

Bartering in the Land of Abundance. "Accidental equilibrium"

This collective piece has certain aspect of economies understood as cultural systems as the point of departure (Gudeman, 1986). Economy translated into "material culture" is a prevailing factor in the way that we define our identity and role in society. In this hypermercantile society the old ritualistic bond that was created by exchange has been vanishing.

The Floating Lab collective, as part of the ongoing project 43.5 actions in USONIA, has been researching a variety of practices to establish relations between communities, expanding on the use of art as linkage. As a result various community based arts projects have been established in the Metropolitan area of Washington exploring different formats to create dialogue and exchange.

The project "Bartering in the Land of Abundance" uses "barter" as a format to create community exchange. Barter creates its own social relations, implicit in this type of exchange, and is also a way to provoke dialogue. In that context autonomy and agency are given to a subject by and through their articulation with language and social relations (Humphrey and Hugh-Jones, 1992).

The idea of barter in this case is to subvert the traditional context of the art object as mercantile in nature and also its semantic value. This project places the object in a social interstice, basically removed from the law of profit by emphasizing the sociability of the object in the context of bartering.

Barter is used for a horizontal dialogue, because the very act of barter exchange creates equality out of dissimilarity, establishing a symbolical equality. Another important aspect is the elusiveness of barter, which is incorporated in the different meaning held by the two sides engaged in exchange.

"Bartering in the Land of Abundance " is initiated with empty plastics bags that will be distributed in some neighborhoods, in collaboration with neighborhood organizations. The idea is that the neighborhoods will contribute the objects to be used for barter. For every object the giver will be asked to write information about what he/she knows about the object. Each object is sketched and the known information about it is added. The objects are then displayed in the gallery for barter with the people visiting the gallery. A sketch will also be made of each bartered object and similar information about the object will be collected as a way of creating an archive. The drawing will be then displayed in the Katzen Museum during the show "Close Encounter".