

Making

Managing

Mediating

2018

Title of Project/
Platform/Practice

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OurGoods.org & TradeSchool.coop

OurGoods.org was a resource sharing network for [cultural producers](#) that was co-founded by Jen Abrams, Louise Ma, Carl Tashian, Rich Watts, and Caroline Woolard in 2008 and run by the group as a collective until 2016. The [website](#) and public [events](#) connected over 7000 artists, [craftspeople](#), and activists in New York City to share [skills](#), spaces, and objects and to get independent projects done in a culture of [mutual aid](#). More information is online at: <http://ourgoods.org>

TradeSchool.coop was a self-organized learning platform that ran on [barter](#) from 2009–2019. Students exchanged [barter](#) items rather than money with their teachers, making space for [reciprocal and radical pedagogy](#). Co-founded by Louise Ma, Rich Watts, and Caroline Woolard in New York in 2009, and then run by Christian Diaz, Aimée Lutkin, Louise Ma, Rachel Vera Steinberg, Caroline Woolard, and Or Zubalsky in New York until 2012, TradeSchool.coop expanded to become a global network of [barter](#)-based schools, with thirty local chapters and over 22,000 students and teachers. More information is online at: <http://tradeschool.coop/story>

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While forced digital **mediation** of the body is a political tragedy, the coding of digital space against global capitalist platforms should be taken very seriously. The digital infrastructure for radical **permanence** should be a tool to break the process of individualization of people, to make them gather and come together in the physical space, it should aim to organize political common encounters as opposed to tear us apart into the depoliticized isolations of individual time.

—Marco Baravalle, 2020

When you **barter** with someone, especially a creative person, the **labor** is known. When you talk to that person about the thing they have made, they can even show you the shop where it's made and where they sourced the materials. So **barter** is a way to think about the economy in a very direct manner. You are meeting the person whose **labor** is embodied in the object you're trading.

—Caroline Woolard, 2010

Reflect

Idea in Public

Experiment

Timeframe

Inquiry

Commitment

Study

Experience

2007/2008
 Financial Crisis
 40% of Americans lost their homes.
 Banks get bailed out.
 Maggie has an MFA from Yale but is working the same job as me.
 People are moving back home. They can take our jobs, but not our **skills**.
 No money.



Study

We can meet our needs together. We can connect existing **mutual aid** efforts.

Commitment

Experience

How can I make projects without money?

We can work as a collective.

Inquiry

Barter
 Swap
 Trade
 Exchange
 Mutual Aid
 Gift



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Freecycle

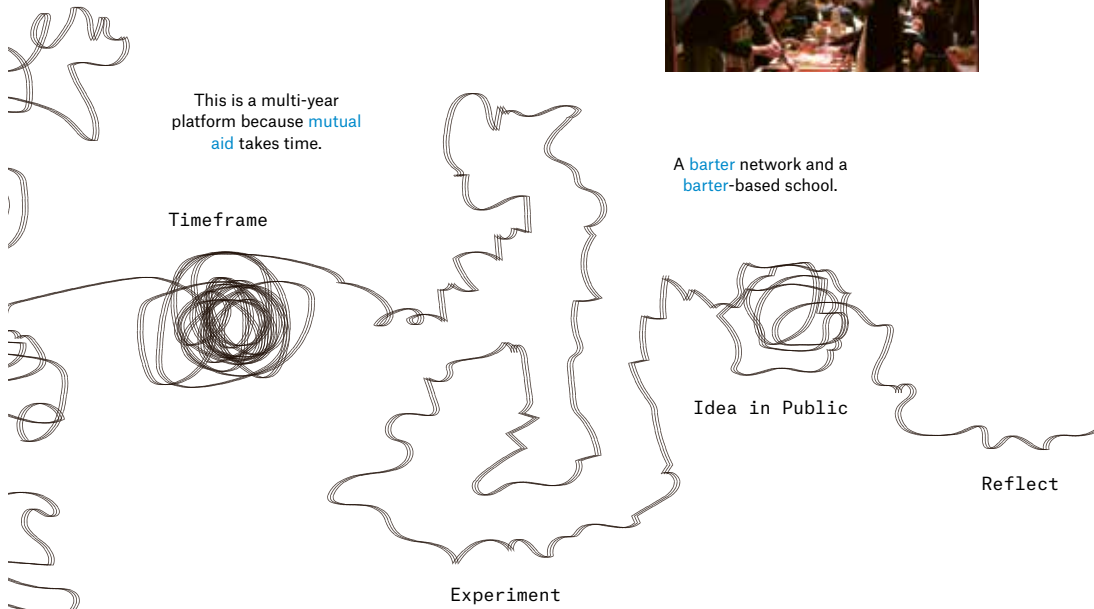
Value
Rank
Capitalism
exchange value vs. use value
solidarity economy
Neoliberalism
power
Carolina Caycedo
art



domestic work

Farah Tannis
Black Women's Blueprint
"the coincidence of wants"
"the elegant negotiable"
Lewis Hyde
WOW Café Theater
Jesse Reiley's Time Bank
Craigslist
Germaine Koh

Logo constantly changes
icons, a continuous barter
Newspaper becomes a hat
business cards break in half
Furniture has a U to connect,
like barter
website
events



1:1
Nonlinear time
Two people
Eyes
Folded paper
Clamshell
Bilateral symmetry
Dyad

peer to peer network (P2P)
Why do we apply for so many grants and residencies, when most people won't get them?
We could take the same 8 hours we spend on grants helping each other, and the project would actually happen.
With mutual respect, anything is possible.



OurGoods.org &
TradeSchool.coop

Decommodified Labor

Leigh Claire La Berge, PhD, professes at the intersection of arts, literature, [visual culture](#) and [political economy](#). She is the author of *Scandals and Abstraction: Financial Fiction of the Long 1980s* (Oxford University Press) and *Wages Against Artwork: Decommodified Labor and the Claims of Socially Engaged Art* (Duke University Press, 2019). She is Associate Professor of English in the Department of English at BMCC CUNY.

Leigh Claire La Berge, critical theorist, adapted from *Wages Against Artwork: Decommodified Labor and the Claims of Socially Engaged Art*.⁷

An international network of schools in which anyone may take classes by [bartering](#) with teachers, in which any collective may start a branch in their own town or city; a [barter](#) network for artists to offer and receive [skills](#), materials, and [labor](#); a café installed at the Museum of Modern Art where visitors are invited to invent the value of their own currency on notes provided and to use this currency to purchase tea; an artist-run think tank centered upon the [political economy](#) of art education; a real estate investment cooperative that aims to remove land from market-based [circulation](#) and place it in a community [land trust](#). Each of these works is a project started by the artist Caroline Woolard with a range of interdisciplinary [collaborators](#), and in each we notice a particular orientation toward the construction of value: how we value, why we value, and for whom. The first, TradeSchool.coop, conflates the act of trading with the language of [craft](#) but also with the commodification of education; the second, OurGoods.org, makes a public claim to utility in the face of the more common assignation of value to the individual possession of talent; and the third, Exchange Café ^{see chapter 4}, asks its visitors to reimagine the act of using money within the defining experience of a museum-based café, itself so often the place to find respite from whatever artwork-viewing

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Leigh Clare La Berge, *Wages Against Artwork: Decommodified Labor and the Claims of Socially Engaged Art* (Duke, 2019).

Study

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opportunities the museum has on offer; the fourth, BFAMFAPhD ^{see chapter 5}, investigates the **political economy** of arts education; and, finally the NYC Real Estate Investment Cooperative aims to suspend the commodification of a piece of urban land.⁸

we notice a particular orientation toward the construction of value: how we value, why we value, and for whom.

Beginning with the 2007–8 credit crisis, which coincided with Woolard’s graduation from the once-tuition-free art school Cooper Union, Woolard began constructing what she now understands specifically as “institutions,” what I will call “institutions-as-art.” Woolard’s institutions comprise shifting coalitions of artists who devote themselves both to making art and to making it possible for other artists to make art. For Woolard, the institution concretizes and navigates a space more capacious than the individual—thus institutions-as-art **mitigate** against being reduced to the artist’s ego, to the artist’s oeuvre, or to some potential canonical assignment; rather, the institution remains open to change but also simply remains as a form of duration. Yet the institution-as-art must avoid the well-known temptation of focusing on its own duration over the ends it supposedly serves. According to Woolard, if an institution can maintain that

nuanced space, it may exist as both an art form and as a social form for artists.

Each of the above “institutions-as-art” might be seen as an answer to a question about how artists can sustain their **practice** in an age of **decommodified labor**. Where do artists go after school, if they want to continue their education? They go to TradeSchool.coop, that is, they learn to continue their own schooling through nonmonetary exchange. How do artists make artwork after being displaced from their studios, and if they don’t have the resources that art school had afforded them? They use OurGoods.org to find a network of like-minded practitioners with whom to exchange **skills** and materials, time and space. Where should artists work and where should they **practice**? They might join the Real Estate Investment Cooperative in an attempt to create permanently affordable space or to find others with whom to share a space. What do they do when they realize that their art education has seemingly no better prepared them to be a working artist than had they not gone to art school, particularly if they are a woman or a person of color? They might join BFAMFAPhD, a group that investigates the **political economy** of arts education and arts **professionalization**.

Taken together, these questions continue an investigation into the transformation of artwork and artists’ work under conditions

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Images and descriptions are available at carolinewoolard.com; see also www.tradeschool.coop; ourgoods.org; and Exchange Café at “MoMA Studio: Exchange Café,” <http://www.moma.org/visit/calendar/exhibitions/1364>. For an in-depth look at Woolard’s work on the Real

Estate Investment Cooperative, see Art21’s documentary production, “Caroline Woolard Flips the Real Estate Script,” Art21, July 31, 2015, at <https://art21.org/watch/new-york-close-up/caroline-woolard-flips-the-real-estate-script/>

OurGoods.org &
TradeSchool.coop

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of the decommodification of their artistic **labor**. If decommodification allows for the removal of land, **labor**, or money from market-based **circulation**, then many artists, socially engaged or not, are already working within its historical **ambit**. Like deindustrialization, decommodification moves in a cyclical fashion, and for **labor** to be decommodified it must first have been commodified. Our current moment of the decommodification of artistic **labor** follows, as both Sharon Zukin and Donna M. Binkiwicz have detailed, a 1950–60s expansion of “artists’ ability to claim their art as a career” through the proliferation of artist’s agencies, granting bodies, foundations, universities’ arts programs, and so on. This was an economic moment when, as Binkiwicz recounts, New York Senator Jacob Javits could suggest that “since the principle of government subsidy ... [is] well established with many industries ... why could this same principle not be applied to the arts?”⁹ And yet, simultaneously with this flourishing of an artistic life as a possible

professional life, a foreshortened **labor** market for artists appeared on the horizon. Zukin notes that by 1963 the US **Labor** Department was already producing “gloomy projections” about art-based employment. Furthermore, she qualifies the kind of workers sociologists and government officials believed artistic work would engender: “Expanding jobs in the arts could be expected to produce a fairly amorphous and relatively quiescent **labor** force.”¹⁰

Woolard’s **practice**, including her work on *Artists Report Back* with the collective she founded, BFAMFAPhD, might be understood as a contemporary, artistic response to the kind of social history of the professionalizing and commodifying **art world** that Zukin and Binkiwicz provide. In Zukin and Binkiwicz’s respective histories, the Kennedy administration inaugurates the National Endowment for the Arts; in Woolard’s public presentations of the **barter** network OurGoods.org, she notes the fiscal decimation of that agency. In Zukin’s history, the federal government expands arts funding through universities in the form of student grants; in *Artists Report Back*, funding sources are understood to have been converted from grants to loans. After school, artistic careers are still possible in universities, but those careers will be restricted to a few, while the majority who attempt them will become part of the contingent academic **labor** force. Such facts must be read as a reminder that much as commodification famously delivers what **Marx** calls the “double freedom” of a waged life—you’re free to sell

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Donna M. Binkiwicz, *Federalizing the Muse: United States Arts Policy and the National Endowment for the Arts, 1965-1980* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004), 32.

10

Sharon Zukin, *Loft Living: Culture and Capital in Urban Change* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1986), 98.

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your **labor** to whomever you choose; you have to sell your **labor**—so does decommodification: you're free not to sell your **labor**; you can't sell it. Woolard's works respond to this situation with nuance and pragmatism, and the tenor of their responses derives in part from their institutional forms. Indeed, they insist that artists will keep working, even without a wage, that artists refuse not to work, that even as they are deprofessionalized, they will remain professionals.

What I claim is the need for artists to secure their own forms of **labor** exchange outside of the strictures of the art institutions of the waged world, Woolard sees as "a need to make both artistic objects and an institutional context in which those objects can meaningfully circulate," because artists' lack of a wage will limit their ability to circulate in formal art spaces.¹¹ When Woolard graduated from the Cooper Union with her own Bachelor of Fine Arts degree, she emerged into the 2007–8 credit crisis and subsequent "Great Recession." She supported herself by continuing to work at Cooper Union and then by collecting unemployment, an allowance she lists on her cv under "grants and funding sources." It is fitting that being compensated by the government for not working provided the time, space, and the decommodified freedom to develop two institutions that both respond to and allow for a (partially) decommodified artistic **practice**. And it is more fitting still that Woolard made the decision not to pursue a Master of Fine Arts in her

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In conversation with the artist.

twenties, but rather to develop her own artist-run institutions of education and resource sharing, which she conceived of as crucial parts of her **practice**.

If decommodification allows for the removal of land, **labor**, or money from market-based **circulation**, then many artists, socially engaged or not, are already working within its historical **ambit**.

OurGoods.org and TradeSchool.coop are two **barter**-based networks that Woolard organized with **collaborators** who included grant writers, computer programmers, graphic designers, and a range of visual and performing artists. OurGoods.org is a web-based network for individual **barter**, whereas TradeSchool.coop provides a similar web-based network for group **barter**; groups of students **barter** for classes with instructors. We might understand the second as an expanded application of the first. Founded in 2009, OurGoods.org had at its peak seven thousand members, most of whom were based in New York City. Members create a profile detailing what **skills** and materials they have to offer and what **skills** and materials they need for their own artistic projects. They communicate how any **barter** will be incorporated into their project or **practice**. "I need translation

OurGoods.org &
TradeSchool.coop

services for an art poster,” one profile might say, for example, or “space for an event.” The benefit of a single **barter** is that one agrees to trade what one has. The disadvantage is that forms of socially accepted measures of equivalence, time for money, still obtain here as members decide how or whether to trade a higher income-generating and often **masculine** skill, say web development, for a lower, often feminized one, say childcare. Yet unlike the similar, short-lived artist-run institution Time Bank by Anton Vidokle of eflux, OurGoods.org does not enforce such a form of equivalence, that is, you put in an hour, you get back an hour. Rather, members negotiate these exchanges on their own.

The site does not track the actual **barter** exchanges to which members agree. Rather, members engage in these exchanges in real time and space, trading messages through the OurGoods.org portal. This individual correspondence doubles as a limit on how **barter** is represented in a manner reminiscent of the challenges of performance art and its documentation. Much like a performance never happens the same way twice, **barter** has an improvisational quality. Unlike performance, however, there are no spectacles here: one doesn’t get to watch others **barter**. To watch, you have to do. Woolard has compared **barter** acts to **storytelling** and oral traditions in which the same story produces different effects when told or

enacted by different tellers and listeners. I want to follow the project’s own literary language and think about how, when read as art, the **barter**-based transactions facilitated by OurGoods.org may be seen as a kind of metaphor in that word’s historical sense of being a vehicle for conducting meaning. “Metaphor” etymologically breaks down to mean “to carry over”; it denotes a movement in which meaning is transported from one object to another in speech and writing. **Barter** structures a specific type of metaphor, perhaps akin to what David Halperin calls a practical allegory, in that it is instantiated through activity.¹² The **barterers** performed through OurGoods.org metaphorize what an other, new economy would look like while simultaneously constituting that new economy. If I **barter** two hours of my editing **skills** for one hour of soundtrack-laying ability, our exchange represents a mode of economic transformation. It also constitutes that mode. The representation and its efficaciousness become one.

OurGoods.org follows the movement that Shannon Jackson describes as a transposition from a “discrete notion of the work of art to a process-based notion of the work it takes to make art.”¹³ Why do artists **barter**? They **barter** because they have potential artistic **labor** but no market in which to sell it. Why else do they **barter**? Because they need others’ potential artistic **labor** but have no money with which to purchase it. Their **labor** and consequently their potential to earn a wage have

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Richard Halperin, *Shakespeare Among the Moderns* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1997), 12.

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Jackson here is discussing Mierle Laderman Ukeles’s “maintenance artwork,” which finds an easy **aesthetic** correlation in what it takes to maintain both an individual art **practice** (a wife) and an art institution and **art world**.

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been decommodified, and now each will find another in a scene of decommodification in which the definitional properties of commodification as such — “made by waged labor and sold on the market” — will not be brought to bear. OurGoods.org instead offers the chance to work for one’s self, but not through a conception of the kind of neoliberal self-capitalization. Rather, one works through a different form of being “a partner in exchange” in which another is required for mutually enhancing but not profit-generating reciprocity.

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The potential trades facilitated by OurGoods.org may expand ad infinitum, even as each individual trade will never be represented to others and composes a niche economy scaled at two. It was the limitation of the one-to-one scale of OurGoods.org that laid the foundation for the next collective, similarly decommodifying

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Caroline Woolard, “Dear Potential Trade School Organizer,” *Social Text Online*, October 14, 2013, http://socialtextjournal.org/periscope_article/trade-school/ (accessed February 2016).

institution, TradeSchool.coop. This web-based platform may be downloaded by any individual or group, can be translated into multiple languages, and has spawned “schools” as local as New York and Indianapolis and as international as Quito and Glasgow. In narrating how the project came to be, Woolard herself makes frequent recourse to the availability of time and space that are one possible result of decommodified labor. Writing in *Social Text*, she explains: “On February 25th to March 1st, 2010, we ran [the first] TradeSchool.coop ... Over the course of 35 days, more than 800 people participated in 76 single session classes ... In exchange for instruction, teachers received everything from running shoes to mixed cds ... We ran out of time slots for teachers to teach and classes filled up so quickly that we had to turn people away. [Thus we reopened] ... in an empty school, paying rent with the support of charitable donations and running on donated time from 8–20 volunteers.”¹⁴

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OurGoods.org &
TradeSchool.coop

The converse of “having time” to give, of course, is that such projects “take time” to run — Antonio Negri’s “tautological time” seems apt.¹⁵ **Barter**s reclaim the tautological time of real subsumption; Negri asks, “When all life is work, who measures whom?” “We will introduce our own measures,” Woolard seems to respond. Both OurGoods.org and TradeSchool.coop require time for planning, for engaging, and especially for communicating. Before any given TradeSchool.coop class, teachers agree with students on what their recompense will be. The institution operates through given time and given space, what we may understand as decommodified time and decommodified space. As of 2019, Woolard estimates that around twenty-three thousand students and teachers have participated in the project. **Barter** remains the currency. Anyone may propose a course (for **barter**) and anyone may take a course (for **barter**). Different schools will develop different local cultures; for example, TradeSchool.coop in Glasgow has a mental health and senior care focus, whereas TradeSchool.coop in New York is more arts-focused.

For Woolard, the representation and self-constitution of artistic **labor** should transpire on a plane of some mutually recognized equality. The institution, not reducible to any individual, should enable that equality by providing a platform in which artists can encounter each other

through the exchange of their **decommodified labor**. In that temporal constitution of the **barter**, there must have been, however brief, a recognition of reciprocity. The point is not to assert that the commodification of **labor** is bad and its decommodification is good — a fundamentally facile claim — but rather to show the course that **labor** takes in its various forms in the **aesthetic** realm. The **labors** of Woolard’s institutions do not assume reified status because they are continually called on to circulate intersubjectively, to be exchanged from one position to the other. Crucially, the focus of the **barter**s remains the relationality of the artistic laborers to each other, not the relationality of the object produced by such **labor** to the viewer. Here we find ourselves quite close to the claim made by Nicholas Bourriaud in his foundational *Relational Aesthetics* — namely, that what distinguishes **socially engaged artwork** is that its “substrate is intersubjectivity.”¹⁶ Yet that intersubjectivity must itself have both a material and an affective form. We may say that the likely form of that intersubjectivity in **socially engaged art** derives from the content of its **decommodified labor**.

In the larger discussion of the divaricated theoretical trajectories of the real subsumption of **labor** and the neoliberalization of the economy that structures my argument, the necessary questions for Woolard’s institutions remain: Do they produce value for others (real subsumption) and/or do they necessitate that the artist assume the subject position

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Nicolas Bourriaud, *Relational Aesthetics* (Paris: Presses Du Reel, 2002), 21.

16

Nicolas Bourriaud, *Relational Aesthetics* (Paris: Presses Du Reel, 2002).

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All citations to Marina Vishmidt, “‘Mimesis of the Hardened and Alienated’: Social Practice as a Business Model,” *e-flux Journal*, no. 43 (March 2013), <http://www.e-flux.com/journal/43/60197/mimesis-of-the-hardened-and-alienated-social-practice-as-business-model>.

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of “entrepreneur of herself” (neoliberalization)? Which is the more appropriate framing of the **decommodified labor** that structures these artworks? Answering these questions will help us to explore another—namely, the fluid boundary that critics have suggested is the sometimes muddled difference between “**socially engaged art**” and “socially engaged business,” a **tension** helpfully grouped under the rubric Marina Vishmidt has called “social **practice** [art] as business model.”¹⁷ Vishmidt is concerned that the most successful social **practice** artists engage in what she memorably calls “shovel-ready” art **practices**. She quite rightly asks, “Isn’t it the case that the [art] **practices** viewed as most successful [have been] the overtly entrepreneurial ones ... because they occupied both the community-facing and business-minded ends of the relational [**aesthetics**] spectrum?” Vishmidt continues to claim that such art illustrates “how **entrepreneurialism** and autonomy conjoin in a resolutely post-critical and results-oriented agenda,” similar to an NGO or a **nonprofit**.

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To support her claims, Vishmidt provides the example of one of the most well-known, certainly protocanonical, **socially engaged artists** working today, Theaster Gates. Gates refers to himself as a “hustler” and calls his art **practice** an “insurgent business”; the New York Times has designated him “Chicago’s opportunity artist.”¹⁸ Consider Gates’s Dorchester Projects on Chicago’s impoverished, mostly black, South Side. Partnering with his employer, the University of Chicago, Gates has built community centers, libraries, a cinema, and the like.¹⁹ Vishmidt writes: “Gates’s entrepreneurial outlook—promoting the virtues of **labor** in social change, preferably the **labor** of others, while he interfaces with real estate developers, art institutions, and ngos—is resolutely and unapologetically ‘post-political.’”²⁰

Some of Vishmidt’s criticisms could be applied to OurGoods.org and TradeSchool.coop. Indeed, OurGoods.org and TradeSchool.coop have not been consistently legible as artworks, but as something more like a community partnership. Woolard herself is more agnostic. During their making she didn’t necessarily refer to them as art. Now she understands them as institutions for artists that double as art. One the one hand, Woolard herself explains

18 That the University of Chicago itself has been partly responsible for the decimation of black areas of culture and business development is an omitted part of this narrative.

19 Ben Austen, “Chicago’s Opportunity Artist,” *The New York Times Magazine*, December 20, 2013, <http://www.nytimes.com/2013/12/22/magazine/chicago-opportunity-artist.html>.

20 An example similar to Gates may be found in the work of the Houston-based artist Rick Lowe, whose residential development, Project Row Houses, is, by its self-description, “founded on the principle that art—and the community it creates—can be the foundation for revitalizing depressed inner-city neighborhoods.” Cited in Finckelpearl, *What We Made*, 132.

of OurGoods.org, “We didn’t want to call it a work of art because then people wouldn’t use it. They would feel as if we were using them for our own performance.”²¹ Yet, these works have been presented at canonical institutions of art including the Whitney, MoMA, and the Brooklyn Museum, as well as less canonical but still important venues like Creative Time’s summit, Living as Form. And many artists who make similar work do call them art, appealing, for example, to Joseph Beuys’s notion of “social sculpture” to anchor these kinds of works in an art historical trajectory.

The **barter**s performed through OurGoods.org metaphorize what another, new economy would look like while simultaneously constituting that new economy.

Nonetheless, while Woolard herself has been identified as the artist, and the institutions she has helped create have been identified as artworks, OurGoods.org and TradeSchool.coop have — perhaps suspiciously — garnered attention from members of the world of so-called social entrepreneurship and the recently anointed “sharing economy.” Such a sensibility was on display when Levi Strauss and Co. offered to purchase and franchise TradeSchool.coop (which Woolard declined), and when the real

estate developer Ron Spurga sought to organize a monetization of OurGoods.org’s database of members (also declined by Woolard). The intimacy of an opposition often creates opportunities for radical misidentification, and that was the case when OurGoods.org’s and TradeSchool.coop’s scene of almost totally **decommodified labor** was interpreted as a site for the possibility of their complete commodification.

So-called **sharing economy** companies such as Lyft or Airbnb truck in the fantasy of being able to commodify all personal time and space while simultaneously “not working.” It’s not really “work” to drive someone in your car via Lyft (after all, you’re not a taxi driver) or have them sleep in your home via Airbnb (nor are you a hotel proprietor). You’re just doing what you would be doing anyway — driving, sleeping, cooking, being in your home, and so on — but now you are “sharing” with others and you are making money while doing so. Here we note one example of how the neoliberal disappearance of the concept of **labor** takes daily, ideological form: Airbnb and Lyft eagerly suggest that their users’ activities, those that make money for the company and the individual through the allotment of time, should not be understood as work.

Woolard’s collective projects provide the precise refusal of this logic. While engaged in a **barter**-based transaction, you’re doing what you’d be doing anyway and you’re still not making money. OurGoods.org and TradeSchool.coop insist that such activities are serious, real, professional, even; they become a kind of work but without the wage. With Lyft you set your own schedule,

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In conversation with the artist, 2013.

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but not your own wage. With Woolard's institutions, you enter into a mutual time/space in which your artistic labor may be recognized and evaluated according to new, if nonwaged, metrics.

These aspects of Woolard's projects finally allow us to make a link to the neoliberal claim—articulated most clearly in Foucault's famous reading of the Neoliberals—that our contemporary economy has undergone “a breakdown of labor into capital and income.”²² What we can affirm here through a reading of Woolard's institutions-as-art, is that the neoliberal, post-labor declaration is essentially a descriptive claim. The activities remain the same only to be conceived of and narrated differently. Thus we can affirm Jason Read's crucial suggestion that “neoliberalism is the ideology of real subsumption,” and we can demonstrate its truth in the field of cultural production.²³ This demonstration should help us to clarify the relation between a change in economic organization and a discourse about that change.

My contention in this essay—indeed in my book, *Wages Against Artwork*—is that a change in the value composition of capital will necessarily result in a change in how labor is valorized. In our contemporary moment of finance's ascendance and labor's degradation, “precarity” has been suggested as an appropriate descriptor. The problem with this suggestion is that “precarity” does not index a change at the level of the labor commodity; rather, it only indexes a change in the social reception of that labor. By using the term

“decommodified labor,” I hope to isolate a change in the composition of labor and how that changed labor takes an aesthetic form.

In the work I have discussed, the labor that renders the art is not a commodity, nor is the art object that emerges from it. There is no ethical claim to be made here. Nor do we need to turn to the imposition of finance or regimes of accumulation for our heuristics; here, those become too abstract. Rather, we should return the critical paradox set out in Stewart Martin's perspicacious work on art's commodity status. Martin suggests that “within a society in which commodification is dominant, everything that is external to this commodification becomes marginal, liable to be socially irrelevant or merely yet-to-be-commodified.”²⁴ Art cannot be a commodity because if it were, it would forfeit its critical power. But art cannot not be a commodity because were it external to commodification, it would also forfeit its critical power. This paradox presents the balance of the socially engaged art that derives from decommodified labor: namely, that it may be worthless in more ways than one.

If a socially engaged artist like Theaster Gates avails himself of both gallery-based commodification and nonprofit-based infrastructural support, then Woolard's two institutional platforms, OurGoods.org and TradeSchool.coop, reached neither of these pivot points precisely. Reminders of OurGoods.org or TradeSchool.coop were not sold off in a gallery, nor were the

22

Michel Foucault, *Birth of Biopolitics: Lectures at the Collège de France, 1978-1979* (London: Palgrave, 2009), 224.

23

See Jason Read, “A Genealogy of Homo-Economicus: Neoliberalism and the Production of Subjectivity,” *Foucault Studies*, no. 6 (2009): 25-36.

24

Stewart Martin, “The Absolute Artwork Meets the Absolute Commodity,” *Radical Philosophy* 146 (November/December 2007), 18.

OurGoods.org &
TradeSchool.coop

institutions in their entirety given over to a [nonprofit](#), as in the case of Gates’s Dorchester Projects and its association with the University of Chicago. They did not offer themselves up to corporate “sponsors,” as did [socially engaged artist](#) Rick Lowes’s Project Row [Houses](#) through its association with the Houston-based oil services company, Chevron. Had Woolard and her [collaborators](#) accepted offers to franchise and monetize private concerns, money would have been exchanged for [labor](#) already done. The institutions in question would have ceased to be decommodifying and would have relied instead on a familiar organization whereby some [labor](#) would be done without wages — namely, the [bartering](#) relationships — but out of that lack, surplus value would be generated via the organization itself. Here we must remember [Marx’s](#) point that “the secret of the self-expansion of capital resolves itself into having the disposal of a definite quantity of other people’s unpaid labour.”²⁵

a change in the value composition of capital will necessarily result in a change in how [labor](#) is valorized

With both OurGoods.org and TradeSchool.coop, the offers out of decommodification were rejected. Woolard and her [collaborators](#) concluded that if someone gets paid, then everyone should get paid. And once everyone gets paid, not only do expenses increase exponentially, but increasing time

must be devoted to organizing, disbursing, accounting for, and tracking payment. Then the artist really does become an entrepreneur, and not the philosophical type memorialized by Foucault. Rather, she becomes a kind of payroll manager. Money has its own expenses and introduces its own scale. The old adage that it takes money to make money is certainly true, but so is its converse: it takes money to break even or operate at a loss. Money takes money. Woolard and her [collaborators](#) at TradeSchool.coop decided that no commodification was a better state of affairs than some commodification, because some money generated through commodification would have demonstrated that there really was a scarcity of money, that all members really could not be compensated for their [labor](#).

Woolard and her institutions adhered to their decommodification. They believed that such a choice gave their institutions more freedom, more inclusivity, indeed, even an ability to be perceived as art. But then, decommodification cannot be hailed as a “solution” in any way beyond the [boundaries](#) of the [aesthetic](#). When commodification is the regime, decommodification may offer a pause, a temporary respite, and it does so only in relation to prevailing social conditions of commodification. After running for six years, OurGoods.org came to a close; the New York City branch of TradeSchool.coop shut down, and Woolard and her [collaborators](#) passed the management and software development on to a new generation of artists and activists. The conclusion of these projects in some sense furthers their status as artworks. As Claire Bishop

Study

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[Marx](#), *Capital*, vol. 1, 377.

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questions of a different [socially engaged art](#) project, also a school, run by the artist Tania Bruguera, “Why do you need to call it a work of art? Can’t it just be something you do in Havana? For this to be a work of art, you have to finish it. It can’t be ongoing.”²⁶

Without money or sale, without incorporation of some sort, parts of these institutions ended. And yet, other parts continued. This ending seems a likely consequence of [decommodified labor](#). But it also reasserts a kind of singularity so important to the [aesthetic](#). Woolard’s work provides a decommodified [aesthetics](#) that is itself a decommodification of some of our most important commodities: [labor](#) and education. In Epsing-Andersen’s original formulation, the welfare state decommodifies certain goods and services so that its citizens may socially reproduce outside of certain market constraints. In the post welfare state, however, this relationship is inverted, and enterprising citizens, in a Foucauldian gesture, structure their own decommodification to achieve a certain freedom. We are not yet prepared to qualify this freedom as misplaced or genuine; rather, in keeping with Foucault’s less often examined language of [neoliberalism](#), we can only say that in this moment it is understood as a certain freedom by those who [practice](#) it. Those momentary freedoms are [aesthetic](#), par excellence.

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Finkelpearl, *What We Made*, 205.

Idea in Public

IMAGINE A GROUP GATHERING

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IMAGINE A GROUP GATHERING

OurGoods.org &
TradeSchool.coop

fig. 3-1

The Space Between Us, 2008,
paper, thread, book board,
4 × 6 × 15 inches. Courtesy
of the artist.

A **barter** brings up these questions: What is possible, between us, when we determine what our work is worth?

Like so many artists in the United States, where home ownership is linked so directly to race, class, and access to education, I am interested in the home as a symbol and also the home as an active site of struggle politically, to ensure that housing is a human right and that we can see development without displacement of long term residents.

Think of Mel Chin's *Safehouse*, the **house** as a giant vault, his 2008 sculptural icon of Operation Paydirt in New Orleans, or David Hammons' *House Of The Future & America Street*, his 2007-2017 collaboration with a local builder, a 6' × 20'-foot teaching model of Charleston, South Carolina's signature style, or think of Alan Wexler's 1990 *Crate House*, where all **tools** slide in and out of the **house**, or Gordon Matt-Clark's interventions in the 1970s, when his brother had committed suicide and his parents got divorced, or think of J. Morgan Puett's living-housing-workstyling at Mildred's Lane since the 1990s.

—Caroline Woolard, interview with Larissa Harris at the Queens Museum, 2020



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fig. 3-2
Artist Andrea Liu teaches a
class about Jean Baudrillard
at Trade School in 2009. Photo
courtesy of TradeSchool.coop.

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fig. 3-3
Artist Hương Ngô teaches a weaving class at Trade School in 2009. Photo courtesy of TradeSchool.coop.

fig. 3-4
Artist and entrepreneur Perry Chen teaches a class about fundraising at Trade School in 2009. Photo courtesy of TradeSchool.coop.



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fig. 3-5 (overleaf)

Was That You or the House?,
2010, documentation video of
performance with Linda Austin
wearing *The Work Dress*.
Courtesy of the artist and
the Watermill Center.

fig. 3-6

The Work Dress, 2007-2013,
cordura, canvas, cotton-denim
blend, size Tall/Medium.
Courtesy of the artist. Pho-
tograph by Martyna Szczesna.

Woolard's *Work Dress*, hanging
on a ladder, was available
for [barter](#) only from 2008-
2013 and led to the creation
of OurGoods.org. The photo-
graph documenting the dress
was taken by Martyna Szczesna
as a [barter](#), in exchange for
a dress.

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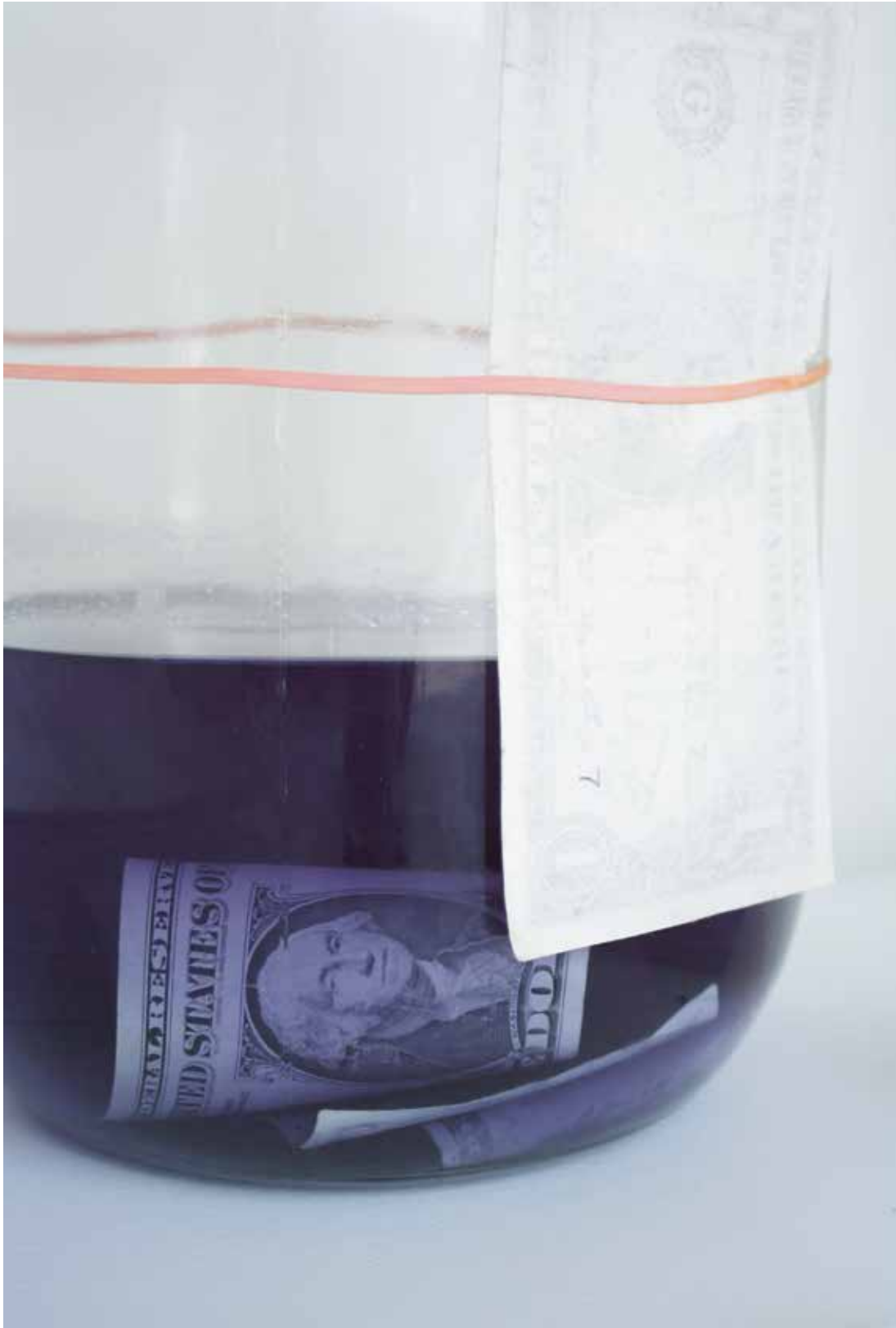
OurGoods.org &
TradeSchool.coop

fig. 3-7

Erased Washington, 2008, legal tender, Purple Power concentrated industrial cleaning fluid, rubber band, performance. Courtesy of the artist.

Barter, time banking, and community currency reveal that national money is only one medium of exchange; only one store of value. There are so many ways to encourage flows of value to circulate in communities. Legal tender is simply ink on cotton. It can be erased with car cleaner.

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TradeSchool.coop

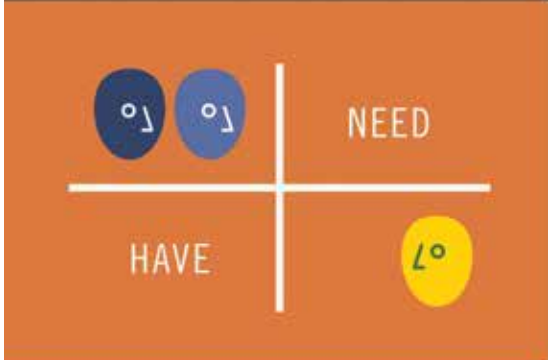
Idea in Public

The arts have always existed in a recession economy. Independent artists are experts at making do with very limited resources.


As these limited resources diminish, OurGoods enables artists to use their strengths to create a support system for art-makers everywhere.



We facilitate the barter of skills, space, labor, and art objects.




We match barter partners and provide them with accountability tools.



OurGoods creates opportunities for collaboration in a network that runs on mutual respect.

It shows trends and activity in the parts of the creative world overlooked by institutions, and offers an alternative way to value creative work.



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Ephemera

In the pages that follow, you will find the correspondence, budgets, grants, readings, and design ideas required to create and collectively run the [barter](#)-based initiatives OurGoods.org and TradeSchool.coop from 2009–2019. You will also find excerpts from *TRADE SCHOOL: 2009–2019*, a book of teaching [tools](#) and stories written by TradeSchool.coop organizers in thirty [barter](#)-run learning spaces around the world. Woolard has selected ephemera that serves as visual reference points for OurGoods.org and TradeSchool.coop. All materials here are reproduced with the consent of [collaborators](#).

fig. 3-8
How it Works, 2009, designed by
Louise Ma, dimensions variable.
Courtesy of OurGoods.org.

OurGoods.org &
TradeSchool.coop

Managing

Timeframe

In American culture, especially if you are owning-class and/or **white**, you're told that success is self-reliance. It means making enough money so you can buy help, you don't have to ask anyone for anything. And it makes two kinds of people: we see people who have a lot of needs, and then people who have succeeded, pulled themselves up by their bootstraps, and who might be charitable towards these other people. This image of assumed need over here and success and self reliance over there is something we want to do away with altogether.

—Caroline Woolard, at an event with Jen Abrams in 2013

I graduated with a BFA from Cooper Union in the winter of 2007. At that time, I worked a lot of odd jobs, ranging from graphic design to service work gigs, to working part-time as a research and studio assistant for Natalie Jeremijenko. I also had a job working the night shift from 10 p.m. to 6 a.m. where I was required to stay awake all night and monitor a studio space by walking around every hour, on the hour, and making sure people were working safely. I had a computer in my office, so when I wasn't monitoring the studio, I spent a lot of time reading, **listening** to things, sewing, and thinking about what to do after school. One night in 2008, I read about a grant called Economic Revitalization for Performing Artists (or ERPA, for short), funded by a non-profit called The Field. They described the grant in the following ways:

ERPA grows from the premise that the traditional non-profit model of fundraising does not support the majority of performing artists in New York City. This lack of financial solvency leads to early departures from New York, early departures from art-making, and ultimately, a diminishment of New York's vibrancy and vitality. ERPA aims to combat these challenges by asking artists to conceive dynamic solutions for **financial stability**, and giving them the **tools**, resources, and cash to help develop their ideas. As its name implies, ERPA aims to thus revitalize performing artists' and arts organizations' economic lives for long-term impact.

After **listening** to the "information sessions" that The Field made accessible online, I decided to try to apply for the grant, and to convince The Field that I was a performing artist, even though I went to school to study visual art. What follows is the first successful grant that I wrote, at age 23, right out of school. This got me \$5,000, a mentorship from Jennifer Wright Cook, and **meetings** with a cohort of professional artists who supported me and believed in my idea. This also allowed me to convince four other people to join me in creating a multi-year project.

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ARTISTIC STATEMENT –
 CAROLINE WOOLARD
 NOVEMBER 5, 2008

+ ABOUT ME: I endeavor to exist as both a rigorous artist and **decent human being**, moving daily with curiosity, generosity, and **integrity**. I attempt to find a wide audience for an ever-expanding notion of art, pushing for **creative dissatisfaction**: plausible alternatives to the monotonous routine.

+ CV IN PARAGRAPH FORM: Born on an island in RI and based in NY, Caroline Woolard received a BFA from Cooper Union for the Advancement of Science and Art in 2006. As a Research Scholar at NYU's Environmental Health Clinic, a Research Assistant at Mildred's Lane, and an Artist in Residence at the Brecht Forum, Woolard investigates the construction of **subjectivity** in architecture, art, and design. Woolard's interventions are presented publicly in the urban environment and have been affiliated with psychogeographic **events** like Conflux in NY, Cryptic Providence in RI, and Unoccupied Spaces in Montreal. These interventions enter the public imagination and have been investigated by *TimeOut NY* and *Wallpaper* Magazine*. Caroline Woolard is the recipient of a MacDowell Colony Residency, a Watermill Residency,

a Pilchuck Scholarship, the Leon Levy Foundation Grant, and The Elliot Lash Award for Excellence in Sculpture. Her work has been shown at the Newport Art Museum in RI, Jackson Gallery in GA, Oxbow Gallery in MI, and The Bruce High Quality Foundation in NY.

+ ABOUT MY WORK: In 2004, I moved to the edge of a discipline (sculpture) and peered into the abyss of another (dance). My interdisciplinary work combines sculptural **tools** and bodies, pushing **boundaries** with **creative dissatisfaction**, what Helen Cixous describes as "the possibility of taking a mountain into one's arms." I create platforms for experience in public space. I subvert domestic objects like chairs and lights to cultivate collective curiosity. I explore the space between people and architecture: making a place for the body amidst gigantic buildings on the street of NY and finding new ways to occupy pedestrian space. My sculptures are often **tools** for action, implying **protagonists** in an unknown narrative. Currently, I am developing a performance with Linda Austin inspired by the absurd wonder of **human factors engineering**: I witness and record her as she uses my swings, megaphones, curtains, light bulbs, and utility **dresses** as I choreograph a new work for Watermill in March.

+ SUPPORT: I am employed by Cooper Union as a studio monitor, where I work the night shift. I am also "supported" by residencies like the MacDowell Colony and Watermill and by mentors that I met in school or introduced myself to. I also receive small payments for the pedagogical assistance I give to Morgan Puett at Mildred's Lane in PA, Richard Reiss at Artist As Citizen in NY, and Natalie Jeremijenko at the Environmental Health Clinic in NY.

+ IN 5 YEARS: I hope to have settled into one or two long term projects (2-5 years) with a community. I hope to find the best structure for public participation and financial self sufficiency: will it be public art projects with community invested stocks? Will it be a new kind of "house party" that enables community solidarity without the obligatory hierarchy of institutionalized artist heroes? Will it be a design firm or an alternative restaurant as a parallel revenue stream alongside my artistic practice?

+ INNOVATIVE SOLUTION: In June of this year, I started an LLC and studio space with a group of peers. We built out an 8,000 square foot warehouse and now rent it to 28 incredible people in order to stay in one place for eight years and partially subsidize our own studios.

Although studio renovations are commonplace, the large scale collaborative effort that enabled this endeavor seems unusual to me. Each day we learn something new and/or teach a skill to at least one other person. Each person exchanges individual resources for rent: one artist pays part of her rent in vegetables from the farmer's market where she works, another in web design assistance, and many others in construction labor. We pool many other resources and have group critiques. This peer group is responsible for my intellectual/spiritual well being. I am excited to advise others about our process and will speak at RISD's professional practice class in 2009.

+ ERPA IDEA/PROJECT: Online Network for Peer-to-Peer Artistic Support (P2P-AS) An online network for peer-to-peer artistic support. Artists upload proposals that require more money, space, volunteers, or materials and any interested party can donate the necessary goods. Rather than the ubiquitous online portfolio site of self interested megalomania, which perpetuates a hierarchy with support from above, this website helps artists look to each other for recognition and fulfillment. Here, artists upload project proposals with requests for support (money, space, materials,

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volunteers, etc). AND make personal donations to other people's projects. This network will visualize contemporary trends, create artistic bonds, and foster communication between the public at large and individual artists.

Questions that will be made visible are: Which artist gets the most support from other artists? Do users have more time, money, space, or materials to donate? Do users end up helping the same person that helped them, essentially [bartering](#) resources? What longstanding bonds can be made through volunteering? How can [peer-to-peer](#) generosity adapt to other fields?

+ NEW FINANCIAL STREAMS: Modeling itself off of [websites](#) like kiva.org, craigslist.org, and couchsurfing.com, this [website](#) will state that it is also in need of monetary support. Hopefully, artists will donate to the "mothership" as their "satellite" projects are successfully supported.

+ CONNECTION TO ARTISTIC STATEMENT: My projects are often presented in public space because I want to introduce positive alternatives to the status quo in the public imagination. This project presents artists as generous people who are invested in more than egomania.

Instead of perpetuating the model of a successful career as a ruthlessly claimed top seat in a competitive pyramid of success, the [website](#) will help artists look to each other for recognition and fulfillment. Real world connections will also establish a more densely interconnected fabric of human relations in the creative community. Lastly, artists will learn how to manage volunteers and organize generosity more effectively.

+ FEASIBILITY AND MY GUARANTEE FOR COMPLETION: The minimum grant of \$5,000 will easily support the server costs and web designer salary. I am in contact with many young web designers who I could hire to complete the project: from Jeffrey Warren at MIT's media lab to Roy Rub of toposgraphics.com and Louise Ma at the *New York Times*' design team. Stefan Sagmeister supported my subway swing project and could help me find an excellent designer as well. I outsource my projects when specialization is the most effective solution (as I did with the fabrication of my subway swings) and am quite familiar with these contracts from my work for Natalie Jeremijenko at the Environmental Health Clinic. Frankly, this project simply must happen and I am undeterred in finding a way to produce it.

+ IMPACT OF ERPA RESOURCES: I know that simply creating a framework for [peer-to-peer](#) generosity is not enough. For example: How effectively will individual artists manage volunteers? ERPA's human resources are invaluable, as individual experience in sustainable venture philanthropy will help guide the underlying methodology and structure the site with pragmatism and dignity. I suspect that ERPA has web design suggestions and contacts that could provide technical support as well.

+ REPLICABILITY/SUSTAINABILITY: This [website](#) has no foreseen end and could be replicated in any field.

+ EXCITEMENT FOR ERPA'S IDEAS AND RESOURCES: I am inspired by the incredible human resources at ERPA: the network of entrepreneurs (especially women) who are committed to [conscious capitalism and social entrepreneurship](#). Many ideas I've had are being carried out by pioneers who spoke at ERPA workshops. Access to this level of self determination and collaborative genius is so exciting that I may have to track these people down individually no matter what.

Ideological note about venues: I am committed to performing in public space. I firmly believe in the

importance of spontaneous interruptions in daily life because predictability stifles imagination. Unexpected encounters with high quality performance works in public space enrich the cultural experience of any place. I make certain that participation or viewership is organized respectfully, so that users self nominate and audiences self organize and no one feels obligated to experience the event. Further, my work involves constructing experiences with [tools](#) and [props](#) that choreograph actions, following a history of [interventionist practice and performance art](#).

2008

Was That You or the House?,
Watermill March 28 (upcoming)

2007

Swinging on the Subway,
the L train

2006

For Mom

2005

Suspicious Packages,
Cooper Union, ongoing
director/choreographer

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Making

I think OurGoods.org functioned as a multi-year project because I was able to gather a team of amazing people with [skills](#) and personalities that complimented each other. I knew that I needed at least three people to make the project: a grant-writer, a designer, and a computer engineer. When I got the \$5,000 grant from The Field, I asked Louise Ma and Rich Watts if they wanted to work with me. While we were not friends, Louise, Rich, and I went to Cooper Union together, and I had seen how they worked in design classes. I knew that they were both generous, rigorous, and very talented.

November 21, 2008
Louise,

It is VERY late, but perhaps you still have time to do this dress [website](#)? I will have a window installation in Providence on Dec 6-March 13 and will be [bartering](#) Utility Dresses in it. I will have images of the dress soon, but until then, can you make a single page that says the following:

FINAL DAYS!!! IT IS THE END OF THE WORLD AS WE KNOW IT!!! THANKS FOR YOUR LOYALTY. GETTING OUT OF BUSINESS!!! [BARTERS](#) ACCEPTED!!! BIG DISCOUNTS FOR LOCAL ARTISTS DESIGNERS [CRAFTSPEOPLE](#)!!! MAKE ME AN OFFER—I trade NEW UTILITY DRESS for ceramics, jewelry, painting, web design, and other artwork. SLIDING SCALE!!!

I accept locally grown vegetables, old photographs of RI/NY, window space in Manhattan, 50s-80s design patterns, haircuts, massage, dental work, shoe repair, yoga instruction, health consultation, hydroponic/indoor vegetable training, canning tutorials, secret recipes, conversational spanish tutoring, accounting help, liability law services, and many other [skills](#) ... If you cannot [barter](#), you can pay a penalty of \$200 and take a dress. LAST DAY MARCH 13, 2009.

OurGoods.org &
TradeSchool.coop

Then I just need you to create a form they fill out to make me an offer, or a button they click to contact me...also a Buy Now option would be good for those people who want to fork over the money. And, if you have time to respond conceptually, maybe instead of my GETTING OUT OF BUSINESS vernacular (which is really a call for the end of capitalism) I should just offer another approach ([bartering](#)) triumphantly from the outset...then the text should read:

INTRODUCING [COMMUNITY CURRENCY](#), a fashion line which can ONLY BE EXCHANGED FOR LOCAL GOODS AND SERVICES. Utility [Dresses](#) by Caroline Woolard can be exchanged for: ceramics, jewelry, painting, web design, fabric, furniture, photo/video documentation, locally grown vegetables, old photographs of RI/NY, 50s-80s design patterns, haircuts, massage, dental work, ...etc.

What do you think?
Caroline

When Jennifer Wright Cook, the Director of The Field put me in touch with Jen Abrams, who she said "had a similar idea to mine," I was excited to collaborate with Jen, rather than thinking she was my competitor. I did not know Jen at all, but we seemed compatible. Plus, I was only 23 and Jen was 38, bringing over a decade of wisdom and experience from WOW Café Theater, the oldest all women and trans theater space in the United States, running on a [gift](#) system.

So I'm at WOW, and I'm sitting in the [circle](#), and I for the first time raise my hand, and I say, 'I need someone to design the lights for my show.' This was terrifying for me for a couple of reasons, first of all because I'm not totally sure they're going to do it right, and second of all because I'm not totally sure I'm a person who deserves that kind of help.

—Jen Abrams, 2013

Before we started working together, Jen suggested that we write about a list of questions that she generated, based upon her experiences at WOW. Writing over email, we shared our strengths and weaknesses, to see if we would work well together.

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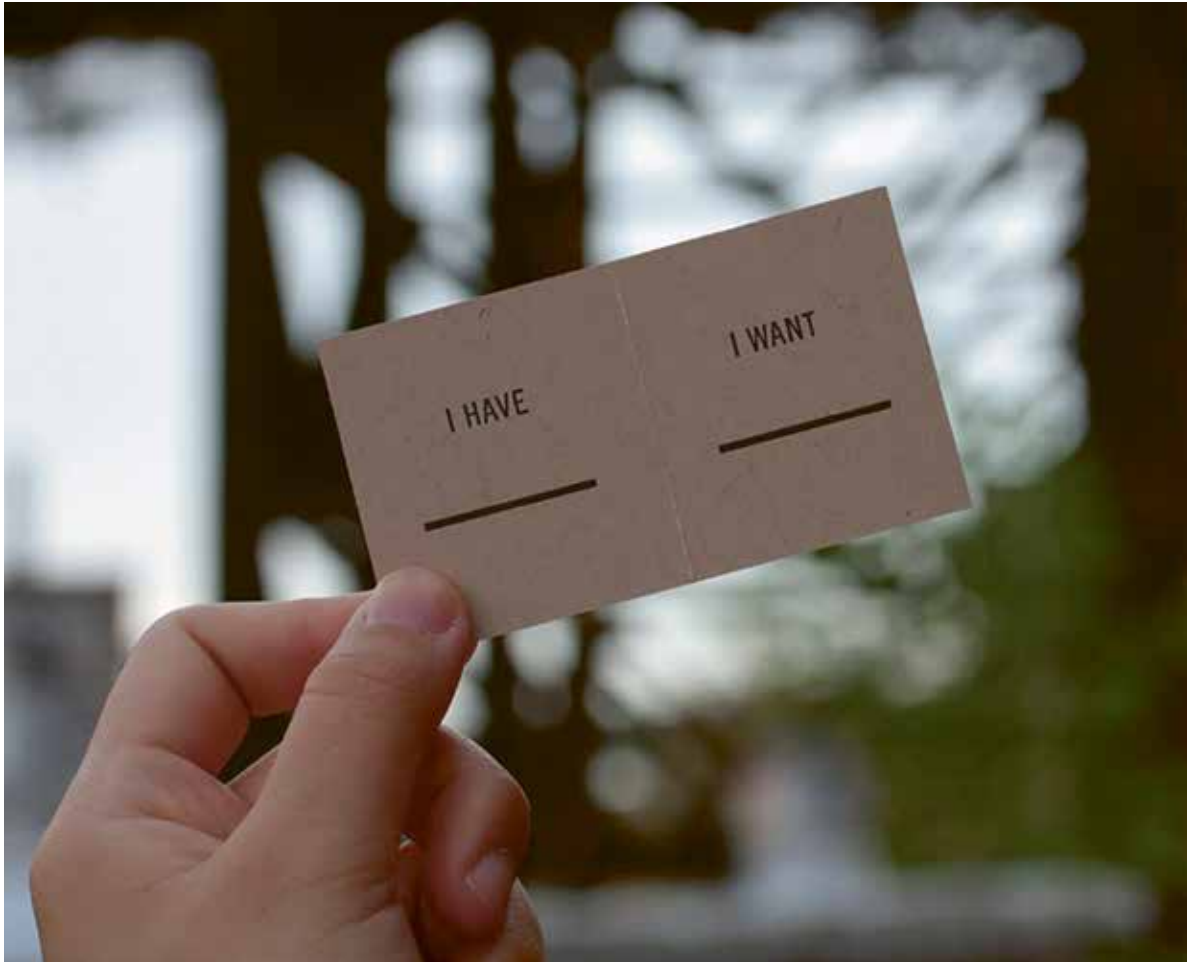


fig. 3-9
Business card for OurGoods.org,
2008, designed by Louise Ma and
Rich Watts.



OurGoods.org &
TradeSchool.coop

CAROLINE'S STRENGTHS/WEAKNESSES

Have no unenumerated expectations of individuals.

This is hard for me. I'm not sure that I KNOW everything I expect. I will keep thinking about it...this is what I can think of:

- Be RELIABLE: Show up, honor your word, etc.
- Be loyal. Give me credit and respect my work.
- Work hard!
- Hold me accountable. Work through problems with me. Address problems as they arise (this will be hard if we have short meetings and then represent the project publicly... working through the mission will help this. Perhaps we will agree through writing grants and testing our ideas in presentations/ interviews with friends).

Voice your own project-related strengths/interests/likes

- Understanding personality types/ needs—this facilitates project strategy/effect.
- One-on-One socializing/planning: I love meeting new people and have broad interests (weakness: I am TERRIBLE with names).
- Interests...Skills of my close friends: 5 Environmental Activists, 6 Public-Art/Project-Based Artists, 1 dancer/chef, 3 Architects, 1 Social Worker, 2

new media/web people, 3 graphic designers, 1 painter.

- I love exploring the city, sourcing materials, digging up information, finding a way IN...I go to too many lectures/workshops/tours and cannot stop myself.
- I'm pretty even-tempered and try to be nice to as many people as possible.
- I feel best when I sense that the community respects me, values my integrity (my priority is to be acknowledged for hard work and intelligence by the group).

Voice your own sensitivities/ areas with a slow learning curve/motivations.

- I have a bad long-term memory and hate myself for forgetting what I've learned.
- I have a pride issue with being told how to do things unless I ask for it—I am working on this. Basically, I would rather volunteer than be told.
- I may take on more than I can actually manage—I hope to deal with this. I gave you my schedule, but we can go through this again to predict time crunches! For example, I'm about to go MIA from March 18-30.
- I need to learn how to delegate group tasks (perhaps less relevant here).
- I procrastinate and build things

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- last minute—I HAVE to change this: this is less of a problem with OurGoods.org because I am managing it rather than building it!
- I HATE public speaking/dealing with groups. I'm trying to get better at it.
 - I have a complicated relationship to authority and access—I want **power**, but I distrust it. I have a hard time working with people who love hierarchy.

Know who you're dealing with:
my WORK

You can see my new work if I send it to you, but most of it is offline.

Know who you're dealing with:
my CONTACTS

These people can tell you a lot about me:

1. Christine Wang, my business partner in the studio space
2. Chris Kennedy, my friend/past co-worker
3. Natalie Jeremijenko, artist/past employer at NYU
4. Alexis Thompson, my current employer
5. Nancy Austin, my mom

Know what you need and when you need it.

- We need the code person now!
- But we need to fundraise to pay this code person first.
- I think our "**tactics of deployment**" need to be discussed.

JEN'S STRENGTHS/WEAKNESSES

I will strive to be:

- Reliable. When I say I'll do something, I'll do it.
- Competent. When I do something, I'll do it right.
- Clear. If I've said I'll do something and it turns out I can't, I'll tell you. If I have an expectation, I'll articulate it. If I have a problem, I'll talk about it.
- Honest. If I'm concerned about something, not sure of myself, or know I'm getting close to a discomfort area, I'll let you know. If I'm bad at something, I'll tell you. If I screw up, I'll admit it.
- Supportive. When I appreciate what you've done, I'll tell you so. If you are struggling with something, I'll do my best to help.
- Receptive. If you have feedback, I'll listen. My main expectation of a collaborative relationship is that both parties strive toward the above, value them, and work together to fulfill them.

Some strengths I think will help:

- When I make a commitment, I keep it. Period.
- I'm extremely organized, good with schedules and accountability.
- I'm good at public speaking, good at articulating ideas verbally and on paper.
- I do really well with groups.

- I'm really good at offering positive feedback.
- I handle conflict pretty well.
- I'm a really good manager, good at working toward a deadline. I have a good sense of my own time and what I can and can't realistically get done.

My weaknesses (that I know of):

- When I make a commitment, I keep it. Period. This can make me inflexible, and it sometimes means I don't know when to quit.
- I'm a control freak. I've been working hard on this for...ever, actually. At this point I'm pretty good at noticing when I'm control-freaking, but I am definitely capable of lapsing. This comes up the most when there isn't **trust**. I feel pretty good about our **trust** level at this point.
- I can get impatient. I'll want to do things in the most efficient way, which sometimes causes me to miss stuff I'd have seen if we'd been more exploratory.
- I have an excellent long-term memory, which sometimes translates into holding onto stuff too long.
- I like to keep moving forward—can be resistant to going back over ground I feel we've covered already.

Issues I/we should keep an eye on:

- I have many more obligations than you do. My partner and I are about to buy a place together that will require a lot of fixing up. I'm working 20 hours a week at a job I can't do other stuff at. And I'm trying to finish making an evening-length work. I work hard, smartly, and efficiently, but I don't think I have as much time to work as you do.
- I tend toward the very practical. I'm more interested in the practical aspects of this than in the philosophical aspects, whereas I think you're more interested in the philosophical aspects. That can be a good pairing as long as we both keep respecting both.
- I need this to generate income for me and you don't. If that looks like it's not going to happen, I'll have to ratchet my investment way down at some point (but I won't abandon the project, and I'll let you know in advance if/when that time approaches).

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Jennifer Wright Cook, Executive Director of The Field, 2020:

When I met you, I never imagined that you'd become one of those people that stick in my head and my heart. We meet so many people in our lives. Some folks say an "average" person meets 10,000 people. Someone else said it's more like 490. Whatever the number, how many people actually stick in you? I met you in 2008 when our work intersected. One day you said I was a "connector." It meant so much to me. I hadn't thought of myself that way. It felt like you saw me, the me beyond the me that worked with you. The me beyond the me that I thought made me me. That's something that you do. You see people. You see them beyond their [borders and boundaries](#). You look at them. You slow down and listen. You ask. You laugh BIG. You taught me so much. You came in talking about [barter](#) and collaboration, public objects and facilitating actions, accountability and expectations. I felt lost. I was so drawn to your belief and [optimism](#) but it was unfamiliar to me. I needed to move faster, I needed to draw lines in the sand, I needed to be the boss, to make decisions quickly, to get it done. I was in the thick of the non-profit NYC arts sector, as a [white](#), cisgendered, able-bodied woman with economic privilege. You showed me an inside-out, upside-down world. You didn't shove, or holler, you just lived and wondered. "We Are No Longer Strangers" is the title of the small book we wrote at the end of our official work time with you in 2010. That poetic title came from you, in an email you wrote to me about your work, our work together. It's [beautiful](#) because it declares our present state from inside our past. Dear you, you stick in my head and heart.

OurGoods.org &
TradeSchool.coop

In Jen Abrams' words:

I came to this process, as Caroline mentioned, through Jennifer Wright Cook's matchmaking. That by itself had to do with Jennifer seeing an alignment of how Caroline and I moved in the world. I think you can't underestimate the [power](#) of relationships to catalyze something like OurGoods.org.

In some ways I was a mismatch—fifteen years older than Rich, Caroline, and Louise and ten years older than Carl, in a very different phase of my life, and a performing artist rather than a visual artist. There were GenX/Millennial communication and cultural differences, and the [social expectations in the visual art world](#) are very different from those in the performing arts world. I had so much more experience, but the rest of the team had so much more time and energy, and they shared language and expectations that I didn't understand.

Part of what made it work was true care for each other as people. If our only focus had been the project, we wouldn't have made it 6 months. I wanted to be around Caroline's profound [optimism](#) and vision of a different world, Rich's sense of humor and intense commitment, Louise's sense of hilarity and magic, Carl's ability to see every situation positively. It was a real leap of faith—I barely knew Caroline, and Rich, Louise, and Carl were total strangers. I think it's really important to listen closely to your body when choosing [collaborators](#). The phrase is "[trust your gut](#)" for a reason, but it's not just your gut. Your whole body knows who you can work with and who you can't, and it will tell you if you listen.

Because I was older and more experienced, I had to find a delicate [balance between surrender](#)

Experiment

Commitment

The Challenge: Since the 2008 market crash, [cultural producers](#) have struggled to come to terms with the new economic landscape.

—Caroline Woolard and Jen Abrams, from Rockefeller Foundation's New York City Cultural Innovation Fund Grant Application, 2011

Collectively-
Initiated

and insistence. Ninety percent of the time, I needed to yield to the group—even if we were going down a path I’d gone down before unsuccessfully. There are things a person can’t know without doing them themselves, and linear progress wasn’t our goal. OurGoods.org had to be about developing everyone on the team’s capacity, and sometimes that meant winding up in a cul-de-sac I’d visited ten years ago. Learning to name that as a success was important for me.

Ten percent of the time, it was important for me to insist on something. I wish I had clear criteria for when to yield and when to insist, but I don’t. I know I got it wrong sometimes. For instance, I insisted that we use the word “barter,” and build one-to-one reciprocity into the system. At the time, I didn’t think people would trust a gift economy. I felt they needed to know what was in it for them. I think I was wrong. Other times I think I got it right—for instance, when it came to structuring certain things so that they could be understood by funders, even if it wasn’t the very best way for us to do it, and when it came to thinking about sustainability and burn-out.

When Rich, Louise, and Jen agreed to take on the project, at \$1k each for a year, I was thrilled. Jen and I made a pretty amazing team, working 2–4 days a week for many years. I think we were self-aware enough to sense that this would be possible when we first met and talked over our strengths and weaknesses. Jen Abrams taught me how to do public speaking, budgeting, accounting, hiring, and hone my professionalism in the nonprofit and performing arts worlds. I think I brought research and storytelling skills, commitment to high-quality design, passion and charisma, and the endless energy of my twenties to the project. Jen became my main collaborator from 2008–2014.

If politics is something that helps people think about the way power is organized, and the way they live it in their lives, then OurGoods is a political project.

—Caroline Woolard, 2010

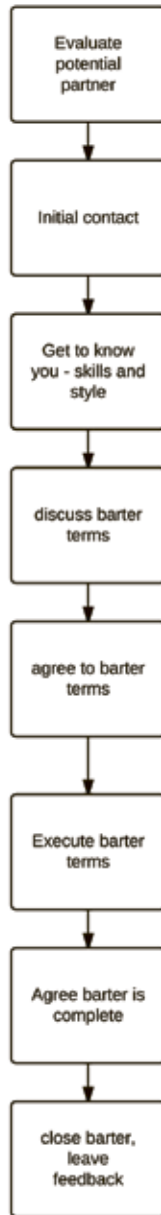
OurGoods.org &
TradeSchool.coop

fig. 3-10

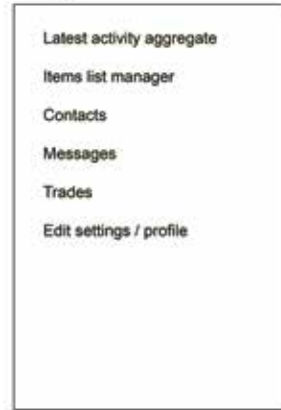
User experience wireframes and web sketches for OurGoods.org made by Louise Ma and Rich Watts in 2009.

The difference between a simple website, for example, an art portfolio, and a peer-to-peer Web 2.0 website like OurGoods.org is that OurGoods.org enables peer-to-peer communication. This means that each person must have a unique account, be able to log in, and have conversations with other users. To make the user experience fluid, designers, developers, and user experience experts need to create user experience maps, wire frames, and front and back end designs such as these.

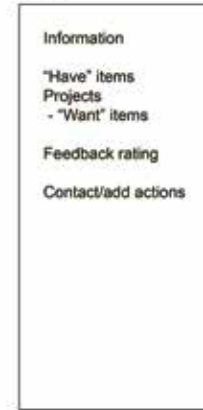
Ideal Barter



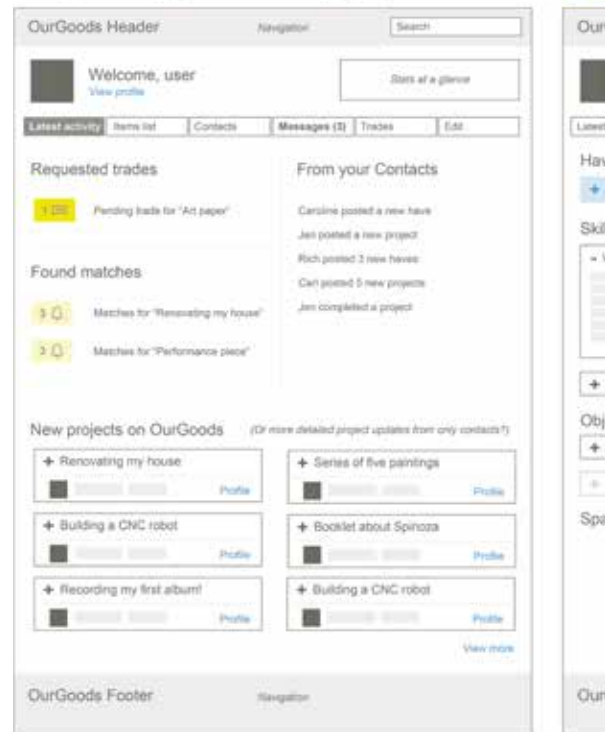
Dashboard



Profile



User logs into this page. This is the first page they see.



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Find/Browse

Browse

- Newly added have/want items
- Within the neighborhood (5mi)
- Latest active people
- Latest active projects

Search

- Projects
- People
- Wanted items
- Have items
- Within 1mi, 5mi, 10mi, etc

Ancillary pages

Blog and news	Help	About
Terms of service	Legal	Press?
Non-member home Register	Login Forgot pass	

Indigible "tokens" earned by another user. Notification of watch from OurGoods robot

Goods Header Navigation Search

Welcome, user [View profile](#) [Stats at a glance](#)

activity **Items list** Contacts Messages (3) Trades Edit

Items

Add another item

Items (2)

Web design [Stats](#) [Details](#)

Illustration [In progress](#)

Projects (1)

Art paper [1 item](#)

Open trading [Personal](#)

Items (0)

Wants

Add another project

- Performance piece [Stats](#) [Details](#) [1 item](#)
- lighting design
- 300 waf apoco stage
- 18th century prop
- digital photography
- [Add another item](#)

+ Renewing my issue [1 item](#)

Goods Footer Navigation

OurGoods Header Navigation Search

Welcome, user [View profile](#) [Stats at a glance](#)

Latest activity **Items list** Contacts Messages (3) Trades Edit

Contacts (8)

Stats Details	Stats Details	Stats Details	Stats Details
2 new items		1 new project	

Stats Details	Stats Details	Stats Details	Stats Details
2 new projects	8 new items		

OurGoods Footer Navigation

OurGoods Head

Welcome [View profile](#)

Latest activity [Items](#)

Messages from

- You, Rich Watts (2)
- Carl Teshian
- Jew Abrams
- Caroline Woolard, You

OurGoods Foot

OurGoods.org & TradeSchool.coop

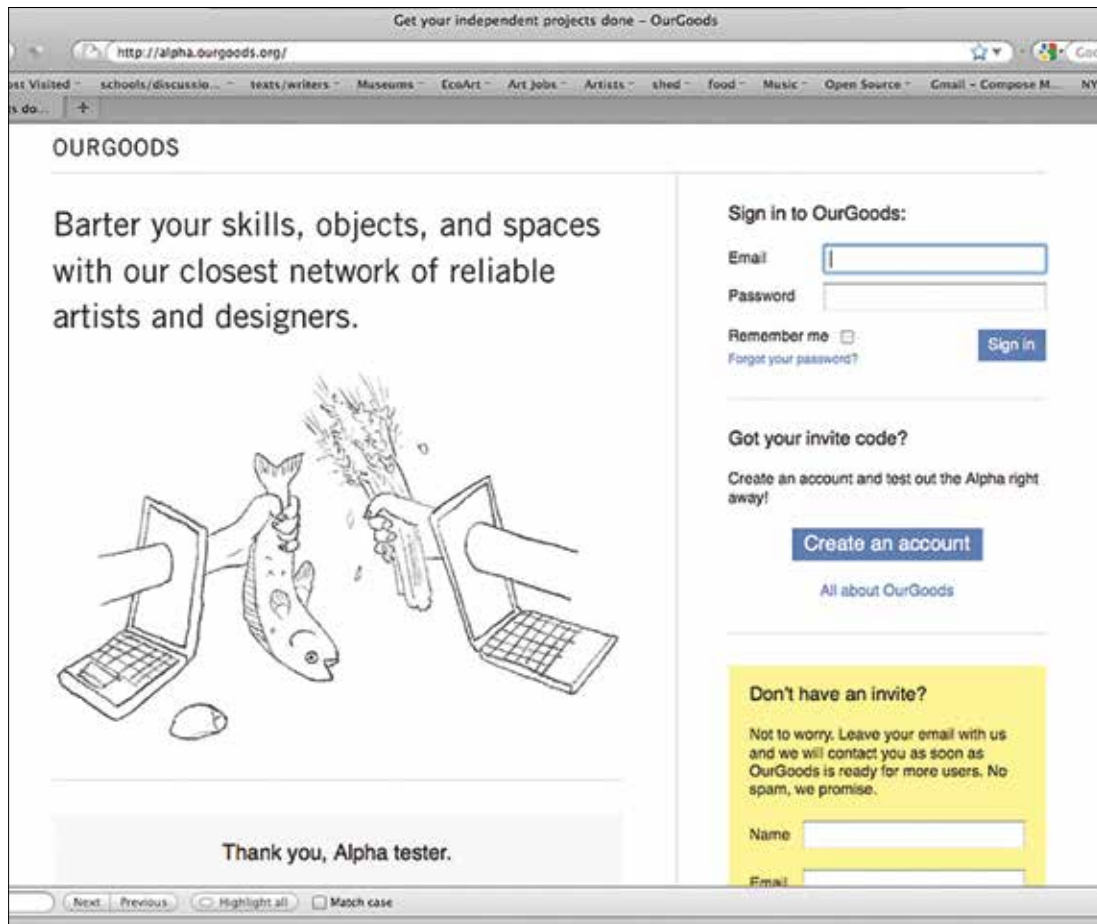


fig. 3-11
OurGoods.org alpha (original)
website, 2008, dimensions vari-
able. Courtesy of the artists.

Collectively-
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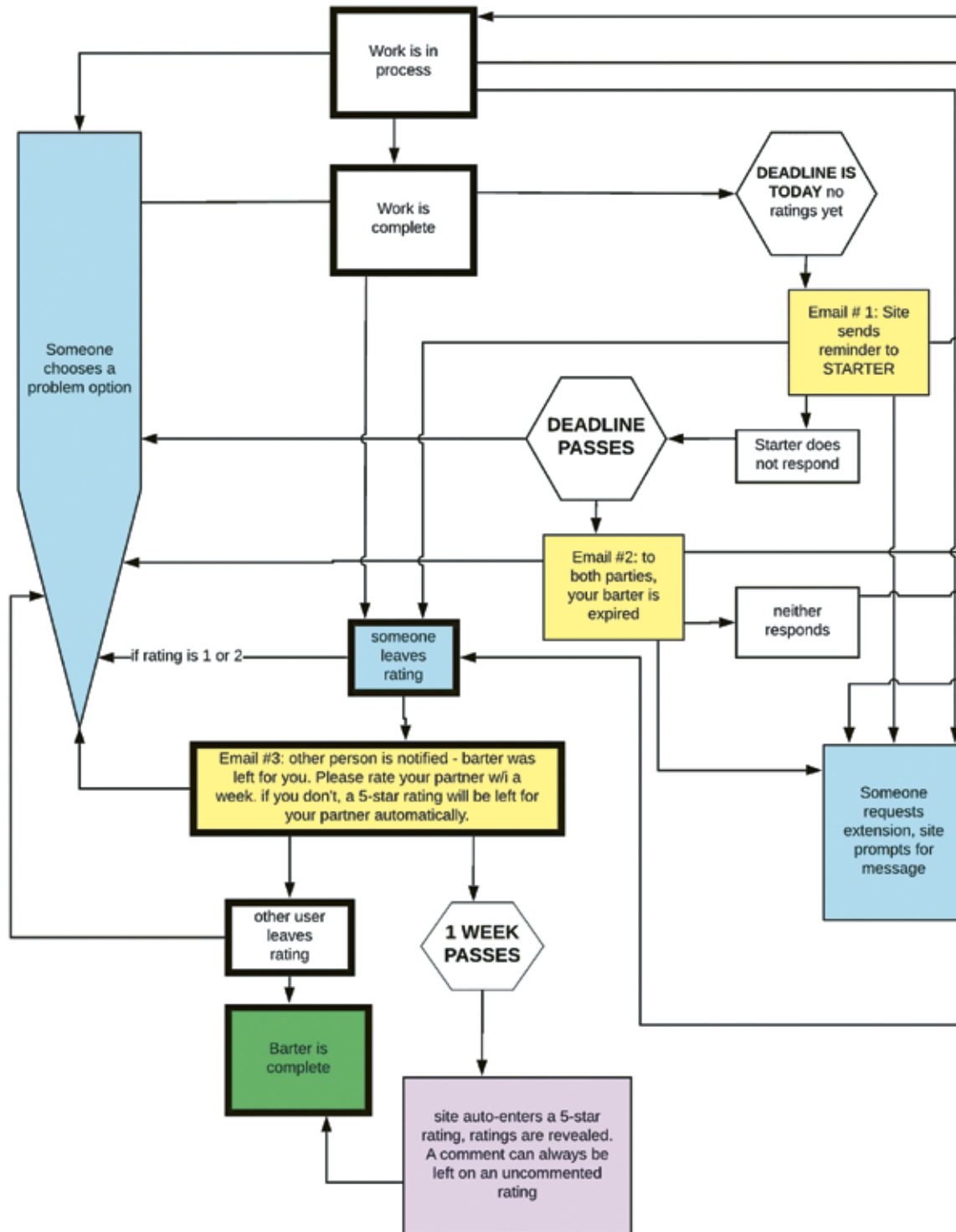
The dominant economy values the outputs of our production (completed artworks) far less than it values the inputs to our production (rehearsal space, materials, skill, time, energy). OurGoods sidesteps this persistent imbalance by helping [cultural producers](#) exchange directly with each other, creating an alternate economy based on shared values.

—Caroline Woolard and Jen Abrams, from Rockefeller Foundation's New York City Cultural Innovation Fund Grant Application, 2011

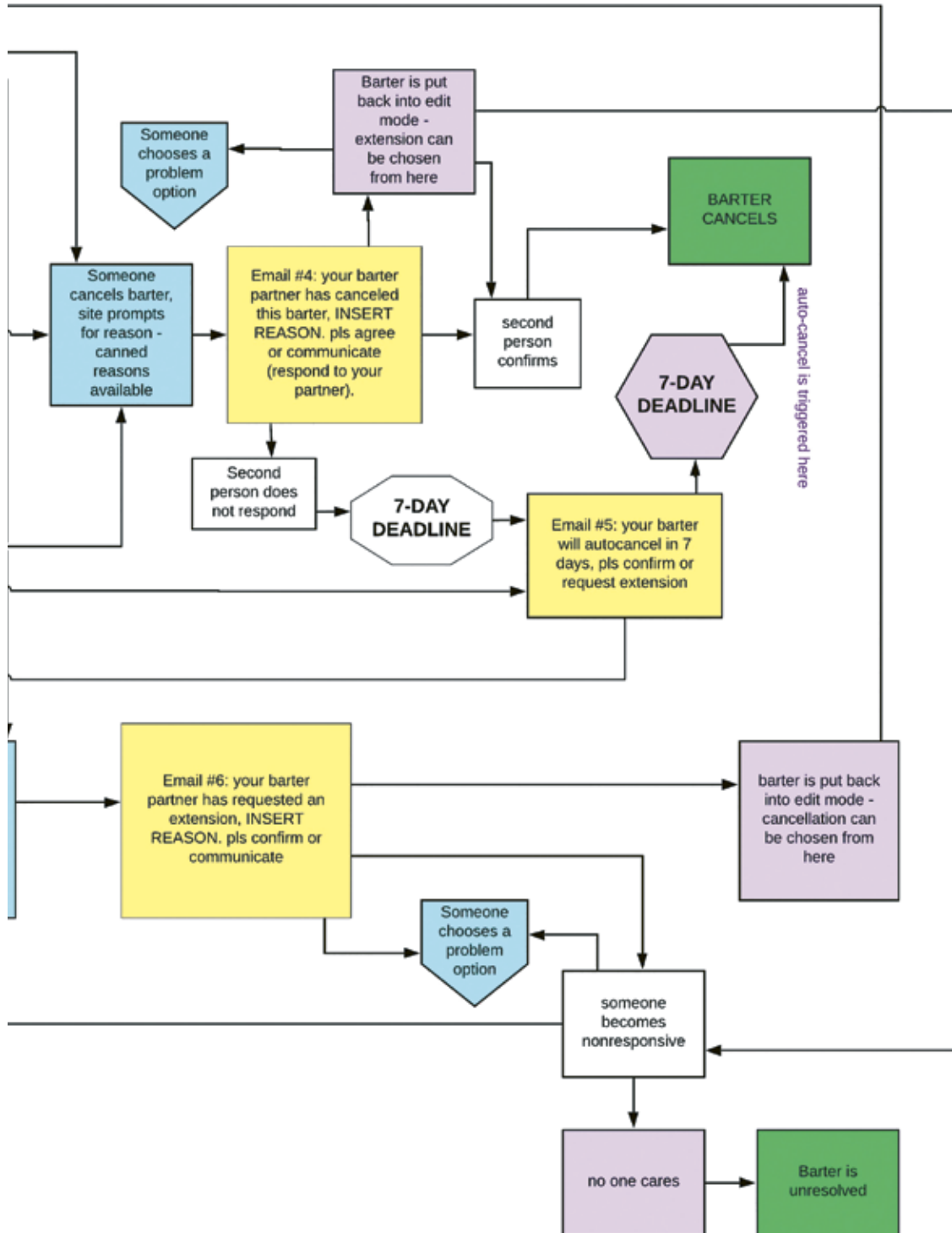
fig. 3-12 (overleaf)
[Wireframes](#), 2010, dimensions variable, OurGoods.org.
Courtesy of the artists.

OurGoods.org &
TradeSchool.coop

Idea in Public



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OurGoods.org & TradeSchool.coop

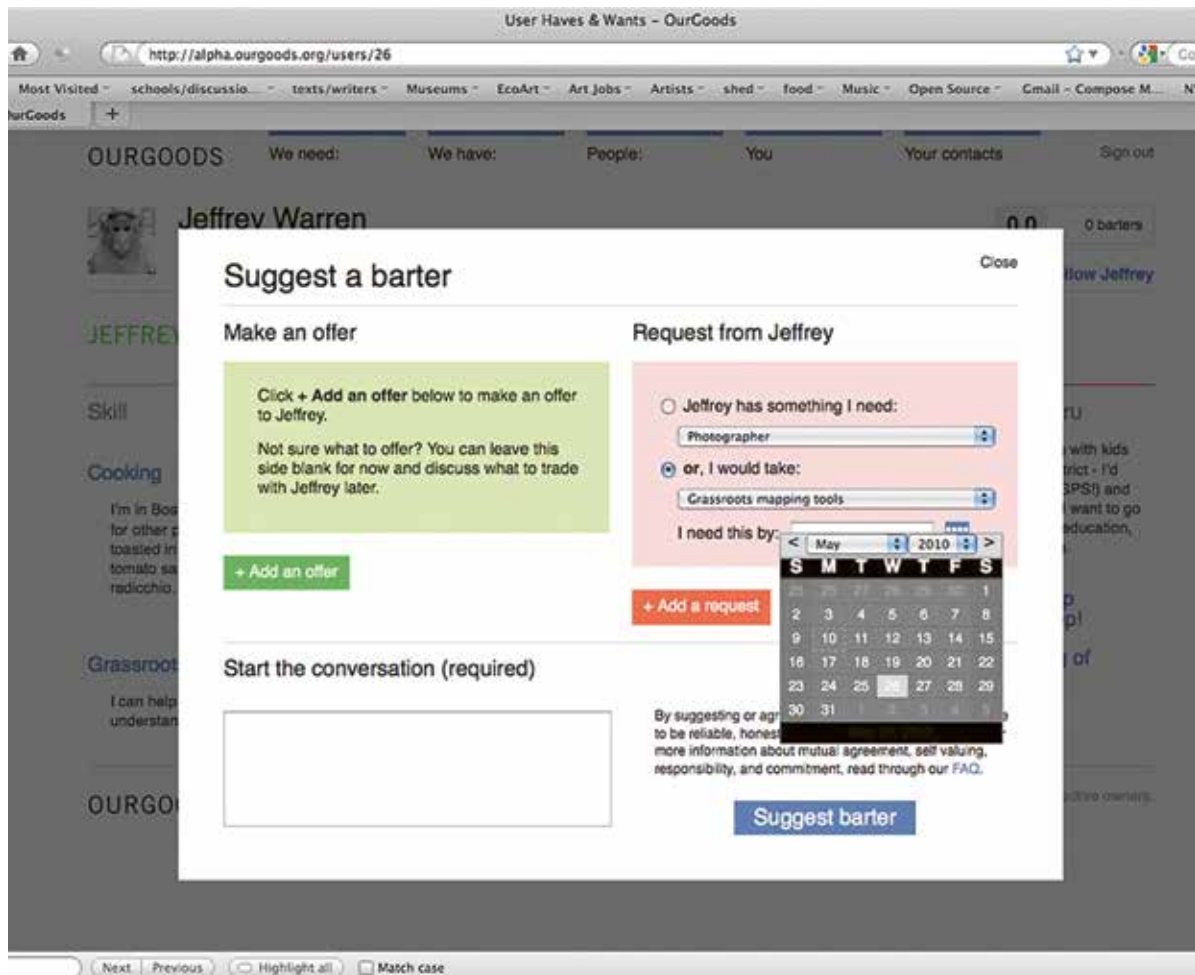


fig. 3-13
OurGoods.org alpha version of
the [website](#), screenshot, 2009,
dimensions variable.

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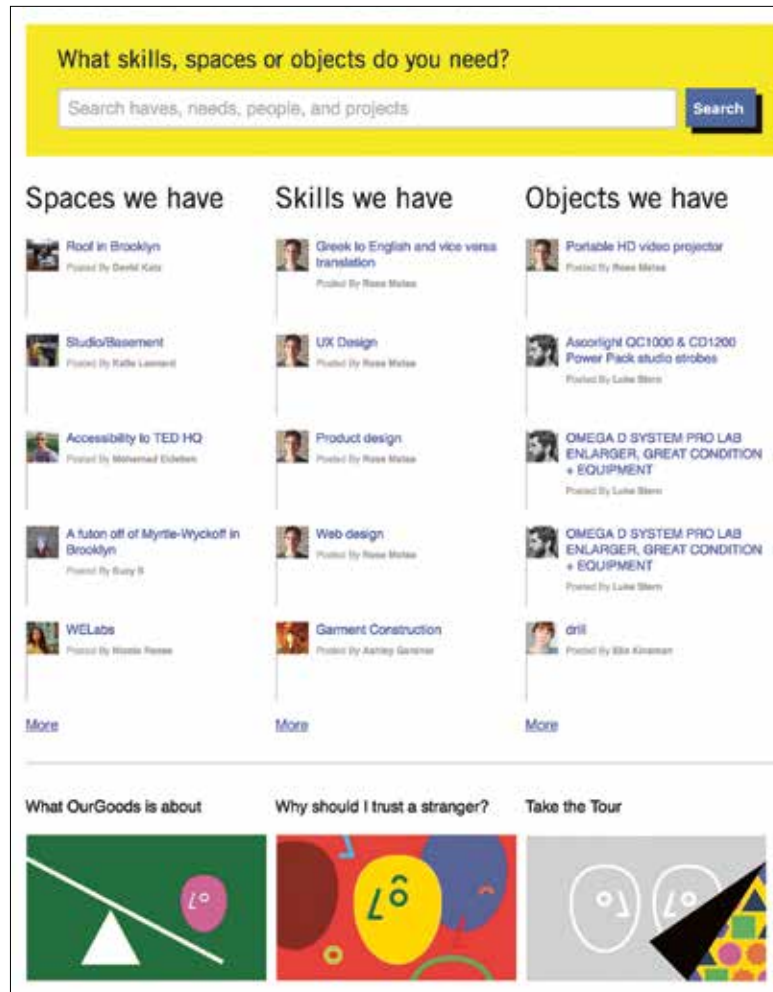


fig. 3-14
OurGoods.org front end home
page, beta version, 2011,
designed by Louise Ma
and Rich Watts, developed
by Carl Tashian.

It took a long time to find Carl Tashian, the computer engineer, but we did, and he was a perfect fit because he wanted to work on collaborative projects that mattered. In Carl Tashian's words:

OurGoods.org was a special project for me because of the quality of the collaboration. I had moved to New York a year earlier, hardly knowing anyone, and I learned through working with Caroline, Jen, Rich, and Louise that this kind of collaboration was really what I had come to the city for: people who cared as much as I did about building something great.

We gelled as a team really quickly. The five of us did not always agree on everything, so we learned to have **productive conflicts**. Our time together was very productive in general. There was a level of **trust** and commitment, mutual respect, and **role clarity** that made it possible for us to organize ourselves and get a lot done. OurGoods.org came to life quickly this way. We'd have these bursts of flowy productivity where we'd work late into the night at Rich's studio or Jen's apartment. We always ate well—whether it was good Chinese takeout, coffee and pie from around the corner, or something delicious that Jen cooked up. We laughed a lot, listened to music, and just jammed for hours. It's hard to ask for anything more than that in a creative endeavor.

The five of us did not always agree on everything, so we learned to have **productive conflicts**.

You can see, in our second application for \$25,000 from The Field, in 2009, that Jen had already taught me to write in a more "professional" **nonprofit** grant-ese vernacular.*

Timeframe

Commitment

More and more we're coming back to the importance of community building that's face to face. So in the same way that we meet around this table and we hold each other accountable based on mutual relationships of **trust**, we do a lot of in person **events** as a compliment to the software. It's not a replacement, it's an addition.

—Caroline Woolard, 2014

*

see CarolineWoolard.com for the rest of this document

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ERPA - APPLICATION COVER SHEET

1. LEAD ARTIST CONTACT INFORMATION (please type)

Name _____ Caroline Woolard _____

Company name (if applicable) _____ OurGoods.org _____

Alternate contact name and title _____ Jen Abrams, co-director _____

2. PROJECT SUMMARY

OurGoods is an innovative response to the crisis in funding brought on by the recession. It is an online community of artists that facilitates barter of skills, space, labor, and art objects. The site matches barter partners, provides accountability tools, and offers technical assistance resources. It is an instigator for generosity, a locus of empowerment, and an innovative model for supporting the work of artists. We request \$25,000 to complete the beta test and hard launch of the site in New York City, and to replicate the model in one medium-sized city by August 2010.

3. REQUEST AMOUNT \$ 25,000 TOTAL PROJECT BUDGET \$ 89,980

ERPA, Page 1 of 7



OurGoods.org &
TradeSchool.coop

Time frame

PHASE 3 PROGRESS REPORT - Charleston

WILLIAM CHERNOZHIKOV, Faculty, I prepared a rubric which will be prepared to allow for help... (text continues)

RESEARCHING THE HISTORY The first step was to research the history of the program... (text continues)

NEW CURRICULUM DESIGN The first step was to research the history of the program... (text continues)

MY WORK IN THE CLASSROOM RESEARCHERS The first step was to research the history... (text continues)

DETAILED EVALUATION AND REVISIONS The first step was to research the history... (text continues)

1884, Page 1 of 7

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1884, Page 1 of 7

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1884, Page 1 of 7

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1884, Page 1 of 7

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MY WORK IN THE CLASSROOM RESEARCHERS The first step was to research the history... (text continues)

1884, Page 1 of 7

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Accountability: The accountability tools and mediation techniques we have built into the site and the community will be tested in the first year and perfected in the second year. A structure for accountability is absolutely necessary to establish the trust required for successful barterers. Without it, the site will fail. Anonymity is not allowed, nor is an individual allowed to have more than one identity. Once a member's identity is verified by another user, the site offers extensive information so that members can choose their barter partners carefully. Each barter will be guided by an online contract with agreed-on expectations and completion dates. Members must give feedback on each barter and sign off on its completion to close the contract. Members can see how long another member has been on the site, how many barterers they have completed, whether they have expired incomplete contracts, and what feedback has been left by their past barter partners. The site's core team will offer mediation in cases of dispute, and in rare situations, reserve the right to remove a repeat offender from the site.

B) Long-Term Financial Sustainability

As we discussed in the Project Description, we believe this model is extremely fundable because of its enormous multiplier effect. Based on the expansion model described above, we anticipate it will cost an average of \$30,000 per city to replicate the project (see attached supplementary budget). Conservative projections show **\$800,000*** worth of goods and services supplied to artists as a direct result of funding. As funders seek to derive more and more value for each charitable dollar, OurGoods will provide an efficient and innovative solution. We also believe "the ask" to individual donors is very strong.

If fundraising efforts are unsuccessful, the site will still serve the community. Once the site is built, it is possible for it to run itself. Server space and coding updates to the site will cost less than \$4000/year, and will be comfortably covered by a small membership fee of \$10/year. The site will grow more slowly in that scenario, but we are confident it will grow.

Because the site requests ZIP code information from users, it can self-segment by area. If the need is great enough, new members could use the site to generate a network in their area spontaneously, without the assistance of the OurGoods team. We see this as a rockier path to replication, but a path nonetheless. It could yield interesting insights on how communities of need develop and organize themselves, and provide valuable lessons for the project as a whole.

Assuming modest funding, Jen Abrams and Caroline Woolard will become part-time employees of the organization in September 2010, and designers Louise Ma, Rich Watts, and Carl Tashian will become paid consultants. OurGoods will raise money locally and nationally to fund the \$30k rollout in each new community. Once rollout is complete, OurGoods as an organization will require \$10k-\$15k/year per city to pay staff and consultants to continue to develop the model, expand server space, add new features to the site, troubleshoot as community-specific problems arise, and find new ways for the site to serve all OurGoods members. This could be supported by membership fees or by local and national fundraising. We are also open to exploring carefully curated advertising (for instance, by local organizations serving artists, and/or by individuals and institutions promoting performances and exhibitions). And we are open to exploring being subsumed by a larger arts service organization, if a good match can be found.

c) Supplementary: Please find the OurGoods Future Budget attached.

* Calculation as follows: 1000 participating members complete an average of four barterers per year. Barter values range from \$60 (\$30 per partner) for an exchange of 3 hours of flyer distribution for 3 hours of data entry, to \$2000 (\$1000 per partner) for an exchange of a basic portfolio website for a 2-camera shoot of a performance. Assume a very conservative mean barter value of \$200 for an exchange of massage therapy for a small pottery piece. In the first year, artists will receive **\$800,000** worth of goods and services.

ERPA, Page 7 of 7



OurGoods.org &
TradeSchool.coop

In 2011, we applied for even more money for OurGoods.org. We applied for \$100,000 from the Rockefeller Foundation’s New York City Cultural Innovation Fund, and we got it! It came at precisely the right moment, as the five of us had met the night before and had decided that, without funding, we could not continue to give 2–3 days a week to the project as volunteers. Here is what Jen and I wrote, and the actual budget that we used, going forward.*

Timeframe



Welcome, Jen Abrams **Applications are due Monday, March 7th, 2011.**

[Home](#) | [Change Password](#) | [FAQ](#) | [Guidelines](#) | [Logout](#)

[Guidelines](#) [Contact](#) [Organization](#) [Project](#) [Lead Project Personnel](#) [Budget](#) [Cultural Data Project](#) [Print](#) [Submit](#)

Print

You may [Print](#) a copy of this application for your records.

When you are done, proceed to [Submit](#).

Main Contact

Honorific	Ms .
First Name	Jen
Last Name	Abrams
Title	Co-Founder

Study

*

see CarolineWoolard.com for the rest of this document

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ORGANIZATIONAL BIO

OurGoods.org is an online [barter](#) network for artists. As the 2008 financial crisis hit, OurGoods.org's co-founders asked two questions:

1) How can we facilitate a stronger, more sustainable network of [cultural producers](#)?

2) How can we value cultural abundance in an economy driven by scarcity?

OurGoods was born in response to these questions.

...

MISSION STATEMENT

OurGoods is a [barter](#) network for creative people. Our [barter](#) community offers a sustainable model for cultural production by making it possible for artists to create an entire project outside of the cash economy. We address artists' immediate needs by connecting individuals who can help each other, and we address artists' long-term needs by helping them create a support network based on mutual respect.

...

OVERVIEW AND STORY

Please describe the proposed project/process. What challenge is this project addressing? What would be the impact of this project and who would benefit from this impact? How will this project contribute to New York City?:

The Challenge: Since the 2008 market crash, [cultural producers](#) have struggled to come to terms with the new economic landscape.

...

A wide range of foundation leaders, technical assistance peers, and other artists see OurGoods.org as an elegant and essential answer to a longstanding problem. The dominant economy values the outputs of our production (completed artworks) far less than it values the inputs to our production (rehearsal space, materials, skill, time, energy). OurGoods.org sidesteps this persistent imbalance by helping [cultural producers](#) exchange directly with each other, creating an alternate economy based on shared values.

...

Because support for projects is based on relationships and common goals, rather than on scarcity or the [aesthetics](#) of gatekeepers, work that is difficult to fund traditionally can thrive.

...

As individual [skills](#), spaces, and items for [barter](#) are aggregated on OurGoods, we will be able to see where we need to build capacity in our community, individually and as a network. We will research existing

OurGoods.org &
TradeSchool.coop

opportunities for users to build their **skills**, and seek out experts within and outside of our community to offer skill-building workshops to our users.

...

INNOVATION

The Resource Sharing Landscape: Resource sharing has exploded in recent years, driven by new technology and the growth of social media, and by the economic crisis. Though this trend is growing, it is not yet adequately serving independent artists. Existing **barter** and recycling sites (e.g. **Freecycle**, Craigslist, SwapTree, Scoodi) focus on manufactured objects and allow users to operate anonymously, without **trust**. Existing **mutual aid** systems like time banking (e.g. TINY, Time|Bank) are not widely used by our peers, in part because our peers do not consider all hours as equal for every task. Most sites ignore skill-sharing entirely, and no sites are built exclusively to connect the creative community in non-cash working relationships.

Our Organization: The five co-founders of OurGoods have formed a powerful R&D team, working towards this site for the past two years. Carl Tashian and Jen Abrams joined the group with years of experience in resource sharing communities,

and the other three co-founders (Caroline Woolard, Rich Watts, and Louise Ma) have spent the past two years implementing TradeSchool.coop, (a project of OurGoods.org, described in the "Communication" section).

...

When money mediates transactions, the value is finite. When we **barter**, we get the value of the object/service and we form relationships while engaging with the creative landscape. These relationships connect artists to new professional opportunities, form the basis of friendships that support artists' lives as well as their art, and help us respond to changing conditions within our community. These relationships intertwine to create a network that allows artists to make their work regardless of the economic climate.

Barter creates value, but it also causes us to rethink our relationship to value in a market economy. The market sets prices/renumeration for cultural production that bear little resemblance to the value artists put on each others' work, or to the value derived by their audience. By allowing users to self-value **skills** and objects, we create a new model for valuing cultural production and for legitimizing the work of artists outside institutions and

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art markets. Within this alternative economy, we can increase cultural dialogue and create an environment of abundance and community.

...

RISKS

Describe any potential risks associated with this project and how you would [mitigate](#) them:

The two main risks to this project are not reaching a critical mass of active users, and not being able to sustain the project after CIF funding.

...

BUDGET

If you receive a smaller amount than requested, what would your contingency plan be?:

OurGoods is a project of passion for all five co-founders. We have committed many thousands of volunteer hours to this project, and will continue to volunteer our time to make OurGoods successful. Our staff is currently mostly unpaid.

The scale of the project we have proposed assumes that we can begin to pay ourselves modestly for our work. If we are given less than we have requested, we will adjust the scale to reflect that reality. Our usership will grow more slowly,

features will be added less frequently, and the overall output and quality of the site will be reduced.

We believe our team has the [skills](#) and experience required to make OurGoods.org a successful stand-alone organization. However, if it serves our mission, we would be open to being absorbed into a larger organization.

...

Although this budget includes part-time salaries for OurGoods.org co-founders, it does so at a rate significantly below what we would earn for the same in another organization. \$8k of the in-kind income reflects home office expenses donated by the co-founders to the project. The remainder reflects the difference between the market value of the work of OurGoods.org co-founders and what they will be paid. Payment goes up in Year 2, so in-kind goes down.

Timeframe

My Name: _____
My Address: _____
My Phone: _____

My Education: _____

My Career: _____

My Interests: _____

My Values: _____

My Goals: _____

My Strengths: _____

My Weaknesses: _____

My Personality: _____

My Relationships: _____

My Community: _____

My Future: _____

My Reflection: _____

My Name: _____
My Address: _____
My Phone: _____

My Education: _____

My Career: _____

My Interests: _____

My Values: _____

My Goals: _____

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My Weaknesses: _____

My Personality: _____

My Relationships: _____

My Community: _____

My Future: _____

My Reflection: _____

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ORGANIZATIONAL BUDGET

OurGoods proposal to the
Mertz-Gilmore Foundation

	ACTUAL	SECURED	PROJECTED
	2011	2012	2012
INCOME			
The Field ERPA regrant	\$20,000	\$0	\$0
Rockefeller Cultural Innovation Fund	\$25,000	\$50,000	\$25,000
Rockefeller Brothers Fund	\$0	\$35,000	\$50,000
Mertz-Gilmore Foundation	\$0	\$0	\$30,000
Lower Manhattan Cultural Council	\$0	\$875	\$2,500
Department of Cultural Affairs	\$0	\$0	\$30,000
National Endowment for the Arts	\$0	\$5,000	\$5,000
Individual Donations	\$0	\$700	\$1,000
Earned Income	\$5,900	\$7,100	\$10,000
TOTAL INCOME	\$50,900	\$98,675	\$153,500
EXPENSE			
Personnel			
Co-Executive Director	\$7,163	\$23,000	\$28,000
Co-Executive Director	\$11,075	\$23,000	\$28,000
Graphic Design and User Experience	\$8,863	\$12,000	\$16,000
Site Engineering	\$8,028	\$20,000	\$40,000
Front End Development	\$8,028	\$11,000	\$16,000
Fringe	\$0	\$0	\$4,200
TOTAL PERSONNEL	\$43,157	\$89,000	\$128,000
OTHER			
Fiscal Sponsor Fees	\$3,501	\$4,329	\$9,975
Bank Fees	\$77	\$100	\$100
Office Expense	\$74	\$100	\$200
Travel and Transportation	\$583	\$200	\$600
Server Fees	\$543	\$725	\$1,000
Marketing	\$283	\$985	\$2,550
Consultants	\$585	\$600	\$3,000
Materials and Supplies	\$1,050	\$1,000	\$1,200
Partner Organizations	\$0	\$0	\$3,000
Misc	\$10	\$1,000	\$3,000
TOTAL OTHER	\$6,706	\$9,039	\$24,625
TOTAL EXPENSE	\$49,863	\$98,039	\$152,625
Surplus/Deficit	\$1,037	\$636	\$875
IN KIND			
Personnel	\$76,843	\$31,000	\$8,000

Budget Notes

Income: All income for FY12 is secured. Income for FY13 is projected, with the exception of the Rockefeller CIF funds, which are secured. The grant from The Field was a limited-time program, and is no longer available. The grant from the NEA in FY12 was a partnership grant for \$10k. \$5k of that grant came to OurGoods.org, and the other \$5k went to our partner organization, Fourth Arts Block.

Personnel: OurGoods.org is ramping up its [compensation](#) to a more sustainable level. In FY12, all personnel will work as independent contractors. By FY13 the Co-Executive Directors will become salaried employees. The fringe line reflects taxes for those two positions. The Graphic Design, Site Engineering and [Front End](#) Development positions relate directly to the building of the [website](#), and will continue to be contract positions. The FY13 budget shows increased workload based on the activities included in this proposal.

Other: Server fees increase as traffic on the site increases. Marketing increases significantly in FY13 to reflect project activities. Consultants increases in FY13 to reflect the video portion of the proposed project.

In Kind: This line shows the difference between the market value of [labor](#) provided to OurGoods.org and the payments to the OurGoods.org team. In order to make OurGoods.org sustainable, we need to significantly reduce the number of hours the team is working for free. This line shows our progress toward sustainable [compensation](#).

OurGoods.org &
TradeSchool.coop

From this moment on, Jen and I worked in-person, at her [house](#), around two days a week, and we worked remotely as things came in, throughout the week. We made the following kinds of agreements with Rich, Louise, and Carl:

June 12, 2011

Hi all,

Rockefeller expects three major site updates in the next 12 months. We have \$16k for each of you to make that happen.

1. What we're envisioning is three 10-day coding caves: one now, one in December and one next March/April. The \$16k covers those three sessions (plus some travel money). Can you tell us: Are those three coding cave sessions doable for you guys? When would you know? Is Louise's concurrent availability important and if so, Louise, are you available?

2. If they are doable, when could the first one happen? What can you envision getting accomplished in the first session? In the second?

[Looking](#) forward to hearing from you—we're incredibly excited to suddenly have all this momentum!

Jen

While, in 2011, OurGoods.org had more money that we could have imagined a year earlier, it was not enough funding to keep the best computer engineers around. By the end of 2012, Carl had many offers for web development jobs, and they all paid so much more than OurGoods.org. He eventually took one, and we took years trying to find developers who could work at the same level that he had. We learned that we would have to pay a developer to rewrite much of the code that Carl had written, to update it, which meant that we were spending money to maintain the site. We had not realized that you could spend

NOTE:

We also applied for funding from the CUE Foundation and from Creative Capital, among many other applications, but those applications did not advance very far. I began to understand that there is a real difference between a service organization and an art project, and that OurGoods.org was a [nonprofit](#) in the [eyes](#) of funders.

Study

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money without adding functionality to the site. We learned a lot about the expectations that developers have about creating the smallest “feature” possible and that we really had to pair down our expectations of the site in order to save money.

By 2014, Rich Watts had started his own company and could not focus on OurGoods.org, and Louise Ma and I were both deeply involved in other work. By 2016, we decided to shut down the software.

June 17, 2016

Beloved OurGoods team,

It’s time to shut down our software. Caroline sent me this article by Christina Xu called Every Project Deserves a Good Death (2015) a while ago, and I found it to be quite profound. I’ve been thinking about it ever since.

Caroline and I have had a bunch of conversations, all of which lead to this: It’s time to shut down our software. So we wanted you to see the letter we are sending to our members next week before it went out. We also wanted to tell you that we are going to work on some kind of documentation of the project that will live at www.ourgoods.org, so that the project will not just disappear.

I wanted to tell you (and I’m sure Caroline will concur), that the five of us changed my life. OurGoods as a project changed my life, but before OurGoods was OurGoods, it was the five of us, holed up for an uncountable number of hours, hammering out visions and relationships, and what is life if not that. I’ll be forever grateful to you all, and you will always be my family, regardless of how much

As individual [skills](#), spaces, and items for [barter](#) are aggregated on OurGoods, we will be able to see where we need to build capacity in our community, individually and as a network.

—Caroline Woolard and Jen Abrams, from Rockefeller Foundation’s New York City Cultural Innovation Fund Grant Application, 2011

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distance and time might grow between any of us in particular.

Together (and with so much love),
Jen

In December of 2009, Rich, Louise, and I decided to run an experiment “on the side” of our work with OurGoods.org. Jen and Carl did not have time to take on another project. Then, something unusual happened. This “experiment on the side” ended up being far more popular than OurGoods.org, lasting ten years, being replicated in many countries, and involving over 20,000 people—all without any funding.

Rich had been invited to do something in a storefront space, and he opened up the opportunity to Louise and I. We decided to run a learning-space on a [barter](#). We called it “Trade School,” with the “trade” being about exchange, but also, about “trades,” or, vocational education. The one-to-one [barter](#) network OurGoods.org led us to start TradeSchool.coop, a self-organized learning platform that ran on a [barter](#) system from 2009–2019: <http://tradeschool.coop/story>.

This “experiment on the side” ended up being far more popular

It started as a month-long storefront space with classes during nights and weekends, but it ended up being a long-term project. I think it worked because the idea solved three primary issues we were having at OurGoods.org. We felt that one-on-one [barter](#)s were difficult for artists, designers, and [craftspeople](#) because they were: (1) open-ended, online negotiations between two people about what is a “fair” exchange, (2) requiring that both people show up in person, and (3) no clear time or location to meet. At TradeSchool.coop, students agreed to bring whatever the teacher requested, if half of the students did not show up, the teacher would still receive something in exchange, and we hosted a [beautiful](#) space where strangers could meet.

I would like to join
Business School for Artists
 on Sunday, January 25th, from 6 to 7 PM.

I can offer the following:

- Web, Twitter, and Facebook author marketing and social networking tutorial
- Music recommendations
- Vegetarian recipes
- Help knowing how to keep up with cool events in New York

My name is

and my phone number is

my email address is

I understand that by joining this class I agree to provide what I have offered above in exchange for my instructors time and knowledge. I also promise to show up for class (on time) because I know that class space is limited and a seat is being saved for me.

JOIN or [cancel](#)

TUESDAY
 1 - 27

6-7 PM ▶ Composting: All You Want to Know

fig. 3-15
 TradeSchool.coop user experience.

OurGoods.org &
 TradeSchool.coop

TRADE SCHOOL

TODAY 1-25

6-7 PM ▾ **Business School for Artists**
Taught by Amy Whitaker

An introduction to finance and economics for artists. Much the same way everyone is an artist, everyone is a business person. This isn't a class in how to do your taxes or market your work but how people believe economics works as a system.

I have both an MBA and an MFA in painting. I used to give these lectures as lunchtime talks to fellow painters at the Slade in London. The book of the lectures is sold at Printed Matter.

To barter, I would like: web, Twitter, Facebook author marketing and social networking tutorial, music recommendations, vegetarian recipes, and help knowing how to keep up with cool events in New York. I am functionally 85 when it comes to understanding new-fangled technology, but an eager student. Or, you can volunteer to bring snacks or drinks to class. Cookies and beer are traditional.

JOIN

MONDAY 1-26

6-7 PM ▶ **Splinters and Logs: Building Out a Studio Space**

FULL

TUESDAY 1-27

6-7 PM ▶ **Composting: All You Want to Know**

6-7 PM ▶ **Preserving Function in an Ornamental Wilderness:
Foraging and Preserving "Wild" Foods from NYC Streets**

WEDNESDAY 2-1

5-10 PM ▶ **Demonstration District**

5-7 PM ▶ **The nuts and bolts guide to putting together an exhibition**

5-7 PM ▶ **FORESIGHT IS 2020**

FULL

Experience

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I worked with Cooper Union graduates (Rich Watts and Louise Ma at first, and also, later on, Christian Diaz and Aimee Lutkin), as well as generous and rigorous artist and computer engineer Or Zubalsky, and the incredible systems-thinker and curator Rachel Vera Steinberg. I have written about this work at length in a book I edited called *TRADE SCHOOL: 2009–2019*.

As majority Cooper graduates, we connected the cost of tuition to the education a student receives. I like to say that there is a “[pedagogy of payment](#)” that must be explored in the economies and administrative structures of schools, accredited or not. Through TradeSchool.coop, I learned from great educators and helped groups open similar self-organized schools to understand the open-source software and the principles of self-organization that we were using in New York and adapt it according to their contexts in thirty cities internationally, from Athens to Pietermaritzburg, Glasgow, and Quito. My excitement for education has to do as much with economic justice and self-governance as it has to do with pedagogy; for me, they are inseparable.

While OurGoods.org and TradeSchool.coop ran for many years, we eventually closed both projects due to a lack of market-rate funding for the top-notch computer engineers who are required to keep the software up-to-date. We simply could not raise enough money through grant funding to pay computer engineers, and we did not establish a [nonprofit](#) board with people who would regularly give us money to sustain the software and the administrative work required to make the [barter](#) network run online and in person.

fig. 3-16

[Front end](#) of TradeSchool.coop website, designed by Louise Ma and Rich Watts, 2010.

OurGoods.org &
TradeSchool.coop

Here is some writing I did in 2015 (published in the book *TRADE SCHOOL: 2009-2019*) which I hope helps people think through the implications of starting an online platform.

Idea in Public

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SO YOU WANT TO START AN
ONLINE PLATFORM
By Caroline Woolard, 2015

Dear founder,

I'm glad to hear about your idea for an online platform. Congratulations! I'm sure we both agree that a diversity of opinions is a good thing, and that platforms should benefit their participants, as participation is what makes an online platform valuable. What follows are a few questions that I wish someone had asked me when I started four multi-year projects.

I am sharing these four questions, along with bits of advice, because I hope that you will succeed in contributing toward the cooperative culture we want to see. To live in a [democratic society](#), we all need more experiences of [democracy](#) at work, in school, and at home. Thank you for helping push the cooperative movement forward.

You will notice that a lot of what follows also speaks to founders of non-profit organizations or [social impact businesses](#). I am writing this especially for young, educationally-privileged people who have big ideas but are newcomers to the neighborhood they live in. This reflects my own experience as a college graduate, waking up to working class histories in New York City while trying to build cooperative software and resource-sharing projects.

It took me a while to learn outside my immediate group of friends, to reach beyond the academy and beyond the [Internet](#) to learn.

1. CAN YOU MAKE A PLATFORM FOR AN EXISTING CO-OP?

In a culture that values ideas over [practices](#), it might be hard to see the existing cooperatives around you. But, I promise you, there are many systems of [mutual aid](#) and cooperation nearby. These "platforms" are systems of self-determination and survival are often created by people who have been systematically denied resources through institutionalized racism, sexism, and classism (read about [redlining](#) if you don't know what that is). The credit unions, [land trusts](#), worker-owned businesses, [rotating lending clubs \(susus\)](#), community gardens, and [freedom schools](#) in your neighborhood may not have great [web-sites](#), but they are incredible cooperative platforms that you can learn from and with.

These initiatives are often not lifestyle choices made by educationally privileged people, and will therefore not be written up in *The New York Times*, but they are robust and powerful community networks with organizers who might be interested in adding an online platform to their work. Here is an often-overlooked challenge: try to join and add to existing cooperative platforms, rather than building your own from scratch. The result

OurGoods.org &
TradeSchool.coop

will likely last longer as it will be informed by the deep wisdom of existing cooperative community norms, roles, and rules. Perhaps we need something like the Center for Urban Pedagogy for cooperative software—an organization that matches grassroots groups with developers to build software that is driven by community need.

2. WHO WILL BUILD THE COOPERATIVE PLATFORM?

Let's say that organizers at your local credit union, [land trust](#), cooperative developer, community garden, or freedom school are interested in building an online cooperative platform to add to their ongoing work. Or, they confirm your hunch that the cooperative platform you want to build is necessary. How will you form a team that can make this software come to life?

I have found that innovation occurs most readily in small teams with shared goals but different skill sets. Big groups, on the other hand, are good for education and organizing work, and for refining existing platforms. But to innovate, I like to work in core teams of three to six people, as this allows for deep relationships, [shared memory](#), and relatively fast decision-making, since each person can speak for ten to twenty minutes per hour in [meetings](#). The collective Temporary Services says that every person you add to the group doubles the amount of time it takes to make

a decision. So, I say: build a small group of rigorous, generous experts whose past work demonstrates that they are aligned with the cooperative platform you want to make. Ask the larger group to consent to the expertise of your small team, and ensure that your small team will make room for feedback from the big group along the way.

Now, build your team! Find people who are better than you in their area of expertise. At the very least, you will need: 1) a Project Manager to help with scheduling [events](#), facilitating [meetings](#), and tracking budgets; 2) a Communications Pro to [craft](#) a clear message and recruit people to try out the platform as it develops; 3) a Designer (or two) to make the [front end beautiful](#), 4) a Developer (or two) to develop the software and annotate it so that other people can add to it in the future; and 5) Advisors—one per area of expertise above, as well as more who have strong connections to the community you aim to work with. Meet with your core team on a weekly, if not daily basis, and with your advisors on a monthly or quarterly basis.

You are likely the Communications Pro or the Project Manager, since you are reading this letter. Find advisors who are retired, or far older than you, and who have seen the field change and are widely respected for their work. Learn about programming languages—which languages (Ruby, Python, etc.) have active development communities, and which languages are most likely to

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be interoperable with future cooperative platforms. Find developers who have worked on social justice projects in the past. If you are a non-profit with limited funds, watch out for developers who want to get paid market rate, as developers and project managers (like you) should believe in the project equally and should take an equal pay cut. Watch out for developers who say they can build the site quickly in a week or two, during a public “hackathon” or “sprint,” because if they do that, the site will be a sketch, not capable of growing. The site needs to be built well, annotated well, and be understandable to future developers.

3. HOW MUCH TIME AND MONEY DO YOU HAVE?

As you build your team, be honest with yourself about your existing priorities, and the likelihood that your life will change in the coming months or in a year or two. To gauge our availability to work on TradeSchool.coop, we did an exercise where each core member wrote a list of their top life priorities, including family, friends, health, volunteer projects, art, hobbies, and day jobs. This allowed us to be more honest with ourselves and each other about the amount of time we had to work on our project, which parts of our life were unknown, and also our reasons for doing the project.

Plan for turnover by having clear systems of documentation and open

conversations about how to bring in people who might join the core team when someone has to leave. Be sure that the Developer(s) code in teams, or that an Advisor looks over the code, so that it is intelligible to your other Developers. Be sure that the Project Manager and Communications Pro share leadership and responsibility, [crafting](#) a clear process for new people to join the core team, moving from roles of assistance to core membership in months. After a year of organizing TradeSchool.coop, I wrote a manual to make sure our systems were clear. Ask yourself: do you want to get it done, or do you want to get it done your way? This is the question that Jen Abrams, a co-founder of OurGoods.org, brought to us from a decade at the collectively run performance space WOW Café Theater.

4. WHAT IF YOU RAN [EVENTS](#) AND HIRED A COMMUNITY ORGANIZER INSTEAD OF BUILDING SOFTWARE?

Last of all, consider the possibility that you could make a greater impact on cooperative culture and resource-sharing in your community by hosting [events](#) rather than building a new cooperative platform online. Software does not run itself; it must be maintained and upgraded by developers who can easily make tons of money working on non-cooperative platforms.

Remember that people won't take the time to learn a new app unless they need it daily. Remember that people

are used to Facebook, Google, Twitter, and sites that have legions of developers working around the clock. Remember that hire number three at Airbnb was a lobbyist. If you are starting out, build the smallest feature and do not add to it. It will be hard enough to maintain and upgrade that small feature.

Be honest about your ability to put in long hours and to raise the funds to sustain the development and constant upgrading of online networks for years. Until we have cooperative investment platforms for cooperative ventures, you will have to look for philanthropic support or venture capital that might alter your mission and that will rarely sustain the initiative for years.

If you can't raise \$300,000 a year for a core team of five, don't build a demo site that barely works or buggy software that won't last—organize great [events](#) and build community! You can use existing online platforms that your members already know. You can use your funds to pay a community organizer instead. Not only will you sustain the livelihood of a wonderful person, but the knowledge built in the community won't return a 404 Server Error when someone needs help next year.

In cooperation,
Caroline Woolard

fig. 3-17

The TradeSchool.coop open source code, which was written and maintained by artist, musician, and developer Or Zubalsky from 2010-2019, enabled the [website](#) to be adapted to local TradeSchool.coop chapters, including chapters in thirty cities internationally.

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```

class Branch(Location):
    """
    A Branch is a chapter of TS in a specific location (usually city/region).
    """

class Venue(Location):
    """
    Venue represent physical locations where Trade School events take place.
    """

class Person(AbstractBaseUser, PermissionsMixin, Base):
    """
    A custom model in place of Django's auth.User model.
    A Person in the Trade School system can be an organizer,
    teacher, and student. Their interaction with the system
    determines their roles:
    When a person registers to a class, they are acknowledged as a student.
    When a person teaches an approved class, they are acknowledged as a teacher
    When a person is given is_staff=True, they are acknowledged as an organizer
    """

class Organizer(Person):
    """
    Organizers are Person objects that have is_staff set to True.
    Conceptually, organizers are the people who use the admin backend
    to run a chapter of Trade School and help others run theirs.
    """

class Teacher(Person):
    """
    Teachers are Person objects that have taught at least one course.
    The distinction is made so organizers can find teacher profiles
    more easily on the admin backend. Teachers can belong to Students
    and Organizers as well.
    """

class Student(Person):
    """
    Students are Person objects that are registered to least one course.
    The distinction is made so organizers can find student profiles
    more easily on the admin backend. Students can belong to Teachers
    and Organizers as well.
    """

```

```

class BarterItem(Base):
    """
    Barter items are requested by teachers when submitting a course
    and are selected by students registering to a course.
    """

class Course(ScheduledEvent):
    """
    A one time scheduled class that is taught by a teacher in a TS Branch.
    Course is currently the main model that Trade School facilitates:
    A teacher submits a class proposal through the frontend class submission
    form on a branch's website. The proposal includes the attributes of a
    ScheduledEvent model, a list of barter items and the teacher's information.
    The class proposal is either approved or not by the branch's organizers.
    Approved courses appear on the branch's website so students can register
    to them. Students register by agreeing to bring one or more of the items
    that were requested by the teacher.
    A Course also has 7 types of emails that are sent automatically:
    teacherconfirmation: Sent to the teacher to confirm a successful
        course submission. Also includes a link to edit the course.
    teacherclassapproval: Sent to the teacher to notify them the course
        was approved by the organizers.
    studentreminder: Sent to a student to confirm a successful course
        registration.
    studentconfirmation: Sent to all registered students before the course
        is scheduled to start to remind them it's happening and what items
        they said they would bring. It also includes a link to unregister.
    teacherreminder: Sent to the teacher before the course is scheduled
        to start to remind them that it's happening.
    teacherfeedback: Sent to a teacher after the course took place with
        a link to leave feedback.
    studentfeedback: Sent to all registered students after the course took
        place with a link to leave feedback.
    """

class Feedback(Base):
    """
    Feedback is collected after courses take place.
    Emails are sent to both students and teacher after a course has taken place
    with a URL to a form where they can leave feedback on a course.
    Feedback is saved anonymously for students. The only indication is whether
    it was received by the teacher or by one of the students.
    """

```

Mediating

For both OurGoods.org and TradeSchool.coop, [collaborators](#) Louise Ma and Rich Watts made exceptionally [beautiful](#) print material (business cards, posters, fliers) as well as well-designed [websites](#). Or Zubalsky wrote the code for TradeSchool.coop twice, taking months on end to make sure that the [website](#) worked in multiple languages (for text going right to left as well as left to right) around the world.

Rich Watts made sure that we took high quality photographs of every event we held, as well as at many of the classes we organized (when students were open to it). In other collectives, such as BFAMFAPhD ^{see chapter 5}, we have not prioritized documentation of [events](#), exhibitions, or workshops, and I think that the lack of great photographs hurts our grant-writing and exhibitions, and makes presentations more difficult.

... education has to do as much with economic justice and self-governance as it has to do with pedagogy

We were approached by documentary filmmakers Alex Mallis and David Felix Sutcliffe who offered to make videos about our work. Thousands of people learned about our work by watching these videos on our [website](#). From that moment on, I knew that I would commission a video for every multi-year project, as it was one of the best ways to communicate with a wide range of people.

In 2009, when OurGoods.org and TradeSchool.coop were starting, I did not think it was important that we were based in New York City. [Looking](#) back, I can see that the press we got was directly related to the people who attended our [events](#) from art, design, and technology fields and who lived in New York City and worked in the media. We would not have been written up in *The New York Times*, *The New Yorker*, *The Nation*, *Hyperallergic*, *Fast Company*, or *The Wall Street Journal* if we were not based in a cultural-center with so many media [outlets](#). We continue to be asked to re-open both [barter](#) networks, but we do not have the capacity to run them. Before closing TradeSchool.coop, I compiled stories from people around the world to share what we learned in the book *TRADE SCHOOL: 2009-2019*.

OurGoods.org &
TradeSchool.coop

Additional thanks to:
Katherine Pradt (Writer), Carl Tashian (Developer), Lauren Voswinkel (Developer), Meerkat Media Cooperative (Video Editor), Ann Chen (Event [Facilitator](#)), Saul Melman ([Producer](#), Organizer), Alex Mallis (Videographer), Daniel Dordelly (Event [Facilitator](#)), Pritha RaySicar (Event [Facilitator](#)).