

On Sunday Soup
included in The Library of Radiant Optimism's *Let's Re-make the World*
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InCUBATE is an experimental Chicago-based research institute, started by Bryce Dwyer, Roman Petruniak, Ben Schaafsma, and Abigail Satinsky. We are dedicated to developing new models for funding and supporting artistic production using creative and non-traditional administrative practices. For two years now, InCUBATE has undertaken a number of projects, including operating a storefront that houses a residency program which brings international artists to Chicago every month; organizing a traveling exhibition in five cities throughout the country; facilitating the exchange of mail art; selling home-brewed beer; and administering the Sunday Soup grant program. InCUBATE does not have non-profit status, instead we are interested in developing work patterns that are capable of circumventing many of the commonly held truisms of non-profit management, especially the incessant desire for organizational growth and the notion that institutional success can and should be measured quantitatively. While exploring our own process of becoming a research institute, we become a resource for others by generating and sharing a new vocabulary of practical solutions to the everyday problems of producing under-the-radar culture.

The Sunday Soup grant program is one particular model of arts funding that uses a collaborative, entrepreneurial business-like structure in order to support ourselves and our own creative community. It started over a year ago as a weekly meal, hosted at InCUBATE's storefront space. Guest chefs cook simple soups using local ingredients. Soup is sold for \$5 per bowl. At the end of each month, the soup income is given as a grant to support a creative project. Visitors who purchase soup also earn a spot on the grant selection committee. All of the grant proposals are emailed to Sunday Soup patrons, and a popular vote determines the grant recipient. Sunday Soup, while raising money, also serves as a way to build a network of support that reaches beyond purely monetary assistance. Guest chefs prepare soup, organize presentations and engage visitors in conversation. In this way, Sunday Soup becomes an open platform to discuss ongoing projects with new audiences, meet new collaborators, and share ways of working.

Sunday Soup, though convivial, is explicitly functional as a way of generating independent funding for cultural producers, and implicitly critical as a way of generating conversation about the availability and distribution of resources within the mainstream arts establishment. In an environment where governmental support for experimental art practice is minimal at best, and private support is dictated by the values and priorities of granting foundations, innovative and potentially controversial work is compromised in order to fit within categories deemed "fundable." With Sunday Soup, community participation in the grant funding and selection process is key. Applying for a grant is intentionally simple and un-bureaucratic in order to encourage broad participation. This enables InCUBATE to stimulate and promote experimental, critical and imaginative practices that may not be eligible for formal funding.

The questions InCUBATE is asking through the framework of the Sunday Soup Grant Program are meant to be pointed and challenging, but we are also concerned that this inquiry extend beyond the rhetorical basis for our program model. We imagine Sunday Soup as a much-needed and necessarily local gathering space to begin talking about the kinds of alternative economies we want to create, both on the macro- and micro-scale. We want to actively examine the ways in which we are implicated and accountable within the economies of culture. Although Sunday Soup is rooted in the local, its framework is easily adaptable to different contexts and situations. Sunday Soup programs are now operating in Mexico City, MX and Newcastle, UK, and Grand Rapids, MI. As the network of participants grows and expands, InCUBATE's continued research raises questions and reflects upon how to imagine and organize collective models for funding creative projects that are transparent, participatory, and operate on a social as well as financial level.
