

Maaïke Lauwaert &
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Facing Value

Radical
perspectives
from the arts

Valiz

1. Be unproductive

2. Hesitate and question

3. Share

4. Improvise

5. Invite and participate

6. Embrace the void

7. Play!

8. Support

9. Unite

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be found there.⁷⁹ In any case 'exchange-through-gift' is the rule there. Yet, it would be merely pure scholasticism to dwell on this theme of the law if it were only Maori, or at the most, Polynesian. Let us shift the emphasis of the subject. We can show, at least as regards the *obligation to reciprocate*, that it has a completely different sphere of application. We shall likewise point out the extension of other obligations and prove that this interpretation is valid for several other groups of societies.

The Gift: The Form and Reason for Exchange in Archaic Societies. London and New York: Routledge, © 2002, pp. 10–23, 112–123. Reproduced by permission of Taylor & Francis Books UK.

Marcel Mauss (1872–1950) was a French sociologist whose academic work traversed the boundaries between sociology and anthropology. Today, he is best known for his analyses of magic, sacrifice, and gift exchange in different cultures around the world, which he elaborated in his most famous book *The Gift* from 1925.

79 Even assuming that the institution is not found in present-day Polynesian societies, it may well have existed in civilizations and societies that the immigration by Polynesians has absorbed or replaced, and it may well also be that the Polynesians had it before their migration. Indeed there is a reason for its having disappeared from part of this area. It is because the clans have definitively become hierarchized in almost all the islands and have even been concentrated around a monarchy. Thus there is missing one of the main conditions for the potlatch, namely the instability of a hierarchy that rivalry between chiefs has precisely the aim of temporarily stabilizing. Likewise, if we find more traces (perhaps of secondary origin) among the

Maori than in any other island, it is precisely because chieftainship had been reconstituted there, and isolated clans had become rivals. For the destruction of wealth on Melanesian or American lines in Samoa, see Krämer, *Samoa-Inseln*, vol. 1, p. 375. (See Index, under *ifoga*.) The Maori *murū*, the destructions of goods because of misdoing, may also be studied from this viewpoint. In Madagascar, the relations between the *Lohateny*, who should trade with one another, who may insult one another, and wreak havoc among themselves, are likewise vestiges of the ancient potlatches. See Grandidier, *Ethnographie de Madagascar*, vol. 2, p. 131 and n.; pp. 132–3. See also p. 155.

TIME/BANK: A CONVERSATION WITH JULIETA ARANDA AND ANTON VIDOKLE

Julieta Aranda & Anton Vidokle

What was the impetus to resurrect Josiah Warren's project/store? Is it the current financial crisis and belief that prevailing economic systems don't work, in which case the project would be an eminently political action that uses the realm of artistic practice to come into being, or is it an essentially artistic project, strictly intended to address the realm of art (practice, audience, consumption)?

ANTON VIDOKLE:

Well, for me (and it may be something else for Julieta) there is something poetic in revisiting a project that existed briefly in 1827. It's interesting how alternative and utopian proposals keep resurfacing in history again and again. Most of the time they have a short lifespan or remain unfinished or unrealized, but stubbornly keep coming back. I'd like to think that maybe someone else a hundred years from now will open yet another time store somewhere, and this time it will be so successful that it will really transform everything. Or maybe it will fail, but someone will try it again, and again... until it succeeds. What is reassuring is the continuity of a desire for things to be different.

The more practical side of this is that a time store is a very immediate visualiza-

tion of an alternative economy. I find that one of the biggest problems in society in general is a certain difficulty to imagine things as being different. For example, while a lot of people are attracted to the idea of time-based currency or economy, most have a really hard time imagining what they can do with it. So it's very helpful to have a store with all sorts of commodities that one can obtain in exchange for time—it makes a rather abstract concept visceral.

JULIETA ARANDA:

I agree with Anton, and would just want to add that I don't see how we could think of a project such as *Time/Bank* as purely symbolic, even though I would actually say that *Time/Bank* is definitively an artist's project. You see, the realm of art is not limited to practice/audience/consumption. That may be true about a market-driven contemporary art economy, but that economy—with all its visibility—represents only a part of the totality of art.

Recently, I was walking around a small occupation that sprouted in Mexico City, and it struck me that, in the same way as in Zucotti Park in NY, there was evidence of art everywhere—painting, theatrical situations, musical performances. While the manifestations of work that I witnessed

IS THE RETURN
PART OF THE LIFESPAN?

may not have particularly conformed to the quality standards upon which contemporary art is judged and interpreted, I believe that the said work came into existence because of an internal logic inherent to art, which has to do with expressing affects.

That said, *Time/Store* is a practical outlet for *Time/Bank*—so that it is possible to have real access to the alternative economy that the project proposes. And while we acknowledge each and every one of the previous iterations of time currency propositions, the focus of the project is not exactly to resurrect Josiah Warren's Cincinnati Time Store, as that implies a certain amount of historic romanticism.

What is infinitely more interesting is to think about this project as a chance to create worlds, to imagine and produce other realities; to further the work that has been done towards a society where things are different.

Money, or currency, is a fiction that societies (antique, pre-capitalist and modern) have and continue to abide to; often when national economies collapse, governments have reacted by simply creating a new one, pegged to a sizeable multiple of the previous one. Brazil is one of the so-called success stories of such experiments, with the invention of the Brazilian real in the 1980s, when inflation crippled the economy. Currency, or assigning a monetary value to labour and production, is only a facet/aspect of the economic system; one of many columns on which the edifice rests. Is the intention to bring the edifice to a collapse from within (an anarchist strategy), or is it to build a parallel edifice that would undermine the validity of the prevailing model? Is Time/Store intended to propose a new

horizon of possibility, or sabotage the present one?

AV:

Yes, I think we are trying to create a parallel structure that would place the burden of explanation on the prevailing system: if things can be done better (with more quality and pleasure) in other ways, why does the current arrangement dominate? Is its legitimacy derived from the fact that it's good, or because it is simply imposed putatively; enforced by police and armies?

JA:

There is a slight difference between currency and money, I think. Currency can be defined as 'transmission from person to person as a medium of exchange; circulation,' while money is 'a measure and a store of value'.

This would mean that currency is what is circulated and money is what is hoarded. Currency is something that can be used to represent an exchange—a written note, a loaf of bread, a stone, a string of beads, a promise—and it doesn't have to be pegged to money or to the notion that one of its main purposes is self-enrichment. If we succeed at least marginally in showing that it is possible to peg currency to something more humane—like time—new horizons of possibility may indeed open up.

It is fairly clear that things are not working quite right with the present system, and that there is a massive mistrust in governing and regulating institutions as they are established at the moment. So, while the collapse of the present arrangement comes about (or not), it is important to lay the grounds for different ways of doing things, which is what I consider we are doing with this project.

FACING VALUE

CURRENCY IS A SIGNIFIER?

You have clarified very eloquently where you locate the project, and you are right in that it does render an abstract idea (whose soil or sky are utopian) concrete. While the project is wilfully located outside the realm of art practices driven by the market, it nonetheless circulates and takes form in a world that orbits very closely around the market. Do you foresee a potential conflict arising from the daily, concrete, material lives of users who experience an alternative economic system, and the art world in which the project has acquired recognition and value as an art project? How do you see the engagements with these two realms connecting, and does this interconnection bear an impact on the agency of the project?

AV:

Yes possibly, but that's life: are any projects (artistic, political, scientific, religious, etc.) safe from potential conflicts? If there are any, they are probably completely uninteresting.

It's also important to keep in mind that this demonized abstraction called the 'art world' is partly comprised of the artistic community, which in essence is a group like any other: a group of senior citizens, an association of plumbers, immigrants, etc. So if these other groups can organize mutual aid societies and other alternative economic networks, why shouldn't we—artists, curators, writers—try to do this as well?

JA:

I think that it is possible—and logical—for actions and projects to have multiple readings and to work on multiple levels. If *Time/Bank* operates in two or more realities, hopefully that can only be

beneficial for the project as it would then not be reduced to either a symbolic artistic gesture, or an act of good will. I actually think that it is important that *Time/Bank* enjoys visibility at the level of the art world where value is produced, so the notion of an alternative way of doing things becomes part of the conversation. How else might one interject a rupture in the way of doing things?

I am curious about your reflection on evaluating creative capital, or the immaterial labour in the arts and creative industries, that the text describing the project refers to. So much in the arts—especially practices outside the market—depends on volunteering; devoting time and energy that is still partially unrecognized, and one has to be motivated in other realms or fields to keep the immaterial side of the clock running. The success of the franchises of Time/Bank underlines a genuine motivation in understanding immaterial labour as increasingly relevant and valuable. What are your thoughts on the matter?

AV:

There are many different definitions of immaterial labour that have nothing to do with volunteering, but simply with work that does not immediately result in the production of concrete commodities: writing, research, software development, and the like. Quite a lot of such 'immaterial labour' is extremely highly compensated. Sometimes immaterial labour is bundled with the notion of affective labour, which is often unacknowledged but is fundamentally important in our society.

I think that what we were specifically interested in is the kind of work that takes place in the arts and is extremely

necessary, but is not valued by society and always falls through cracks. For example, a couple of years ago I was editing a film and really needed someone to view a draft, and give me critical feedback. It needed to be someone who was not necessarily a friend and who would be objective about the work, and also someone who had experience in filmmaking. Eventually I found a friend of a friend who watched the film and spent a couple of hours giving me feedback, which was incredibly useful and productive—I really could not have finished the film without this. I would have never thought of paying her and she would have never asked for money as compensation—it would have really confused the situation and have also made the possibility of critical feedback somewhat suspect. Nevertheless this sort of work that we in the art community often perform for one another is really important. *Time/Bank* creates the possibility for this type of help to be compensated, not necessarily by the actual person who requested the help, and certainly not in money, but through the system of *Time/Bank* itself.

This is important because if such valuable help is compensated it brings something back that is more than simply gratitude. It enables me to help more—to do more of something that I really like and value, without jeopardizing my economic situation by spending too much time volunteering free work (which is not sustainable in capitalist society in the end).

JA:

The *Time/Bank* is not only about creating a valuation system for immaterial labour—that would be like substituting money with money. More important is to create an alternative notion of compensation, rooted on the weaving of a community that can be dependable to perform a range of functions for itself within the boundaries of the community.

I am not talking about volunteering, but also I am not referring to a square system of valuation where time and/or labour are equivalent to a proportional amount of money. This compensation takes place elsewhere in forms that are not fixed and that are determined within the community, by its own set of needs and resources.

Finally, is it important for you to evaluate (and if so, in what way) certain types of interest groups, affinities, communities that arise and relate to one another within the project?

AV:

I would not really know how to evaluate such groups.

JA:

I don't really think that this would be something that pertains to us. If there are productive affinities and communities that result from a project, they will manifest themselves, in their own way and in their own time.

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THIS
TYPE OF
ECONOMY
WORKS
IN LOCAL...

HETEROTOPIA

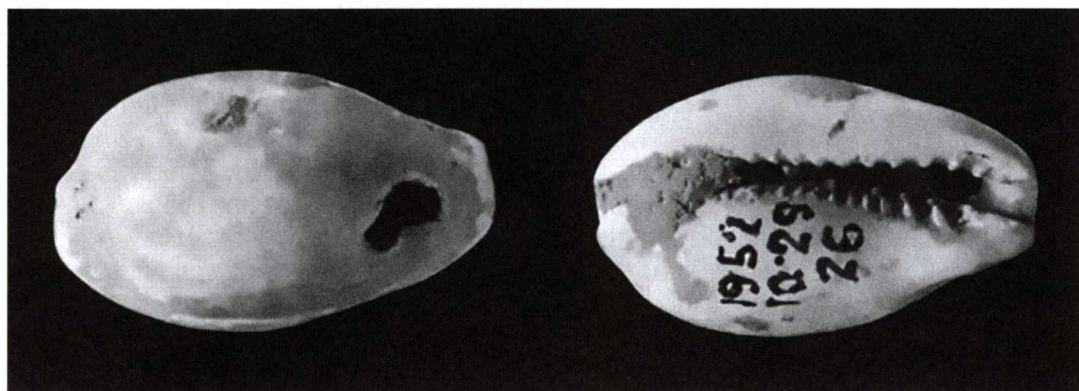
→ vs. global or universal...



Agnes Denes, *Wheatfield—A Confrontation*, 1982

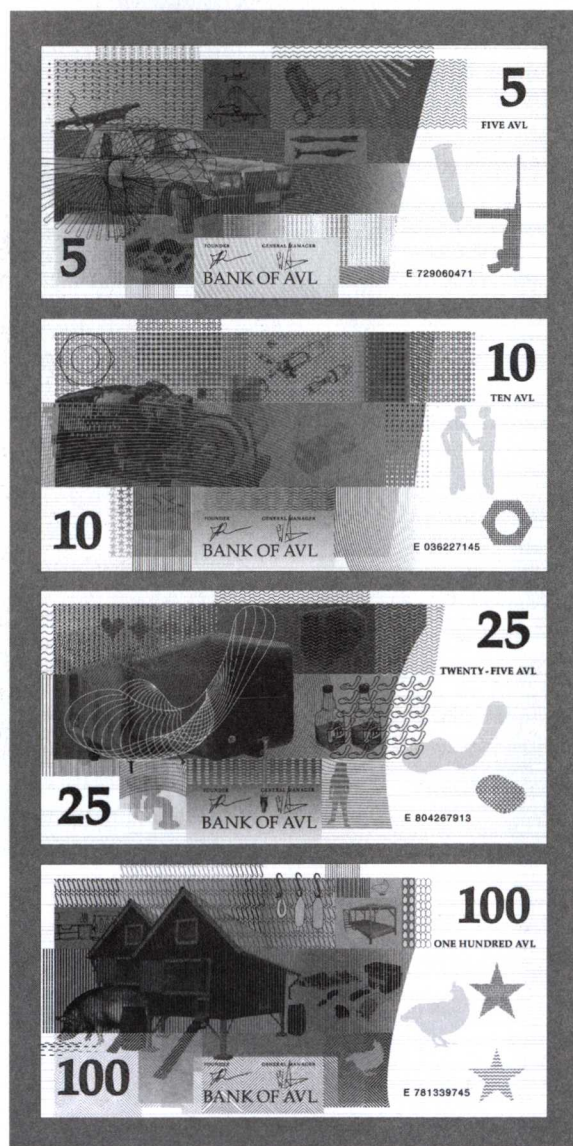
www.manifestajournal.org/issues/souvenirs-souvenirs/timebank-conversation-julieta-aranda-and-anton-vidokle

Julieta Aranda (1975) and Anton Vidokle (1965) are both artists and co-organizers of e-flux, e-flux *Time/Bank* and, together with Brian Kuan Wood, e-flux journal, a monthly online publication on art and critical theory. Vidokle established e-flux, a publishing platform and archive in 1998 and Aranda joined in 2003. They started the e-flux *Time/Bank* in 2010.



Chinese cowrie money, 1600 BC–1000 BC

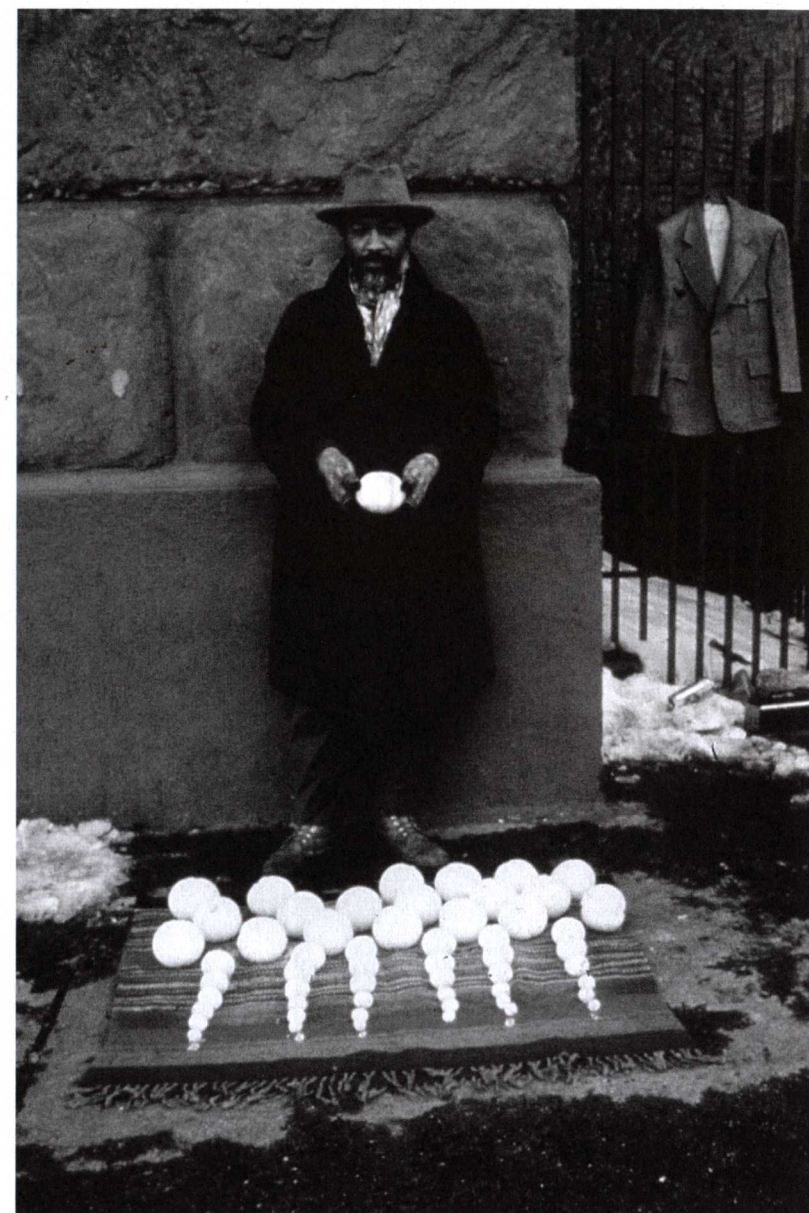
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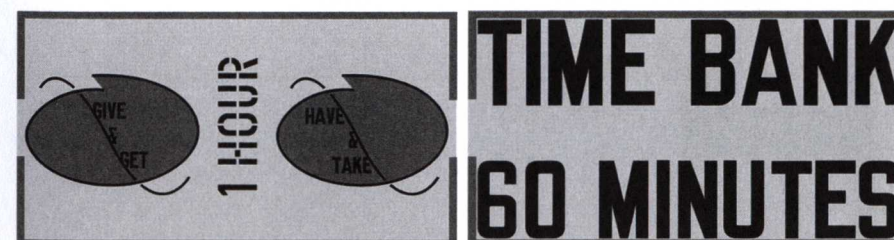
Atelier Van Lieshout, Freestate of AVL-Ville, Rotterdam, 2001



Metahaven, Sealand Identity Project, 2003–2004, currency



David Hammons, performing *Bliz-aard Ball Sale*, Cooper Square, New York City, 1983



Lawrence Weiner, *Time Bank* note, bank note, commissioned by E-flux, 2010

3 SHARE