
SUBVERSIVE ECONOMIES: UNDER/ VALUED ENERGETIC ECONOMIES

other economies
decolonization
activism

by Raju Rage / London Working Group

If what we need to dream, to move our spirits most deeply and directly toward and through promise, is discounted as a luxury, then we give up the core—the fountain—of our power...we give up the future of our worlds.

—Audre Lorde, 1984

Just the other day I was reading that resilience is an ecology more than it is an individual trait or possession. If so, dreaming together can weave the context for our healing. That is: a container, an atmosphere, a potentiality. Not transcendence. In fact, I'm not sure how much we're breaking free of personal/collective trauma as much as we're brewing adaptogens, recipes for resistance, a kiss and a fist.

- Almah LaVon, 2015

Capitalism treats our dreams (the dreams of multiply structurally oppressed people) as nightmares to repress. But one thing about the relationship to dreams that we are talking about is that it also challenges the internalized capitalism of our relationship to our aspirations. Are our aspirational dreams just something else that we feel pressure to individually achieve? What if that's just not how it works? What if the future our dreamworlds require can't be achieved? What if it just has to be listened to, collectively held, remembered, allowed, loved, accepted, like our night dreams? We really are creating collective energy to dismantle some of the american dreams, (in my case) immigrant dreams, capitalist dreams that are taking up so much energy in our lives to make space for a love and connectedness we could never individually chart up.

- Alexis Pauline Gumbs, 2015

'Undervalued energetic economy' is a term inspired by Alexis Pauline Gumbs (poet, independent scholar, and activist, aka queer black troublemaker and black feminist love evangelist). It describes the importance of 'investing in the undervalued energetic

economy of the kitchen table' and its significance to Black feminist organising in 1980's USA.

(...) love, knowledge and inspiration are renewable resources for the revolution that we produce every day (...) We are dedicated to the visibility of love as something we are always doing (and therefore, not it is neither scarce nor is it for sale)

Those of Kitchen Table Woman of Colour Press, named after the gatherings of women of colour at kitchen tables to discuss feminism and their frustrations with mainstream 'white feminism' at the time. Set up by Barbara Smith and Audre Lorde, the Kitchen table Press (self) published political pamphlets, chapbooks, and short story collections that became pivotal to many women and queer of colour movements transnationally and trans-generationally. In 1980 Smith and Lorde made the radical decision to publish writings only by women of colour, and over the next 20 years, their publications included *Home Girls: A Black Feminist Anthology* in 1983 and the second edition of *This Bridge Called My Back: Writings by Radical Women of Color* in 1984. Inspired by (and tribute to) the Kitchen Table Press, Alexis Pauline Gumbs set up her own press, BrokenBeautiful, in 2006. As Barbara Smith states in an interview with Gumbs "BrokenBeautiful Press, according to (its) mission statement, is based on the basic

assumption that love, knowledge and inspiration are renewable resources for revolution that we produce together every day. Use this site to make love as community, creativity, interaction, knowledge and growth. We are dedicated to the visibility of love as something that we are always making (and therefore which is neither scarce nor for sale)". Gumbs further states: 'Broken Beautiful Press is actually a cyber/multimediated/hybrid/multi-community accountable KITCHENTABLE. A structure of wood and wisdom. A gathering space designed to support the creative genius of oppressed communities with a set of resources incompatible with capitalism: our love, each other, our love for each other'.

Jin Haritaworn, in *Queer Lovers and Hateful Others, Regenerating Violent Times and Places* (2015) discusses the contemporary queer of colour activisms in the 2000's, specifically those in Europe that have drawn from this genealogy in order to forge what Gumbs describes as 'counter narrative and poetic interruptions that not only threaten the reproduction of the narrative of heteropatriarchal capitalism but also offer something else in its place' (2010, 57).

Examples of this activity and genealogy within Europe are the creative activist groups in London and Berlin who went on to organise: London Transgender Film Festival 2008 UK (Raju Rage) Cutie BPoC (Black People and People of Colour) Festival Berlin 2016-2018 and Transformations Trans* Film Festival Berlin 2017-2018. These self-funded and self-organised spaces with a DIT (Do it Together) collective ethos carved out a space for community, knowledge sharing through arts and activism as well as creating informal yet professional networks for artists, activists, academics and community groups to create and platform their important work. Activity comprised of community accountability; fascism and racism in Europe; Trans feminisms; films, art and performances by queer and trans people of colour; dance parties; roundtable discussions; workshops such as archiving our social movements and more.

Collective Creativity arts collective (2014-2018): Evan Ifekoya, Raisa Kabir, Rudy Loewe and Raju Rage is another example of this legacy. As stated on their blog, it is 'an intentional informal non-hierarchical collective space created to share ideas to reflect on texts/films/art (and more) in a group setting, that inspire, interest or provoke us and/or our practice. Collective Creativity is a group formed out of necessity, to carve collaborative space outside of the institutional framework where a specific Black QTPOC (queer/trans* people of colour) voice and experience could be nurtured.' as a way to centre these narratives and knowledges. Collective Creativity, offer critical reflections on the history and the contemporary circumstances under which students and other people of colour experience contemporary art school curriculum from the perspectives of QTPOC (Queer, Trans* and Intersex People of Colour) creative practice focusing on the legacy of black artists and artists of colour in Britain. They published *Surviving the Art School* toolkit.

not/nowhere, 2018, conceived by Imran Perretta and Taylor Le Melle is an artist workers' cooperative in London that supports new media practices through workshops, screenings and other programming. Their mission 'to ensure that local artists who use new media in their work can access film and media equipment, and acquire the training to use these machines creatively. We are committed to Black and POC artists and exploring new possibilities for owning the means of production of our work and finding sustainability in our practice. not/nowhere's additional focus is to provide infrastructural support to artists working in all mediums, and enfranchise people living or working in London to take pleasure in expressing themselves creatively.'

PSS publishing, set up in London UK (2017) by Taylor Le Melle and Rowan Powell 'is an independent publisher of printed matter. Working with a variety of practitioners across art, poetry and theory, PSS is committed to producing original text publications as well as experimental printed artists' material.' One of PSS first publications was a poetry compilation *Subversive Economies* by Daniella Valz Gen, an artist and writer born in

Lima Peru and based in London whose work investigates different forms of embodying liminality, and reflects on negotiating territories, modes of address, and value systems.

Financial Times

Cool economics peak
on casual exchange rates
and risk hedging strategies

Self-assured ersatz
Swipe
Consume desire fast
Swipe

Affect is not affection

Slip

(All the meanings we can't hold)

Currency
(open clueless tender)

My currency
(The throb of touch)

An anachronistic fear of debt
(Generous and ashamed)

Too good / Too much
collide
in an assessment of
emotional abjection

(Current trends)

Extract of Financial Times, Daniella Valz Gen 2018

'Under/Valued Energetic Economy', 2017-18 is also an installation and work in progress by visual artist Raju Rage. Inspired by Alexis Pauline Gumbs term, Rage maps out the tangled ecology between "activism", "arts" and "academia". Presented on a trestle table top as a tablecloth with 'alternative- archival' objects and artefacts that references their interest in kitchen-table conversations and the knowledges that are produced by them.

The work highlights informal strategies of organising, creativity and collectively as valuable. It also explores alternative archiving of his/her/theirstories in the form of interviews, the kind of conversations that come from feeling comfortable to speak at kitchen tables, to speak up, as opposed to institutions which shut down speaking up on account of becoming the problem – (Sara Ahmed). This follows with Ahmed’s question in ‘Living a Feminist Life’ 2017 on ‘how to create relationships with others that are more equal; how to find ways to support those who are not supported or are less supported by social systems; how to keep coming up against histories that have become concrete, histories that have become as solid as walls.’ Ahmed, building on legacies of feminist of colour scholarship, seeks these creative support systems that become necessary for feminist killjoys after becoming estranged from (institutional) worlds they critique—often by naming and calling attention to problems.

‘Under/Valued Energetic Economy’ by Rage also aims to map and track these exact genealogies discussed in this essay, following on from Haritaworn, by specifically focusing on the potential of the kitchen table space and conversations that derive from this self-organising. Not just limited to the kitchen table, but using it as a model of coming from this survival need to self-organise, due to lack of spaces (anti-squatting laws, gentrification, austerity, policing, social and community spaces closing, white centric spaces, exclusiveness of institutions) and opportunity in mainstream white euro dominated spheres, as a way to come away from the formality and restrictions of oppressive institutional spaces. The work also looks to this informal self-organised space/activity as a way of acknowledging knowledge production outside of academia/institutions which ties into embodied knowledges that come from lived experiences of oppression, but more importantly values the lives and knowledges of these individuals and collectives involved as an energetic economies.

These movements mentioned raise the importance of speaking from the margins as a place/space of empowerment rather than trying to be part of the center, which usually means complicity and complacency within capitalism. Instead these movements center, explore and question love, desire, intimacy, dreams, futurity, community, accountability, knowledge and skill exchanges as sustainable subversive economies¹.

¹ 'UBUNTU also functions as a site of sustainability in another sense. The fact that we have built informal mechanisms to offer childcare, trade massages, do aromatherapy work, share personal fitness training, cook for each other, grow food together, help with homework, borrow cars, offer a space to crash. This means that as each of us takes seriously the work of responding to violence in our scattered community (for me this often means responding to violence that my students are experiencing, immigration violence that my family experiences, etc.) we also have a support network to help us, feed us, hug us, massage us, create a healing oil for us when we need it. And we often do. I know I so often just need a cup of tea, or a poem from my community.' Alexis Pauline Gumbs on UBUNTU a coalition based in Durham, NC and lead by women of color, queers and survivors, that came together to respond to the aftermath of a sexual assault perpetrated by members of the Duke University lacrosse team on several Black, female sex workers.

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