

Welcome

Caroline Woolard, Artist, Walentas Fellow 2018–2020

When Patti Phillips, Chief Academic Officer, Academic Dean at Moore College of Art & Design, asked me what I wanted to do most as the inaugural Jane and David Walentas Endowed Fellow at Moore College of Art and Design from 2018–2020, I said I needed to think about it. This Fellowship is a huge privilege, and it came without an application, giving me two years to “bring my vision for the future of cultural production to the Moore community and the larger artistic community of Philadelphia.” This was an opportunity that few artists ever get.

After thinking it over, I decided that I wanted to create a public art project (*The Meeting* ^{see chapter 1}), but also to openly share my working process with students at Moore. This book—made for anyone who might be interested in learning about the ways that I have navigated institutional invitations as well as self-organized, multi-year projects in the arts—is my best attempt to share my working process. The materials in this book can also be accessed online at CarolineWoolard.com, and in a traveling exhibition. When I was in school, getting my BFA from 2002–2007 at Cooper Union in New York City, I always wondered about the realities of working as an artist. How do artists survive? How do artists negotiate and manage [research-based](#), socially engaged, and large-scale projects? How do artists build organizations, collectives, and the [art worlds](#) they want to see? Who gets to be an artist, and why?

I have written about communal [property](#) in *The Social Life of Artistic Property*, co-authored with Pablo Helguera, William Powhida, and Amy Whitaker in 2014, about co-organizing [barter](#)-based education in *TRADE SCHOOL: 2009–2019*, a volume that I also edited, and about a holistic model for arts pedagogy in *Making and Being*, co-authored with Susan Jahoda in 2019, but I have never reflected deeply upon my own [practice](#). This is an attempt to share the material conditions of the way I work, alongside imagery of finished projects. This book, and the corresponding open-access exhibition, accessible online at CarolineWoolard.com, aims to provide information about the specific ways that I move from a BIG VISION of the solidarity arts economy to the EVERYDAY [PRACTICES AND STRUCTURES](#) that are required when working on interdisciplinary projects. Of course, this book is based upon my

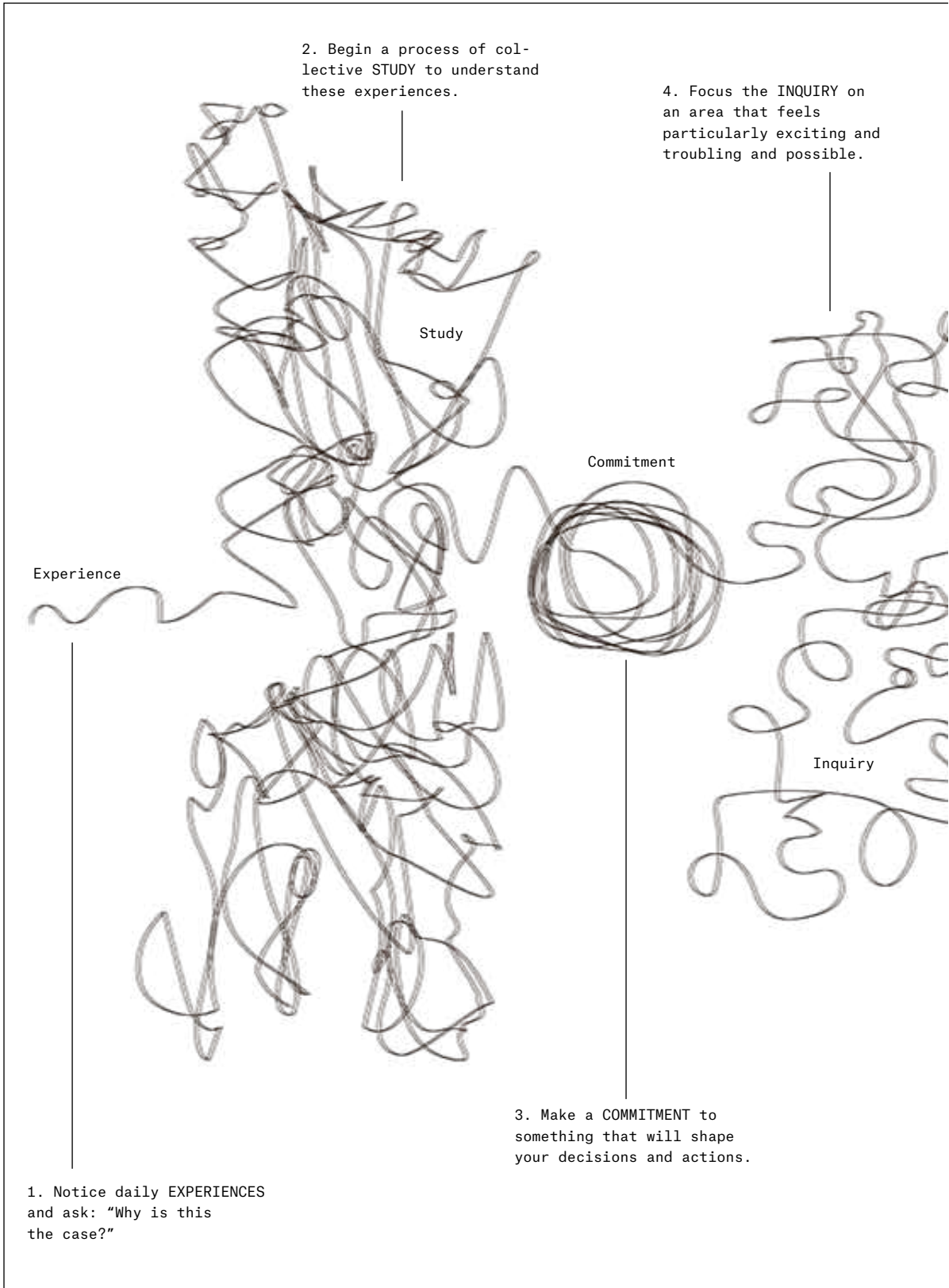
experiences and opinions, which are only one perspective of many, and the projects have all emerged from the particular conditions, limitations, and opportunities available to me, and to arts collectives based in New York City and in arts institutions in the United States, from the financial crisis of 2007/2008 to the COVID-19 pandemic of 2020.

In trying to explain my working process to students, I wrote up eight steps that go like this:

1. Notice daily EXPERIENCES and ask: "Why is this the case?"
2. Begin a process of collective STUDY to understand these experiences.
3. Make a COMMITMENT to something that will shape your decisions and actions.
4. Focus the INQUIRY on an area that feels particularly exciting and troubling and possible.
5. Determine what TIMEFRAME the work will take. Will it be a short-term project or a multi-year platform? What practices are necessary to sustain this?
6. Begin to EXPERIMENT with ways of gathering, materials, forms, resources, and ways of representing your inquiry as a project or platform.
7. Share the idea in PUBLIC for feedback, debate, and learning.
8. REFLECT upon this process, and return to #1.

I made a diagram to visualize the process of moving from unconstrained exploration to focused circling around a decision. It charts the movement from wide-ranging research and associations, saying yes to all ideas and following as

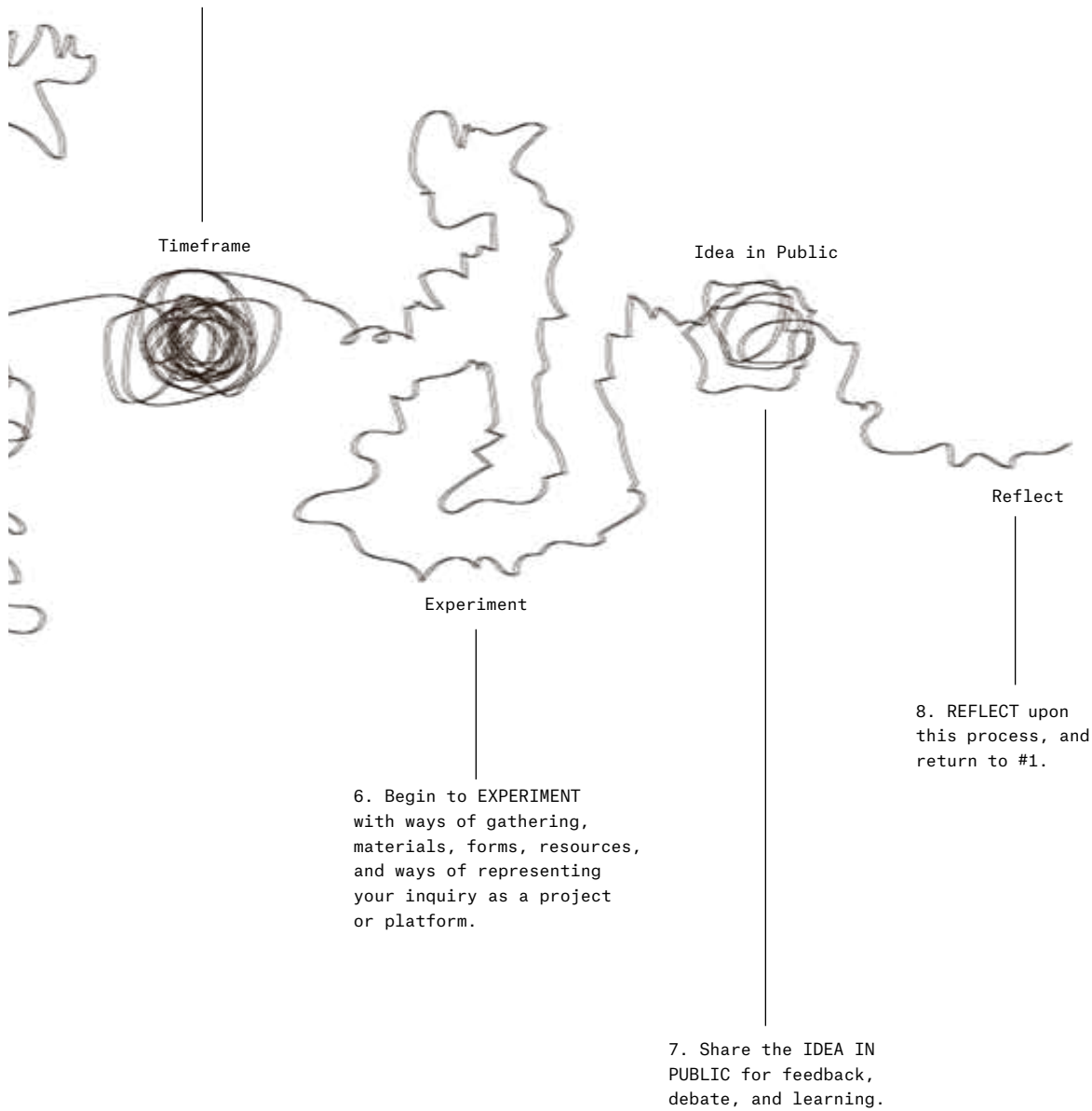
Experience
Study
Commitment
Inquiry
Timeframe
Experiment
Idea in Public
Reflect



many as possible to see where they lead, to narrowing and focusing and making decisions so that you can see where a specific idea leads when it is materialized and made public.

5. Determine what TIMEFRAME the work will take. Will it be a short-term project or a multi-year platform? What practices are necessary to sustain this?

I made this Process Diagram to explain how I work and to see if it might apply to other artists, as a visualization of a research-based, interdisciplinary arts practice. The teacher in me made it into a numbered list, but of course, no path is linear.



Welcome

1. Pay attention. Notice daily EXPERIENCES and ask: "Why is this the case?"

For example, if art is so important, why is it so hard to survive in the arts? If women and men are equal, why are women expected to clean up after men in so many settings? If Black, Indigenous, and people of color are equal to **white** people, why do **white** people have unequal access to cash, property, police protection, high quality public education, and media that affirms their dignity?

2. Begin a process of collective STUDY to understand these experiences. Who can you learn with and from?

The idea that each person in the United States, artist or otherwise, can "pull themselves up by their bootstraps" and survive alone, with success based upon merit, is both ridiculous and lonely. It is my life's project to **heal** the trauma of **alienation** that I sense around me by embodying a living commitment to the pleasures and **pains** of interdependence. My parents both taught me to distrust my neighbors at a young age. They said they had survived this far by "only relying on one another." While I knew that this logic made sense to them, I knew it could not be true. I felt the **pain** of their isolation daily and decided to seek ways to begin to **heal** the intergenerational wounds that deepen with distrust and **fear**. When I was 23, working a night shift from 10p.m.–6a.m. as a studio monitor at Cooper Union, from which I had just graduated, I found a **website** called The **Community Economies Collective**. The knowledge and connections I found there changed my life. I read everything on the **website**, and contacted the info@ email address. They put me in touch with people

Commitment

Study

Experience

living and working for the community economy, or [solidarity economy](#), in my neighborhood. Eventually, I was welcomed into a community of visual artists, as an artist myself, and into the [solidarity economy](#) movement, as an activist. I found “home” with people making [conceptual art](#) and with people organizing for economic justice, and for the [solidarity economy](#), in New York City.

I often ask, “What is the economy that art wants?” I believe that the economy art wants is one of the [commons](#). I define the [commons](#) as shared resources that are managed by and for the people who use those resources. The [commons](#) involve shared ownership, cooperation, and solidarity—in other words, economic justice. Rather than believing that the economy is a monolithic entity which cannot be altered, I aim to co-create equitable systems that privilege communal well-being over personal gain. I try to make discrete art projects within systems, or collectively initiated platforms, that are aligned with my values. This is no easy task.

3. Make a COMMITMENT
to something that will
shape your decisions
and actions. [Circle](#)
around it. How do you
want to show up?



In [Generative Somatics](#), a commitment refers to an ability for individuals and groups to “return to a positive vision and act from their values under pressure; to identify what they care about and make it known to others.” Working with Alta Starr of [Generative Somatics](#), I know that my current commitment is to slowing down and staying with the pleasures and the [pains](#) of interdependence. Since 2007/2008, I have made a commitment to creating artworks within the [solidarity economy](#). What does this mean? Each project I make is informed by, and aims to contribute to, a sector of the [solidarity economy](#). For example, [barter](#) networks, community currencies, collectives, and community [land trusts](#) are all part of the [solidarity economy](#). Here is a text I wrote, together with Michael Johnson, Cheyenna Layne Weber, and members of the collective

Welcome

SolidarityNYC, in 2011, during the spring and summer before [Occupy Wall Street](#) began.

WHAT IS SOLIDARITY?

Solidarity is a collective process of taking active responsibility for our inter-relationships on both a local and global level. This is how we empower ourselves and take control of our lives.

WHEN WE [PRACTICE](#) SOLIDARITY, WE RECOGNIZE:

- that our fates are bound up with the fates of others, both human and non-human.
- that our interconnections—sometimes profoundly unequal and oppressive—demand conscious action and transformation.

THROUGH SOLIDARITY:

- we recognize the diversity, autonomy, [power](#), and dignity of others.
- we come to understand that our struggles to be free and joyful are interdependent, not separate or distant from one another as we may have thought.
- we begin to develop an ethical [practice](#) of shared struggle that crosses race and ethnic lines, class lines, sex and gender lines.

PEOPLE MAY SHARE SUCH VALUES AS:

- [Unity](#)-in-diversity
- Shared [power](#) (as opposed to [power](#)-over)
- Autonomy (always both individual and collective)
- Communication (horizontal, not top-down)
- Cooperation and mutual-aid (shared struggle)
- Local rootedness, global interconnection

Alternatives to economic and social exploitation are growing strong across the globe, especially in places like Brazil, Quebec, Northern Italy, and the Basque region of Spain. They call it Solidarity Economics, a grassroots form of cooperative economics. It is working throughout the world, connecting thousands of local alternatives together to create large-scale, viable,

and creative networks for both economic and social change.

ECONOMY: The many different ways in which we human beings collectively generate livelihoods to meet our needs in relation with each other and with the rest of the earth.

SOLIDARITY: The process of taking active responsibility for our relationships in ways that foster diversity, autonomy, cooperation, communication, and shared-power.

SOLIDARITY ECONOMY: Interconnected and diverse ways of generating our livelihoods that encourage and embody practices of solidarity. An “economy of economies” that resists individualistic, competitive, and exploitative economics.

The Solidarity Economy’s values-based, big tent organizing approach enables groups to build real economic relationships between producers, solidarity-committed investors, retailers, and consumers; and then link to other grassroots social movements in networks of mutual support and exchange.

We believe that it is not enough to be “against,” nor is it enough to create. We must build social movements that encompass and connect many forms of action:

defensive action

- to protect ourselves and our communities from immediate harm;

offensive action

- to challenge the current structures of oppression and exploitation in all of their racist, sexist, classist, homophobic, and otherwise exclusionary forms;

healing action

- to work through and recover from the pain and brokenness that we have imposed on ourselves and others have imposed on us in so many ways;

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creative action

- to build alternative structures that meet our daily needs and help us secede from the oppressions of the dominant society and economy; and

transformative action

- personally and collectively becoming the change we want to bring to the world.

Understanding economies of solidarity and artmaking as always already intertwined matters to me because the arts are not valued in the United States in the way that they are in other countries, and I cannot separate the value of artistic **labor** and production from the value of land, health, or education, all of which are integral to human dignity, self-determination, and survival. Without affordable space, healthcare, or education, how can culture thrive?

4. Focus your study. Create an INQUIRY in an area that feels particularly exciting and troubling and possible.

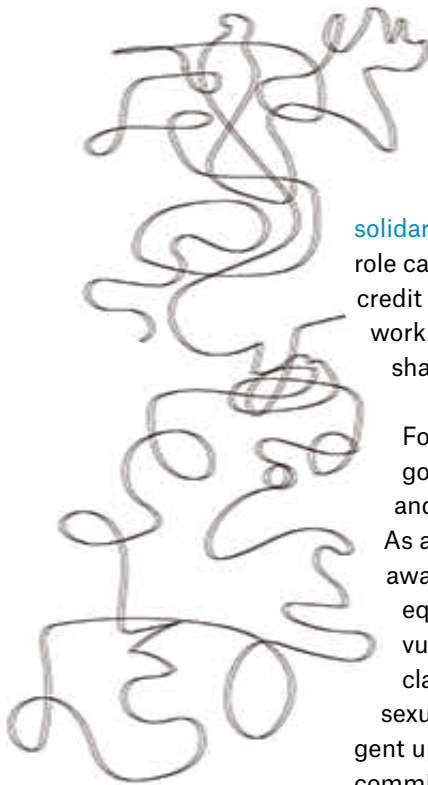
Once I am grounded in my deep commitment to the **solidarity economy** in the arts, I begin to ask myself what my role can be as an artist in this larger movement of cooperatives, credit unions, **land trusts**, and **barter** networks. I continuously work to understand my social identity and the histories that shape my beliefs.

For example, my father was the first person in his family to go to college; he raised me with an awareness of the rights and responsibilities that come with educational privilege. As a member of the LGBTQIA community, I am acutely aware of my positionality as a creative practitioner, cultural equity advocate, and teacher. My ability to be in **trusting**, vulnerable, and transformative relationships across race, class, ability, age, citizenship status, nationality, gender, sexual orientation, and other aspects of identity is contingent upon an evolving awareness of my social position. I am committed to ongoing study and struggle in relationship to the histories and present-day conditions that give people minority

Timeframe

Inquiry

Commitment



status, produce bias, and structure everyday, interpersonal dynamics, because this work makes life and learning possible.

I then try to notice patterns—social, technological, and political—that are emerging in real time, and consider ways to adapt ideas from non-arts fields or sectors to the arts, or from the arts to non-arts sectors. For example, what is possible as blockchain emerges, the Jumpstart Our Business Startups (JOBS) passes, and thousands of people advocate for community [land trusts](#) across sectors, in New York City, all around 2012?

5. Sustain the effort. Determine what TIMEFRAME the work will take. [Circle](#) around it. Will it be a short-term project or a multi-year platform? What [practices](#) are necessary to sustain this?



I believe that every artist has a core question or idea that only a few other artists in the world share, and that they need to find the other artists who want to refine that idea or core question, together. What is the point of making a new approach to art if other artists do not recognize it? I have been inspired by Thomas Kuhn's notion of a "paradigm shift" in the structure of scientific revolutions which states that in order to recognize innovation, there needs to be consensus. Of course Kuhn's scale is entirely different; he discusses historical periods. But what motivates me is that, ironically, standardization and innovation go together. Without agreement about a theory or model, it is impossible to know when a new knowledge has been created.

For this reason, I try to connect my specific interests to broader groups of artists and non-artists. Often this requires making more than a project. It requires long term collective dialogue, online networks, and gatherings to debate and refine [key](#) ideas with one another.

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I believe that artists need to learn to think organizationally in order to imagine how artwork and ideas might circulate in the world, and that we can work together to create opportunities for ourselves and for one another. I have created a diagram to describe my approach using a tree as an analogy.

PROJECTS. The fruit and leaves: shiny and short-lived. You might also call projects artworks, objects, or **events**. A project is an object or experience which is produced with an imagined audience that is larger than the artist or group involved in the effort of creation.

PLATFORMS. The tree trunk and branches: strong and enduring. You might also call platforms organizations, initiatives, or collectives. A platform is a multi-year initiative that aims to reproduce itself in order to reliably provide support for projects.

PRACTICES. The roots or **mycelium**: underground and life-giving. A **practice** is a way of doing things intentionally on a regular basis to develop an ability or awareness. **Practices** nurture platforms.



Sharon Loudon reminds us that we can be as creative in making opportunities for ourselves as we are in making our artwork. I hope this framework helps artists to connect the ideas in their artwork, or “projects,” to the organizations, or “platforms,” and [practices](#) that they engage with on a daily basis.

I am part of a generation of artists who talk about arts [advocacy](#) and cultural organizing (platforms) alongside their studio [practice](#) (projects). I believe that the future of art includes a critical attention to multi-year initiatives or platforms alongside discrete projects. Think of all the artists who made major cultural institutions like El Museo del Barrio or Fourth Arts Block possible, but who didn’t feel the need (or have the ability) to present this work alongside their artistic [practice](#). Their institutions and their art [practices](#) remained separate. I hope to bridge this divide with my work, and I hope to encourage other artists to do the same. I think this future of art will only be possible if artists in the academy reconcile the practiced ignorance—or [epistemological violence](#)—that has excluded community arts and cultural organizing from the art academy for so long. Luckily, my generation has been raised in [Occupy Wall Street](#) and in [Black Lives Matter](#), so the transformation of the academy and of the arts ecosystem is already underway.



6. Begin to EXPERIMENT with materials, forms, resources, ways of gathering, and ways of representing your inquiry as a project or platform.

I try out different ideas and notice which skill sets and personalities might work well together to pursue an idea in a collaborative team. In most groups, I am [looking](#) for people who are more detail-oriented than I am, who have expertise with computer engineering and design, and who are relational and intuitive, as I can be very task-oriented and focused on work rather than on building deep relationships by hanging out. I bring an awareness of material and

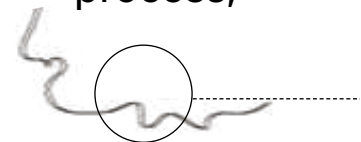
form to the objects we make, analytical [skills](#) as a researcher, an intense passion for work I believe in, a desire to meet lots of people, charisma, project management, writing, public speaking, and media-making [skills](#). I continue to listen to group feedback and to see group work as a space for transformation. We make material tests and loop back to the beginning of this process, changing ideas, [collaborators](#), and our sense of emergent patterns, in a dynamic and non-linear process, until the idea feels solid.

7. Share the idea in PUBLIC for feedback, debate, and learning. [Circle](#) around it.



When the idea is solid, it goes live and we share it with participants, peers, the public, and the press. Some projects cannot be described in arts spaces, or in books like this one, because to do so would be to limit their political [power](#). For example, the NYC Real Estate Investment Cooperative and SolidarityNYC, both of which I helped to create, need to exist outside of any individual artist's narrative. It is important that in these cases, I am a contributor and member, but I am more aware today than I was previously of the ways that writing about them in a book like this, which will circulate in arts spaces, will enclose the public understanding of these long-term platforms (initiatives, [para-institutions](#), [autonomous institutions](#), etc.) as an "artwork" with a singular author and will give them a limited capacity to transform.

8. REFLECT upon this process, and return to #1.



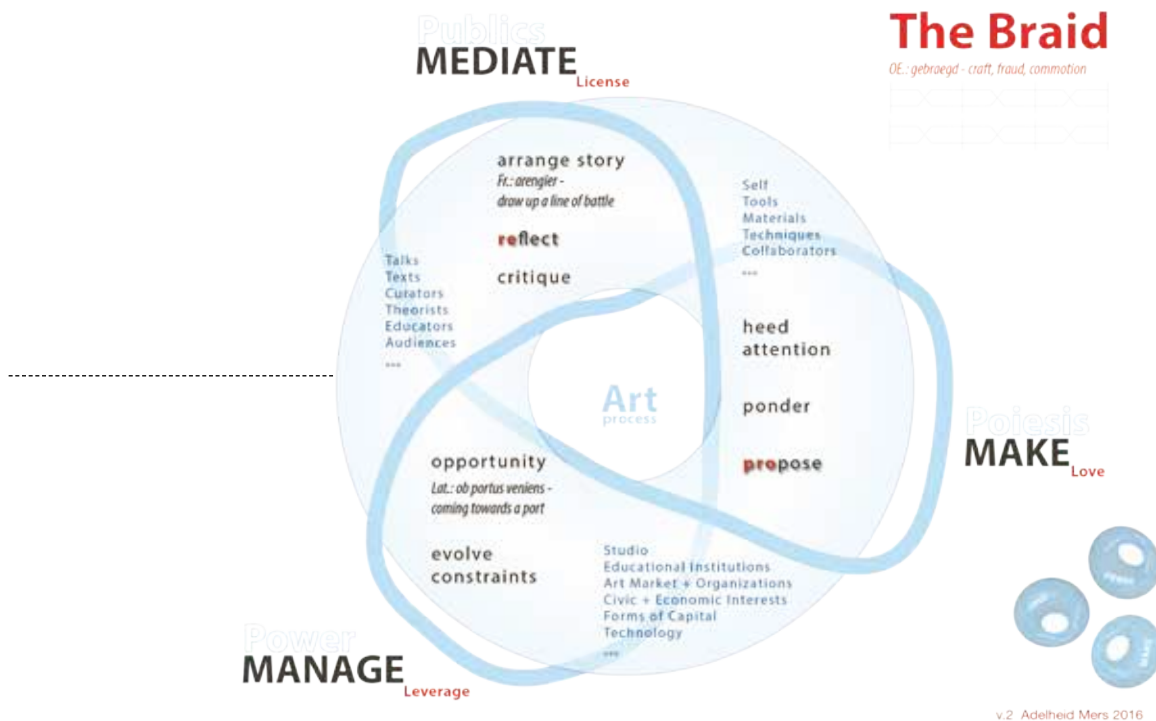
For example: What did we/I do well?
What can we/I improve? What capacities did we/I embody? How did the contradictions of upholding our/my commitment show up in this work?

Throughout this entire process, I think about the knowledge that I must learn from mentors and [collaborators](#). I use [The Braid](#) as a diagram to help think through a constant movement

subjectivity, material, form, and poetics (making); structure, governance, and policy (managing); and public presentation, text, and media making (mediating). This image, and the idea that some of this knowledge is tacit, and should become more explicit, comes from Adelheid Mers. Mers is an artist, theorist, and a member of The Study Center for Group Work, a collectively initiated project that I describe in this book ^{see chapter 2}.

Mers' practice centers around what she calls Performative Diagrammatics, which "range from verbal prompts to pre-printed diagrams on whiteboards, fabricated objects, and live-streaming, custom-coded 360° video. This work develops by carefully observing how lay and professional cultural producers animate the systems through which they operate; and by creating tools collaboratively, with volunteers and other contributors, who share experiences and ways of knowing." She has developed *The Braid* in dialogue with performing and visual artists over many years, and has made open access diagrams that artists can download online and adapt to their own practices. I have done this, with the support of Mers. Following the practice of braiding, as Mers' would call it, you will notice that making, mediating, and managing run throughout the entire production process, and throughout this book.

Adelheid Mers, *The Braid*, V3, 2016, dimensions variable. Image courtesy of the artist.

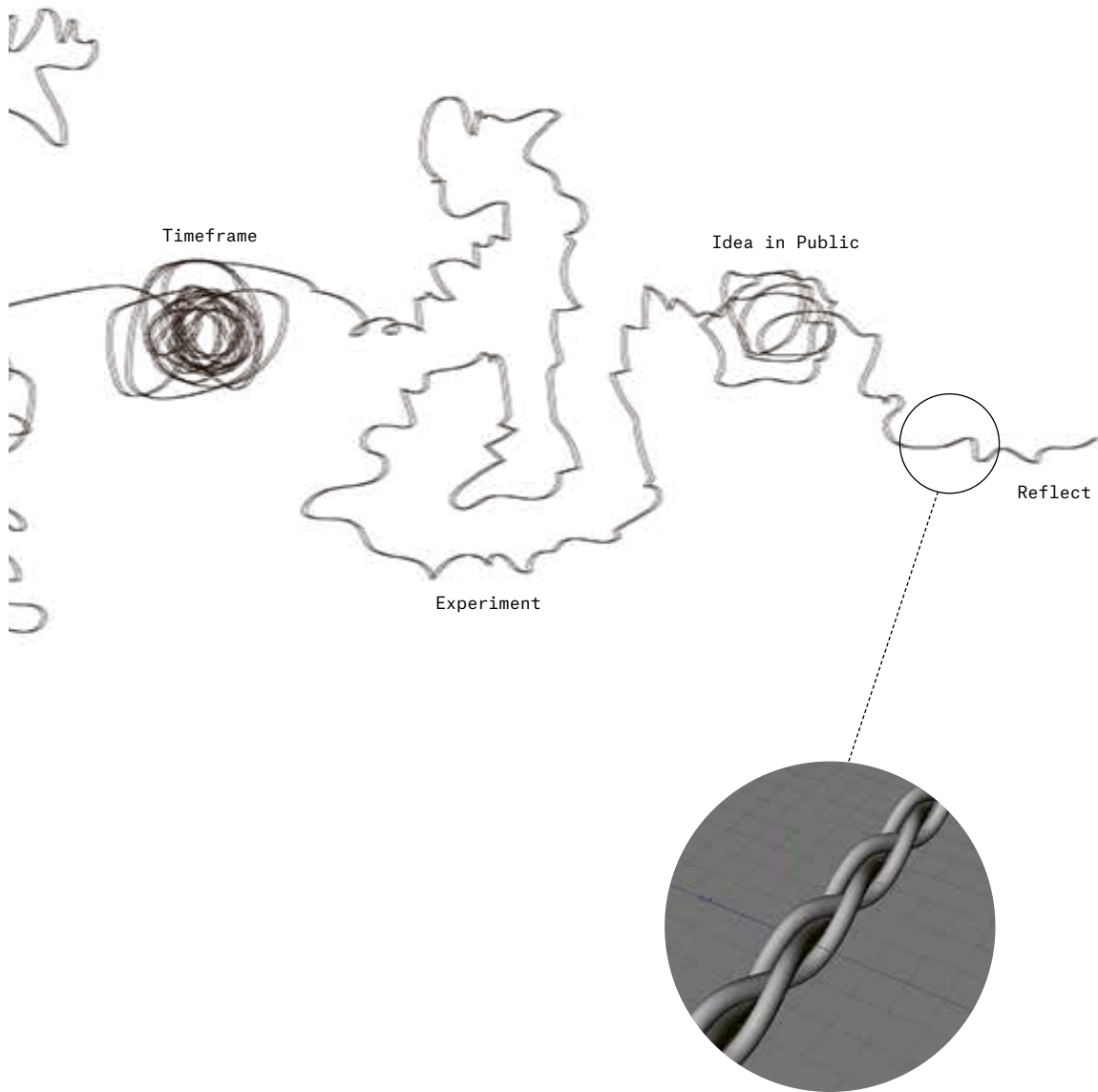


Welcome

Experience Study Commitment Inquiry Timeframe Experiment Idea in Public Reflect



If you love diagrams, as I do, look at this Process Diagram that I made to visualize the experience of moving from unrestrained EXPLORATION to CIRCLING and focus. Imagine that it is a three-dimensional braid, with three strands that represent Making, Mediating, and Managing, woven together to form a fluid and dynamic [practice](#) see chapter 2.



Making

Managing

Mediating

Welcome

The work collected in this volume—and indeed my last ten years of work—is shaped by twin capitalist crises: the first, the 2007 global credit crises and subsequent “great recession” that hollowed out the budgets of arts organizations nationally; the second, the recent (and ongoing, as I write) global pandemic, a consequence of capitalist development. It’s too soon to say what this second crisis will cause, even though (another) [legacy](#) of austerity seems all but certain. Regardless of the unknown, our economic system has bequeathed a [legacy](#) of [pain](#), racism, austerity, and scarcity. I have taken these effects as sites to produce art within and, I hope, to offer some sense of community as a response to a critique of the economy.

If ever there were a time to dream up [art worlds](#) that work for artists, this is it. What are the [art worlds](#) that you want? Who do you want to be in community with? Where do you want your artwork to go, after you make it?

My art seeks to undo some of the most pernicious doings of capitalism on an interpersonal level: that system of private [property](#), individual rights, class and race-based inequality out of which it generates its profits. How should an artist work in such a system? How can she work and to what end? The need for any truly progressive economic transition to be both a way of thinking and a way of doing animates my [practice](#) of making artistic objects that operate symbolically and making [alter-institutions](#) that require artists to work with one another cooperatively.

Likewise, my desire to keep the material conditions (budgets, emails, chore lists, the very [labor](#) of production) alongside the traditional curatorial essay and installation imagery hopes to enact this very dialectical possibility: our material conditions are not understood through our artwork, they become our artwork, they make our artwork possible and provide the lens through which it will be critiqued. If we actually do believe—as so many theorists and artists profess to—that art is not simply an object but a long process of negotiation, production and [circulation](#), shouldn’t that belief enter into how we display, envision, and critique art? As Shannon Jackson says, describing Mierle Laderman Ukeles [practice](#), this is a “move from a discrete notion of an art “work” to a process-based notion of the work it takes to make art.”²

2

Shannon Jackson, *Social Works: Performing Art, Supporting Publics* (New York and London: Routledge, 2011).

During the [COVID-19](#) pandemic, more and more people agree that the dominant “[art world](#)”—a term that signifies all of the people and networks and organizations that enable the learning, discussion, making, presenting, and [circulation](#) of art—is not functioning as so many of us artists would like it to. As art critic Jerry Saltz wrote in April of 2020:

The mighty Met estimates it could lose \$100 million and has announced widespread layoffs; the Hammer Museum laid off 150 part-time workers; L.A. MoCA laid off its entire part-time staff; S.F. MoMA expects to lay off 135 on-call staff members; Mass. MoCA is laying off 120 employees. Meanwhile, many maintain restoration labs, care for vast collections, pay insurance premiums, electric bills, and thousands of other unseen costs. Other than the Getty, Kimble, the Met, and MoMA, most museums don’t have vast endowments that can allow them to get through [a pandemic] like this.³

The ideal arts space is simple: it’s one in which art and culture are not sequestered from the lived experience of artists and their communities.

—Carolyn Lazard, 2019 *

* Carolyn Lazard, “Accessibility in the Arts: A Promise and a [Practice](#),” 2019, [promiseandpractice.art](#).

Beyond prioritizing insurance premiums over employees, the [art world](#) is too [white](#), too colonial, too extractive, too hierarchical, too male, too straight, and too market-driven. And yet this realization—of the dominant art-world’s limitations—occurs during every capitalist crisis, every decade or so now, it seems. New [art worlds](#) were dreamt into existence by artists in 2007/2008 as well as in the long down-turn of the 1970s fiscal crisis. New [art worlds](#) are dreamt into existence in every crisis.

New [art worlds](#) are dreamt into existence in every crisis.

In response to [COVID-19](#):

- the US Federation of [Worker Cooperatives](#) has just launched a national worker-owned freelancer cooperative;
- artists Vallejo Gantner, Alex Reeves, Erica Schnitzer, Chet Kerr, and James Dennin started the online marketplace [hireartists.org](#) to give work to “accomplished, dedicated practitioners from across the arts [who can] share their knowledge or to help with creative and everyday needs”;

3

Jerry Saltz, “The Last Days of the Art World ... and Perhaps the First Days of a New One,” *Vulture*, April 2, 2020, <https://www.vulture.com/2020/04/how-the-coronavirus-will-transform-the-art-world.html>.

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- artist Linda Goode Bryant and cultural worker Sarah Workneh opened a free and expanded food pantry to “help supply and supplement the already at-risk communities of Brownsville and East New York”;
- and President Sanjit Sethi of Minneapolis College of Art and Design has announced that the school “will offer immediate, temporary space to be used by organizations and nonprofits that have been displaced.”⁴

And initiatives of [mutual aid](#), solidarity, and cooperation need not be unique to a crisis. In fact, these [art worlds](#) are dreamt into existence every week by artists and people who survive the daily “crisis” of being told that we are not valuable, that we should not exist, that we need to continually justify our own existence.

Take a moment to sense the spaces, networks, and communities created by artists around you. Sense the [art worlds](#) led by Black artists, Indigenous artists, and artists of color, by disabled artists, by trans artists, by [queer](#) artists, by nonbinary artists, by neurodivergent artists, by undocumented artists, by immigrant artists, by poor artists, and by so many people who are not only surviving, but flourishing, in [art worlds](#) of cooperation and [mutual aid](#). Artist-centric networks, organizations, and initiatives — in short, solidarity [art worlds](#) — are not only possible, they already exist.

Allow yourself to sense the [power](#) of these [art worlds](#) around you, and allow yourself to dream into the [art worlds](#) that you want. Just as last decade’s global crisis transformed the [art world](#), so now [producers](#) and critics are beginning to imagine what a post-Covid-19 [art world](#) will look like. How do “social distance” and “social [practice](#)” go together? What is the temporality of exhibits, installations, and biennials with little global travel, reduced capacity in all indoor spaces, and [fear](#) of contagion? One imagines, at the very least, we will be witnessing a re-localization of the arts, one combined with a new scale of intimacy of the kind only predicted by globalizations boosters in the 1990s — now a conversation with a [collaborator](#) in Seoul truly is the same as with one around the corner — they both take place on Zoom.

4

Sarah Workneh, personal email, May 6, 2020, and MCAD newsletter June 2, 2020.

Whatever else this terrible pandemic produces, it may in fact lead artists and arts organizations to ask and answer the

most basic questions anew: what are we doing and why are we doing it? The opportunity to consider such fundamental propositions are also the moments in which institutions like MoMA—whose only desire is to reproduce themselves—may not adapt, while local initiatives, those with collective **power** and the ability to transform nimbly, may emerge and perhaps harness the productive capacity of new groups and coalitions of artists.

I have long had an interest in community-generated currencies and other ways to imagine and visualize the flow of resources outside of our existing, capital-driven economy. I believe that the only way in which we will have a new economy and an economy that works for many artists is for artists themselves to begin the project of imagining, representing, and instantiating new organizations of **labor**, currency, and infrastructure.

Solidarity Art Economy Manifesto/ From Artist to Solidarity Arts Economy Organizer*

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Adapted from Caroline Woolard,
“Solidarity Art Worlds,”
Brooklyn Rail, February 2013.

Rather than waiting to “go back to normal,” to an **art world** and system of production and distribution that works for very few people, now is the time to dream.

Allow yourself to dream.

Allow yourself to dream with friends.

I am going to invite you to dream with me.

1.

Remember a moment when you chose to be in the arts, or the arts chose you.

Despite a dominant culture that values reading, writing, and speaking, you made a commitment to drawing, moving, or singing—to visual and embodied ways of knowing.

You are told you that are stupid, passionate, stubborn, or crazy because you live in your imagination.

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This lack of respect for the arts continues to make you feel alone, but you have survived, and your persistence is part of your strength, your internal **power** that no one can take away from you.

How do you feel?

2.

You are told that you will never get a job, that you will be a “starving artist” in the United States, and you understand this to mean that artists are not paid well, that the arts are not well funded in the United States.

You want to be an artist anyway. You are told you are stupid, passionate, stubborn, or crazy.

The impossibility of making a living in the arts makes you feel alone, but you survive, and your persistence becomes part of your strength, your internal **power** that no one can take away from you.

3.

You come to realize that the arts are devalued like all work that sustains life, all work that allows people to rest, dream, and return to work the next day (what is called social reproduction).

You come to understand that the arts are aligned with service work, **domestic work**, sex work, agricultural work, **healing** work, educational work, spiritual work, social work, and all racialized and gendered **labor** in the United States that is not compensated adequately.

You realize that the people who do all of these kinds of **labor** have been told that they too, are stupid, passionate, stubborn, or crazy.

You now know that you share this internal **power**, together.

4.

You begin to wonder: If the artistic work required in order to collectively celebrate, to communicate without words, to draw, to dance, to sing, to build shared symbols and imagined futures, to raise children, to clean homes, to collect the garbage, to grow food, to [heal](#), to learn, and to connect is not compensated or supported, how does it continue?

How is life sustained? You are transfixed by this question.

And here you begin a process of studying the political economy, of analyzing your material conditions, and the conditions that you share with others.

5.

Through study, you become aware that life is sustained by [gift giving](#), by [mutual aid](#), by lending, and by informal exchanges.

But you also are told—by the people who call you stupid, passionate, stubborn, or crazy—that the work of sustaining life is not really [labor](#). You think: Perhaps this work will always be devalued, existing only to support the dominant economy of waged [labor](#) so that some people can make a lot of money, while those of us that sustain life continue to be un- or undercompensated.

But, because you have survived, and you have this internal strength, this persistence, you think: Perhaps, there is another way.

What if the work that sustains life can be valued, connected, and strengthened?

You think: What if the work that sustains life is the economy we need, the economy of peace, of community, of cooperation?

You know, as you know of your own survival, that this work has [power](#).

6.

You seek to learn more about the [power](#) of this work.

The knowledge you seek has been hidden and devalued, like the knowledge that is embodied and visual, but you find it.

You sense it in the arts, and around you, in the healers, the guides, and the caregivers.

You learn that this idea—giving [power](#) and [compensation](#) to the [labor](#) that sustains life—is called the [solidarity economy](#), and that it emerged from the global South in the 1990s, as *economia solidária* to describe economic [practices](#) and models which advance values of [democracy](#), mutualism, cooperation, ecological [sustainability](#), justice, and reciprocity. You learn that these economic [practices](#) can be visualized as follows:

CREATION: IDEAS AND RESOURCES

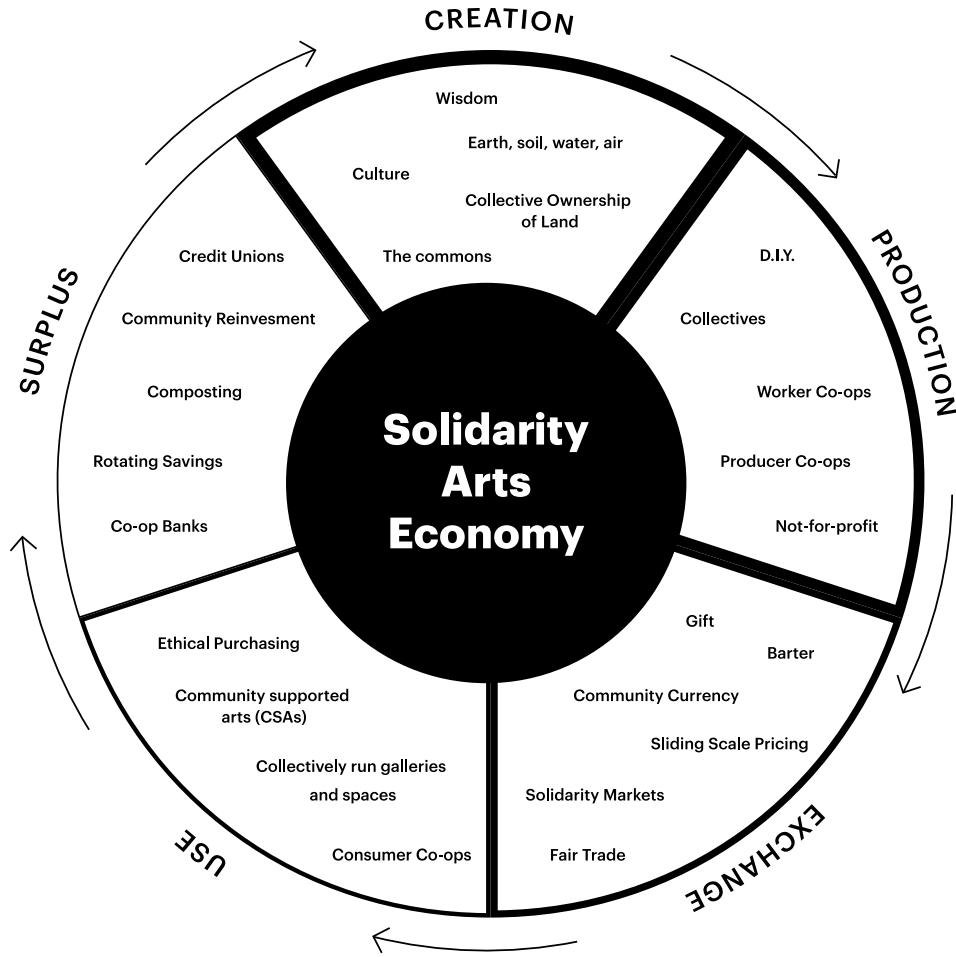
- the [commons](#): ecological and intellectual
- free and open-source software and technology
- community [land trusts](#)
- skill shares
- free schools

PRODUCTION: HOW THINGS ARE MADE

- [worker cooperatives](#)
- [producer cooperatives](#)
- 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) cooperatives
 housing cooperatives 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
 cooperative loan funds
 rotating savings and credit associations

Solidarity Economy. This *Solidarity Economy* diagram has been adapted from Ethan Miller's diagram and was designed by Topos Graphics for the book *Making and Being* by Susan Jahoda and Caroline Woolard (Pioneer Works Press / DAP, 2019).

Welcome

mutual aid societies
 cooperative banks
 community development banks

7.

You realize that the economy that art needs is one of the commons—of the solidarity economy—and that in order to sustain shared imagery, culture, communication without words, and embodied knowledge, the solidarity economy is critical.

You begin to connect artmaking to this economy of care, knowing that your power, your survival, is connected to the survival of these other practices and people, well beyond the arts.

You find community with these practices, and feel slightly less alone.

8.

You feel a tension between what you know are collective ways of meeting collective needs and what you are told is the horizon of possibility, that there is no alternative to being a starving artist, to doing household work without pay, to capitalism, in short.

You learn that the tension between art and life, between a wage and a livelihood is as old as capitalism; it is capitalism. And you realize that you have been feeling, bodily, what so many people have felt for over 400 years.

Only in that economic system—capitalism—does art confront the world as separate, as symbolic and non-reproductive; only with the rise of capitalism was art cast out of the world of daily life and rendered newly “useless.”

You understand that the tension you feel arises from a 400-year old historical contradiction that must be held collectively and used to inform collective work; it is not a tension that can be resolved on a personal level.

9.

As you join in some collective work, you continue to learn about the history of organizing against profit for the few, against the exploitation of work that sustains life, against capitalism, and against the kind of [art world](#) capitalism bequeaths.

You feel, with collective strength and experience, that another economy is possible in the arts, and beyond, because it already exists. Just as you have survived, this economy has survived, and is surviving.

This economy of care, of cooperation, and of [mutual aid](#) is thriving, despite being marginalized and devalued.

You continue to connect, grow, and strengthen [solidarity economy practices](#) and networks, and to learn about the ways that political [power](#) for the [solidarity economy](#) is growing internationally, in countries where cooperative economies are given more support than in the United States.

You witness the wisdom in the collective work around you, the shared persistence, and shared strength.

You begin to move through the world with awareness of this collective [power](#), and begin to know that you are not alone.

This awareness of collective [power](#) becomes part of your internal [power](#) that no one can take away from you.

10.

You continue to transform, in community.

You understand that the [solidarity economy](#) has always been led by Black, Indigenous, and people of color, especially women, nonbinary people, and trans people. You explore the parts of you that are held up by dominant culture, and the parts that are not.

You explore how you show up in groups, and you see how this ongoing work makes deep connections across differences possible.

When you can, you take resources from the dominant economy and put them into alternative and post-capitalist economies so that they can continue to grow.

You divest from exploitation and invest in the work that sustains life.

You join the [worker cooperatives](#), credit unions, [land trusts](#), community gardens, and initiatives that extend well beyond the arts.

You address and move through the interpersonal difficulties of collective work, of the [pain](#) of trying to be less alone, and you strengthen the collective capacity within you.

How do you feel?

11.

When the economy collapses, as it has and will, again and again, under capitalism, you know how to survive.

You might lose your job, but you cannot lose your identity, as no one can take this—your creativity, your collective strength, your [gift](#) economies—away from you.

You know that the [solidarity economy](#), with your deep relationships of care, your [mutual aid](#) networks, your community currencies, your [barter](#) networks, and your community gardens, [land trusts](#), and cooperatives will sustain themselves, as they always have.

You know that, despite being told that you are stupid, passionate, stubborn, or crazy, you have collective strength with you. You are practicing a powerful economy of care, together. You have all survived, are all working together. This is your internal [power](#) that no one can take away from any of you. And you continue to thrive. How do you feel?

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I Don't Have A Boss,
Caroline Woolard for
SolidarityNYC, typeset by
Andrew Persoff, 2010.

Sometimes New York seems like the center of cut-throat competition.
But there are many New Yorkers thriving in mutual benefit.

They say:

I DON'T HAVE A BOSS.

I'M A WORKER-OWNER IN A COOPERATIVE BUSINESS.

I DON'T HAVE A LANDLORD.

I'M A MEMBER OF A LAND TRUST, CO-OP, OR INTENTIONAL COMMUNITY.

I DON'T PAY FOR SCHOOL.

I PARTICIPATE IN SELF-ORGANIZED SCHOOLS AND DEMAND FREE EDUCATION.

I DON'T HOARD MY STUFF.

I TAKE PART IN TOOL-SHARES, BARTER CLUBS, AND CLOTHING SWAPS.

I DON'T BUY FOOD THAT KILLS.

I'M A MEMBER OF A FOOD CO-OP, CSA, AND COMMUNITY GARDEN.

I DON'T LET MY BANK PROFIT OFF ME.

I JOINED A CREDIT UNION, SO MY MONEY STAYS IN THE COMMUNITY.

There are so many ways to be part of an economy that supports
people and the planet over profit.

We're mapping the ones in New York City at SolidarityNYC.org.

SOLIDARITY
— nyc —
WWW.SOLIDARITYNYC.ORG

Welcome



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I Don't Have A Boss, Caroline Woolard for SolidarityNYC, typeset by Andrew Persoff, printed by Patrick Rowe at Exchange Café, 2013.

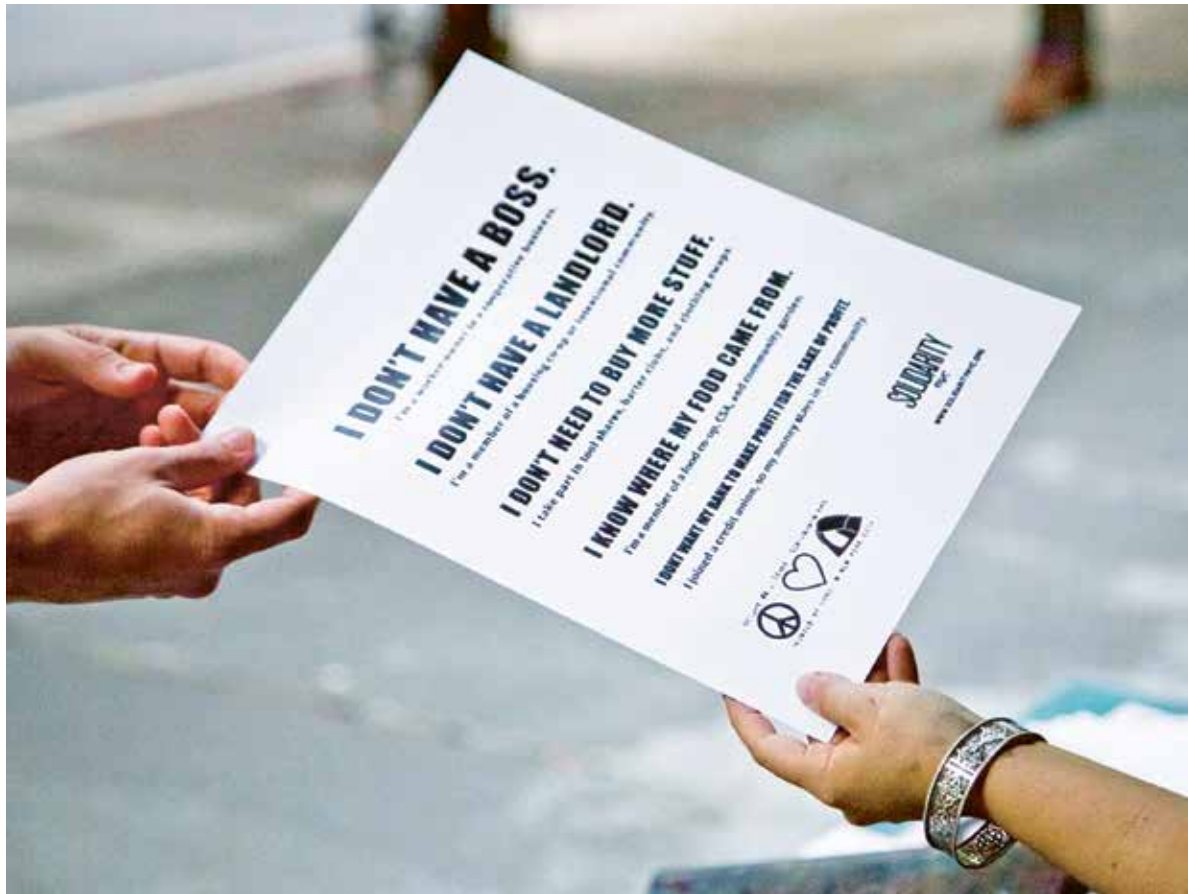
12.

One day, someone acknowledges your strength, and you smile, and say something like: I know, in the depths of my being, that I help sustain life, and that, as an artist, I am able to let myself feel, and to be present with those feelings.

I am in control of my [labor](#).

I structure desire and imagination. I create space for emotionally open responses. I make memorable symbols. I help to solidify memories and histories. I speak truth to [power](#). I can communicate without words. I use the [powers](#) of fiction and play to question norms and reveal possibility. I connect communities—geographic, identity-based, and professional.

How do you feel?



13.

What is here? Dream into it.

Take in the feelings, smells, tastes.

How do you feel?

I invite you to keep dreaming.

Welcome