

BROOKLYN RAIL

CRITICAL PERSPECTIVES ON ARTS, POLITICS, AND CULTURE



MAILINGLIST

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Solidarity Art Worlds

by Caroline Woolard

I cannot describe the future for you because I am writing this alone. In Solidarity Art Worlds, no one person will understand what we currently mean by “*alternative*” or “*my ideas*.” Solidarity Art Worlds grow from collective spaces of listening, not from immediate reactions to coercion and individual accumulation. Solidarity Art Worlds are not just small *alternatives* to inevitable structures of greed, hoarding, and isolation. Solidarity Art Worlds emerge as we share authority and sense our collective power. I find hope and strength when I engage with Third Root community health center, the Rock Dove healing collective, the open source computer engineers at Eyebeam and NYCResistor, the readings at Bluestockings, and the ongoing work at Ganas, Fourth Arts Block, Interference Archive, Black Women’s Blueprint, TimeBanksNYC, Picture the Homeless, The Foundry Theater, WOW Cafe, The Church of Stop Shopping, OurGoods.org, Milk Not Jails, INDIGNación, 596Acres, Callen-Lorde, O4O, CUNY’s Public Science Project, Brooklyn Cooperative Credit Union, the Park Slope Food Co-op, and Black Urban Growers.

Solidarity Art Worlds exist in places where people acknowledge each other with care and dignity, linking common struggles so that the next generations can work towards a world without structural violence, without worrying that solidarity, cooperation, redistribution, or guaranteed housing, universal health care, and education are *alternative*. I experience Solidarity Art Worlds when a wide range of struggles, desires, and needs are discussed. Without these spaces, I cannot dream of a better world. With two week timelines from invitation to publication, the *Rail* will seldom hear collective contributions. I cannot describe the future for you because I am writing this alone. One statement cannot communicate the lived experience of collective analysis, action, and collaboration. I cannot describe the future for you because I am writing this alone.

The declaration below, from organizers and advocates affiliated with the Alternative Economics Working Group of Occupy Wall Street, sets forth a foundation that I feel applies to Solidarity Art Worlds:

As we organize to resist, subordinate, and displace corporate power and a self-destructive economic system, we hold in our hearts a vision for an economy based on justice, ecological sustainability,

cooperation, and democracy. We look to sites of creation and imagination, where we are forging new systems of exchange which prefigure a society that puts people and the planet before profit and growth.

We use direct democracy and cooperation to clothe, feed, heal, nurture, celebrate, educate, and challenge each other. We do all of this not to profit individually, but to meet the human needs of our community. Our internal economies are the antithesis of the greed and oppression we have been taught to expect from each other and acknowledges and addresses the myriad injustices that people bear everyday. Together we are moving beyond “jobs,” something someone gives you or takes from you, towards shared livelihoods that increase our collective economic security.

As we create new spaces, new relationships, and new systems, we acknowledge the existence of a solidarity economy outside of our occupations. The concept of a solidarity economy emerged from the global South, as *economía solidària*, to describe economic practices and models which advance values of democracy, mutualism, cooperation, ecological sustainability, justice, and reciprocity. These economic practices include:

Creation: Ideas and Resources

the commons: ecological and intellectual
free and open source software and technology
community land trusts
skill shares
free schools

Production: How things are made

worker co-operatives
producer co-operatives
non-profit artisan collectives
self-employment
labor unions
democratic employee stock ownership programs
local self-reliance

Transfer and Exchange: The Way We Share Goods and Services

barter networks
freeganism
sliding scale pricing
time banks
gifts
clothing swaps
tool shares

community currencies
fair trade
community supported agriculture
community supported kitchens
consumer (usually food) co-operatives
housing co-operatives and collectives
intentional communities
self-provisioning
non-profit buying clubs

Surplus Allocation: The Way We Create Economic Security

credit unions and community development credit unions
co-operative loan funds
rotating savings and credit associations
mutual aid societies
co-operative banks
community development banks

While we must continue to experiment and refine ways of creating local self-reliance, we also acknowledge that without supporting the existing alternatives, and bringing them into our communities, we continue to uphold the very economic power that is destroying our communities and our planet. Likewise we recognize we must challenge and transform the existing forms of economic power to create room for more just forms of economic activity to take root and grow. In other words, we need a complete transformation of the dominant economic system.

Let's assert our economic power through exercising our right to move our money credit and create restorative systems of exchange to replace extractive corporations. We can also learn about the alternatives that already exist in our communities, and where none exist, we can form them in the spirit of direct democracy! Together, we can create a world free of greed and oppression. Each day our very existence proves the possibility of other, more just and cooperative, economies.

I want to thank the Alternative Economies Working Group for creating such an inspiring document. As I struggle to avoid the busy lifestyle of workaholic Cultural Capitalists, where artists make time for careers rather than friendships, for work rather than healing, I openly struggle as a member of TradeSchool.coop to share authority and information. I am dedicated to sharing the resources I have: I open my studio space to friends during the day, and I have committed the \$30,000 I received as a Fellow at Eyebeam: Art and Technology Center to a collective house. I'm currently seeking a dedicated group of people who want to organize a low income community land trust with spaces that do not allow for speculation on land. When I bind my livelihood together with artists and activists, I find the emotional and financial support to dream. I am excited to see more Solidarity Art Worlds, more collective projects, and longer timeframes so that I can open the *Rail*

and read statements of collective struggle and desire.

MORE ARTICLES BY THE AUTHOR

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