclosure, the political language and imagination of those taking part and those interpreting these revolts remain largely captured by the public/private ownership or state/people dichotomy.”

*Commoning Times*, the Stockholm portion of the project, has been going on since 2010 and will be continuing not only in Tensta, but also in New York, Detroit, London, Utrecht and Vienna. In Stockholm the artists hope to be able to use – as they did in Documenta 13 in Kassel in 2012 – both the exhibition context of Tensta Konsthall and their studio period in IASPIS to propose, share, and stimulate debates and actions around contemporary struggles toward a common(s).

16 Beaver is the address of a space in New York's Financial District initiated and run by artists to create and maintain an ongoing platform for the presentation, production, and discussion of a variety of artistic, cultural, economic, and/or political projects. Since its inception, the group has organized more than 200 events ranging in format from lunches, walks, and film screenings to artist presentations, readings, panels, and discussions.

**Thursday 12.6, 14:00**

Ayreen Anastas and Rene Gabri introduce *The Paths to the Common(s) Are Infinite*

More introductions will take place during July–September. Keep updated at [www.tenstakonsthall.se](http://www.tenstakonsthall.se)

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**A conversation between Ayreen Anastas, Rene Gabri and Ulrika Flink**

**Ulrika Flink**

You both have individual practices, how long have you been collaborating? Can you describe the differences between working alone and together?

**Ayreen Anastas**

We met in 1998. In 1999, we both became involved with a space located on 16 Beaver Street in New York. We became friends through the time we shared organizing things with others there, and that's how everything starts, with friendship. A beginning for a common horizon, along with others, to find and create a common ground. Our collaboration started through that process. Maybe the difference between working together and working on your own is that when you work together, a third, and fourth and fifth collaborator in between emerges if the affinity is there. The space in between is the most interesting when you collaborate, it is the space of multiplicity.

**Rene Gabri**

When one works alone, it is always in relation to others. Sometimes you may need a space alone. But I think that we are living through a period when there are so many pressures to isolate us and individualize us so sometimes you find more strength to resist certain conditions if you're not alone. Working with friends at 16 Beaver and working together has also meant learning from each other what each of us does individually. And then trying to find a way to invent something new and maybe that's what Ayreen was talking about, to find the fourth or fifth or sixth emerging. Because it creates different conjunctive possibilities. In collaboration, one is also discovering through the other person, different abilities and modes of being, doing.

**UF**

You mentioned 16 Beaver Street, maybe you can explain to me how this place got started, how it functions – in other words, how one goes about creating a space, socially and collaboratively.

**RG**

In a way we have always resisted talking about origins; even in its early period when 16 Beaver Street started, for example, Ayreen and I had met each other, our friendship, our working together, as she said, grew out of the space. The desire to de-emphasize the beginning is tied to an ethics of becoming, of allowing something to emerge that one didn't know or completely intend or will. So it is unlike, lets say, a kind of structure, where you put a mission, and a goal, and you specify who are the founders, and clearly know who is involved, etc...

**UF**

Avoiding the form of an institution?

**RG**

Yes, we were looking for something else. We were responding to the existing institutions and how formal they become with time and how rigid. I think that most people coming to New York, feel that you're going to meet other artists and share ideas. Many of us came there to find a common, the common that the inhabitants of a city each and everyday produce. But then you arrive and the conditions of life are separating, forcing you to relate to others often in a competitive manner, isolated, individualized. Most of the spaces where you can meet others are institutionally delimited and determined both in terms of the spatial configurations as well as temporal duration. Your relationship with people will be determined by the years it takes for you to finish a degree or the time of a two-hour lecture or an opening. I think many people felt a frustration – this is where we came to find a common, but instead, we find ourselves struggling to pay rent on our own and solve everything on our own, and also confront an art context that doesn't reflect our desires or interests. For me, for Ayreen, and most friends and collaborators, who ended up gathering at the space (16 Beaver), we had a need for linking, conjoining different struggles and desires. We were coming from a political or social imagination that was different and looking to construct a shared

language and a common place together. So the exigency was to create a space like that. But then also to not make it tied to identities, to be more open, and allow something to happen through the use and making of it. Everything that it has been or become during the 15 years we have helped animate it has really happened through a multiplicity of voices, of bodies and of energies. For this reason, it is important to talk about it as a common place, meaning a place, a place created and developed with and through friendship and in common. But also common as a place in between different practices, interests, know-whats and know-hows. A place where, for example, artists, researchers, activists, and others interested in broader social, cultural, political, economic concerns could come together to speak and think and even do things together. A de-professional place, and more importantly a place where areas of knowledge and interests can meet and have more relevance in the forms our life takes, and potentially, in the actions we may take with others.

#### **UF**

How do you view the process of making exhibitions where you are temporarily, in a place, like Tensta for example? You will be in Stockholm for three months. What kind of methods do you try to use to be able to create a similar commons context in a short exhibition form?

#### **AA**

I don't know if we want to create something similar. Our practice is multiple, as Rene was saying. 16 Beaver is a collective process and effort. It's singular and has to do with the time, the context and the city of New York. What happens if we are invited? The question of an exhibition is a challenge anyway. What is the meaning of an exhibition today? That's one question that we ask. In general, if we are invited somewhere, we try to be there longer, to build contacts to other groups and people living there. We try to use the occasion to learn and do something we would otherwise not have the chance to do. When we are working together or

when we are working alone, we are still asking questions that are related to the challenges in the world, but then you have to decide how to work with them, and in different contexts we try different things.

#### **RG**

Each of us is attracted to different things and seduced even by different kinds of processes. We are multiple and what animates us is the complex field of things that touch or move us, that we are affected by. What Ayreen is talking about is that we try in a way to maintain multiple modalities and processes to attend to the multiplicities that we are. I think we're interested in continuing a social process with others, but also in allowing a space where one is able to take and use ideas and experiences developed in common, and to reflect on them, to share with others you may meet, and sometimes even to create new forms for the ways of producing or opening the space or experience of the common(s).

#### **AA**

When we speak of a common or commons, what interests us is how the common(s) enhances our way of not only understanding our multiple selves, but also understanding and acting in the world in general. Often, people are taught the opposite: the common as something inhibiting singularity. But it is the homogenization of contemporary life, often overly determined by money relations and subject to very violent hierarchal institutions which pre-empt processes of singularization, produces what Spinoza called 'sad passions, anxiety, impotence, depression'. Processes of singularization are important affective, creative processes and experiences which require movements between a common life and something more intimate. But one affects the common life or cares for the common without also caring for the subjective and intersubjective processes which spring from it. And so if one does not begin with separating what is individual and what is common, then it is clearer that even when I am alone,

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or we are working alone, there is an experience or manifestation of and even a care of a common(s).

**UF**

You recently opened your exhibition Let it not be said... at the Showroom in London. This exhibition was said to be set in another time. Can you please tell me more about what time we enter when we step inside the exhibition?

**AA**

It's definitely not clock time. It's more our life time. That's the time: how we can be together in a different way, not isolated, having this common horizon. This time creates different rhythms. It has to be experienced to be understood.

**RG**

We are more and more interested in thinking and talking about the time of reproduction, the time of reproducing a certain kind of community, reproducing those you want to live with and become with. If not reduced strictly to a logic of production art has had this ability across cultures and times. The time of reproduction is very different from the time of production. It's not an efficient time, it's not clock time, it has to do with rhythms that are very different, that are biological, but also based on other kinds of needs and desires than the time that money, capital and a working regimen require.

On a parallel front, events like Fukushima, the political upheavals beginning in north Africa, even the occupy experiences, signal that we are in another time, but so much is invested in recreating and reproducing the same temporality, and the idea that this is an homogenous time, that we can just keep going as it is, and the logic will remain the same. But in fact something is shifting. And you feel it in the climate change, with the catastrophic situation with Fukushima, that these times call for other ways of relating to our habits and to the forms life could take.

**UF**

Social struggles or movements seem to have discontinuity as a character. There were these eruptions, people coming together in a struggle. Eruptions and then it dies down. Do you have an idea how continuity can be constructed? Do you think that to a certain degree this movement has a constitution now, this idea of another horizon, another way to live together?

**AA**

It's everywhere. I don't know if it dies down. This analysis seems wrong to me. Because life does not die down, it can be oppressed, repressed, or suppressed, and in these moments that we see life manifesting itself living, that's when we see it, and that's how it should be always. It's more the opposite, it's exceptionalising the moment of life and living, like a vacation, like a revolution, that is wrong for me. It has to be a constant one and it is, but it's more the apparatus of repression, the media apparatus, of suppressing everything living, in many ways, on an ideological level, and on a lived level. That's why the regime of property is above all. If we think of north Africa, people want to live their lives, they get to this moment of bursting, because they can not take it any more, the repression of life, their life and the common life. The reactive forces come back and they want to repress everything. For me this is the image: more life is bubbling everywhere, and the reactive forces want to repress it in many ways, and they also work hard on it, they build institutions to suppress it, schools, universities, police departments, military, TV, journalism, everything is used to convince us that it is not possible. The way that we are so called convinced that occupied is finished, Arab spring is finished, it is by naming, fixing, killing, that's how it goes. On the symbolic level it's being killed by naming, fixing, finishing. And on the real level by coming with the army and bulldozing the parks. This is a planned thing. It's a violence on many levels that wants to suppress life. But life is going on and it's our task and challenge to see it where it is, and enhance these forces of life

and enhance these processes that will eventually come, it's there everywhere we just have to see it.

**RG**

It's a difficult thing and that is why the work also on the level of the imagination – on making things that can be shared with others in relation to these questions – is important. If you see occupy more as certain ways of doing, certain processes of intensifying and making visible, a way of disagreement with the distribution of forces in the world, then it's something that one can do at any moment and you see it whether it's in Bosnia or in Taiwan. It doesn't mean that reactive forces can't also take these ways, and maybe manipulate them. So okay, there is the reclaiming of a non-governmental public space or what we could call a commons, a certain collective care of the life that is reproduced in that space, a certain disagreement that brings together different struggles, some use of technologies to amplify those common concerns. These are some elements we are learning how to make use of.

**AA**

And relating to each other not as strangers, everybody is related and can be related if we open all the possibilities of getting in touch with one another.

**RG**

We see these struggles as global ones. Multitudes across many borders are finding ways of resisting increasing neo-liberalization and the different authorities that then are employed to carry through these processes of dispossession, of robbing from and destroying from the common basis of life. In that sense I do feel there are many parallels that are also cut off by naming these movements. We have seen a lot of continuities – people struggling in Spain, Tunisia, Egypt, Istanbul, Italy, Greece, England and even here. Back to the experience of 16 Beaver, these are the risks of naming and fixing, trying to identify collective processes with particular people or individuals. You run the risk of confining and stopping the movements from their becoming.

**UF**

You once said that you are producing, or doing, art for the producer and not the spectator. I wonder what role the spectator has in relation to what is being produced?

**AA**

It's more a philosophical question. It's not that there is an established spectator and then there is a maker and they are separated. For me everybody is a maker; everybody can be in the position of the maker. And it's not like some people are spectators and some people are makers because they are born like that. It's more that the ideal situation to encounter the work is from the point of view of a maker, a position you can take. It is not an essential thing that some people are spectators.

**RG**

Children for example, when they encounter works of art, they encounter them from the perspective of makers, that's clear.

**AA**

They take that position immediately.

**RG**

You go home with them and they immediately translate the experience into their ways of doing, they are influenced and affected by it. How is it that we live in a society where more and more through these regimens of work, delimitation (of what one is capable of or able to do), professionalization, that this ability to be affected and to translate this affection into what and how we do things is denied or channelled strictly into specific functions?

Children use this sensibility of translation, of embodying certain experiences into a practice of their own? We are interested in an art that still keeps that openness for people to find a way and experience whatever one calls by that name (art) less as a kind of entertainment and more as a field of shifting perception, thought and affect, and in relation to what and how we do.

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**AA**

How we desire to live with others.

**UF**

In the exhibition at Tensta Konsthall there are many notebooks, written thoughts, diagrams, and drawings. What function do these notebooks have for you in your practice?

**AA**

They are efforts to find a way to render common use, to embody, share, conjoin: ideas, experiences, actions, meetings, reflections and common paths and journeys with friends and comrades. For us, they are not works in a conventional understanding in the sense they cannot be isolated from the processes we undergo: they are internal to a form that is constantly becoming, which is more than any particular artistic form, a form-of-life.

**UF**

How would you link the notebooks to the video works on display, do they share a common starting point or theme?

**RG**

In the last years, with many friends, we have been focusing our research, work, and thinking around the question of a common(s). We approached this question through many different encounters, struggles and experiences. There is so much to say about common(s), that one cannot do it in short hand and still be true to it. But we will try to do so briefly.

We feel that it is a place that brings together many different struggles and insights. From feminist insights to indigenous struggles against further destruction of their habitats, to ecological struggles, to class struggles, struggles against state violence, racism, colonialism, and capitalism – common(s) is able to retain their specificities and yet bring them together. Common(s) can also be a critical basis for thinking not just against state or corporate power but also toward something which could unhinge the monopoly that both the notions of public and private have over the political, social and cultural life.

One way of approaching the common(s) could be as the means or bases of reproducing life; not only biological life, but also social life, cultural life, the life of all living things. Today, we see a deterioration and further attempts to enclose upon these common premises of life, and this is largely done through processes which try to put a price, cost, and monetary value on things that are beyond any measure. Clean water, air, access to land, a place to live, learning with others, none of this should have a price on it.

Our research on common(s) and commoning has also led us more recently to investigate collectively with friends this thing called money. Money as a representation of the living labor of workers, money as a unit of account, of value, a means of exchange, but also money as a storage and means of accumulating social power. Money as a way of tracing the violence implicit in processes of enclosure: by violence, we refer to processes where commoners are forced off a common(s), deprived of the bases of their reproduction, and become more and more dependent on money and selling their time for a wage. These are not just historic processes or processes in the global south. We see this today even in Europe where education or housing are less and less seen as guaranteed premises of life and turned into commodities, something to be sold, owned, go into debt for, and to speculate upon.

So this is the field we are exploring. Money as a social relation which implies certain ways of thinking and behaving, which are quite limiting. It implies a certain community, what we called with one of the contributors to this research, David Harvey, 'the community of money'. If we want to enhance social relations of common(s) or commoning processes, we will also need to understand and resist the social relations that are implicitly structured by money. We feel affinity with struggles for the redistribution of wealth, or for guaranteed universal or basic income, but we also feel that the form of money, especially the existing

one based on debt, is something which cannot escape our scrutiny.

This is our research and thinking at the moment. Everything in the exhibition is certainly not about this specifically. Rather the notes and videos are for us traces of processes which have brought us to these questions. They are in some way elements leading to or traces of our paths to the common(s).

Ulrika Flink is an assisting curator at Tensta Konsthall and founding member of the curatorial collective Parallelogram.





*Notes Towards an Arabesque*, 24 min  
(Element 1)

Several years ago, the artists embarked on a process exploring the ideas and forms associated with the notion 'Arabesque'. They were interested in the possibility of using this term in another way, restaging and redeeming another potential future for it, beside and on top of its common use and meaning. These film notes were collected in 2009 and are traces of that inquiry. Made several years ahead of the political struggles which have spread from North Africa and the Near East to other parts of the world; these notes are nevertheless very connected to them. Bookended by footage collected in their increasingly gentrified neighborhood in Brooklyn and the gleaming towers of Dubai and Abu Dhabi are traces of labors, movements, landscapes, thoughts, and forms of life which remain latent with forces calling forth unexpected futures.

*A Geography of Palestine or The Storyteller* with Khaled Hourani, 20 min  
(Element 2)

Elements 2 and 3 are encounters recorded in Ramallah and Jerusalem in 2006. The two videos were made in the same year the artists produced *What Everybody Knows*. *What Everybody Knows* is one of their most detailed accounts of the specific conditions of life in Occupied Palestine as well as the lives of Palestinians living inside Israel (these videos can be viewed upon request by visitors, please ask one of the attendants).

*A Geography of Palestine or The Storyteller* is a fragment of an encounter with the artist Khaled Hourani. What is of interest in this context is not only the stories that Khaled recounts, which in some way create his own version of a geography lesson. But also, the artists are interested in storytelling as a method and time-space which resembles or approaches a common time, or as a technique of commoning time.

*Some People Have the Watch. Others*

*Have the Time* with Albert Aghazarian, 30 min, (Element 3)

*Some People Have the Watch. Others Have the Time* is an encounter with Albert Aghazarian, who has lived in the Armenian Quarter in the Old City of Jerusalem his whole life. He works as a translator and as an interpreter. His account of the situation, however devastating in relaying the deteriorating conditions for Palestinians, remains critical for the artists mainly for his insistence that there is within culture, language, interpretation and translation the capacity and potentiality to overturn these dark chapters and our present circumstances, impasses.

*Bouazizi's Neighbor*, 11 min  
(Element 4)

A fragment of an encounter with a fruit vendor that had a stand next to Tarek al-Tayyeb Mohamed Bouazizi, whose immolation was one of the sparks of the Tunisian Revolution and what was to be called the 'Arab Spring.'

*The Line is My Line and the Word is Mine*, 7 min (Element 5)

A fragment from a conversation with Walid, a writer and revolutionary from Al Hamma, Tunisia. Part of a longer set of meetings and encounters, the adaptation of this moment is as much about bringing to the fore the context of political repression, as it is about overcoming limits of representing or making sensible that repression or torture, whether physical or psychological.

*Something for All the World*, 18 min  
(Element 6)

An encounter with Zizu, from Darfur. The video takes place inside a room in a building in Amsterdam, occupied by and housing 250 or so other refugees from different countries in the Fall of 2013. Despite the often grave circumstances of their flights for asylum, most in the building are either in a bureaucratic limbo or on false grounds refused asylum. The encounter is really between

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a camera, a mind, a body, and a voice that is both singular and plural, it is something for all the world. This video is dedicated to Qusay, Mohammed, Naji-Kuku, Tawfiq, Taji, Zizu and the many friends who were at the Vluchtkantoor/ Vluchtschans asking for asylum and respect for their rights, their dignity.

*My Body and Mind is the World Too*, 43 min (Element 7)

An encounter with writer and thinker Goksun Yazici in Istanbul. This fragment from a longer conversation with Goksun took place in late November of 2010, just before the uprisings (referred to by some as the movement of the squares) began in Tunisia, Egypt, and then slowly spanned the globe. Even though it takes place several years before, it can be seen as an introduction to some of the political insights behind the 'Taksim Commune' and Gezi Park uprisings. Goksun would subsequently become very involved in those struggles. The conversation is also part of an attempt to find a new lexicon for resistance to capitalist and patriarchal notions of value(s) and to develop different modes of relating to the world.

*A Continuous Film Altered Daily, Day 10, Day 11, Day 12*, 75 min each (Element 8)

In the winter of 2014 in London, the artists used the Showroom Gallery's upstairs and downstairs as a small cinema studio and screening space. On 12 evenings, films were projected downstairs which were being made live upstairs. A continuous film altered daily refuses to be finished, to delimit or to disclose its subjects or objects. It is a film which tries to be hospitable to its time while interrogating it. It is a film which tries to find a form commensurate to its time.

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