

Alternative Economics, Alternative Societies

A project by Oliver Ressler

After the loss of a counter-model for capitalism – which socialism, in its real, existing form had presented until its collapse – alternative concepts for economic and social development face hard times at the beginning of the twenty-first century. In the industrial nations, broadly discussed are only those “alternatives” that do not question the existing power relations of the capitalist system and representative democracies. Other socio-economic approaches are labeled utopian, devalued, and excluded from serious discussion if even considered at all.

The thematic installation, “Alternative Economics, Alternative Societies,” focuses on diverse concepts and models for alternative economies and societies, which all share a rejection of the capitalist system of rule. An interview was carried out for each concept. Interview partners include economists, political scientists, authors, and historians. From these interviews, a video in English was produced. In the exhibition, these single-channel 20- to 37-minute videos are each shown on a separate monitor, thus forming the central element of the artistic installation.

The project presents alternative social and economic models such as “Inclusive Democracy” from Takis Fotopoulos (GB/GR), “Participatory Economy” from Michael Albert (U.S.A.) and “Anarchist Consensual Democracy” from Ralf Burnicki (D). Chaia Heller (U.S.A.) presents “Libertarian Municipalism”, Marge Piercy (U.S.A.) the feminist-anarchist utopias of her social fantasies, and the underground author p.m. (CH), the ideas of his concept “bolo’bolo.”

Other videos focus on certain principles that might be of importance when discussing alternative economics and societies: Nancy Folbre (U.S.A.) speaks about “Caring Labor,” Christoph Spehr (D) about “Free Cooperation”, Maria Mies (D) about the subsistence perspective and John Holloway (MEX/GB) about his ideas of how to “Change the World Without Taking Power.”

As interesting historical models, Todor Kuljic (SCG), thematizes workers’ self-management in Yugoslavia in the 1960s and 1970s, Salomé Moltó (E) talks about the workers’ collectives during the Spanish Civil War (1936–38), and Alain Dalotel (F) discusses the Paris Commune of 1871.

Chosen from each of these thirteen videos is one quotation significant for the alternative model that it presents. The quote is placed directly on the floor of the exhibition room as a several meter long text piece. This floor lettering, made from adhesive film, leads exhibition visitors directly to the corresponding videos and thereby provides a kind of orientation within this non-hierarchically arranged pool of videos. These videos offer stimulus and suggestions for contemplating social alternatives and possibilities for action.

The whole exhibition project started in Ljubljana in 2003 with five videos. Meanwhile, the installation has grown to include thirteen videos with a total length of almost six hours. The project is ongoing. Further economic and social concepts will be added continually in the coming years.

The installation “Alternative Economics, Alternative Societies” was/will be realized within the following exhibitions:

Galerija Skuc, Ljubljana (SI), 30.10. – 23.11.03 (“Alternative Economics, Alternative Societies”)

Espace Forde, Genève (CH), 06. – 19.12.03 (“There is no Alternative”)

Kunstraum der Universität Lüneburg (D), 08. – 16.01.04 (“Alternative Economics, Alternative Societies”)

Transmediale.04, Berlin (D), 31.01. – 15.02.04 (“fly utopia!”)

O.K – Center for Contemporary Art, Linz (A), 11.03. – 02.05.04 (“Open House”)

Kunsthalle Exnergasse, Vienna (A), 16.06. – 24.07.04 (“permanent produktiv”)

Itacultural Institute, Sao Paulo (BR), 01.07. – 26.09.04 (“Emoção Art.ficial II – Divergências Tecnológicas”)

Sorlandets Kunstmuseum, Kristiansand (N), 06.07. – 15.08.04 (“Detox 04. Crossover Jam Culture”)

Wyspa Progress Foundation, Gdansk (PL), 03.09. – 03.10.04 (“Health and Safety”)

Centro Cultural Conde Duque, MediaLabMadrid, Madrid (E), 30.09.04 – 31.10.04 (“Economía alternativa, sociedades alternativas”)

Forum Stadtpark, Graz (A), Steirischer Herbst, 08.10. – 28.11.04 (“There Must Be an Alternative”)

Main Trend Gallery, Taipei (RC), 21.01. – 26.02.05 (“Wayward Economy”)

Museum of Modern and Contemporary Art, Mali Salon, Rijeka (HR), 04. – 12.03.05 (“Alternativne Ekonomije, Alternativna Drustva”)

Platform Garanti Contemporary Art Center, Istanbul (TR), 29.04. – 21.05.05 (“An Ideal Society Creates Itself”)
kuda.org – New Media Center / Museum of Contemporary Art, Novi Sad (SCG), 24.05. – 01.06.05 (“Alternativne Ekonomije, Alternativna Drustva”)
Museum of Contemporary Art Belgrade, Salon, Belgrade (SCG), 04.06. – 10.06.05 (“Alternativne Ekonomije, Alternativna Drustva”)
Badischer Kunstverein, Karlsruhe (D), 08.07. – 22.11.05 (“Critical Societies”)
Miroquesada Garland Gallery, Lima (PE), 12.08. – 04.09.05 (“9th International Festival of Video/Arte/Electrónica”)

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