

## IT SEEMS WE LIKE TO HELP EACH OTHER BY JEN ABRAMS

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From Movement Research's Blog:

We did our first round of OurGoods live barter networks this weekend, and it was fascinating. What struck me the most strongly was how ready and willing everybody was to help everybody else.

(PSA: two more live barter networks next weekend. Info [HERE](#).)

It seemed that the natural and universal response, when faced with a fellow artist who needed help, to help. I thought there would be people who needed convincing. After all, everyone's time is limited, and ultimately that's what we were trading in.

Although this was a barter market, not a gift circle – ie, everyone offering help was getting something in return – I don't think the root of that willingness to help was self-serving. The room just didn't have that vibe. Participants seemed genuinely invested in each others' success.

I've been in environments with my peers that felt more competitive. It's a reality that there aren't enough grants or presenting venues or audience members to support and nurture the development of every artist in NYC who is making solid work. And since we get "paid" in reputation/regard rather than in money, we can tend toward looking at each other sideways to see how we measure up to whoever else is in the room. Not everyone does this, but it's common.

In a barter economy, we are not defined by scarcity of funding or regard. (Scarcity of time is an issue.) Unlike the curator of a presenting venue, I'm not limited in how many artists I can support.

This thing I saw at the barter networks – people who didn't previously know each other investing themselves in removing obstacles to each others' success – is certainly not exclusive to those events. I'm always struck, though, at how much I prefer that way of being to the weird world of competing with my peers for scarce resources. I'm always struck by how much I like being in a space that is overtly defined by investment in each other's success.

This isn't woo-woo for me. It's not all about love and flow and good karma. It's very concrete. I'm thinking about that right now, and how it works. Hopefully I'll be able to say something intelligent about that before the end of the month.

\* November 8th, 2010

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