

M|A|U|S|S INTERNATIONAL • N°4

**ANTI-UTILITARIAN INTERVENTIONS
IN THE SOCIAL SCIENCES**

DIGITAL JOURNAL
DEC. 2024

**EXPANSIONS ON THE
THE GIFT:
ACTIONS AND
REACTIONS**

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MAUSS International
Anti-Utilitarian Interventions in Social Sciences

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Site du MAUSS International : <https://www.maussinternational.org/>

Site de la Revue du MAUSS permanente : <https://www.journaldumauss.net/>

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www.editionsbdl.com

33300 Bordeaux

ISBN : 978-2-38519-161-0

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IN MEMORIAM

PHILIPPE CHANIAL (1967-2024)

Les Maussquetaires

The MAUSS is in mourning. Our flags are lowered and our hearts weigh heavy. Just when this issue was going to press, the terrible news reached us that Philippe Chanial, the director of the *Revue du MAUSS* and *MAUSS International* had suddenly passed away at the age of 57. We still find it hard to believe that Philippe is no longer with us. He was the most generous, the most luminous, the most gentle and the most intelligent of us. In his person and in his work, he incorporated the spirit of generosity and the delicate essence of solidarity. For thirty years, together with Alain Caillé, he led the Mouvement Anti-Utilitariste en Sciences Sociales. In his own work, situated at the crossroads of sociology, political philosophy and the history of ideas, he unearthed the roots of French cooperative socialism, articulated the anthropology of the gift with the ethics of care and explored synergies between American pragmatism and German Critical Theory. In his last book, *Nos généreuses réciprocités. Tisser le monde social* (2022) (*Our Generous Reciprocities. Weaving the Social World*), which deserves to be translated in English, he opposed his own luminous sociology to the dark anthropology of the riders of the apocalypse. In this issue, we publish his last text on intimate love as a tribute to our dearest friend. The text that opens this issue extends the ideas he exposed in the last issue of this journal (n° 3) and closes a whole period of the MAUSS. Without him, the movement will never be the same. To be honest, we don't even know how and if we can continue *sans Philippe*.

A MAP OF TENDERNESS: THE LOVE-GIFT FROM SIMMEL TO MAUSS¹

Philippe Chanial

« Qui tousiours prent et rien ne donne L'amour de l'amy
abandonne. »

Thresor de la langue francoyse, 1606

“The gift is touching, sensuality: you will touch what I
have touched, a third skin unites us. I give X... a scarf
and he wears it: X... gives me the fact of wearing it.”

Roland Barthes,
A Lover's Discourse: Fragments, 1977

“Sacrificial and oblativ, that's the kind of love an artist's
wife owes to the one she loves. — But Émile, he's always
lying to me!”

Vanessa Springora, *Consent*, 2020

A mong the many interpretations of the allegory of the Three Graces, one of particular interest to readers of Marcel Mauss is the one evoked, albeit without conviction, by Seneca, who himself borrowed it from Hecaton, who in turn took it from the Stoic Chrysippus. According to the latter, it could be read as an allegory of giving, with the three sisters, daughters of Venus/Aphrodite and Bacchus/Dionysus, each embodying one of its three moments: giving, receiving, and giving back.²

1 This article was translated from the original French by Frederic Vandenberghe, Ilana Silber, and François Gauthier, with a little help from technology. It was the author's last article published in the *Revue du MAUSS semestrielle* (2024, n° 64, p. 51-73). The theme of this issue is “The Gift of Love. The Impossible Reciprocity?”. There is no better way to express our feelings of love, loss, and indebtedness to Philippe, our dearest friend, and everything he has given us.

2 Commenting on this passage from Seneca's *Treatise on Beneficence*, Lars Spuybroek (2022, p. 224) states: “A closer look at the names of the Charites—Aglaea, Euphrosyne, Thalia—reveals more about how they relate to Mauss' three obligations.

On the other hand, it has hardly been noticed, except allusively by Elena Pulcini (2012) and Luigino Bruni (2014), how much, like the Three Graces of antiquity, the archetypes of love, at least in the Western tradition, *Agape*, *Philia*, and *Eros*, also echo these three constituent moments of the cycle of the gift identified by Mauss. Is not *Agape*, the symbol of hyperbolic, one-sided generosity, the embodiment of love that gives itself unconditionally, with no demands in return? Or even of love that dispossesses itself, surrendering itself body and soul to the beloved? *Eros*, driven by the desire to fill a void, to possess—or even to conquer, to take—what we don't have, seems to be oriented towards the second moment, that of receiving. Whether we identify it with the egoism of taking, aiming only for our own self-interested satisfaction—the gain of pleasure—or, in its spiritual forms, with the quest for the “beautiful as such”, rising from the “beautiful body” to the divine absolute, it is less a matter, be it in earthly *eros* or in celestial *eros*, of giving than it is of receiving from the beloved person the means of this enjoyment or this elevation. Finally, does *philia* not symbolise reciprocity between equals, who certainly give and receive, but only better to return the same to each other? Unlike friendship for the sake of pleasure or interest, is not true and virtuous friendship, for Aristotle, that disinterested love that develops between people who wish each other well and reciprocate good for good?³

That the Maussian gift is able to embrace these different forms of love means that it cannot be reduced to any single one of them in the first place. The gift par excellence is not *agape*, unless we consider that the only true gift is the one that ignores or proscribes any counter-gift (Boltanski, 1990, p. 173; Derrida, 1991; Caillé, 1994, 2019). Although Mauss emphasises the extent to which the gift, as a symbol of alliance, has the virtue of transforming enemies into friends, it cannot be reduced to the impeccable symmetry and reciprocity of the friendly relationship according to Aristotle, since it defies equivalence, measurement, and even equality. For there is indeed desire in

Aglaea, which means “radiance” or “shining”, is the figure of giving; Euphrosyne, meaning “joy” or “good cheer”, the figure of receiving; and Thalia, meaning “bloom” or “flourishing”, the figure of thanking and gratitude.

3 In addition to the classic developments in the *Nicomachean Ethics*, see also his *Rhetoric* (II, 4, 1380b-1381 va 3): “To love is to wish for someone what we believe to be good, for him and not for ourselves, and also to be, as far as we are able, inclined to his benefits. He is our friend who loves us and whom we love in return.”

giving. But the desire that drives it—the lure of the bond and not of the sole good—is irreducible to erotic desire alone. In this sense, it is not illegitimate to suggest that giving is the result, as Elena Pulcini (2012, p. 159) shows, of the “mutual contamination between the different forms of love”: the generosity of *agape*, the reciprocity of *philia* and the desire for *eros*.

But if the gift is love(s), in its most diverse forms, in what way, reciprocally, is love a gift? If there is any point in exploring the “gift of love”—or the “gift of loving”—how does the gift paradigm enable us to draw a “map of tenderness” that simultaneously allows and contains, in both senses of the latter term, this heterogeneity of the word love and its matters? If the spirit of the gift hovers or blows over the affairs of love, what is love the gift of?

Does this kind of hybrid and resolutely total phenomenon that Mauss calls the gift—with its tensions between interest and disinterest, freedom and obligation, through its multiple forms of reciprocity, its light face, but also its ambivalences and dangerous liaisons, its shadow face—constitute a particularly valuable analytical tool for thinking of love as one and multiple?

The different forms of the gift of love, based on the model of reciprocal contamination suggested by Elena Pulcini, could then—and this is the wager of this text—define as many—necessarily porous—combinations of the constitutive elements of the Maussian gift.

ONE AND MANY: SO AS TO NOT GIVE UP ON LOVE, WITHOUT A CAPITAL LETTER

A few preliminaries, however. Before we take on this challenge, let us recognise that our task is not without risk, first of essentialism, and even of Western-centrism. Following A. Nygren (1953), François Jullien (2013, p. 155) asks if: “we can ignore the fact that under the single Latin word: ‘to love’, *amare*, the Greeks saw lumped together two terms which ignored each other for so long ignored before only belatedly—with Christianity—coming in contradiction: *êros* and *agapè*?” Is “love” then a “false word”, coupling two terms that each have their own history, and a history written, from Plato and Paul onwards, by the West? Moreover, is it not by establishing Love as an absolute—love with a capital L—that European anthropology, and European anthropology alone, has claimed to “contain so much heterogeneity by use of force” (*ibid.*, p. 156)? By “brewing the universal at a bargain”, it transformed

this “commonplace” into a “totemic word”, the “great myth of the West” (*ibid.*, p. 18 and p. 157). Should we, then, as the author invites us, to put an end to love—never say “I love you” (Jullien, 2019) ever again—and replace the “noise of love” with the word “intimate” and these things, spoken words, gestures, and glances that are discreetly exchanged in the in-between, in the reciprocity of “living together”?

Not that “intimacy” can claim a universality that “love” lacks—Greece and China had no conception for it. But from the *Confessions* of Saint Augustine to those of Rousseau, another experience of the inter-human relationship appears to have been invented, one that is both historical and cultural, and “originary”:

The fact that we can effectively only live in pairs, as the great theme of love has recognised, albeit clumsily and in an overly mythological way, is to say that we can only “live” by ex-sisting, i.e., by standing outside ourselves, reconciling these two verbs (live/exist); this is not secondary, truly, but originary (Jullien, 2013, p. 176).

If this originarity of “living together”—of the I/Thou relationship in the sense of Martin Buber (1969)—and, through it, the requirement to “come out of oneself” by which Mauss defines the morality of the gift,⁴ does indeed circumscribe a singular space, or structure of relationality and reciprocity, why, then, should we refuse to use the term “love”—or “intimate love” or “loving intimacy”—to describe what would appear to the philosopher to be an incorrigible oxymoron? Is it not François Jullien’s praise of intimacy that authorises us the following: to search for a subtle reformulation of *philia*, which, on the basis of its reciprocity, opens it up to the desire of *éros* (without becoming chained to it), while at the same time opening it up to the generosity of *agape* (without losing oneself in it)? Archetypes are not easy to escape. Let us dare to write about love, therefore, even if we cannot *a priori* pretend to seize anything else than the forms that are specific to the modern West.

In addition, do the “spheres” of intimacy and the gift not share obvious family resemblances. If we enter intimacy by “switching out of indifference,

4 “Let us therefore adopt as the principle of our life what has always been a principle and will always be a principle: to come out of oneself, to give, freely and obligatorily: there is no risk of making a mistake” (Mauss, 1989, p. 265).

or hostility, into a shared interiority” (Julien, 2013, p. 172), the bonds of alliance inherent to the gift are forged in the same way. In traditional societies, Mauss suggested, any encounter—with the other, the stranger—opens onto three possibilities: appear indifferent, show hostility, or initiate the relationship by means of a gift. In the words of the *Essay*, instead of “standing aside” or “fighting”, one needs to know how, on the contrary, to “lay down the spears”, “give up one’s quarters”, and “commit to giving and giving back”, “from momentary hospitality to daughters and possessions”.

In this sense, “that fleeting moment when society takes form”, according to Mauss’ beautiful phrase describing the epiphany of the social in the rites of the gift, is not foreign to the work of “crystallisation” by which Stendhal defined love in his essay *De l’amour* (1822). Are the “transports of love” not the manifestation of this transport (outside) of oneself—*ek-stasis*, etymologically? Like the archaic alliance, is the love relationship not initiated and nurtured via the gifts that symbolise it—the scarf mentioned by Barthes,⁵ but also the gift of one’s attention, thoughts, secrets, and most intimate confidences, until the gift of one’s body, right down to the “last favours”—, by the “gifts of the self” and the “surrenders of the self” (Bozon, 2016) in their multiple forms, by the abandonment⁶ of a part of ourselves that calls for an equivalent movement in return? In this respect, intimacy is perhaps the privileged place, the name of the gift of love, or at least that of lovers.

INTIMACY AND RECIPROCITY: SIMMEL’S GIFT OF LOVE

This hypothesis cannot be supported by the works of Mauss, who says little about the affairs of love that concern us here. It does, however, appear in the work of German sociologist and philosopher Georg Simmel. Indeed, it is striking to note how often the various, scattered passages in which Simmel evokes love are also those in which he discusses the question of the gift.

5 On this subject, he says: “The gift of love is solemn; carried away by the devouring metonymy that governs imaginary life, I transport myself entirely within it. Through this object, I give you my All [...]” (Barthes, 1977, p. 89).

6 The author’s wordplay is lost in translation here. “*Abandon*”, in French, contains “*don*”, the gift. (Translators’ note.)

And vice versa.⁷ Of course, for Simmel, love is first and foremost a psychological disposition, a state (or emotion) of the subject—desire, impulse, affect, feeling, etc.—that is capable of attaching itself, superficially or exaltedly, to the most diverse objects: not only to people (a child or a friend or a lover), but also to things (an ordinary trinket, a work of art), places (a landscape, a city), collective entities, abstract or ideal (the homeland, Humanity, God).

Nevertheless, it is by focusing on the relationships that these dispositions—this potential “binding force”—are capable of forging, and in particular this singular form of dyad, the erotic dyad, that he shows how much the latter are based on the reciprocity of the gift. Hence he invites us to characterise the quality of this form of association (*Vergesellschaftung*), which he rightly identifies with intimacy (*S*, p. 115-116), in terms of the quality of the forms of the gift that circulate within it.

Intimacy in love according to Simmel defines first and foremost an exclusive relationship in the double sense of the term: a “relationship without equal between individuals without equal”.⁸ It rejects any “idea of generalisation”: “there has never yet been a love like this; nothing can compare either with

7 In addition to his *Fragments on Love* [*FA*], see in particular his developments on the dyad, on subordination, his digressions on secrecy as well as on gratitude and fidelity, on the stranger, in his *Sociology* [*S*], but also certain passages devoted to marriage and prostitution in his *Philosophy of Money* [*PhA*, *Pr*], his texts on sociability [*Soc*], coquetry [*Co*], on female culture [*CF* and *PdS*], on adventure [*Av*]. It is also worth recalling the sociological importance Simmel attaches to the gift, one of the “strongest sociological functions”: “if society did not continually give and receive—even outside of exchange—no society could exist [...] every gift is therefore a reciprocal action between donor and donee” (*S*, mod. transl., p. 579, n. 1). On the elective affinities between Simmel and Mauss, see Papilloud (2008), Keller (2002), and more generally Frédéric Vandenberghe’s masterly synthesis (2001). See also the issue of *Simmel Studies* (2021) devoted to “Simmel and Love”, in particular Oakes (2021).

8 (*FA*, p. 149). Simmel illustrates this exclusive character by comparing two pairs of lovers in Goethe: Faust and Marguerite, on the one hand, and Édouard and Odile in Goethe’s *Elective Affinities*, on the other. Whereas in the first, “each of the two loves while missing precisely the individuality of the other” by attaching himself to a generic type, in the second, “the feeling goes exclusively to the [other’s] ‘irreplaceable personality’”, to the point where “all eternal future is limited to the two and to their ‘life together’” (*ibid.*, p. 136 and p. 138). It was this relational absolute, this “worldly love”, that Romanticism exalted, even if in sometimes less passionate forms.

the person loved or with our feelings for him or her” (S, p. 666). To underline this exclusivity, he remarks in a short note (*ibid.*, p. 619; Watier, 2003, p. 26-27), that the very term relation (*Verhältnis*)—which can be translated here as “bond”—applied to the things of love has a remarkable linguistic property: the same term designates form and content. Or rather, it is the form (the whole) which, by a kind of metonymy, designates its content (its parts): lovers who “have” a bond “are” this bond [*liaison*]⁹—the sociological unity they form—at the same time that each person is the ‘bond’ of the other. This quality of the bond [*lien*] thus outlines a singular social form whose intimate nature is manifested in its affective structure insofar as it emphasises what each person gives (or shows) to only one person: to “his/her” love and no other (FA, p. 120).

But what sustains amorous intimacy in the erotic dyad, its “essential condition”, is reciprocity.⁹ The *modern*, intimate form of the love relationship is that of shared love (FA, p. 147 and p. 183; Luhmann, 1992).

It presupposes that the roles of the lover and the beloved are interchangeable, that the object of love is at the same time the subject of love, and vice versa: the beloved is the object of which the lover is the subject, and the subject of which the lover is the object. This reversibility of subject and object is manifested by the singularity of the gift of love: by the reversibility of giving and receiving.

“Erotic nature, Simmel writes, is perhaps that for which giving and receiving are one and the same, it gives by receiving, it receives by giving” (FA, mod. transl., p. 166). Between them, the two lovers complete the cycle of giving, like the round of the Three Graces. Indeed, to receive (*nehmen*) here means to receive a gift in return. In this way, the cycle goes full circle in the form of a sensitive and immediate reciprocity—a structure of chiasm that is reminis-

9 It is this structure of reciprocity that, according to Simmel, distinguishes modern erotic love from Platonic *eros* or Christian *agape*. In both cases, reciprocity is not a decisive, “intimately essential” element (FA, p. 146). In Plato, “the idea to which love is really addressed does not love in return, nor does its earthly representative [...] Greek *eros* is a ‘will to have’”. Christianity, on the other hand, by defining the soul a priori as loving, requires it to love everything, “to embrace all individualities”, whatever the merit. In the image of the Creator’s undifferentiated love for all His creatures, it forbids every elective affinity and recommends Love without expecting anything in return—apart from the possibility of “earning salvation by means of love” (*ibid.*, p. 163).

cent of the phenomenology of the kiss, the caress, or the embrace.¹⁰ Because lovers are for each other the bond they form together, the different moments of the gift, for Simmel, cannot be dissociated; they are intertwined in the immediate flow of their relationship. The “goods of love” according to Simmel, insofar as they cannot be separated from the living process of love, are not substantial realities whose relationships of proportion or equilibrium can be established, or which can be measured in terms of pleasure and displeasure.¹¹ They are not the result of something one *has*—and therefore the object of an exchange, in the economic sense—but result from the very *being* of the lovers, from what they are, henceforth, in and through the bond that unites them.¹²

It is therefore not just voluptuousness that is at stake here, but rather the individuality of the two partners—the subjects and objects of this love—and even the exaltation of their respective qualitative singularities. The reciprocity that manifests itself in this reversibility of giving and receiving must therefore be understood as a force of intersubjectivation—not fusion—by which, through this mutual gift of one to the other, two radically new and differentiated beings are generated.¹³ For Simmel, this is the very heart of the love relationship: it is both a gift of self and a gift of relationship.

10 Or, for certain phallic interpretations of sexual intercourse reduced to coitus, of penetration, cf. Erich Fromm (2015, p. 45). We prefer the fragment by Barthes that we have placed as an epigraph, or the image of “intercorporeality” as the “flesh” of the community of lovers, to put it in Merleau-Ponty’s terms; the “reciprocity of incarnation” in Sartre’s analysis of sexual desire (1943, p. 441); or again Levinas’ “community of the feeling and the felt” proper to *eros* (1991, p. 297à).

11 As he notes in his *Philosophy of Adventure*: “Any reciprocity of love is a gift that cannot be deserved, whatever the intensity of the love, because love evades all demands, all equality in distribution, it is in principle dependent on a category quite different from that formed by the idea of mutual compensation” (*Av*, p. 80).

12 (*FA*, p. 180). This is one of the reasons why love, because it manifests itself according to Simmel only in the key of being and not of having, is for him beyond egoism and altruism, in the sense of Hegel’s formula with which he defined love and friendship: “*Bei-sich-selbst-Sein im Anderem*”—“to be, in this other, close to oneself” (quoted in Honneth, 2015, p. 75).

13 “Just as I myself, as lover, am a different person than before—for it is not this or that ‘aspect’ of me, this or that energy that loves in me, but my whole being, which need not mean a visible transformation of all my other manifestations—so the beloved is, as such, a different person, born of a different *a priori*

He shows this with great subtlety in his famous digression on fidelity and gratitude. Questioning the meaning of the reciprocal gesture expressed in gratitude, he points out, particularly in the case of love, that this gesture, because it responds to both the benefaction *and* the benefactor, is much more than a counter-part, a counter-gift, or a simple thank-you. It manifests “that astonishing plasticity of the human soul which enables it to integrate the totality of the subjectivity of both giver and receiver in the gift and its response” (S, mod. transl., p. 581).

What’s more, he goes on to point out the paradoxical bonding power of the gift:

At the deepest level, this “thanks” does not consist in responding to the gift with another gift, but in recognising and showing that it could not be responded to, that there is something here that places the donee in a certain lasting state towards the giver, that makes him aware of the infinity of a relationship that cannot be fully exhausted or realised by the return of a gift or by any other action that remains finite (*ibid.*, mod. transl., p. 582).

In short, we do not give to give back. We give,¹⁴ paradoxically, because we will never be able to give back (the same). It is not the value of the good that is at stake: the gift is a gift of relationship insofar as it produces a *bond value*, symbolised by the debt it creates between the partners. In this sense,

than the being known, or feared, indifferent, or venerated. The object of love in all its categorical meaning does not exist before love, but only through it” (FA, p. 121). Bourdieu, also attentive to this reversibility of subject and object and to the creative power of the love dyad, sees it as one of the “miracles” of love, in which the lover experiences himself as a “creator who, in return and simultaneously, experiences himself, unlike an egocentric and domineering Pygmalion, as the creature of his creature” (1998, p. 89).

14 Material things, of course, but also and above all, Simmel insists, immaterial and entirely personal: the gift of your presence, of your existence, the “simple” fact that you have thus entered my life (S, p. 579). In this sense, the form of love is rich in multiple contents that symbolise the bond: expectations of recognition, projection of responses, ways of coming into contact, of speaking and listening to each other, of touching, “body techniques”, etc. I would like to thank Laurence Kaufmann for inviting me to emphasise this point. And a few others.

the gift of love is an exemplary, even hyperbolic instance of what Jacques T. Godbout (2000, 2007) has called “positive mutual indebtedness”. This differs from negative debt, which weighs on the partners and must, on balance, be paid off to be freed from its weight. On the contrary, the state of indebtedness is valued on both sides: “He/she has given me so much”, both partners in the relationship confide or feel (*idem*); “I owe him/her so much”, to the point where no particular contribution in return would suffice. Here, positive debt generates a feeling of gratitude rather than guilt and gives rise to a desire to give in turn rather than to pay back (Godbout, 2007, p. 168). Simmel insists on this point: “it [giving] leaves a debit (*ein Rest*), even after an equal or greater counter-gift has been paid.” And, insofar as each partner in the love dyad is sometimes in the role of giver and sometimes in the role of receiver, this residue, the debt of gratitude, persists, he insists, *on both sides of the relationship* (S, p. 584). This seems to defy all logic and arithmetic, and to contradict any conception of the inter-human relationship as a zero-sum game—one gains what the other loses, and vice versa. Yet it is precisely this state of real indebtedness, this mutual insolvency, that constitutes a positive-sum game in intimate love.¹⁵ It invites us not so much to make up the accounts in order to get even—and thus to unravel the relationship, as in an exchange—but, paradoxically, to renew it even more firmly, to keep it alive for the long term, to nourish it, necessarily and freely, with gifts.¹⁶

It is in this respect that love, Simmel emphasises, through its dual force of individualisation and socialisation, is “one of the great categories that give form to what exists” (FA, p. 11). The “loving affect” is “formative” in the twofold sense that it forms individualities and specific “associations” or “sociations” (*Vergesellschaftung*). To express it in the language of the gift, the Simmelian gift of love appears to be both a vector of subjectivation (of oneself

15 “Exchanges always involve deprivation and renunciation, whereas we can exchange love and any intellectual content without having to pay for this enrichment with impoverishment” (S, p. 341).

16 This is what makes intimate love, as an expression of that general social form that constitutes gratitude for Simmel, such a subtle and solid bond. This is the whole point of his analysis of fidelity: it should not be seen merely as a negative or moralising concept, but a positive and unconditional affirmation of respect for the other (and for oneself through the other), and therefore also for one’s prerogatives, dreams, and projects, which ensures that the love relationship has a certain permanence over time (S, chap. 5).

and of others) and a performer of a covenant which, through its structure of reciprocity, fulfils and seals—but also surrounds and closes off, I shall return to that later—the couple's society.

DUALITIES IN LOVE, AS SEEN THROUGH THE GIFT: FROM SIMMEL TO MAUSS

This does not mean, however, that this first form of a love relationship that we have proposed to identify in Simmel's work, intimate love, is a long, tranquil river. Like the Maussian gift, it is fraught with dualities and tensions, as are all social forms for the German sociologist. More generally, the love relationship oscillates between a plurality of opposing poles.¹⁷ It therefore constitutes a "synthetic unity", eminently fragile and labile, that rests on cooperation, complementarity, imbrication—and also on opposition and conflict—between differentiated elements.

Thus, the intimate love we have focused on so far is only one possible form of love, the kind that Simmel sometimes calls "authentic love".¹⁸ Other combinations and articulations between these polarities reveal other modalities of the love relationship that are distinct from it, or other phases or "rhythmic alternations" of the same relationship (*FA*, p. 115 and p. 93). The paradigm of the gift, so sensitive to the lability and reversibility of interhuman relationships, enables us to grasp these dynamics of transformation from up close. It is these plural articulations that we now propose to formalise, by rereading Simmel's sociology and philosophy of love in greater detail and by putting on the spectacles of the Maussian gift.

17 Masculine and feminine (*CF*, *PdS*), altruism and egoism (*FA*), sensuality and affectivity (*FA*), possession and non-possession (*FA*, *PhA*), "say-yes" and "say-no" (*Co*), equality and subordination (*S*, chap. 3), distance and proximity (*Av*, *Et*), attraction and repulsion (*S*, chap. 4), unveiling and secrecy (*S*, chap. 5), as well as the polarity of form and life (*MsV*, *TdC*), and so on.

18 (*PhA*, p. 55) However, this intimate form of the love relationship does not exhaust the subject. Love is at once, to use our formula, one and multiple: "the diversity of the many manifestations that language baptizes with this name does not testify against its fundamental unity, but on the contrary proves its existence" (*ibid.*, p. 116).

Referring to the “miracle of love”, Simmel saw it resting on its ability “not to abolish the being-for-itself of either the I or the Thou, but even to make it the condition that allows this abolition of distance” (*ibid.*, p. 114). He thus placed at the heart of the love relationship a first polarity, that of the I and the Thou, the subject and the object, or more precisely the tension between subjectivation and objectivation. *The subjectivising force* of the gift of love, which rests on the recognition of the other as a subject (and as a differentiated subject), presupposes its opposite: its objectifying force.

Love as intersubjectification, the sensitive and intimate form of the I-Thou relationship in Buber’s sense, can constantly tip into the opposite, impersonal relationship, that of the I-It or I-He/She.¹⁹ Objectification of the other, to cite a few Simmelian examples, of the street or brothel prostitute who, in and through the monetary exchange with her client, is reduced to a depersonalised, anonymous commodity in which all interiority and individuality are abolished (*Pr*, p. 1415, *PhA*, p. 472-479). But also the ambivalences of fusion-love, where “the absolute gift of self”, “the temptation to merge completely with the other, to abandon the last reserves of the soul after that of the body, to lose oneself without restraint in the other” can lead to the abolition of all distance between the I and the Thou, engulfed in this undifferentiated “absolute union” (*S*, mod. transl., p. 364).

The socialising force of the gift of love, its capacity to create a link or “liaison”, is caught up in a second polarity: the tension between symmetry and asymmetry. As we have seen, the “goods of love” can circulate within the reversibility/

19 Sartre’s “negative intersubjectivity” (Honneth, 2013, p. 143) is exemplary of this almost exclusive insistence on the pole of objectification, describing any “being looked at” as a reification, and more generally any human interaction as an encounter between mutually reifying subjects. Hence the “failures” of love, which seeks to “possess freedom as freedom”, and of desire, where “I make myself flesh in the presence of others in order to *appropriate* the flesh of others” (Sartre, 1943, p. 416-439, emphasis added). This does not prevent him from beautifully recognising the possibility of the “joy of love”, when he emphasises, in the language of the gift, that through the love received, the beloved can feel “justified in existing”: “My existence is because it is *called*. This existence, insofar as I assume it, becomes pure generosity. I am because I give of myself. These beloved veins on my hands; it is out of kindness that they exist. How good I am to have eyes, hair, eyebrows, and to lavish them tirelessly in an overflow of generosity on this tireless desire that others freely make themselves to be” (*ibid.*, p. 420).

reciprocity of giving and receiving, but this fluidity, which is characteristic of Simmelian intimacy, can take other forms when this reversibility/reciprocity breaks down—one gives, the other does not—or is transformed into a demand for something in return—each gives *on condition* that the other gives back. In the first case, these asymmetries are characteristic of power relations, particularly “gender” relations, which Simmel kept interrogating.²⁰ In the second, the subtle bonds of gratitude mentioned above are dissolved into various forms of contractualisation of love relationships, such as marriage by purchase or “marriage for money”, the practice of dowry, the maintenance of courtesans or even matrimonial announcements (*PhA*, p. 465-472 and p. 478-483).

HOW TO FIND YOUR WAY ON THE MAP OF TENDERNESS? A COMPASS FOR LOVE RELATIONSHIPS IN THE KEY OF THE GIFT

With and beyond Simmel, but in the company of Mauss, it is tempting to deepen the typology of the forms of the gift of love that we have just outlined, by drawing up a map of tenderness based on this double polarity. It is on the basis of this map that we proposed, in previous works (Chanial, 2022, 2023), to formalise a compass of inter-human relationships in the key of the gift. Let us briefly present its four cardinal points.

The first polarity distinguishes the nature of the content, in Simmel’s sense, invested in the relationship, i.e., a certain subjective attitude towards others, a system of intentionality, in the phenomenological sense. The generosity of the gift is expressed when this attitude manifests a committed, sensitive, and empathetic involvement and recognition of others, in short, when it brings into play what we have called its power of subjectivation.²¹ Conversely, as this demand for generosity weakens to the point of disappearing, an attitude of closure to otherness emerges, based on the suspension or deactivation of all sensitive

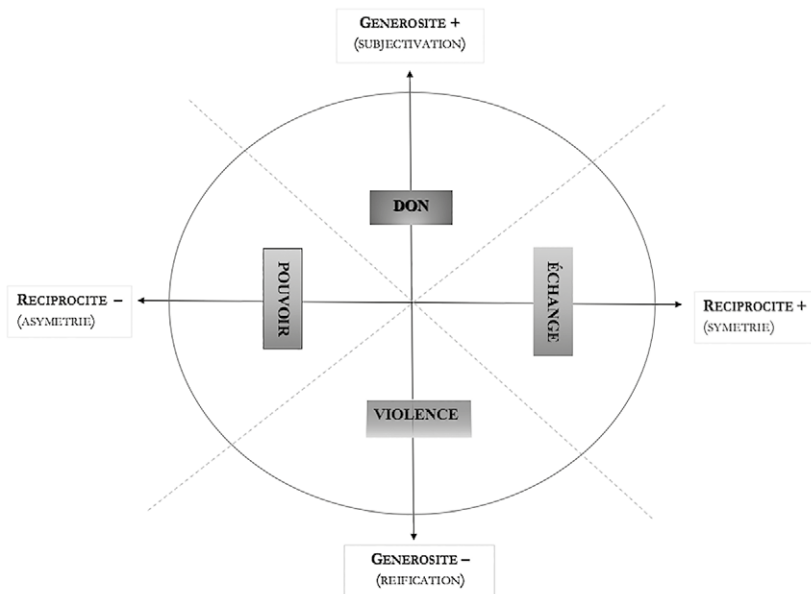
20 In this way, he repeatedly shows the extent to which relations of subordination can result from the (masculine) polarity of masculine and feminine. See in particular *CF* and *PdS*.

21 We should recall Claude Lefort’s definition of the gift (1951, p. 43): “the act by which men confirm to one another that they are not things”, but subjects. Simmel makes a broader point in the chapter of his *Soziologie* devoted to domination and subordination as a social form: “the moral maxim—never to use a human being as a mere means—appears as the formula of all socialisation” (*S*, p. 162).

involvement and empathic identification. It stems from a form of apprehension of others that is no longer subjectivising, but objectivising or reifying, in the sense of Axel Honneth (2007, chap. IV). The first two cardinal points are as follows: North, the Generosity + pole; South, the Generosity – pole.

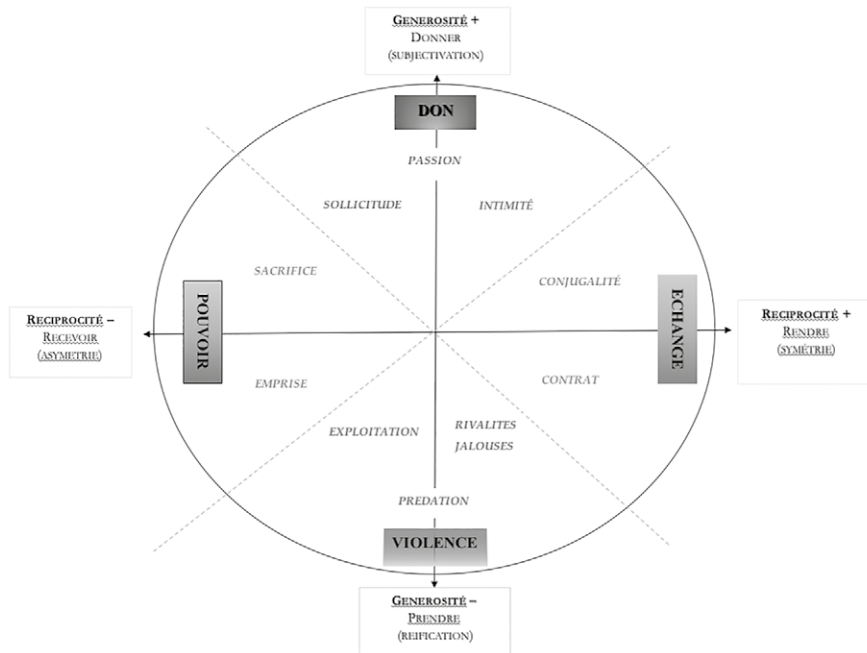
The second polarity distinguishes relationships according to their structure of reciprocity, whether symmetrical or asymmetrical. Hence the last two cardinal points: East, Reciprocity +; West, Reciprocity –. By crossing these two axes, we can define four regimes of relationship: the regime of the *gift*, that of *violence*, that of *exchange*, and that of *power*.

Applied to love relationships, this basic compass helps us draw a Maussian “map of tenderness” that I propose, for exploratory purposes, to represent as follows:



Does this compass²² help us to find our way in the worlds of love? Let us try it out.

22 It should be emphasised that it only identifies ideal-types of love relationship. These can empirically mix in a given form of relationship, as they can characterise one of its moments. [Editors' note: Since we did not have access to the author's files



The North face or the symbolic regimes of the love relationship

Let us begin by exploring the North side, starting from a familiar territory, that of *intimate love*. We have identified it with the forms of relationship woven by the Maussian gift, which is both a gift of self and a gift of relationship. The subjective attitude involved (Generosity +) is part of a symmetrical structure (Reciprocity +), with the positions of giver and receiver alternating, on the model of positive mutual indebtedness. In Mauss' sense, the gift of love is both a sensual and affective sharing-gift and an agonistic gift, in the sense that the reciprocity of desire also drives love play, rivalries that, like a potlatch (Cannone, 2015, p. 195), defy strict equivalence and are in themselves their own end.²³ In this respect, intimate love contains, in both senses of the term, the reciprocity of *philia*, the solicitude of *agape*, and the fire of *eros*.

to work on the translation of this figure, it appears in the original French. Most words can be readily understood by English readers, however.]

23 It is in this sense that the intimate, for F. Jullien, calls its negative and its ally, which he calls the "extimate". The "feasts of the extimate", by agonistically putting

Let us now move westward to discover another form, that of *love as passion*. It can be interpreted as a sublimation, in Max Weber's sense, of intimate love. If it is dominated by the figure of *erôs*, it is reminiscent of the Greek *kharis*. Whereas intimate love invites us *to give so that the other can give*, in order to continually nourish the relationship, passion in love is a matter of grace, of gratuitousness, not only in terms of the "moments of grace" it generates, but as it implies *giving for the sake of giving*. It does not require any reciprocity, unless it freely gives rise to grace in return. This is why the gift of passionate love is initially unilateral, as summed up by the famous phrase of the actress Philine in Goethe's *Wilhelm Meister*, taken up by Nietzsche and often quoted by Simmel: "And if I love you, what business of yours is it?" While it can lead to a shared passion for love, it can also lead to the idolatry of the beloved. The gift of love is nonetheless a vehicle for subjectivisation, insofar as this passion is exclusive and attached to the singularity of the person loved.²⁴

Extending our westward journey, we enter another region of our map of tenderness, that of *agape*, which we call *love-solicitude*. This is a different kind of reciprocity from that of passionate love. If the gift of love here is also unilateral, it's because it aims, in a dispassionate way, to respond above all to the needs, expectations, and desires of the beloved, along the lines of the ethic of *care*. It is about *giving so that the other receives*, with a sensitive attention to his or her vulnerability. This benevolent, generous, and reasoned asymmetry²⁵

excess, exteriority, and played-out distance back into intimacy, ensure that its gentleness does not stifle the possibility of desire (2013, p. 198-199). See also Simmel's fine analysis of the games of seduction in his article on coquetry (*Co*).

24 This is the whole point, on the contrary, of René Girard's critique of romantic love, its solipsism, even its egocentrism (2011, p. 199): "Romanticism is a literature of the self for the self's sake [...]. It is the romantic soul, overflowing with beauty, that transfigures the object of passion. The Romantic is a God and his love a communion with himself." For a critique of Girard's "romantic lie", see Chaniel (2022, chap. 3). We should also point out that passionate love defined in this way can tip into other forms, when oblation becomes sacrificial or gives rise to a relationship of control. But it can also be appeased and sustained by the reciprocity of intimacy or conjugality.

25 Referring to the loves of maturity, following on from the enthusiasms of youth, Madame de Staël gives an illustration of great subtlety: "When one's only aim is one's own benefit, how can one manage to decide on anything; desire escapes, so to speak, the examination that one makes of it; the event often brings

can nevertheless topple into another form of relationship that is far more ambivalent.

Following the latter, we exit the system of the gift that unites the three previous forms, and enter the system of power, of which love-sacrifice is a first expression. A passionate *agapè*, woven also with the threads of *érôs*, the asymmetry between the partners here deepens to the point where the giver offers himself to the beloved, whom he fills with his gifts, by a surrender of self, a gift of self, potentially limitless, to the point of becoming its object. To point at its most extreme point, masochism for Sartre, instead of seeking to unite with the other person by preserving the latter's otherness, the lover plans to be absorbed by the other person, to the point of losing oneself in the other's subjectivity in order to get rid of one's own.²⁶ This "self-objectification" nevertheless manifests the force of subjectification of the other, promoted to the status of capital Subject. In this sense, sacrifice in love is, in our terms, a generous gift of love. It is about *giving what the other cannot/will not give*. However, this radical disengagement of the self is not without ambiguity and, as we will soon discover, can be reversed into a hold on the other. We will come back to this when present the dark, or diabolical, side of desire.

Let us complete our exploration of the north face by taking a brief look at the form of relationship to the east of intimate love. While love as passion embodies a form of sublimation of love, what we call *conjugal love* manifests, also in Weber's sense, its routinisation. The love relationship becomes formalised, depersonalised to the extent that the value attached to the qualitative differences between partners (Simmel) is diminished and tends to be replaced by social or even legal roles and statuses of the institution of marriage: husband and wife, father and mother, etc. in heterosexual couples, or more

about a result so contrary to our expectations, that one repents of everything that one has tried, that one tires of one's own interest like any other undertaking. But when it is to the first object of his affections that life is devoted, everything is positive, everything is determined, everything is driving, he wants it, he needs it, he will be happier for it; a moment of his day can be embellished at the price of such efforts. It is enough to direct the whole course of destiny; it is the only enjoyment of the soul that fills it completely, enlarges within it [...]" (*De l'amour*, p. 15).

26 (1943, p. 427). As Simmel insists, by way of warning: "Only those who cannot give themselves completely can give themselves completely without danger" (S, p. 364). Hence the particular importance of secrecy, of the interplay between veiling and unveiling in the love relationship.

generally parents. The reciprocity at work here, though not necessarily limited to it, is objectified in the form of impersonal and generic rights and duties.²⁷ It is a question of *giving in order for the other to give back*, in accordance with the roles, status, rights, and duties assigned to each. The institution—the social form of marriage—acts as a third party between the partners, and as such introduces a certain distance. In other, more personal respects, the bond forged shares certain features with *philia*. Not that *êros* is absent per se, but, as Simmel shows in his digression on fidelity, other motives, for example, than initial physical attraction, are produced during and by the relationship itself, in particular a certain complicity, mutual understanding, recognition of other qualities, which ensure its longevity. However, if the social form of conjugality presents the virtue of allowing the relationship to survive the disappearance of some of the conditions that gave rise to it, it is, like any social form and according to Simmel's thesis of the tragedy of culture (*TdC*, *MsV*), in tension with the fluctuating vital process that inhabits it and the living oscillations of the concrete reciprocal relationship.

The South face, or the diabolical regimes of the love relationship

Let us now explore the South side, that of regimes that are no longer “symbolic”, but “diaboli”,²⁸ where the subjectivising force of the gift of love is transformed, in varying degrees and forms, into a force of objectification.

The first form is that of *contractual love*. It is characterised by a form of exchange and reciprocity that differs from the symmetry of the rights and duties of conjugality: it is a question of give and take. It involves *giving on condition that the other gives*. This conditionality breaks with the various forms of unconditionality that characterise symbolic regimes. The contract form certainly presupposes the consent of the parties, but within a logic of strict equivalence. Thus, in a minor mode where the relationship of mutual objectivation remains

27 Think, particularly in the *#Metoo* era, of the concept of “conjugal duty” that emerged in French law, in jurisprudence, of “conjugal obligation”, that marriage implies a mutual “sex debt”, a reciprocal “due”: an obligation to “consent” for the wife and symmetrically, at least formally, for the husband to “honour” it. See Anseume (2022).

28 Recall the etymology of these two terms: *sym-bolon*, that which unites; *dia-bolon*, that which divides, “antagonises”.

limited, we find here what Giddens (1992) calls the “pure relationship”, based on the primacy of personal intimacy over the intimacy of the couple, where the partners only commit to each other on condition that their individual fulfilment and freedom are not sacrificed and that they find “satisfaction” in it. But even more so, in a major mode, this implicit contractualisation—explicit today on dating sites and in the practice of *casual sex* (Honneth, 2007; Illouz, 2020)—can be transformed into the commodification of pure *éros*, in short into paid relationships and prostitution. As Simmel points out, (monetary) exchange is the “commodification of reciprocal action”: since two things that have become objectively equivalent are exchanged, even if it is still the individual who performs the action, the individual is no longer important because “the relationship between humans has become a relationship between objects” (*S*, p. 577-578). In this respect, economic exchange is a vector not just of objectification, but of “inter-objectification”, even if, in the case of prostitution, it is above all the prostitute who undergoes this process of reification, by exchanging an intimate, priceless part of herself for this impersonal medium that transforms everything it touches into a commodity: money.²⁹

Another form of objectification, this time asymmetrical, can be found at the opposite pole on our map of tenderness, on the other side of the border of the sacrifice of love. We call this form “*love-empire*” [*emprise*]. Along with the previous form, it defines a second modality of power as it can manifest itself within a love relationship. No longer suffered by the giver, but by the receiver, it reverses, as it were, the ethical aim of *agapè*, on the model of the poisoned gift. The dominant figure in the relationship is the giver who makes the other his obligation, “his thing”, crushed under his gifts, whether real or imagined.³⁰ The gift of love here consists of *giving so that the other cannot*

29 (*PhA*, p. 476-477). Simmel also defines this “moral syphilis”, like the marriage for money, as a relationship of exploitation (*Pr*, p. 16-18). On the relationship between gift and prostitution, seen from the angle of expenditure, which he contrasts with mercantile transactions, see Bataille (1957, chap. XII). Or, from the opposite perspective, the recent work of Dana Kaplan and Eva Illouz (2023) on “sexual capital”.

30 The term gift can be understood here in the sense of services, but also as a quality specific to a charismatic personality, or at least one perceived as such. See Vanessa Springora (2020), who describes her adolescent love affair with the writer G. Matzneff in terms of control, but also exploitation and predation.

give back, so that the other, thus indebted, sometimes for life, remains at his “mercy” [*merci*].

The last three forms discussed below are not part of the regimes of the gift (intimacy, passion, solicitude), power (sacrifice and control), or exchange (conjuality and contract), but of violence, *stricto sensu*.³¹

Love-exploitation, within the amorous relationship, differs from the domination exercised by love-taking in that it consists in *taking what the other gives* in the relationship, in making a sort of profit, surplus value, in Marx’s sense, on the back (or the body) of the partner. Exploitation is thus based on a theft, a steal, with the other being no more than a resource, a property to be used and abused, a slave to the desires, pleasures and whims of the former, his master, idolised and feared at the same time. It is a denial of recognition—the gift of the other is a due, immediately payable, never recognised or “gratified” as a gift—and a refusal of any reciprocity, sealing a relationship of systematic asymmetry where the desire of one reigns as master and possessor of the other.

But violence, whether physical or moral, can also take a more symmetrical form, in which harm is exchanged for harm, blow for blow. These negative reciprocities, modelled on revenge, we propose to call *jealous rivalries*. Unlike the mutually positive indebtedness inherent in intimate love, or the discharge of negative debts by virtue of a contract or through a commercial exchange, they aim to “settle accounts”, to “liquidate” debts, real or imaginary, through violence—the violence, as René Girard would say, of mimetic desire. The aim is to *take what has been taken*. What’s more, these forms of rivalry are distinct from the agonistic gift at work in intimate love: rivalry is no longer a game, a rivalry of generosity, but a war, covert or overt, that must be won, at the risk that everyone loses.

Finally, this journey ends with the *hubris* of human violence, an anomic violence without rules or limits, which we call *predation*. It is no longer a question of a negative gift (the gift of evil), as in the previous case, but of an anti-gift, which comes under the exclusive logic of the catch (and the prey). Possibly caused by the reversal of a disappointed passion, in some cases at

31 *Stricto sensu*, because *largo sensu*, contract and control also manifest a system of intentionality, which does violence to the loved person by objectifying or even reifying them. Here, we are no longer giving goods (benefits), but evils (misdeeds), blows, even death. Or rather, the *generosity* of giving is transformed into the *violence* of taking.

least, it is not a question of giving for the sake of giving, but of *taking for the sake of taking*, without anything having been given. Rape comes to mind here, of course. More broadly, predation, like sadism for Sartre, “seeks the non-reciprocity of sexual relations”. The sadist is the one who enjoys being an “appropriating and free power”, as well as the spectacle of the obscene he stages “by presentifying as pain” the flesh of others, tortured and supplicated.³²

IN CONCLUSION

Grasp all, lose all? This compass could be criticised for leading us astray by pointing in so many different directions and to such contrasting regions of the gift of love. Should we then, as Bourdieu invites us to do in his “Postscript” to *Male Domination* (1998), draw a completely different map of tenderness, that of an “enchanted island” in the middle of a tempestuous and hostile ocean, a haven of peace “isolated from the cold waters of calculation, violence, and interest” (1998, p. 189)? Guided by a compass of domination, we would then discover a “closed and perfectly autarkic world” able “to successfully compete with all the consecrations one usually demands from the institutions and rituals of ‘Society’”. An exceptional world built on a “continuous series of miracles”, in particular that of “nonviolence”, “full reciprocity”, “mutual recognition”, and “disinterest that makes possible disinstrumentalised relationships, based on the joy of giving joy” (*idem*).

These are all dimensions of the gift of love that we have encountered in the company of Simmel and Mauss. Bourdieu also recognises the extent to which the “love dyad” is fragile, constantly threatened by the “return of selfish calculation” and the “simple effect of routinisation”, or by the “sacrilege” of “venal or mercenary love” (*idem*). However, if we have refrained from isolating the love relationship in this way, as this simplified and, all in all, conventional topography of what Bourdieu calls “pure love” leads us to do, it is because of the Maussian conception of the gift that inspired us. The conception of Bourdieu, which authorises his “declaration of love”, is thwarted by a constitutive aporia, consisting in sometimes unmasking the self-interested calculations and power relations that gift necessarily conceals, and sometimes idealising it, following

32 (1943, p. 450). On the refusal of reciprocity in the libertine economy of the Divine Marquis, see Marcel Hénaff (1978).

Derrida's example, as the absolute, miraculous, and hyperbolic form [of the "unconditional gift"] (Caillé, 1994; Chaniel, 2011). The Maussian gift is more modest. By virtue of its hybridity and fluidity, it makes possible to escape such aporias and thus to allow for the plurality of forms, both symbolic and diabolic, of the amorous relationship, as so many possible articulations and reversals of its constituent elements, generosity and reciprocity.³³

The gift paradigm invites us to also resist the dichotomy between the world of love and "Society" defended by Bourdieu. In fact, the forms of the love relationship that we have proposed to identify are very much *social* forms. In the sense of Simmel, but also beyond Simmel. Indeed, the Simmelian love dyad often seems to boil down to pure intersubjectivity, which, because it is a dyad, knows no third party.³⁴ But as Mark Anspach (2002, p. 103) shows in his analysis of the paradoxes of the love circle:

To be a couple of two, there has to be three: if there is not this absolute between the partners, we are on our own. But it's an absolute without a capital letter, a *self-transcending* beyond, created by the very people whose behaviour and identity of whom it becomes an essential determinant.

The absolute of the couple must therefore be conceived as this third party, this fixed point which, like the Maori *hau*, mediates the relationship between

33 Hence the privileged status we have given to intimate love, as a "pure", matrix form of the love relationship, insofar as it manifests the dual force of subjectivation and socialisation of the generous reciprocities that constitute the Maussian gift. Pure form and not "pure Love" in the sense that, like Simmel's sociability, it is not in principle an exceptional experience, but rather, in a more ordinary way, "the fulfilment of a relationship that in some way only wants to exist as a relationship, and in which what is otherwise only a form of reciprocal action becomes a self-sufficient content" (*Soc*, p. 133). Nevertheless, as he points out in his digression on the stranger, if the relationship here has a value in itself, it is because of its uniqueness and exclusivity, which is not the case in the more general framework of sociability (*S*, p. 666-667).

34 See his developments on the quantitative determination of the group in his *Soziologie*. There he suggests that the only third party in the love dyad is death, insofar as it definitively separates the lovers (*S*, p. 113). Or the child born of this relationship (*S*, p. 117).

the partners. This “relational absolute”—the couple formed, in the double sense of the word [“formed by”, and “which forms”], by the lovers—transcends them while, paradoxically, establishing itself in the immanence of their mutual relations, of their reciprocal gifts. If, for the Romantics, love, as Julie wrote to Saint Preux in Rousseau’s *La Nouvelle Héloïse*, is the “great affair of life”, is it not precisely because of its self-transcendent power, of its capacity to “make world”, to “make form”, *between* the lovers?³⁵

What emerges is a triangular geometry of amorous desire quite different from the Girardian triangle of mimetic desire, which Mark Anspach expresses by the Trinitarian formula: “One, God, You” [*Un, Dieu, Toi*”; *ibid*]. But in this triangulation, there is no God other than this transcendent third party, this “We” that emerges from the reciprocity of the lovers’ relations and desires, and which imposes itself on them at the same time, generating multiple mutual obligations and expectations that ensure its perennity. What we have here is therefore a “triadic” form of relationship, insofar as it links the two people who compose it through their attachment to the We they constitute (or think they constitute). It is as if, in a loving couple, so instituted and nurtured by gifts, “by dint of turning faster and faster on itself, the circle of the gift ended up taking off”³⁶ and detaching itself from the lovers to gain a life of its own. However, this life needs to be cared for, and it is to this “We-God”—whether or not one has passed before the wedding altar or the mayor—that one must, if not sacrifice, at least make an offering. Unconditionally? Yes and no, because we know how much we will receive in return [from it].³⁷ As a matter of fact, only generosity can trigger a virtuous circle of love by encouraging reciprocity: giving so that the other can give, in accordance with the maxim of intimate love.

Notwithstanding, doing justice to the luminous (symbolic) side of the gift of love does not require us to leave the dark (diabolical) side of the gift in the shadows. Taking the side of the luminous—which is none other than the wager of the gift—does not hide the possibility, always present, sometimes omnipresent, of

35 This self-transcendence could be read, in the context of Simmel’s vitalist philosophy, as a manifestation of the transcendence of life, which aims, by giving itself a form, in the sense of an aesthetic form, at something “more than life” (*MsV*, chap. 1).

36 Alain Caillé, quoted in Anspach (*ibid.*, p. 104).

37 Mark Anspach’s analysis, like ours, is based on Jacques T. Godbout’s notion of “positive mutual indebtedness”.

tipping over to the dark side of the force of desire. Nevertheless, this shift [from luminous to dark] calls less for a negative anthropology of our accursed share [G. Bataille], or a sociology obsessed with violence and domination, than for a deepening of the generous Maussian anthropology in its attention to the pathologies of the gift and the social and psychic conditions of the corruption of its virtuous cycle (give-receive-give back) into a vicious circle (take-refuse-keep).³⁸

In this respect, these pathologies—such is the hypothesis with which we would like to conclude—are not unrelated to the status of this third party, immanent and transcendent, that of the amorous relationship itself, of the We that it forms. Does the art of love not consist in keeping it this We at good distance, neither too close—to the point of engulfing the lovers in an undifferentiated union or, conversely, of favouring its appropriation for the benefit of one or the other—nor too far away—to the point of enclosing them in an external social form that crushes them and freezes the vital flow of their reciprocal attachments? Is it not when this third party no longer acts as a third party, no longer preserves this “in-between”,³⁹ where the love relationship is *fostered*, that the spell of love threatens to break?

WORKS BY G. SIMMEL

FA: « Fragments sur l’amour », in *Philosophie de l’amour*, Paris, Payot, 1988.

S: *Sociologie. Études sur les formes de la socialisation*, Paris, PUF, 1999.

PhA: *Philosophie de l’argent*, Paris, PUF, 1987.

Pr: « Quelques réflexions sur la prostitution dans le présent et dans l’avenir », in *Philosophie de l’amour*, Paris, Payot, 1988.

Soc: « La sociabilité », in *Sociologie et épistémologie*, Paris, PUF, 1981.

CF: « Culture féminine », in *Philosophie de l’amour*, Paris, Payot, 1988.

Co: « Psychologie de la coquetterie », in *Philosophie de l’amour*, Paris, Payot, 1988.

38 On these social conditions from the point of view of Critical Theory, see Illouz (2012, 2020); on these two cycles, see Caillé and Grésy (2018).

39 Like the Round Table of the Knights of the same name, with which Mauss concludes his *Essay*, or Hannah Arendt’s “inter-esse” which, in the form of the common world, “brings us together, but prevents us, so to speak, from falling on each other” (1983, p. 92).

And: « Excursus sur l'étranger », in *Sociologie. Études sur les formes de la socialisation*, Paris, PUF, 1999.

PdS: « Ce qui est relatif et ce qui est absolu dans le problème des sexes », in *Philosophie de la modernité*, Paris, Payot, 2024.

Av: « La philosophie de l'aventure », in *La philosophie de l'aventure*, Paris, L'Arche, 2017.

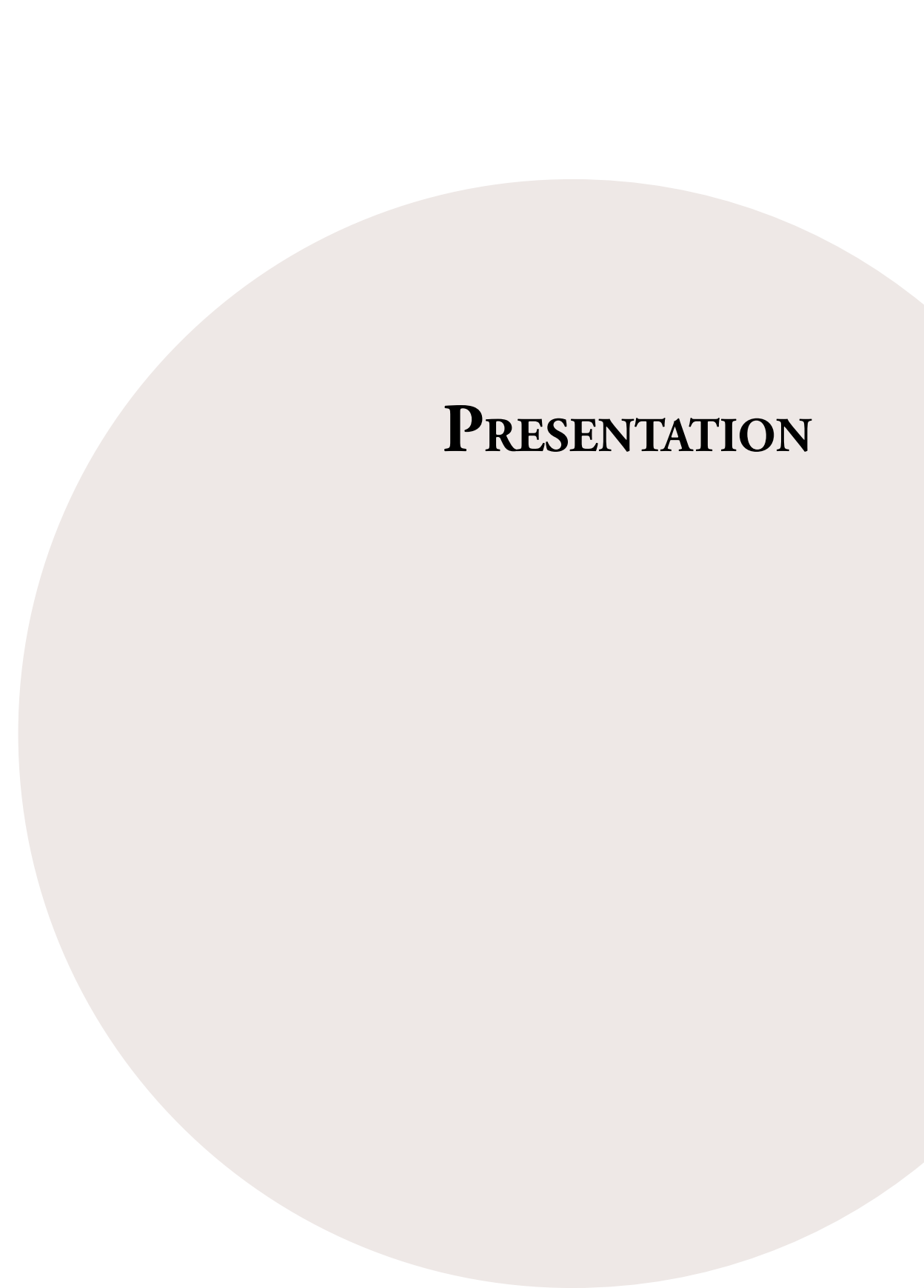
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PRESENTATION

EXPANSIONS ON THE GIFT: ACTIONS AND REACTIONS

The gift is a “great attractor”. Mention any topic of contemporary relevance in the universe—like war, climate change or capitalism—and if you look a bit closer, you’ll see that somehow, somewhere it is connected to the trialectics of giving, taking, and reciprocating. The gift is also a “strange attractor”. It is related to peace, but can also provoke wars. Nature supposedly can also give, but when too much is taken, like Gaia and Durga, it can take revenge. And what is capitalism, if not a consequent implementation of the utilitarian worldview that replaces the precepts of natural law and concerns of moral economy? And yet, if anti-utilitarianism thrives on the critique of utilitarianism, it does neither deny that the calculus is always present nor does it plead for a world of saints in which giving would be asymmetric without any expectation of a return. Marcel Mauss was well aware of the complexity of the gift. That may help explain why his systematization remained incomplete and his synthesis partial, while his generalisations turned out to be hasty and not sufficiently backed by empirical data. Mauss knew that the gift was paradoxical and could go either way: it could open the way to peace, but also to war; it could encompass the whole universe, like in the animism of the Māori, but could also be restricted to humans. As a cooperativist and socialist, he advanced the solidarity of associations against the indifference of the markets. He lived long enough (he died in 1950 and was a contemporary of John Dewey) to witness the full deployment of the consumer society. So, he knew that the gift was susceptible to commodification and recuperation.

His *Essay on the Gift* is now a century old. Reason enough to celebrate! It has aged rather well and is still a source of inspiration and an object of contemplation. The reception of this seminal text has rendered it even more complex with different strands of interpretation pulling the fragile synthesis apart. Structuralists oppose phenomenologists, utilitarians clash with anti-utilitarians, democrats with aristocrats, socialists with anarchists, peaceniks with potlatchers, etc. Even within these groups, tensions may arise about the proper interpretation of the *Urtext*. This is not all. Specialised discussions

among anthropologists, historians, sociologists, etc. have questioned some abusive generalisations in and of Mauss' texts. This is as it should be. Isn't it how science progresses—through the ritualisation of conflict, the unmaking of stable consensus, the relativization of positions, the empirical refutation of theses, the questioning of the facts themselves?

MAUSS International functions like a yearbook. In the first half of the year, we, the editors, do prospections—*reconnaissance* in the strategic-military sense of the term; at the end of the summer (in European context), we gather the texts and in the autumn, we get everything ready and send the whole manuscript off to the publishing house so that our readers can get the issue around the festive season. (For our francophone readers, the issue comes as an annual complement to our flagship journal *Revue du MAUSS*). This is the fourth issue and if everything goes according to plan, next year we shall celebrate our first lustrum! In this issue, like in the former ones, you will find three types of texts. Some are new, others are variations of texts that have been published elsewhere, and a few are translations of texts from our flagship journal. This issue is called *Expansions on the Gift: Actions and Reactions* to indicate the responsivity of the gift and its capacity to expand its reach beyond societies without markets and without state to encompass festive rituals in high civilizations and phenomena of life and death in contemporary over-complex societies. The subtitle also suggests that ideologically the gift can be associated with philanthropic industries like organ donation, critiques of the welfare state as a tax state and all-purpose anarchistic denunciations of the capitalist-utilitarian logic that is eroding the web of life. In any case, by means of a *variété* of texts, the issue exhibits a conceptual, thematic and ideological pluralism that we consider essential for a journal that is simultaneously academic and intellectual, political and scholarly, serious and playful, as the little text by Rabelais in our literary section exhibits.

The issue contains twelve articles, distributed over four sections. The first section explores various types of gift formations over various stretches of time (thousands of years of wine festivals (David Inglis), a century of a whole, diversified gift register in France (Ilana Silber), a decade of organ transplantations in the US and Israel (Boas and Lu) and a week of celebrations in the desert (François Gauthier). The second section contains personal testimonies by Bryan Turner, Stephan Moebius and Peter Sloterdijk on the productivity of encountering Mauss' *Essay* for intellectual creation. The third section is more metaphysical. As a counterpoint to Western naturalism, and in line with our

steady interest in dialogue with other civilizations and alternative theories, it explores other cosmologies (Ames, Berque) and vitalist ontologies (Brighenti, Sabetta and Aldeia). As usual, this issue also finishes with more literary texts on poetic gifts (Gourio) and peace (Rabelais).

This first section is unified by Ilana Silber's proposal to map out and theorize the diversity of gift formations. It begins with her commemorative piece on the work of Natalie Zemon-Davis, the American-Canadian historian who recently passed away at the age of 94. The article is not written as an obituary, but as a tribute, i.e. as a memorialising return to her book *The Gift in Sixteenth Century France*. Ilana Silber approaches this classic work not as a historian, but as a Weberian sociologist, interested in comparative research across periods and regions. She thus highlights the contribution of Davis' idea of gift registers, encompassing a diversity of gifts or sub-systems of giving. The sixteenth-century register, with its core beliefs, distinct language, and manners, is just one historically specific model, and one that puts religious giving in a position of preeminence, partly similar to what was the case in Islam. By combining cultural sociology with micro-and macro-history, Silber suggests, we can envision a multiplicity of variations on the gift across different groups, societies and historical periods. In the conclusion of her article, she outlines an ambitious research agenda for comparative studies in cultural sociology exploring different types of gifts and gift formations.

The following three texts can be seen as instances of such typological research on gifts and gift formations. In his text on gifts, gods and wines, David Inglis reports on the roles of wine gifts in Greek, Jewish and Christian cultures. In different myths, he shows, wine is understood as a gift to humanity from the gods and celebrated in rituals in which wine is given to the gods. The figure of Dionysos illustrates the dangers of traffic between gods, humans and wine in classical form. Wine comes from the Gods, but when consumed without moderation, it disturbs the cosmological order. With incredible erudition, the article traces the continuities of these themes over hundreds, if not thousands of years in Athens, Jerusalem and Rome. Most surprisingly, Jesus himself appears as a wine god—a transfiguration of Dionysos. From Dionysos to Bacchus and from the Sabbath to the Christian eucharist (literally: thanksgiving), we can thus see how myths and rituals configure a particular system of the gift in a divine substance.

The celebrations continue in François Gauthier's ethnography of Burning Man, a secular countercultural festival held annually in the United States

over the course of a whole week. For the event, a temporary metropolis called Black Rock City is erected in the Nevada desert, with its own set of rules (the “Ten Principles”), unique spatial arrangement (including a central tent and temples at the edges) and distinct temporality. The transformative experience reaches its peak on Saturday night with the burning of a large wooden effigy, known as “the Man”, immolated in a grandiose potlatch. Gauthier interprets the festival through the dual lenses of gift and play. The concept of the gift illuminates the radical decommmodification that is practised within the community (once the entrance ticket of 800\$ is paid), while play helps explain the carnivalesque atmosphere and the inversions of reality that take place when the “default world” is momentarily suspended, allowing participants to enter a collective dream that becomes real by being shared.

In the final text of the first section, Hagai Boas and Wan-Zi Lu compare three models of organ donation: the voluntary, or altruistic gift model, at the core of Richard Titmuss’ classic study of blood donations in the UK, as opposed to organ banks in the US and Israel, which offer vouchers and bonus points for future donations to organ donors. Both the US and Israeli models aim to encourage the gift of life by introducing non-monetary incentives, allowing donors to move up the queue if they or their family require an organ in the future. Boas and Lu argue in favour of mixed models that introduce utilitarian principles (though not monetary exchange) for pragmatic reasons (overcoming scarcity) in the organisation of organ donation. Between the British model of the pure, altruistic gift between strangers and the illicit organ trade at the other extreme, these mixed models incorporate virtual, future utilitarian considerations without monetizing the exchange, thereby also converging with a growing attention to temporal orientations in gift theory and sociology at large.

In the second section, readers will find the reminiscences of three prominent scholars regarding their encounters with Marcel Mauss. The first of these scholars is Bryan Turner, a prolific sociologist known for his extensive work on the sociology of religion and the sociology of the body. In a personal reflection on the coherence of his intellectual trajectory—centred on the vulnerability of the body and the protections it requires—Turner highlights the lasting impact of Mauss’ essay on body techniques. According to Turner, this work shielded him from disembodied approaches that treat the body as mere text. He recalls a pivotal study he conducted on ballet dancers’ injuries at the Royal Ballet Company in London, which marked a turning point in his

thinking. Although this specific text engages with Durkheim and extensively invokes Bourdieu's concept of the habitus, there is no explicit reference to Mauss, suggesting that one can be deeply influenced by his ideas even without being fully conscious of their continuing impact.

In the next text, written by Stephan Moebius and Frithjof Nungesser, we get a very well informed *Wirkungsgeschichte* of Mauss' anthropology in Germany, from the 1930's till the present. The initial reception was mediated by René König, who rescued Mauss from Adorno's dialectical diatribes. The reception of Mauss became really productive from the nineties onwards, when his oeuvre finally got more widely translated and various research programmes in cultural, historical, religious and organisational studies opened new perspectives on his work. The article also contains a revealing biographical notice by Moebius himself in which he reconstructs his own path—from a Ph.D. thesis on Derrida and Levinas to the history of French Maussology and from there via René König to a most ambitious research programme on the history of German sociology which he is now pursuing in Austria.

The second section closes with a brilliant interview by Peter Sloterdijk, Germany's most charming provocateur, about Marcel Mauss, the ethos of generosity, intelligent taxation, and the welfare state. From the onset, Sloterdijk defines himself as an "affirmative Maussian" who would only be too happy to associate himself with a "proper Mauss school"—like the MAUSS perhaps? His promotion of the ethos of generosity is part of an offensive against the welfare state he developed at greater length in *The hand that takes and the side that gives* (*Die nehmende Hand und die gebende Seite*) in 2010, which unleashed another polemic with the Frankfurt School, represented this time by Axel Honneth. Against compulsory taxation by the state, Sloterdijk proposes to reactivate the spirit of the gift so that wealth is no longer taken away, but freely given. He reckons that when taxes are no longer considered as debts one must repay, but as gifts, an economy of affluence, grounded in an affirmative anthropology of exuberance, can come into existence. One wonders, however, how Sloterdijk's essayistic philanthropy can be squared with Thomas Picketty's rigorous demonstration that rising inequality can only be stopped if taxes on wealth are dramatically increased. Would he subscribe to the call of the Convivialist Movement, a civil society offshoot of the MAUSS, to shut down all tax havens?

The third section of the journal is dedicated to exploring other cosmologies and ontologies than the Western one. The whole section is set against

the background of a ruined planet that we will leave behind to future generations as a poisoned gift. Philosopher Roger T. Ames, in the first article, offers an intercultural dialogical hermeneutics that is as much indebted to Dewey, Heidegger and Gadamer as it is to Confucius. Ames contrasts the Platonic metaphysics of static substances and essences with a Confucian process ontology, where everything, including human beings, is viewed as dynamic and evolving. In this ontology, rooted in *The Book of Changes (I Ching)*, all entities participate in a continuous, joyous becoming without a definitive beginning or end. Central to his argument is the concept of creativity as an ongoing, generative force in life, aptly summarised by I Ching's mantra: "Procreative living is without end; creativity never ceases." In a succinct yet equally profound companion piece, Augustin Berque, the founder of mesology, the science of the *Umwelt*, offers a meditation on the *oecumene*—the inhabited world composed of multiple *milieux*, each intricately interconnected with human existence. Berque emphasises that humans are not the sole inhabitants of the Earth; rather, like all beings, they create and inhabit their own milieu. However, what distinguishes humans is their ability to *ex-ist*, actively shaping their environment while being shaped by it.

The following text is by Andrea Brighenti and Lorenzo Sabetta, two Italian sociologists who have collaborated on a series of writings on action, reciprocity and reaction. Their article begins with a post-structuralist critique of Lévi-Strauss' influential reading of Mauss, particularly questioning the idea of reciprocity as something that can be caught in a system. For Brighenti and Sabetta, the response to an action that defines reciprocity is not predetermined. It is an unpredictable event that triggers other events in a reaction chain. This dynamic unfolding of actions and reactions is understood through Simondon's concept of "transindividual becoming". Social interactions are driven by chains of responses that resemble a living organism, continuously adapting and transforming, revealing the open-ended and creative potential of human encounters. Including AI into this process of transindividuation, the authors wonder if the reactions of communicative bots to human prompts can also be understood as a sequence of gifts in which both humans and robots become as they react and respond to each other.

In the final article, João Aldeia, a young anarchist from Portugal, offers a critical reflection on the *capitalogenic* extinction of entire species, driven by the destructive advance of a Western Cartesian-utilitarian cosmology. This worldview treats nature—and everything within it—as if humans were the

“masters and possessors” of the universe. Aldeia argues that the will to dominate and possess nature severs the symbiotic chain of interdependence between species. Rather than sustaining the ecological cycle, in which the death of individuals from one species nourishes life in others, this mastery triggers a cascade of death, disrupting the cycle of giving that animates the *oecumene*. The result is not just ecological imbalance, but the collapse of the reciprocal relations that sustain life on Earth.

In the last section the reader will find two, more literary texts. The first one by Anne Gourio examines the evolution of the “poetic gift” from the troubadours to contemporary lyrics. Drawing on poets like Mandelstam and Celan, she shows how the modern act of giving operates outside of reciprocity. Given to unknown recipients without expectation of return, the poetic gift presents and brings to presence the living and the dead, drawing the contours of a shared destiny. The last fragment by Rabelais, the French Renaissance writer, is more actual than ever. It presents the case of a vicious war that came to its end when instead of asking a ransom to release the hostage, the latter was liberated and sent back home laden with presents. The moral of the story is evident: Make peace, be generous, stop the war!

**GIFT FORMATIONS:
FROM GODS TO DRINKS,
DANCE AND DEATH**

NATALIE Z. DAVIS AND THE REGISTERS OF GIVING

Ilana F. Silber

INTRODUCTION

What led Natalie Davis to write her famed book on *The Gift in Sixteenth Century France* (Davis, 2000—hereon *TGSCF*), and how is one to place this slim but ambitious volume in the arc of her intellectual trajectory?⁴⁰ What could possibly relate it to other famed studies of hers, such as *Society and Culture in Early Modern France* (1975), *The Return of Martin Guerre* (1983), *Fiction in the Archives* (1987), *Women on the Margins* (1995), *Trickster Travels* (2006), *Leo Africanus* (2021), to name only a few? Searching for statements of her own on the topic, I was only able to come up with modest shreds of answers, which this article will offer below. But asking these questions is also a useful step in trying to better delineate Davis' distinctive contribution to the field of gift research across the humanities and social sciences: a contribution, I shall argue, which is of not only empirical-historical, but also conceptual and theoretical importance. From an empirical and historical perspective, *TGSCF* deployed a wealth of vistas concerning the place and dynamics of gifts in the context of sixteenth-century France. Conceptually, which is the angle adopted in this article, it also provides us with tools of comparative and macro-cultural analysis that still remain unparalleled and insufficiently applied in gift research and theory to this day.

⁴⁰ These are questions which rose to my mind soon after news of her passing away (on October 21, 2023) filled me, as so many others, with a wave of sadness mixed with admiration for the outstanding scholar and inspiring, generous person she was. Questions which it did not occur to me to ask her in the past, and now would not be able to ask her anymore.

TGSCF IN DAVIS' INTELLECTUAL TRAJECTORY

One thing we know about *TGSCF* is that it is a book that took a long time to complete; a long time indeed if we recall that Davis delivered a public lecture related to the topic of gifts—books as gifts specifically—already in 1982 (Davis, 1983).⁴¹ It was also a book of special importance to her, as she mentions later in a volume of conversations with Denis Crouzet, though without explaining much further (Davis, 2010 [2004], p. 175). But the fact that she describes herself as a restless scholar, moving from one project to another rather than pursuing one same overall theme of research, would seem anyway to defeat any simple interpretation of the place occupied by *TGSCF* in the unfolding of a long and prolific career.

Still, some very general linkages between *TGSCF* and the rest of her research are not too difficult to trace. To the extent that Davis is commonly acclaimed as a pioneer of microhistory who works at the interface of history and anthropology, *TGSCF* clearly stands in line with this general description of her work. It was hailed by Mary Douglas as “a model of historical anthropology”, and indeed, Davis herself states having started thinking about gifts in the early 1980s as a superb opportunity for connecting history and anthropology (*TGSCF*, p. 175). Moreover, throughout the years, Davis points to a number of anthropologists who influenced her intellectual trajectory from early on, among them Victor Turner, Claude Lévi-Strauss, Mary Douglas and Clifford Geertz,⁴² and shaped her understanding of popular religion and everyday life, rituals and ritual inversion (charivaris, carnivals), violent uprisings and resistance in particular. Also influential were less easily classifiable authors (Arnold Van Gennep, Mikhail Bakhtin, Michel de Certeau), reflecting her interdisciplinary disposition and interest in folklore and literary studies among else.

41 Davis mentions she had to put this book on a back burner for a while, as happened to her at times when feeling she had not entirely figured out how to tackle aspects of the topic at hand. In this case, she also realized that the topic was much more complicated and multivalent than seemed to her at first (Davis, 2010, p. 175). The way in which she coped with this “multivalence” is key to what will be presented here as her major achievement.

42 The work and influence of Clifford Geertz is something that Davis discussed at some length (Davis, 1999, 2008, 2009).

None of these major figures, however, appear to play much of a part, at least not explicitly, in *TGSCF* itself. Neither do we find there special attention to themes otherwise distinctive of Davis' earlier works, be it rituals of inversions and bursts of violence as just mentioned above, or her preference for highlighting the views and life stories of individuals on the lower ladders or margins of society, and women in particular. Also absent are themes of cultural *métissage* and self-fashioning that acquired growing importance in her writings, with an eye to the construction and performance of identities in-between worlds, realms of life and cultural contexts.

In contrast, the more explicit and determinant influence in connection to *TGSCF* is Davis' encounter with the life and writings of Marcel Mauss, and his landmark *Essai sur le don* (Mauss, 1924), with which she relates she had been in dialogue throughout her work on *TGSCF* (Davis, 2010, p. 56).⁴³ Indeed, it is not by chance that when the book appeared in French translation, it was entitled *L'Essai sur le don dans la France du XVI^e siècle* (Davis, 2003). Further helping explain the affinities with Mauss, is Davis' life-long intellectual, ethical and political concern with resisting the growing dominance of market capitalism—or “religion of the market” as she also termed it (Davis, 2010, p. 13)—as well as any form of totalitarian regimes, including communisms imposed from above.⁴⁴ Thus, studying the past in general, and past configurations of the gift in particular, is also meaningful to her in helping “show that the past could be different, that it was different, and that there are alternatives” (Coffin, Harding & Davis, 1984).

From that point of view, other influences which punctuate Davis' thinking are Karl Marx, Karl Polanyi and Max Weber. Far from putting any of these on a pedestal, she engages with them all, Mauss included, in a critical constructive manner. Her historical exploration of multiple gift practices and situations is thus also a way for her to challenge their conceptualization of long-term developments world-wide, be they economic, political or cultural.

43 This dialogue was also fueled by her interest in Mauss as a Jewish intellectual in France, whose fate in Paris—as a Jew “retired by the Collège de France” during the German Occupation—she followed in the archives.

44 In that perspective, she remarks having started by viewing the gift as a “critical option to the commercial and individualistic sensibility celebrated everywhere in the media”, but then moving on to “realize that gift relations were much more complicated and multivalent” than she first thought (*TGSCF*, p. 175).

Moreover, as her introductory chapter forcefully attests, she is clearly interested in conversing with and contributing to new theoretical reflections on the gift, and significantly, to do so, from a broad, long-term macro societal perspective.

Opening with a discussion of Mauss' legacy, Davis first recalls his well-known views on gifts as carrying a mix of freedom and obligation, gratuitousness and interest, and partaking of chains of gift-exchange propelled by dynamics of reciprocity, but also power and competition. These basic ideas will repeatedly emerge buttressed, if also refined and used in a supple fashion, throughout *TGSCF*. Yet as she moves to a macro-historical and societal plane of analysis, she turns more critical and underscores a tension in Mauss' approach between seeing gifts as increasingly displaced by market capitalism on the one hand, but also as a permanent feature of human societies on the other—one he hoped would keep surviving and even strengthen in contemporary modern framework (Davis, 2000, p. 4). She also notes that the archaic spirit of gift exchange, in Mauss' view, was already sapped by processes of legal and religious differentiation that long preceded modern capitalism—such as Roman law's distinction between persons and objects—thus confirming what she sees as a partly evolutionary slant in his thinking,

Davis' swift reading of subsequent contributions to the study of the gift is similarly intent to further challenge any form of unilinear long-term evolutionary thinking and dichotomic distinctions between gift and market. In that vein, she opts to highlight research—be it from an anthropological, sociological or historical perspective⁴⁵—which underscores their varying forms of coexistence and mutual entanglement in past and present contexts, and stresses the many diverse ways, spheres of life and networks of interaction, including political formations, in which gifts could be found to persist and be at work.

While one may argue with some aspects of her reading of either Mauss or others, few would disagree, I believe, when she concludes: “The gift landscape thus has many more paths through it and its boundaries are more open than when Mauss tried to map it seventy four years ago” (Davis, 2000, p. 8). How

45 Confirming both her interdisciplinary and theoretical reach, Davis builds upon major contributions by anthropologists Marshall Sahlins, Annette Weiner, Chris Gregory, Nicholas Thomas, James Carrier, sociologist Alain Caillé, as well as number of historians specializing in various periods of European history, from Greek Antiquity up to early modernity.

to deal, conceptually, with this multiplicity of the gift and its variable, flexible expressions and trajectories in past and present contexts still remains a central challenge to this day. It is also why it is worth revisiting how Davis herself confronted the issue. At any rate, what we can see already emerging from her introduction is another facet of *TGSCF*: a feat not only of micro-history cum anthropology, but also one of comparative and cultural interpretative macro-sociology. It is also a facet that has not yet been sufficiently acknowledged in the field of gift research specifically. At the core of Davis' contribution, as will be shown now in some detail, stands her idea of a gift register.⁴⁶

THE GIFT REGISTER IN SIXTEENTH-CENTURY FRANCE

From the very start, Davis resolutely relinquishes any unitary, singular conception of the gift and opts for avenues of research that emphasize plurality and diversity. She thus sets out to inquire into diverse forms and circuits of gifts in different settings, as well as search for variations relating to differences of status, gender, wealth and specific milieux. Yet significantly, she also encompasses this empirical diversity under a common, unifying conceptual umbrella: "This book is not so much about The Gift as it is an ethnography of gifts in sixteenth-century France and a cultural and social study of what I call a 'gift register' or a 'gift mode'" (*TGSCF*, p. 9). She also addresses this "mode" or "register" sometimes, even in one same sentence, as a "*repertoire*"—"a repertoire of behavior, a register with its own rules, language, etiquette, and gestures" (*TGSCF*, p. 15)—thus clearly using the three notions of mode, register, and repertoire as closely related and even interchangeable.

The gift mode, she insists, may expand or shrink in a given period, and does not obey any universal pattern of evolutionary stages. But it is clearly a very major and essential relational mode, one that basically persists and never loses significance, even as it also acquires features specific to its historical context. The features it acquires in sixteenth-century France may not

46 The following section is partly based on Silber, I. F. (2007), « Registres et répertoires du don : avec mais aussi après Mauss? », in Eliana Magnani (ed.), *Don et sciences sociales. Théories et pratiques croisées* (Dijon, Éditions universitaires de Dijon), p. 124-144 and Silber, I. F. (2010), « Mauss, Weber et les trajectoires historiques du don », *Revue du MAUSS*, 36, p. 539-561.

be identical to what they had been earlier or would be later, and Davis does not pretend to generalize to other times and places. In that precise historical setting, at any rate, it emerges as a very lively and pervasive dimension: “Sixteenth-century people were evaluating gifts all the time, their own and those of others, deciding what was at stake and judging whether it was a good gift or a bad gift or even a gift at all” (*TGSCF*, p. 9).

It is also a sure indication of this mode’s importance that Davis identifies only two more such essential relational modes—the mode of sale and that of coercion, with which the gift mode may interact, compete, intertwine, sometimes even partly overlap.⁴⁷ All in all, Davis seems to detect much more tension, in the context of sixteenth century France, between the gift mode and that of coercion, than that of sale. What and how an action is positioned within the discursive realm of gift, however, much depends on the actors’ active involvement and point of view, amounting to a rather painstaking, far from automatic labor of interpretation: “Sixteenth century people were also attentive to the borders of that realm, to the signs that might distinguish a gift from a sale, and a gift obligation from a coerced payment. [...] this might not always be so easy to do” (*TGSCF*, p. 22).

Buttressing this idea of a gift mode or register, Davis exposes the operation of a unifying framework that linked between a rich diversity of gift processes with the same words, same categories, even a shared core of beliefs. Briefly, a first belief linked human gifts to divine ones: everything we have is a gift from God, which leads to give more gifts in gratitude. A second core belief tended to rather justify gift exchange in worldly terms, focusing on the bond of reciprocity circulating and nurtured by gifts and benefits among humans. Moreover, these basic beliefs, or sets of beliefs are shown to be underpinned

⁴⁷ Davis would sum up this argument a few years later in the following terms: “In my book on the gift, I distinguished three forms of human exchange: contractual modes, where in principle all the obligations are clearly spelled out; coercive modes, where services and goods are taken by force or constraint; and gift modes, where things pass in principle with polite ambiguity via networks of reciprocity or outward waves of gratitude” (Davis, 2010 [2004], p. 72). She also explains that she enlarged her categories of analysis, from a focus on dualities and polarities (domination/resistance, Catholic/Protestant) to stressing equally the diverse forms of exchange, mixing and crossing, adding: “My book on *The Gift in Sixteenth-Century France*, which has meant a great deal to me, was a culmination of this double approach” (Davis, 2010 [2004], p. 175).

by, or to operate in tandem with, compatible conceptions of property and contract: “things must be individual or ‘private’ enough to be given away... but not so ‘private’ that owners could not imagine separating themselves from them... The movement toward a concept of full private property... was slow in France” (*TGSCF*, p. 13). Further contributing to the sense of a relatively unified and encompassing framework, sort of “a common thread that joined many different actions under the single register of the gift” (*TGSCF*, p. 21), are a number of additional features, such as the very small range of words used to talk of very diverse gift processes,⁴⁸ the tendency of ethical treatises to group together various categories of donation as branches of a single tree of virtue, and conversely, of religious tracts to attribute failures in regard to different forms of gifts to a single vice, avarice. Not all is a matter of words, concepts, beliefs, or moral assumptions however. What and how something is experienced and interpreted as gift is also very much a matter of accompanying gestures, manners and contexts, or what may be called, using now common sociological jargon, situated practices, be these discursive or non-discursive.

Besides the three levels already identified (core beliefs, words, manners), Davis suggests an additional, more socially specific and situated level of analysis, which she names “prescriptions”, articulating ideals for giving and receiving in different milieux (*TGSCF*, p. 15). Four main such sets of “prescriptions” are thus distinguished: Christian charity, noble liberality, favors of friendship, neighborly generosity. In contrast to the two sets of core beliefs defined above—to recall, one linking human gifts to divine ones, the other relating to bonds of reciprocity circulating among humans—which she sees as rather stable, received from the past, these four sets of prescription are also diagnosed as undergoing change and redefinition in the sixteenth-century.⁴⁹

Yet perhaps above all, contributing to the sense of a highly structured, unified universe, Davis identifies a shared, common *spirit* pervading the whole gift register, and therefore also cutting across the above four-fold distinction.

48 Mostly two or three when in a general sense—gift, present, alms—and a few more referring to more specific situations, such as *legs* (inheritance), *offrandes* (offerings), *bienvenue* (welcoming gifts). Davis also notes that account books could use the same verb, *donner*, for honorable pensions, customary gifts, family presents and modest alms, and subsume diverse gifts under the single heading of “dons, prix, et bienfaits” (*TGSCF*, p. 21).

49 These four sets, Davis stresses, do not cover all cases. For example, it does not include sacrificial offering and the gift of awesome reverence (*TGSCF*, p. 21).

Not too surprisingly, and clearly echoing Mauss, complexity appears to be very much a characteristic of this spirit: gifts are expected to combine both volition and obligation (they both need to be present); human gratitude is what generates return, but donors are in any case assured of some form of return (no loss is truly incurred); gifts were to express sentiments of affection, compassion and gratefulness but were at the same time also sources of support, interest and advancement.

Indeed, Davis gives much importance to the role of *gratitude*, as a driving force and perhaps the major, crucial feature in this spirit or as she terms it also, the “inner spirit” of gifts.⁵⁰ To be noted, this stands in contrast to Mauss, who did not pay gratitude any special attention. But the dividing line between it and obligation is a moving and permeable one. In fact, obligation (even if not necessarily experienced as negative constraint from the outside) looms so large that Davis argues the weight of what she calls an intensified, or “over determined culture of obligation... placing a heavy burden on the gift register” (*TGSCF*, p. 10; see also p. 67). Amplifying even further the sense of an encompassing, even rather oppressive gift register, similar patterns of giving and receiving, obligations and reciprocity, were at work in three major arenas (family, political life and religion), thus strengthening the pressures of obligation as a cultural mood.

Crucially, however, the operation of a rather highly unified, heavily pervasive gift register does not imply any necessarily harmonious, integrated nor benign view of its implications. To the contrary, there is much indeterminacy and potential conflict entailed: “Gift practices can explode into unbridled and violent rivalry... or collapse under excessive domination by the donor.” (*TGSCF*, p. 10). They can easily breed much “gift—trouble”, unresolved conflict and arguments about power and reciprocity at many different levels: families, politics, religion. The heavy culture of obligation, moreover, also breeds counter-tendencies, efforts to try and rethink the nature of reciprocity, and attempts to somehow find a way to obviate, disentangle oneself from the tight

50 Mauss never uses the term gratitude, and only once its negative form, ingratitude. The closely related term “reconnaissance”, does appear a few times (three times, or five, if we include “reconnaissant”), some of which rather in the sense of recognition than gratitude. As an aside, we may note that gratitude was invested with special signifi- cance by Georg Simmel (Simmel, 1950 [1908]), whose writings on exchange and gift are not referred to in *TGSCS*. For a recent, rich and systematic attention to generosity from a gift-theoretical perspective, see Chaniel, 2022.

nets of gratitude and reciprocity. But it is precisely a correlate of the pervasive reach of the gift register, that both pacifying or solidary effects of the mode register, and its contentious implications as well as counter-reactions would thus radiate across the main various levels and domains of individual and social experience.

Last, but not least, we need note the privileged, dominant position occupied by religion, in Davis' analysis of the gift register. Religion is the arena providing major ideas and exemplars both of reciprocity and gratuitousness, and as she puts it sharply: "Religious action and metaphor helped defined wider patterns of reciprocity" (*TGSCF*, p. 100). But it is precisely the consensual importance of beliefs and practices with regard to God and Christian ideals in the cultural universe of sixteenth-century France, combining as it did with the power of the gift register to reverberate across spheres of life, that may explain why differences of stance, interpretation or practice having to do with both the realm of religion and the gift register could have far reaching and explosive repercussions: "In a profound sense, the religious reformations of the sixteenth century were a quarrel about gifts, that is, about whether humans can reciprocate to God, about whether humans can put God under obligation, and about what this means for what people should give to each other" (*TGSE*, p. 100).⁵¹ In other words, dynamics of religious giving worked themselves out in a way that could contribute to either solidary or contentious implications of the gift register in other spheres of life and even society at large.

In sum, Davis powerfully conveys the operation of an historically specific gift register, offering a spectrum of options and leaving room to human agency, debate and reflexivity, while also maintaining these options and indeterminacies within the distinctively unifying and constraining features of a macro-cultural frame—one in which religion played a very central role—that contributed to nurture, rather than suppress, the entailed tensions and indeterminacies. Moreover, she not only identifies a unified register but also pays attention to its internal structure—mainly, as noted, an internal differentiation (pointing to four sub-sets of ideal gift prescriptions corresponding to specific social milieux) as well as internal hierarchy (placing religion and

51 The comparison of Catholic *vs.* Protestant approaches to charity, and how these developed in time, has generated a vast literature and many debates. For a further contribution to the comparison of Catholicism *vs.* Protestantism partly couched in terms of gift analysis specifically, see Hénaff, 2003.

thus the subset of ideal prescriptions associated with Christian charity in an influential, controlling position).⁵² The emphasis in Davis' rendering, however, seems to be perhaps less on such internal distinctions and attendant hierarchization, however important and relatively stable these were, than on the complexities, issues, ambiguities, dilemmas and unexpected consequences of gift processes, richly described as perceived, experienced and painstakingly defined by the actors' themselves and similarly pervading diverse spheres and arenas of social life.

To that extent, Natalie Davis' study still stands, to my knowledge, as the most comprehensive, multilevel account of an entire gift register and of the diversity of gift processes coexisting and made possible within it. To round out this picture, I wish now to draw attention to one more feature of Davis' analysis, namely her interest in furthering a broad, cross-cultural comparative approach to research on the gift.

REGISTERS OF GIVING IN COMPARATIVE PERSPECTIVE

In her conclusion to *TGSCF*, Davis suggests additional "gift trails" worth further exploration in the context of sixteenth-century France (such as gift systems in the world of artists and natural philosophers, professors of theology and medicine, healers, and gender related obligations).⁵³ But reaching beyond

52 Within the realm of charity, moreover, we are given a glimpse, if only via a brief discussion of Erasmus' advice and set of priorities, of the need to choose between giving to the poor or for the beautification of church buildings, or handing out alms to the local poor or contribute to the newer, central civic funds. (*TGSCF*, 110)

53 It is worth noting here the notion of gift systems, which appears occasionally in *TGSF* yet without any special attention and without clarifying its relation to the notions of gift mode, repertoire or register, or that of subsets of ideal prescriptions elaborated to analyze the register's internal differentiation—which we saw deployed as tools of analytical importance. Moreover, Davis also attaches the idea of systems to other aspects of social life (e.g. market system, sale systems, commercial system, patronage systems, exchange systems etc.) loosely alluding to the systemic features of various forms of social action, or broader, societal frameworks.

sixteenth-century France, she also suggests the need for broad, cross-cultural comparison with gift modes in non-Christian societies (*TGSCF*, p. 126).

This interest in comparative analysis was already visible very early on, as for example in her sustained comparison of Catholic and Protestant orientations in “The Sacred and the Body Social”, in which she also engaged, however critically, with Weber’s classic writings (Davis, 1981). In addition, it may well connote the deep influence of historian Marc Bloch (Davis, 2010, p. 41) and of anthropologist Clifford Geertz (Davis, 2005, 2008, 2009), later inflected by the spread of post-colonial, decentering and globalizing approaches across disciplines (Davis, 2006, 2011). Relatedly, she mentions her early awareness of comparative world history, including S.N. Eisenstadt’s comparative study of civilizations and so-called “multiple modernities” (Davis, 1998, 2011), and repeatedly calls for “the elimination of linear thinking and stage theories and their replacement with the notion of multiple possibilities at any moment in the historical process” (Davis, 2006, p. 16).

By and large, however, Davis did not engage the topic of the gift any further, be it in a comparative manner or otherwise, in later publications of her own. If gifts sometimes do appear again in some of her writings, it is in association with, and subsumed by a broader theoretical-historiographic argument, as when she argues the need “to describe and interpret relations between people along two universal axes: the axis of exchange, involving communication, trade, gifts and alliance, and the axis of power, involving the domination of peoples, and resistance to domination” (Davis, 2006, p. 16).

Yet we do find confirmation of her more specific interest in cross-cultural comparison with regard to giving in “non-Christian settings”, as she had termed it, in a concluding chapter she contributed to a volume of studies centering upon charitable giving in particular, *Poverty and Charity in Middle Eastern Contexts*, published only a few years after *TGSCF* (Bonner, Ener and Singer eds., 2003).

Emerging most forcefully from Davis’ detailed discussion of the contributions to the volume at hand, is her attention to what she sees as distinctive features of charity in Islamic contexts, in comparison mainly to Christian if also at times also to Jewish charity in particular.⁵⁴ One primary feature she emphasizes is a distinctively stronger, mutually constitutive relation we may

54 The volume *Poverty and Charity* also included contributions dealing with Jewish charity.

say, between charitable giving and the very definition of religious collective identity: “*Zakat*, the annual giving of alms, was one of the earliest commands to each believer and remained an essential marker of Islam over the centuries... Charity sustained Jewish and Christian societies, but the Islamic example shows us how vital charitable donation can be in the very formation and conceptualization of a religious community” (Davis, 2003, p. 315). Second, she highlights a number of distinctive themes, such as “purification” and the “return” of wealth to the poor: religiously, charity was understood as a way to become closer to God, cleanse one’s wealth, and sustain the community of Islam—without ever challenging, however, the legitimacy of private and family property. There is also much lesser concern with inner, voluntary feelings and the voluntary/obligatory split: “*The zakat* had been required since the beginning, and the donation was not thought thereby to lose its value or be robbed of inner spirit... purification could work through a tax” (Davis, 2003, p. 317). Cited as more salient features than the concern with obligation or volition, are for example, whether a gift is routinely scheduled or more particularly timed, standard or especially conceived, from a general community or from an individual. Also discussed is the distinctive institution of the *waqf*, i.e. the giving of property in perpetuity for a charitable use oriented to both public and private beneficiaries, a generally less judgmental and selective attitude of charitable institutions to recipients of charity, a broader spatial scope encouraging supra-local giving, besides more differences which I shall not detail any further here.

Together with the many and significant differences, Davis also sees similarities between charitable giving in Islam and other contexts: “Whether as required yearly *zakat* or as diverse and unscheduled *sadaqa* (charity), charitable gifts brought religious benefit to the Muslim donor, as they did also to the Jewish and Christian donor.” Moreover: “As with charitable gifts everywhere, donors had multiple intentions.” Besides, and mixed with religious goals, there were thus also considerations of prestige, patronage (local or broad), politics, legitimacy of rulers, and economic or demographic policies.

The focus being on charity, the chapters assembled in the volume do not claim to attend to other forms of giving, even less to an entire gift register as was done in *TGSCF*. Still, we cannot but wonder how all this might have compared with the way charity was depicted in *TGSCF*, to recall, as one of four sub-sets of ideal “prescriptions” for giving and receiving (next to those of noble liberality, favors of friendship, and neighborly generosity), albeit one

occupying an especially influential, controlling position in the gift register in sixteenth-century France and as such, part and parcel of a broader, heavy “culture of obligation”.

Davis herself did not develop such a more comprehensive cultural interpretative comparison. Significantly, however, she does call here for future studies that would explore the relation between charitable giving and other forms of gifts in the context of Islam—in other words, studies situating charity in the context of a broader gift register, or gift repertoire, as we know she did herself in *TGSCF*. In addition, it would seem no less crucial to encourage studies that would further explore the place of the gift register itself in social life at large, and perhaps even uncover the importance of exploring the variable relation of the gift register not only relatively to sale and coercion—the two basic alternative modes of interaction emphasized in *TGSCF*—but also to other major parameters of social life as well. For only one, but major example, her own discussion of charity as a central parameter in the very definition of the religious community in Islam, suggests the importance of studying the variable relation between the gift register and the very definition of collective belonging and identity, be it religious or otherwise. In a sense, this might even broaden gift research and free it from its lasting, overriding concern with the relation between gift, market and state.

CONCLUSION

Much has happened in the field of gift research and theory since *TFSCF* appeared. Paraphrasing what Davis expressed with regard to Mauss and his *Essai sur le don*, we can surely say that the gift landscape has even more paths traversing it and its boundaries are now even more porous than when she mapped it so brilliantly in the context of sixteenth-century France. Divergences in theoretical approach and interpretations abound, and debates still rage over the possibility of identifying shared essential core features of gifts (or gift-processes as I prefer to term it), perhaps even seeing these as universally foundational to social life at large, while also accounting for the vast range of differences in ideas, ideals, practices and implications which a considerable amount of research on the gift in a number of disciplines has exposed.

Cutting across such disputes, however, it is worth drawing attention to two strands of gift research that may help theorize the diversity of gift processes

without necessarily adopting an essentializing, universal conception, and which precisely confirm the importance of Davis' ideas concerning registers of giving. One important development has been the multiplication of attempts to produce increasingly elaborate, flexible and refined typologies of gifting, positing a spectrum of possible types or modes of giving.⁵⁵ A second development has been the effort to reach for adequate contextualization, be it in historical or contemporary settings, ranging from micro-situations to macro-societal entities and from small tribes or villages to entire civilizations. This often entails the study of emic perceptions, local constructions and multifarious conjectural negotiations, thus also resisting any type of uniform conceptualization.⁵⁶

Yet no less important a challenge lies in a third route, which aims to combine typological distinctions with a systematic effort at contextualization.⁵⁷ While still relatively underdeveloped, this composite strand is particularly evident in studies—significantly often the work of historians or social scientists with a strong interest in history who strive, like Davis did, to provide a comprehensive account of a diversity of gift-practices coexisting in a defined societal context (see in particular Ben-Amos, 2008; Caner, 2021; Bornstein, 2006, 2013; Copeman, 2011; Heal, 2014; Sihlé, 2015; Zionkowski & Klekar, 2009). This composite third strand has also engendered diachronic *longue durée* arguments, tracing historical switching points or developments with regard to the relative

55 Covering what has become an extensive body of literature would lead beyond the limits of this article. For some examples, see Caillé, 2000, 2019, 2020; Chaniel, 2016, 2023; Elder-Vass, 2015; Godbout, 2007, Hénaff, 2010, 2012, 2013; Komter, 2005; Pyyhtinen, 2014; Vandevelde, 2000.

56 Here again, the literature is too voluminous to refer to and includes many excellent studies by anthropologists and historians. For a lead contribution, see Gadi Algazi and Valentin Groebner (eds.), *Negotiating the Gift: Pre-modern Figurations of Exchange* (Göttingen, 2003), which is referred to by Natalie Davis in *TGSCF* even though it officially appeared three years later, as she took part as commentator in the conference upon which the volume is based.

57 For an earlier survey of such trends, see Silber, 2007. Similarly calling to combine ideal-typical with contextual analysis, see Alain Caillé's search for invariants as "fixed points in a system of transformations of the gift", as a way to avoid the pitfalls of essentialism and approach the gift as always intrinsically specific and contextualized (Caillé, 2000), all the more significant (and generating challenging questions) since Caillé is also the proponent of a general gift-paradigm, possibly extending gift theory to all societies and aspects of social life (Caillé 2019).

dominance of different modalities of gift giving through the ages, some up to our own days (Hénaff, 2010, 2012, 2013; Parry, 1986; Tarot, 2000). Most recently, combined attentiveness to typological and contextual analysis generated an innovative typological approach to the gift's dangers, which also questioned their variable expression in the context of different spheres of human experience (Sowerby and Urakova, 2023). Further expanding the horizon of typological cum contextual analysis is a novel attention to a virtual, imaginative dimension of gift-processes, such that what is given is frequently evaluated in relation to what might have been but was not given in a particular context—thus also forming the basis of social criticism (Copeman and Banerjee, 2021, 2023).⁵⁸

Building upon Davis' ambitious precedent, we wish for future daring interdisciplinary scholarship to further explore such varying configurations of gift repertoires in diverse historical and cultural contexts. Reaching back to Marcel Mauss, and recalling his deep interest in religions as well as his strong historical and comparativist leanings—however relatively understated precisely in his *Essai sur le don*—we can safely presume that he would have rejoiced at the prospect of such an enlarged comparative, historical, and macrocultural elaboration of his pathbreaking uncovering of the core, or in his own words, “total” significance of gift-processes. I suspect he would have also rejoiced at Natalie Davis' own “moral conclusions”, calling us to deliberate in a livelier way, as was done in sixteenth century France, what counts as a good or bad gift; but also echoing his own hopes for more giving, and more solidarity in our times—even as she anchored such hopes, more explicitly than he did, in *a spirit of gratitude* and as she wrote at the very end of her conclusion, in “the dream of a world restored, replenished, even expanded in generosity” (Davis, 2000, p. 132).

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58 One way of better combining typological elaboration with improved contextualization, I suggest, is to further develop the idea of gift repertoires, as a way of also bringing into focus the mutually constitutive coexistence and dynamics, both ideational and institutional, of various forms of giving in one same historical context (Silber, 2002, 2007).

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DRINKING THE DIVINE: ON GIFTS, GODS, AND WINES

David Inglis

“I like best the wine drunk at the cost of others.”

Diogenes the Cynic

“Since heaven and earth love wine.
Need a tippling mortal be ashamed?”

Li Bai, 8th century CE

“God made only water, but man made wine.”

Victor Hugo

INTRODUCTION

Throughout its entire history, stretching over some eight thousand years, wine made from grapes has been intimately bound up with myriad human gift practices (Howland, 2023a). Drinkers have treated each other for millennia to cups, glasses, and bottles of the stuff in expressions of commensality, companionship, and fellow feeling. Giving or sharing a bottle happens with more basic wines in quotidian contexts constantly, while presenting high-level wine operates as a means both of expressing esteem for the recipient and of marking the specialness of special occasions (Harding, 2023). Winemakers have created enduring senses of community in winemaking regions by sharing with each other their mutual assistance, their valuable know-how, and the resulting end products (Smith, 2023). Longstanding wine regions have complex cultures of hospitality and gift-giving among wine-related actors, which are constantly being reconfigured and renegotiated while being presented as inheritances of the distant past (Demossier, 2023). Giving the gift of one's own wine to others engaged in the creation of it often happens most intensely at harvest time and at the season when new vintages are unveiled, profoundly connecting human gifting activity to the seasons and natural cycles of the earth (Howland, 2023a).

The present-day wine industry is a highly commercialised arena, hyping and selling wine commodities worth billions of Dollars annually, yet gifts and gifting are endemic to it in multiple ways, such that the instrumental and non-instrumental are imbricated in complicated and constantly shifting manners (Howland, 2023b; Ulin, 2023). Wine tastings today, whether in impersonal spaces such as conference centres or in more distinctive locales like vineyards and wineries, operate in ways that exist between commercial impulses on the one side, and demonstrations of gratuitous generosity from producers to consumers on the other. The tensions between these two dynamics structure wider wine worlds in often ambiguous ways (Black, 2023). Professional networks in the wine industry today are very much reliant on the interchange of gifted wines (Ana, 2023). If I give you a taste of the best vintage my company has to offer, I start to create a web of enduring sociality between us. Whether the gifting primarily might benefit you, or me, or both of us together, depends on the specific circumstances, dynamics, and persons involved (Howland, 2023a), a point also alluded to by Lévi-Strauss (1969 [1949], p. 59-60).

David Graeber (2001, p. 226) sounds a warning note here. He makes a point about the specific nature of (some types of) wine gifts in order to raise a much wider issue about the dangers of conceptualising gifts in one-sidedly positive manners:

There is a great danger... of romanticizing “the gift” as a humanizing counterweight to the impersonality and social isolation of modern capitalist society. There are times when things can work quite the other way around. Let me take... [a] familiar example: the custom of bringing a bottle of wine or somesuch if invited to a friend’s for dinner. It is a common practice, for example, among American academics. In America, though, it is also common for young people of middle-class background to move, from the time they first begin to live independently of their parents in college, from relatively communal living arrangements to increasing social isolation. In an undergraduate dorm, people walk in and out of each other’s rooms fairly casually; often a residential hall is not unlike a village with everybody keeping track of everybody else’s business. College apartments are more private, but it is usually no big deal if friends drop by without warning or preparation. The process of moving into conventional, bourgeois existence is

gradual, and it is above all a matter of establishing the sacred quality of the domestic threshold, which increasingly cannot be crossed without preparations and ceremony. The gift of wine, if you really think about it, is part of the ritualization process that makes spontaneity more difficult. It is as much a bar to sociality as an expression of it.

With this caveat noted, this paper will now turn to consider one of the oldest intersections between wine and gift practices, namely that involving the role of wine gifts in religious beliefs and rituals. It is only within the last several hundred years that the significance of religion in winemaking and drinking has shrunk, these becoming largely secular phenomena. Nonetheless, today wine still plays significant roles in both Judaic and Christian rituals. And regarded in very long-term perspective, for the eight millennia of its existence, grape wine has been strongly associated with the major world religions of central and western Eurasia, including those of the ancient Middle East, Egypt, and the Greco-Roman Mediterranean, as well as Judaism and Christianity (Lutz, 1922; Younger, 1966; McGovern, 2003). From its earliest days, wine has had deep religious significances. It has been conceived variously as a gift from the gods, or God, or from Nature, and these conceptualisations have had ramifications for both wine and religions that have been deep and long-standing (Inglis, 2023).

Ritual libations, of wine and other precious liquids, have long been an essential part of religious practices which involve making offerings to the gods (Dietler, 2006, p. 241). Drunkenness can be used to stimulate mystical experiences: “sobriety diminishes, discriminates, and says no; drunkenness expands, unites, and says yes”, noted William James (1917, p. 376-7). The meanings attributed to wine in any religious context are “embedded in a much wider system of ‘analogies’ that accentuate its symbolic role in mediating between the mundane and the extraordinary, the secular and the sacred” (Fuller, 1996, p. 113). Wine has often been used to create forms of exuberant fellow-feeling among religious congregants. But its capacities in that direction have meant it has also been feared or shunned altogether by religious authorities, especially those oriented towards more austere and self-controlled forms of worship (Fuller, 1996).

Wine-based gifts *to* the gods are particularly likely to be offered by human adherents if wine is understood as a gift to humanity *from* the gods, and thus

considered as valuable and perhaps deeply sacred in itself.⁵⁹ In such cases, wine will seem especially precious, and therefore worthy of being offered back in return to its divine progenitors, as part of an ongoing cycle of gift relations between parties in heaven and on earth. This sort of scenario can be seen in contexts as diverse as ancient China (Poo, 1999), Egypt (Poo, 1995, 2010) and medieval Christianity (Montanari, 2015). But even among populations in which wine's origins and nature are not conceived of as divine, its perceived properties meant that it still figured as an appropriate gift to the gods (Heath, 2003, p. 149).

I begin this paper with the following general propositions. Throughout Eurasian history, the nexus of wine and religion has often featured phenomena of gifts and gift-giving. When wine has been symbolically and practically associated with religion, it has often been attributed with gift-like qualities and affordances. Conversely, when wine has been associated with gifts in a way that goes in some manner beyond more pragmatic and immediate concerns, its gift-like nature may take on some type of religious significance. When a religious creed's symbolic repertoire attributes gift-like qualities to wine, this has effects on the practical uses of wine within that religion's rituals. Those uses in turn may impact upon the religious symbolism of wine when it is understood as a gift. These notions will now be fleshed out using examples taken in turn from the Greek and Greco-Roman, Judaic, and Christian traditions.

GREEKS BEARING WINE GIFTS

Wine was highly valued in antiquity. "It was a common table drink, a desirable trade item, a gift to kings, a medical aid, a ritual offering, and part of nearly every aspect of life as it was shared by family, friends, priests, and kings to celebrate happiness and sorrow, worship and covenant" (Seely, 1996-1997, p. 207). Moreover, the fermented grape was "by far the commonest source of alcohol in the ancient world, and alcohol by far the commonest intoxicant available" (Purcell, 1985, p. 2). Religious rituals often

59 Heath (2003, p. 148) notes that in Eurasian traditions, gods gifting wine to humanity—Osiris in Egypt, Dionysos in Greece, etc.—tend to be male, while in the ancient cultures of the America, how to make alcohol is taught to humanity often by female deities.

involved wine offerings, and wine-oriented rituals—pre-eminently festivals of the grape harvest and of opening new vintages—were important features of the seasonal calendar (Wilkins and Hill, 2006, p. 182).

Wine was central to ancient Greek and Roman imaginaries, including how they understood themselves and their cultural differences with others. The grape vine was understood as a key symbol and guarantor of civilized life (Nencini, 1997, p. 91). Greeks and Romans “often used diet as a basic way to differentiate between cultures... presenting a dichotomy between primitive pastoral people who lived from meat (of their flocks, or from animals hunted, or at worst, even human flesh), milk, cheese, and butter, as well as beer, and the more civilized agrarian people who lived from bread and wine” (Nelson, 2005, p. 4). Wine was a key part of a long-standing ideology—first Greek, then Roman—that understood civilization “as the ability to invent one’s own life and to shape nature—wine, oil, and bread do not exist in nature”, but are rather the fruits of human labour (Montanari, 2015, p. 130).

At the same time, wine was also seen as a gift from the gods, and from one divinity in particular. The Greek god Dionysos—the Latin Bacchus—continues today to be a conventional symbol of wine. But in the ancient Mediterranean, the understandings of Dionysos, and the practices which those understandings animated, were much deeper and more serious (Kerenyi, 1959). Modern people “are accustomed to use the gifts of nature to suit ourselves without being amazed by its secrets”, and so “whenever there is talk of wine, we think of geniality, high spirits, and, perhaps, also of the dangers to health and morals” (Otto, 1965, p. 151). By contrast the ancient Greeks were “caught up by the total seriousness of the truth that here pleasure and pain, enlightenment and destruction, the lovable and the horrible lived in close intimacy. It is this unity of the paradoxical which appeared in Dionysiac ecstasy with staggering force” in the ancient Mediterranean (Otto, 1965, p. 151). In that world, “no god was more worshipped, more feared and more loved” than Bacchus (Isler-Kerenyi, 2014, p. 241). If wine was a blessing, then people should give thanks to the god who gave it to them (Wilson, 2012, p. 27).

As viticulture spread westward from Egypt, through Crete and the Aegean, to mainland Greece, there came also the cult of its ecstatic religion, which underwent various accretions from Egyptian and Minoan cultures (Ruck, 1986, p. 180). The spread of wine making into Greece involved the conjunction of the commercial growth of the wine industry together with intensification of the Dionysos cult, commerce and religion reinforcing each other

(Stanislawski, 1975, p. 428). In archaic Greece, aristocrats “competed with one another for prestige and power by ostentatious displays of martial valour, gift giving, and feasting... [acting] as redistributors whose power [was] as fragile as their last successful party” (Russell, 2003, p. 81). Wine played an important role in the gifts showered by leaders onto followers whose loyalty had to be won (Hamilakis, 1996, p. 25). In later times, wine became an object of sophisticated cultural reflection. As Lissarrague (2016, p. 4) notes, when speaking about wine the ancient Greeks “were inexhaustible. Drinkers’ dialogues, experts’ discussions, lyric poems, and mythological tales—the literature that deals with the divine beverage is extensive”.

At the centre of this cultural constellation stood the complex figure of the wine god. Dionysos was understood by the Greeks as a profoundly ambivalent figure. The ambiguity and multivalence of Dionysos is well captured by Otto (1965, p. 19) in a classic analysis:

All of antiquity extolled Dionysus as the god who gave man wine. However, he was known also as the raving god whose presence makes man mad and incites him to savagery and even to lust for blood. He was the confidant and companion of the spirits of the dead... Dionysus was the god of the most blessed ecstasy and the most enraptured love. But he was also the persecuted god, the suffering and dying god, and all whom he loved, all who attended him, had to share his tragic fate.

It was widely understood that wine was a gift proffered by the god to humanity (Amzallag, 2011). There are multiple interpenetrating features of Dionysos’ gift in Greek thinking. In the first place, such a gift was understood to be simultaneously precious, and in various ways positive, and yet in other ways negative and potentially dangerous too. Wine was therefore a *pharmakon*: both an important aid to human life and—if badly handled—a poison too (Lissarrague, 2016, p. 5-6). The duality of the persona of Dionysos allowed for cultural reflection on the ambiguous nature of his gift of wine. What were understood as the simultaneously positive and negative affordances of wine were projected onto the god, and vice versa, his mixed personality was projected onto wine. In the Greek imaginary, under some circumstances Dionysos *is* wine, and wine *is* Dionysos. This was especially in libation ceremonies, which involved a request for material favours from the

gods (Wilson, 2012, p. 27). More generally, the god revealed himself to the Greek imbibor in both the taste of his gift, and in the physiological and psychological effects of its consumption (Otto, 1965, p. 145).⁶⁰

The mysterious nature of the god's gift partly resided in the fact that the Greeks did not know why fermentation of grape juice happened spontaneously, and various mystical and divine reasons were attached to the process (Otto, 1965, p. 147). One such explanation was that just as the harvested and crushed grapes had to "die" in order to create the marvellous liquid, so too did Dionysos suffer and die bloodily and then was reborn. Therefore "upon the body of the harvested grape could be grown the regeneration of the primitive god into his evolved form as the cultivated and refined intoxicant of civilized times, a rebirth that was clearly observable in the effervescing movement of the rotting ferment, as well as in the perceptible warmth generated by the process" (Ruck, 1986, p. 191).

It was only by sacrifice of himself, an act thought to be repeated each year at grape harvest time, that Dionysos could offer continually the gift of wine to humankind (Ruck, 1986, p. 202). In the making of wine, "the god's experience was analogous to mankind's journey toward redemption through the mouldering tomb... [H]is slaughtered body was... dismembered in the wine press... [and] the juice, that was the god's blood, flowed into urns placed like burial chambers beneath the earth, where the subterranean environment maintained the proper temperature for the fungal growth of fermentation" (Ruck, 1986, p. 194). The fermented juice was understood to be akin to, or actually was, the resurrected Dionysos, whose liquid gift had once again been given, and whose gift-giving powers were reconfirmed through the new wine that came into being with each harvest time.

Dionysos' gift was understood to operate in conjunction with another crucial act of divine beneficence, the goddess Demeter's bringing to humankind of the knowledge required to cultivate oats, and by extension the art of baking bread. Demeter's gifts were locatable in the realm of culture and civilization, "whereas the grapes of Dionysos represent both culture and nature in the wine, crossing the borders between man and god" (Näsström, 2003). Like the divine messenger Hermes, Dionysos worked as an intermediary between

60 But not necessarily in the Greek natural scientific and philosophical imaginary, which often dismissed the idea of the god's presence in the wine as nonsense (Wilson, 2012, p. 24-5).

the heavenly and mundane realms. Likewise, his gift of wine was ambivalently placed between human and natural terrains, for it encompassed both grapes and vines and the humans working upon them. The ontological ambivalence of wine was further represented in the sexual and gender ambiguity of Dionysos, an in-between figure between otherwise highly rigid gendered archetypes of gods and goddesses (Stanislawski, 1975, p. 435). He was represented both as softly effeminate in some ways, and as an incorrigible seducer of women on the other, a representation also stressing the liminal nature of both the god and his gift (Dalby, 2003, p. 51; Nelson, 2005, p. 27).

The powers of the god's gift were likewise understood as deeply ambivalent, resting in the notion that the fermented juice of the grape had the "power to enchant, to inspire, to raise up the spirit" (Otto, 1965, p. 145). But the imbibing could go in one of two main ways. While wine had within it "the power to free, to comfort, and to bring bliss", there also rested within it "the madness of the god of horror", which Dionysos was also (Otto, 1965, p. 150). The god could bring both joy and madness (Perdicoyianni-Paleologou, 2009, p. 320). He had in common with his gift the power to drive away mundane cares, but possibly at the cost of the loss of the drinker's reason, with the dividing line between a "benign frame of mind and mild euphoria" and "aggression and insanity" being a very thin one (Wilson, 2012, p. 31).

Thus, while wine was the facilitator of lasting friendships, warm bonhomie, and sincere words between friends and allies (Stanislawski, 1975, p. 444), still Dionysos' gift had to be handled with great care. Throughout the centuries, admonitions were endlessly voiced about the need to drink wine in moderation, not just to avoid hangovers, but more broadly to retain a sense of cosmological balance (Nencini, 1997, p. 91). Not only excessive consumption but also the drinking of wine in unadulterated form—un-mixed and without the necessary tempering of added water—could lead to catastrophe (Lissarrague, 2016). In the variety of myths about the origins of wine, Dionysos' gift to humankind is usually accompanied by violence and the deaths of the first recipients of the gift (Nencini, 1997, p. 191; Ruck, 1986, p. 195). The donation was too strong for them to handle, with the lesson being that humans must learn to treat this most powerful beverage, "liquid fire", very circumspectly indeed (Wilson, 2012, p. 31).

Moreover, a terrible fate could await those who refused the gift of wine. Euripides' play *Bacchae* dramatizes a much older myth involving Pentheus, king of Thebes, who refuses to accept Dionysos' gift of wine as something positive

for humanity (Ruck, 1986). Pentheus' suspicion of the beverage is compounded by other widely assumed attributes of Dionysos: that he is a sexual threat to patriarchal gender relations among the women of the city, who will be tempted to become his debauched followers, and that he is an untrustworthy stranger, an Eastern foreigner. The Greeks knew that viticulture and viniculture had originally come from more Easterly climes. The non-Greek origins of wine were expressed in the widespread notion, included in Euripides' play, that when he arrives in a new location, Dionysos "spreads ecstasy and madness around him and finally disappears" (Näsström, 2003, p. 139). Pentheus' refusal to accept wine as a benefit to humanity lead to him being hunted down and torn apart by the female followers of the god, the Bacchantes or Maenads (Joffe, 1998). This is a particularly acute rendering of the more general theme of what may happen to those who do not accept gifts in a spirit of goodwill (Mauss, 1970).

We now move from the mythological level to matters of concrete wine-drinking practice. In the male cultural universe of the classical Greeks, Dionysos and his gift played other roles, especially within the institution of the *symposion*, the dinner with entertainments and wine drinking favoured by elite males (Russell, 2003). While Dionysos was praiseworthy as the god who had given his gift to all men, rich and poor (Stanislawski, 1975), still it was the upper classes whose wine-drinking was most explicitly focused both on the god and on celebrating his gift. The warrior dispositions of elites of the Greek archaic age evolved into the more pacific dispositions of upper-class men in the classical age (Joffe, 1998, p. 307). Nonetheless, elements of the older culture of hospitality—involving competitive feasting, and the gifting of food and wine to allies and clients—survived in the *symposion*, with the host giving out largesse to the guests. The food, wine, and entertainments doled out were explicitly gift-like in character. They were de-commodified and framed as expressions of reciprocal and reciprocated friendship bonds, cultivated through the means of ongoing rounds of hospitality between participants. The framing indicated that money and "the grubby exchange of goods in the markets, ha[d] no place in the symposium of friends", who were bound together by a gift economy of hosting each other regularly (Daniel-Hughes, 2012, p. 176).

Such events tended to follow set and quite strict rules aimed at avoiding excessive drunkenness, with a master of ceremonies—a symposiarch—often being appointed to ensure cheerful imbibing did not topple into inebriated chaos (Joffe, 1998, p. 307; Klinghardt, 2012, p. 13-14). Mythological scenes

of the latter often figured on the drinking bowls and other implements used for wine drinking, especially the more expensive ones, as a reminder of the downsides of Bacchus' gift (Isler-Kerenyi, 2014). In the entertainments accompanying the drinking, all guests would be expected to contribute to the "collective gift" that was the *symposion*, by participating in games, or performing party pieces like songs and recitations (Klinghardt, 2012, p. 13-14).

The *symposion* space was arranged so that all male participants were situated in equal relation to each other. As Mnesiphilos of Athens said in the 5th century BCE, "conversation, like wine, should not follow the rules of plutocracy or aristocracy; rather, like democracy, it should be equally shared among all and belong to them in common" (Lissarrague, 2016, p. 46). At the centre of proceedings stood the *krater*, the wine mixing-bowl, which was dedicated to Bacchus and often bore imagery of the god, wine, and vines. The bowl was both a reminder of the importance of the demands of hospitality amongst the gods, as well as a practical and symbolic origin-point of the distribution and circulation of wine around the assembled participants. At the start of the drinking, in an explicitly "religious" aspect of an otherwise primarily non-religious event, part of the wine would be dedicated and offered to Zeus, other deities, and Bacchus himself. As the god of wine, he was both subject and object of the offering. As Euripides makes the seer Tiresias explain in the *Bacchae*: "When we pour libations to the gods, we pour the god of wine himself, that through his intercession man may win the favour of heaven" (cited at Lissarrague, 2016, p. 26). Moreover, as the mixing of wine with water civilized the former, libations were drunk in praise of the god from the bowl, lauding not only his gifting of wine, but also his imparting of the knowledge to mankind that it must be diluted, such that its powers could be brought under human control (Lissarrague, 2016, p. 10).

Dionysus was not only tutelary deity of the vine, but also "the totem of a group that developed activist fervour", namely the Bacchantes of real life, beyond those of mythic and poetic representations (Stanislawski, 1975, p. 428). In classical Greece, women were not citizens, and as such "belonged to Dionysos and his alternative universe", which existed beyond more sedate and State-sanctioned forms of religion (Isler-Kerenyi, 2014, p. 237). As Näsström (2003, p. 141) notes, it was predominantly women, especially of the upper classes, who enacted "the most striking expressions of the orgiastic side of Dionysian religion... [involving] ecstatic dancing on the hillsides with flaming torches and the feeling of being possessed by the god". Dionysos could inspire his subjects

with “enthusiasm”, a word still with us today, albeit in a much more restricted sense. Such rites may well have been experienced as release from otherwise highly circumscribed lifestyles. While the idea of Dionysos’ gifting wine to humanity—and not only to men—was part of the symbolism of the cult, it is doubtful whether wine itself was much used to stimulate the state of possession of celebrants by the god (Nencini and Grant, 2010, p. 2133).

The cult of Dionysos constantly mutated as it spread across the Mediterranean area, going in tandem with the arrival of vine planting and wine making (Stanislawski, 1975). When the cult reached the Greek colonies of southern Italy in about the 4th century BCE (Näsström, 2003), it merged with established belief systems there, including Orphic and Pythagorean cults. The new mystery religion that emerged emphasised “faith in the existence of a destiny in the Netherworld, eternal and beatific”. Once the initiate had overcome all trials, especially death itself, they could enter the Dionysian paradise where the god welcomes him or her with a gift of wine, token of the greatest gift of all, a perfect afterlife (Cabrera, 2013).

The introduction of State-sanctioned Dionysian celebrations in Athens (Robertson, 1993), in the festival of the new wine in January, meant a considerable taming of rites connected to the god (Amzallag, 2011), and a conjoining of him to more respectable deities (Ruck, 217). Libations were offered in thanks to the god (Kerenyi, 1976), but frenzied intoxication was outlawed (Amzallag, 2011, p. 400). By the time the Bacchanalia—named after Dionysos’ Latin nomenclature, Bacchus—reached 2nd century BCE Rome, so threatening were the women-only rites to established patriarchal order that the Senate banned them. According to the historian Livy, seven thousand adherents were eventually executed. The numbers are almost certainly exaggerated, but this was still one of the most serious purge of religious followers in Rome before the time of the Christian persecutions some centuries later (Näsström, 2003, p. 142).

JUDAISM AND YAHWEH’S GIFT OF WINE

We now turn eastwards, to ancient Israel. In Jewish tradition, wine was—and continues today to be—central to many rituals, both more solemn and more joyful, concerning recurring holy days like the Sabbath and Passover, as well as key life events, including marriage and circumcision.

The drinking of certain types of wine only has served for millennia as a means of distinguishing Jews from non-Jews (Putzu, 2017, p. 153). In the rabbinic tradition, which indicates Jews must drink only *kosher* wine, untouched by gentile hands in its making and serving, wine is “the currency of sacredness”, and thereby “must be cordoned off from the profane realm where Jews and Gentiles pursue social and economic relationships” (Wasserman, 2017, p. 124).

Wine is very important in the books of the Hebrew Bible and other canonical texts of Judaism (Smith, 1996 [1975]). There are more references to the vine in the Torah than to any other plant (Phillips, 2018, p. 71). In many of the texts, wine is depicted as being given as a gift (Sasson, 1994, p. 405). “Vineyards, vines, and grapes were symbols of fruitfulness and of the God’s care for his children” (Seely, 1996-1997, p. 217-218). As Seely (1996-1997, p. 223) puts it, “the fruit of the vine gave many gifts to ancient Israel”, being symbolic of both God’s grace and the salvation he promises true believers, and also of his wrath (Sasson, 1994, p. 410).

When the Hebrews fled from Egypt into Israel under Moses’ leadership, a forward party of scouts returned with a gigantic bunch of grapes, a clear sign of God’s favour (Phillips, 2018). Yahweh enjoined the Hebrews to enjoy wine at their festivals, and he demanded that in turn their priests make wine offerings to him, as recognition of his gifts to the people. Wine was accordingly a significant part of the system of temple sacrifices and offerings (Seely, 1996-1997, p. 220). Yahweh was invoked during the wine harvest, while priests demanded tithes of wine and other fruits of the harvest for the upkeep of the temples. “Pure, choice wines” are taken by the Psalmist and the prophets Isaiah and Amos as indications of Yahweh’s love for the chosen people (Royce, 1985, p. 54). The paradise promised to the Hebrews in the afterlife involves bounteous wine flowing freely, and this wine does not have the disadvantage of making one drunk as its earthly counterpart does (Seely, 1996-1997, p. 223; Putzu, 2017, p. 154).

Conversely, when Yahweh was displeased with law-breakers, he threatened to make their vineyards barren such that their wine will cease to flow (Phillips, 2014, p. 49). The image of the wrathful divine winepress, crushing all before, likened the blood shed to grapes at harvest time (Kerenyi, 1976, p. 67). The divine gift of wine could also be abused by excessive drinking of it, or by idolatrous uses of it, both acts subject to Yahweh’s ire (Bacchiocchi, 2001, p. 25). As the book of Proverbs says, wine can be “a mocker” that “bites like a serpent and stings like an adder”. Such texts condemn drunkenness as evil, but praise wine

as a gift from God, which is similar to how Greeks thought about Dionysos' gift (Royce, 1985, p. 51). In some Rabbinic texts, the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil to which Adam and Eve succumbed in temptation was a grapevine, and so wine was held responsible for interrupting the paradisiac life of the first humans, "plunging them into the uncertain and dangerous condition that is this worldly existence" (Putzu, 2017, p. 155). Negative statements about wine have been used over the centuries by advocates of total temperance to indicate that while grape juice is a divine gift, its dangerous fermented version should be shunned altogether (Bacchiocchi, 2001, p. 34).

The development of wine was explained in Judaic tradition as the result of Noah planting a vineyard after God punished sinful humanity with the great Flood. This story indicates that its authors regarded wine as absolutely central to their civilization. The vine is presented as bringing joy and consolation to humanity after the disaster and trauma of the Flood. Noah was both the first person to make wine, and the first to get drunk on it. God gives humanity the gift of the wisdom to be able to make wine. "Wine is a blessing, but it is still the product of hard work. It is not in itself a divine gift: rather, it is a now an essential part of the duties of a farmer" (Wilson, 2012, p. 7). In later Christian interpretations of the Noah narrative, a double exegetical move is apparent: while his drunkenness was condemned by the Church fathers, when interpreted allegorically the inebriation could be praised, "for without drunkenness there can be no salvation", and Noah's drunken suffering could be seen as prefiguring Christ's passion (Wilson, 2012, p. 18).

There are various resonances between the cults of Dionysos and Yahweh. Aspects of the book of Genesis may be multi-layered reworkings of earlier narratives about a Canaanite wine god, with depiction of Dionysiac drunken revels additionally woven into the narrative (Rosenstock, 2012, p. 309). In the book of Jeremiah, a form of "collective madness is issued from the wine worship of Yahweh", in ways that recall the Dionysian killing of Pentheus (Amzallag, 2011, p. 395). Both Yahweh and Dionysos can inspire insights in adherents as well as destructive bouts of madness, both deities being strongly associated with wine and its affordances in those regards (Amzallag, 2011, p. 397). The Hebrew authors sometimes explicitly depict the superiority of Yahweh to his Greek rival. In the books of Maccabees, for example, Yahweh is shown as defeating Dionysus, partly by imitating his wine-related actions (Cousland, 2001; Rosenstock, 2012, p. 310).

At the level of real-world activities, some aspects of the popular cult of Yahweh were perhaps associated with excessive consumption of wine. This is likely less a direct influence from Dionysiac practice, and more probably a remnant of an older Canaanite tradition (Amzallag, 2011, p. 391-392). Greeks sometimes thought that Yahweh and Dionysos might be the same god under different names. The 2nd century BCE philosopher Moiragenes of Athens argued for this idea by observing that Jewish festivals were essentially Dionysiac: “The Jews themselves testify to a connection with Dionysus, when they keep the Sabbath by inviting each other to drink and to enjoy wine” (cited at Standhartinger, 2012, p. 104). The Hellenistic Jewish philosopher Philo of Alexandria, 1st century CE, compared Passover meals to the Greek *symposion*, pointing to similarities in the sharing of wine between guests (Standhartinger, 2012, p. 94).

THE WINE GIFT DYNAMICS OF CHRISTIANITY

In the New Testament, wine plays various important roles. Indeed, one might say that Jesus is in some ways a wine god, so associated with wine is he, both in early accounts of his life, and in subsequent interpretations over the centuries (Phillips, 2014, p. 50).

The strong association between the god in human form and wine may explain why the New Testament is generally more positive about wine than the Old Testament (i.e. the Hebrew Bible). The authors of the former may have been “anxious to make a clear distinction between wine before the Crucifixion, the old world when people had not been redeemed by the death of Christ, and the newly regenerated Christian world” (Phillips, 2018, p. 73). Indeed, St. Luke (5:37-38) describes the novelty of the new religion in explicit wine terms: “No one pours new wine into old wineskins. If he does, the new wine will burst the skins, the wine will run out and the wineskins will be ruined. No, new wine must be poured into new wineskins.” In other words, the new understandings of faith in the divine could not stay within the confines of the older belief system, Judaism (Bradley, 1996, p. 37).

Some instances from the Gospels and other Christian texts confirm the many wine-related aspects of Jesus’ life. He was accused of being a “drunkard” (Luke, 7:33-35); he used wine to institute the Lord’s Supper (Matthew, 26:29; Mark, 14:25; Luke, 22:18); and early Christians used wine at their

communion services (1 Corinthians, 11:21-22) (Bacchiocchi, 2001, p. 34). In the gospel of John (15), Jesus describes the Christian community in wine terms: “I am the true vine, and my Father is the vignerone... I am the vine, and you the branches. He who dwells in me, as I dwell in him, bears much fruit; for apart from me you can do nothing” (reproduced at Holt, 1993, p. 86).

It is greatly significant that Jesus’ first miracle was at the wedding feast in Cana. There he transforms water into wine. Like in the miracle of the loaves and fishes, Jesus acts as host and provider of food and wine gifts. This resonates with themes of “divine hospitality” in the Old Testament, where God is often depicted as a host who provides food for guests (Furnal, 2011, p. 410). Turning water into wine is a feat also associated with Dionysos, making the notion of Jesus as both parallel and answer to that wine god a plausible one. In an interesting detail, Jesus is seen to turn water into *good quality* wine, and not the usual inferior stuff that would typically be served towards the end of the feast when the better wine had run out.

Joseph Ratzinger, the future Pope Benedict XVI, noted that superficially such actions seem not very appropriate for the Son of God, producing a massive amount of wine for the toppers at what was just a private party. But at a deeper level “the sign of God is overflowing generosity” and such “abundant giving is his ‘glory’” (cited at Netton, 2019, p. 88). It could be argued that this transformation is a wine gift which valorises wine’s positive qualities, including against long-standing rabbinical suspicion, and thus it was ‘an appropriate way for Jesus to begin his ministry, during which he elevated wine as both a symbol of the gospel and a symbol of the blood of the new covenant’ (Seely, 1996-1997, p. 220; Biale, 2007). The ability to conjure a miraculous appearance of wine when there was none became a favoured miracle of saints in medieval Europe. St. Augustine observed that the real miracle, performed by God every day, is when he transforms water into wine through the medium of vines (Montanari, 2015, p. 148).

There are many overlaps and resemblances between the figures of Dionysos and Jesus, and thus of their respective cults and symbolisms too. In Dionysian cults, grapes represented the soul’s crossing from this world to the next, and this symbolism was taken up in Christian art as symbolic of eternal life, while vine imagery became representative of mystical communion between the believer and God (Näsström, 2003, p. 142). Moreover, as Moles (2006, p. 81-82) notes, “of all pagan gods, Dionysos looked and behaved most like a human being for the longest periods of time and was *deus praesentissimus*. Dionysos

is the pagan parallel—perhaps the parallel full stop—for the Incarnation” Friesen (2014, p. 234) summarises some of the other parallels:

Both deities had divine and human parentage, a claim that was consequently suspected by some as a cover-up for illegitimacy. Both were viewed as newcomers, foreign invaders; both were subjected to violent and bloody deaths... The followers of both were accused of consuming raw flesh. Both were known for their close association with women devotees... [B]oth were in some sense bestowers of wine, and consequently wine was an important element in their ritual worship.

The comparisons and similarities are not purely accidental. They were commented on, constructed, and mobilised by proand anti-Christian opinion-makers in the first centuries of the new religion, as it sought to gain a foothold across the Eastern Mediterranean region where Dionysiac beliefs and practices had often long been in place. Sometimes the myths surrounding Dionysos could be drawn upon to inform accounts of the life and nature of Jesus by his proponents, resonating the new story with narratives audiences would be familiar with. It is possible that the Book of Acts and the Gospel of St. Luke deliberately draw on the Dionysos-arriving-in-Thebes story as told by Euripides in his play *Bacchae*. Thematic parallels include the disruptive impact of a new god, a series of judicial proceedings against, and imprisonments of, the god and his followers by kingly persecutors, rejection of the god by his own adherents, support offered by women to the god, eventual triumphant overcoming of challenges by the god, and so on (Moles, 2006, p. 65-66).

More tendentious drawings of parallels between the two divinities also appeared. Christian authors wished to contrast the bad pagan, giver of false gifts, with the “good” Jesus, rendered in the terminology of “the true wine” (Moles, 2006, p. 76). Christians sought to paint Dionysos in the blackest possible colours, to discredit his cults, win followers away from them, and to depict the great superiority of Christianity. Conversely, the “soteriological aspects of Dionysus—the release he brought from pain and the triumph he ensured over enemies—made [him] an ideal pagan antagonist to Christ” (Bowersock, 1994, p. 160).

Wine was important in these disputes. In the early centuries of Christianity, the connections between Dionysos, wine, eroticism, and sexual activity were well-established in Greek literature, and early Christian proselytizers were

familiar with such ideas (Friesen, 2014, p. 239). Therefore, they were often concerned about the wider world—including the Roman authorities—misrecognising Christian practices as dubious or scandalous Dionysian mysteries. This was particularly acute as both cults were associated with wine, but one used wine in strictly chaste ceremonies—pointing to wider commitments to chastity, including as a means of differentiating believers from licentious pagans—while the other allegedly used it for eroticised purposes. Wine was also seen by some ascetic Christian communities, particularly in places like Syria, as being too closely associated with polytheistic ritual meals, and so in the Eucharist ritual they used water instead, God’s wine gift being seemingly too fraught to accept (Friesen, 2014, p. 236). Critics of Christianity exploited wine’s associations with rampant sexuality, associations which Christians struggled to gain control over. Thus in the 2nd century CE, the pagan author Achilles Tatius mocked the new religion, first by restating the widely held view that when religion and wine are mixed, it is for erotic purposes, and then by highlighting in Christianity the “incongruity between religious celebrations of wine, on the one hand, and claim[s] of sexual renunciation, on the other” (Friesen, 2014, p. 224).

Referring to baptism and the Eucharist (otherwise known as the Lord’s Supper or holy communion), Senn (2001: 289) notes that Christianity ‘entered the world with a bath and a meal as its most constitutive acts’, these being carried out in expectation of forgiveness of sins and salvation. It can be argued that ‘the history of the church is the history of the understanding and practice of the Eucharist’ (Furnal, 2011, p. 411). The Eucharist as a ritualised meal (Smith, 2003), involving bread and wine, is simultaneously similar to, probably draws upon, but in other ways is different from, both Jewish ritual meals (Klingbeil, 2016, p. 430) and the Greek *symposion* (Senn, 2001, p. 291). The deployment at his last meal by Jesus of wine in a cup, explicitly representing his blood, harks back to the Old Testament notion of the covenant between God and his people being sealed by Moses through a blood offering. The wine symbolizes and enacts a new covenant, creating a community of all those who willingly receive the offered cup—a highly consequential gift—and who thereby “in their eating and drinking identify with the benefits of Jesus’ sacrificial death” (Klingbeil, 2016, p. 432-33).

A community is therefore created through offered bread and wine, the same community that one can be excommunicated from if one’s behaviour does not meet certain accepted standards (Senn, 2001, p. 293). The wine gift enables group membership and entails obedience to the group’s precepts.

These would over the centuries come to be defined and enforced by priestly hierarchies, especially in light of Christianity's transformation from relatively egalitarian sect to hierarchically-organised official religion of the later Roman empire (Johnson, 2009, p. 220). Wine is strongly associated in Christianity with the ultimate element of group membership, promised salvation. It is significant that as Jesus suffered upon the cross, he was offered vinegar—an inferior form of wine—to drink. He informed the disciples he would drink wine again only “when I drink it new with my Father's kingdom” (Matthew, 26:29)—affirming the idea that wine and salvation are intimately linked (Seely, 1996-1997, p. 222).

Eucharistia (thanksgiving) in its Jewish form was “an acknowledgment of the gift-character of all material things”, everything in existence being God's gift to the chosen people. But now “the bread and wine had to be set apart for holy use”, indicative of the influence of pagan separations of the sacred and profane realms. At the same time, the ritual was made extendable to all persons of faith, regardless of ethnicity (Senn, 2001, p. 292). Drawing upon the already highly positive Greek and Roman understandings of wine and wheat-derived bread as hallmarks of civilization, Christianity redefined them as universal necessities. This was because “a message that claims to be universal has to be founded on universal symbols”, as well as on material vehicles for ritualised deployment, as bread and wine became in communion rites (Montanari, 2015, p. 132).

The spread of vines and wine making throughout territories won over to Christianity in the first millennium CE was partly due to the need for the local availability of wine for Eucharistic purposes, although the spread of wine production throughout much of Europe was often for secular reasons too (Unwin, 1991). With the rise of Islam and its prohibition on alcohol, Christian Europe had “reason to characterize itself as wine-drinking Europe.”⁶¹

61 Space precludes treatment of the emergence of the Islamic ban on wine and other alcohols. The ban was uneven across Muslim lands in the centuries after the death of Mohammed, its precise elements were debated and contested, and it was often ignored altogether (Kueny, 2003; Haider, 2013; Brinkmann, 2014). Evidence from Persia and the Mughal empire suggests that aristocratic elites would flout the ban if wine drinking was defined among them as a central part of a warrior lifestyle, and part of the gift-giving hospitality mechanisms which elite lifestyles otherwise often entailed (Green, 2012; Floor, 2014; Matthee, 2014; Honchell, 2015).

From then on, wine lost its original identity as ‘Mediterranean’ and took on a new one that can be called Roman-barbarian... or indeed European”. Within that context, beer was often presented as a pagan drink, the mark of an inferior society that was “non-Roman, non-Christian, non-international, and uncultivated” (Montanari, 2015, p. 134, p. 135).

Medieval Christianity reinforced the association between wine and Christ’s blood. It transformed the Old Testament imagery of the winepress as an instrument and symbol of God’s wrath, instead using the winepress to represent the sacrifice of Christ’s spilt blood, with Jesus giving the gift of himself (literally, a self-gift), his death, and his suffering, so that humanity could be redeemed (Downey, 2016). The blood flowing from his wounds mixes with the grape juice, making a strong point about their essential identity (Phillips, 2018, p. 74).

The excellent qualities and special exalted status of wine were asserted constantly within such a cultural milieu. Wine could not signify “the mystery of human nature, the ardor of the Holy Ghost, the knowledge of the Law, the word of the Gospels, spiritual understanding, the blood of Christ, conscience, contemplation, love” and other important matters, “if it were not itself a product of excellence”. Bread and wine were understood as surpassing “in dignity and preciousness all other fruits of the earth” (Montanari, 2015, p. 141). Traces of this way of thinking are arguably still found today, in the widespread cultural assumption of wine as a prestigious entity. At a more material level, in wine-making regions it was common for proprietors to donate as gifts vineyard plots to Christian institutions like monasteries, in exchange for prayers being said for them and their families. By these means vast plots came to be owned by groups such as Cistercian monks, their wine making practices having great impacts on subsequent viniculture in such regions (Phillips, 2018, p. 80).

The differences between Catholic and Protestant versions of Christianity can be seen in how they each dealt with the Eucharist. From the 12th century CE onwards, the laity in Catholic practice did not partake of wine from the communion cup, partly out of concern for desecrating the blood of Christ by spilling it (Senn, 2001, p. 292). Instead, the officiating priest partook of the wine on the behalf of the whole assembly (Holt, 1993, p. 84). The Reformation undermined the role of rituals, Christianity becoming more “cerebral than corporeal, and individual[ised] rather than collective. The role of the laity was to listen and believe rather than practise and ingest... Protestantism was

a religion of hearing—of receiving the Word but not as Flesh” (Turner, 2017, p. 138). Mystery was replaced by exhortations (Senn, 2001, p. 294).

Accordingly, the bread and wine, which in Catholicism transubstantiated into divine body and blood, became transformative representations without being materially transformed themselves (Harvey, 2015, p. 36). Yet wine was also restored to the laity in the communion service, despite Protestantism’s increasing concerns about the sinful abuse of alcoholic beverages. Calvin said that the Church had “stolen or snatched wine from the greater part of God’s people... [and] given a special property to a few shaven and anointed men”. God’s wine gift was to be democratized (Phillips, 2018, p. 85). Calvin also asserted that “we are not forbidden to laugh or drink wine”, while the American Puritan Cotton Mather saw wine as a “good creature of God” (cited at Royce, 1985, p. 54). But a downside of sharing a cup of wine among all the congregants was that if someone poisoned the wine—rendering it into a literally poisoned gift—a large number of worshippers would be affected. An incident of this sort which happened in Geneva in the 1770s scandalised much of Europe, and it prompted widespread and agonised debate about how someone could be so evil as to infect this holy gift of God (Freedman, 2002).

In response to Protestant innovations, the Catholic Church reaffirmed that the drinking of wine by the laity during the communion service was forbidden, while popular Catholic sentiment in wine-making regions like Burgundy condemned the Protestants’ allowing the imbibing of wine during the ceremony as an outrageous desecration of the holy wine (Holt, 1993, p. 84-85). It was as recently as the 1960s, with the Vatican II reforms, that the Catholic church again allowed for some limited situations where the laity might receive the wine (Phillips, 2018, p. 93).

Today, across the myriad Christian denominations there is a huge variety of different rules and procedures about how wine should be administered during communion (Söderlind, 2015). In some denominations, “concern for those who have been excluded from the sacramental celebrations by allergies or addictions has resulted in a cafeteria-type menu for holy communion by making available non-wheat breads for those with gluten allergies and non-alcoholic wines for those with alcohol addiction” (Senn, 2001, p. 299). But modern production methods bring their own problems:

When bread is the end-product of planting and tilling and nurturing the fields of one’s ancestral home, and when wine is the domestic

product of vines pruned and cared for by our hands and by the hands of remembered fathers under the suns of home—then heavenly investiture of these common things with Divine meaning is a possibility. It comes very close to becoming an impossibility for a generation which buys its bread in shining wrappers in a super-market... (Sittler, 1953, p. 13).

And, we could add, for those who buy bottles of wine from shops, with probably little idea of how it is made. Conversely, perhaps the mysteriousness of God's gift of wine to humanity is reinforced among believers under such conditions of relative ignorance (Kreglinger, 2019). This scenario creates marketing opportunities for the wineries of religious institutions which sell their wares today on secular international markets. The alleged purity of the product—both in its physical properties, production methods, and apparently virtuous, non-commercial orientations of its Christian makers—can be connected to hundreds of years of monastic wine-making experience. This is the case with some Georgian wines, which are made by monks and sold to “natural wine” aficionados, sometimes with reference to Georgia's six millennia of wine-making, and it being the country in which Noah planted the first vineyard and received God's great vinicultural beneficence (Feiring, 2016).

Meanwhile, contemporary feminist theologians focus on how in the communion service, the movement of Jesus' body and blood into bread and wine means his corporeality is displaced and his identity is rendered ambiguous in sex and gender terms. Thus “the possibility for human participation in the divine economy of self-giving is opened up”, including in non-traditional and heterodox ways (Johnson, 2009, p. 224). Forms of liberal theology also suggest that instead of focusing only on “elites who manipulate bread and wine at the altar”, Christian practice may be better understood as particular communities eating together, and therefore one could “place equal or even greater weight on the more frequent sharing of tea, coffee or fruit juice than on the less common ingestion of small bits of bread and small sips of wine. By all these acts of sharing together people become a congregation” (Harvey, 2015, p. 38). Coming full circle over two thousand years, we can note that this was the case in the very early Church, reflecting Greco-Roman dining practices, including the *symposion*, before a Roman ban on meal fraternities early in the 2nd century meant that the sacramental meal was separated out from actual meals and everyday wine drinking practice (Senn, 2001, p. 290).

Nowadays, liberal theology seeks to recover quotidian eating and drinking as part of religious activity, just as it was initially at the start of Christianity.

CONCLUSION

This paper has reviewed how wine, religion, and gifts constitute a complex and very long-standing set of overlapping ideas and practices. Greco-Roman phenomena in this regard derive from earlier sources, while they in turn resonated with and partly influenced the development of their Judaic and Christian counterparts. The pagan beliefs which animated the cults of Dionysos/Bacchus were by and large trammelled by the imperial and then papal versions of Christianity which superseded the early Church. Still, imagery of Dionysos/Bacchus never disappeared from European culture, especially in wine-making regions, and made a major comeback in the Renaissance period (McIver, 2008).

Since then, the idea of wine as the god's gift to humanity has been present in wine imagery, such as bottle labels, and at least one grape varietal is named after him. While he now signifies the mild euphoria and cheerful bonhomie afforded by wine, rather than the wild and dangerous powers his gift was understood to possess in antiquity, it is remarkable that the imagery persists over three millennia.

The ongoing influence of the religion/gift nexus in both Judaism and Christianity, is seen in the fact that today many millions of people probably taste wine for the first time at a religious ritual like communion, and that many will only ever partake of it in contexts that involve religious rituals or celebrations. In such contexts, the intertwining notions that wine is God's gift, that thanks are due to the deity for the gift, and that one may give wine to others as a gift at certain religiously prescribed times, remain vital. Ancient and gift-related notions of wine still inform wine in modernity, and perhaps more than meets merely casual observation.

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(RE)CREATING THE WORLD AT BURNING MAN: PLAY, THE GIFT, AND RITUAL CREATIVITY⁶²

François Gauthier

Roberte Hamayon's book *Why We Play* (2016) is a milestone.⁶³ With rare and remarkable ambition, it revisits the concept of "play" and establishes itself alongside the classic works on the topic by Johan Huizinga (1955) and Roger Caillois (1967). One of the specific features of this book is that it is based on material far removed from our cultural area, since she is a recognized specialist of Siberian shamanism. This starting point frees her investigation to a large extent from the Christian (play as something futile or even sinful and therefore non-serious, illegitimate, and ultimately condemnable) and agonistic (legitimate play as essentially competitive) inflexion that has characterized almost all Western production on the subject. Hamayon's contribution is two-fold. The first lies in her definition of play, which she approaches not as a phenomenon or activity, but as a *modality or specific type of action*—"playing". The second concerns the considerable implications of this conception of play for the analysis of politics and religion.

Hamayon follows Émile Benveniste (1947) by approaching play from the angle of the verb "to play" (*jouer*), i.e., as a modality of human action whose particularity as "a kind of doing" is doing "as if" (Hamayon, 2012, p. 21). As a symbolic activity (i.e., an activity with non-functional and non-utilitarian meaning), play is to social action what metaphor is to language: the creation

62 This article is a modified and updated version of an article first published in French (see Gauthier 2015). It was translated with the help of Camille Liederman, whom I warmly thank. My research on Burning Man has been helped by funding by SSHRC (Canada) and FQRSC (Québec) from 2001 to 2013 roughly, and by the Université de Fribourg as well as the SNF (Switzerland) from then onwards, including the SNF supported research project "The European Efflorescence of Burning Man" (2016-2020).

63 The book was first published in French as *Jouer. Une étude anthropologique* in the MAUSS's collection at Éditions La Découverte in 2012. I had the great pleasure to be witness to its writing as the author sent Alain Caillé and I her chapters as she was writing them.

of a *fictional framework* “where the constitutive acts do not denote what they would denote in non-play” (*ibid.*, p. 298).⁶⁴ As a repetitive, rhythmic movement performed within a limited space, play is defined less by the rules of the game than by the *latitude* it offers: the margin of realization and the possibilities it opens up for action.

Studies of play have typically favored agonistic types (e.g., games) and have tended to prioritize rules at the expense of freedom. Hamayon demonstrates how the priority given to agonistics is a product of history while resetting the dial on the relationship between rule and freedom of action. The Siberian case clearly shows that play is composed of two types of actions with complementary and interdependent functions and stakes: wrestling-type *games* (competition, emphasis on rules), on the one hand, and dance-type “*play*” (non-agonistic, emphasis on freedom), on the other. Distinctions between *play* and *game* in English (Caillais, 1967; Hamayon, 2015) and between *jocus* and *ludus* in Latin (Benveniste, 1947), for instance, exemplify these different couplings between freedom and rule.

For Alain Caillé, Hamayon’s understanding of play as the *integral* of its agonistic *and* non-agonistic forms can be related to discussions on the gift. The latter, Marcel Mauss (1950) wrote in his famous *Essai sur le don*, is at once and irreducibly made up of freedom and obligation, just as it is also made up of a part of self-interest and altruism, or interest-in-others (see also Godbout and Caillé, 1992; Caillé, 2000, 2009; Chaniel, 2008, 2011, p. 254–272). The gift, like play, is therefore *a complex that operates at the junction of freedom and obligation, of subjectivity and social obligation, and of creativity and the internalization and reproduction of the rule (social structure)*. Similarly, play can be understood as the relationship between the rule and the margin of maneuver left to the actor, *each term* (rule and margin of freedom) *being necessary*. By virtue of its metaphorical constitution—the fact that it constructs a “subjunctive mood”⁶⁵ in which participants are doing “as if”—and because

64 Here Hamayon adopts the perspective proposed by Gregory Bateson (1955).

65 “The subjunctive (also known as conjunctive in some languages) is a grammatical mood, a feature of an utterance that indicates the speaker’s attitude toward it. Subjunctive forms of verbs are typically used to express various states of unreality such as wish, emotion, possibility, judgment, opinion, obligation, or action that has not yet occurred; the precise situations in which they are used vary from language to language. The subjunctive is one of the *irrealis* moods, which refer to what is not necessarily real. It is often contrasted with the indicative, a *realis*

the rules have the function of opening up a fictional framework, *the essence of play lies in the share of freedom devolved to the actors*. This diverges from the perspectives that emphasize how play is best approached from the set of rules that frame it and which derive from the social and symbolic structure, for instance Claude Lévi-Strauss (1962).⁶⁶ By defining play as *an exercise of freedom within a subjunctive framework*, Hamayon overcomes the otherwise exclusive and undecidable opposition between freedom and constraint, creativity and rule, agency and structure. While her theory incorporates both freedom and constraint, she insists that the specificity of play resides in its emphasis on freedom—a freedom whose possibility is framed by a set of rules and constraints, and first and foremost the agreement by the parties that their actions are done “as if”.

These considerations recall some of the work done at the MAUSS and the understanding that the gift is an irreducible complex of freedom and obligation. Hence the question: are play and the gift fundamentally interchangeable? Can play be boiled down to the gift? In what follows, I argue that while it is fruitful to think of play from the *perspective* of the gift (i.e., within the framework of the MAUSS’s “gift paradigm”), play remains *irreducible to the gift*. Through the analysis of Burning Man, I show how an analysis in terms of the gift and play reveal complimentary insights.

Hamayon’s conception of play largely fits the parameters of the gift paradigm, as there are fundamental correspondences between both play and the gift on an epistemological level. We can agree with Alain Caillé and Philippe Chanial’s proposal (2015) to overlap the “spirit of play” with that “of the gift” (Godbout and Caillé, 1992). The giving moment within the gift cycle (give, receive, return), they argue, echoes the freedom, spontaneity, and creativity at play in the playfulness of play. Yet I argue that the distinction between play and the gift has to be maintained when it comes to analyzing concrete social practices. There is certainly freedom in giving, and the gift can often be

mood which principally indicates that something is a statement of fact.” *Wikipedia* page, consulted 12th August 2024. It is interesting (and falls under Hamayon’s critique) that other dictionaries I sought for a definition to add here (e.g., *Collins*) emphasized the potentially fearful, misleading, and falsifying consequence of the subjunctive rather the more positively connoted dreaminess of poetic virtuality.

66 Jacques Pierre (2008) has drawn from this all the implications for a theory of religion in a beautiful text that should be discussed alongside the work of Roberte Hamayon.

understood as a way of playing. However, approaching a phenomenon like Burning Man from the perspective of the gift reveals something different than approaching it from the perspective of play, despite all the overlaps.

This article is intended as a contribution to the debate between the proponents of the gift paradigm⁶⁷ and its critics, who accuse the MAUSS of “seeing the gift everywhere” and thereby dissolving the gift to the point of anaesthetizing its heuristic potential. This often formulated critique is misleading. As I understand it, the gift paradigm involves considering social phenomena *in terms of the gift*—as complexes of freedom and obligation, self-interest and interest-in-others—and not making every social action into a concrete form of the gift.⁶⁸ In other words, thinking of social action in terms of the gift does not mean that every social action is a gift. There is an important distinction to be made between the gift *sensu stricto* (at the level of concrete social practices) and *sensu lato* (from the epistemological perspective of the gift paradigm). I argue that while play is irreducible to gift theory *sensu stricto*, it can be integrated with great profit into the wider gift paradigm.

This article deploys both gift and play theory to analyze the case of the Burning Man festival. After briefly describing this dazzling and dizzying cultural phenomenon, which has been central to the developments of Western “counterculture” over the last three decades, the analysis first focuses on the dynamics of the gift within the event, before doing the same for the aspects of play. These building blocks then helps revisit issues related to the definition of religion and the rapport between play and ritual. Hamayon’s approach shows how play is surprisingly central for understanding religion and that play is far more than a degraded or inchoate form of ritual. I argue that this perspective opens novel entries into the analysis of contemporary cultural and religious phenomena, which tend to distance themselves from institutions and scripted forms of ritual in favor of more playful expressions.

67 The gift paradigm is wider than gift theory *stricto sensu* by expanding its key elements into an epistemology and a general social theory. For a short introduction to the gift paradigm, see the “Mission Statement” in the first issue of the *MAUSS International* (2001).

68 Thus, one can even consider the market exchange of neoclassical theory in terms of the gift, as a radically self-interested and free relationship. See Caillé (2009), Chanial (2011).

Regarding methods, my research on Burning Man rests on an ethnographic approach consisting of participant observation and semi-formal and informal interviews conducted during the events of 2003, 2004, and 2008, as well as the coordination of researchers that have been in the field from 2011 onwards. This was supported and complemented by remote monitoring of the event, through various sources and contacts, as well as through collaboration with Burning Man's census department and its "foreign affairs office". A Swiss National Fund supported research project furthermore investigated the processes of "diaspora-ization" and global efflorescence of the culture of Burning Man beyond the event via transnational networks (see Vitos, St John and Gauthier, 2022).⁶⁹

THE BURNING MAN FESTIVAL

In recent decades, there has been a proliferation of festivals of all kinds, to the extent that some researchers describe a process of "festivalization of culture" in the era of consumerism and globalization (Bennett, Taylor, and Woodward, 2014). The Burning Man festival occupies a singular place within this nebula for several reasons. Born in 1986 on the beaches of San Francisco before migrating to the lifeless, flat, and isolated surface of Nevada's Black Rock Desert in 1990, this annual week-long end of summer event has grown steadily, until the number of participants was capped a few years ago to around 80 000.⁷⁰ Burning Man is a kind of work/synthesis-*in-progress* of the various strands of counterand subcultural movements that have emerged over the course of the

69 An international symposium on Burning Man and transformational festivals was held in Fribourg in the Fall of 2018 in which a large delegation of the Burning Man organization, including CEO Marian Goodell, were present. This was a few months only after Burning Man founder Larry Harvey passed away. It was therefore a very important moment in the life of the event-culture during which very fundamental and sensitive topics were discussed. See <https://www.burningprogeny.org>.

70 The Burning Man website (<https://burningman.org>) is a treasure trove of information (including census data and explanations of themes) and photographs. To get an idea of the exceptional creativity generated by this festival, one can look at the vast amount of material available on YouTube. See also the selective list of books and articles on Burning Man in the bibliography.

last decades, from the hippie and psychedelic counterculture to the *do-it-yourself* and anarchist ethics of punk.⁷¹ Burning Man was also heavily invested by Silicon Valley *geek* cyberculture in the 1990s. In those early days, Burning Man was often seen as a real-life embodiment of the free-access and shareware Internet utopia. Burning Man is therefore a sort of “center of the margins”, a meeting of the tribes. More recently, Burning Man has been promoted as a staple for “transformational festivals”, where New Age and holistic spiritualities become remixed in the digital age. Burning Man evades and exceeds all attempts at capturing it in a nutshell, however, and it is emphatically plural and diverse in comparison to many other festivals. Burning Man has also empowered participants who have founded a multitude of related events across the globe. In this sense, Burning Man illustrates a trend by which events give rise to wider transnational cultural movements, or “*event-cultures*” (Saint John and Gauthier, 2015).

Exponentially growing populations over the course of the 1990s meant the need to organize what was initially a no-rules anarchic get-together. By 1996, Burning Man took on the form of a city—Black Rock City—with its own public services department, zoning policies, post office, airport, medical, legal, health and security services, census bureau (in which several social scientists participate), and official (radio, newspaper) as well as alternative media, all run on an entirely voluntary basis. At the turn of the 2000s, Larry Harvey, the founder of the event and director of the organization (now with a non-profit status), The Burning Man Project, sought to crystallize the spirit of Burning Man in what is known as the “Ten Principles”: gifting, radical inclusion (all are welcome), participation (“spectators” are not tolerated), *radical self-reliance* (autonomy), *radical self-expression*, eco-responsibility (*Leave No Trace*), civic responsibility, communal effort, *decommodification*, and the immediacy of experience (conceived as a guarantee of authenticity and truth).⁷²

The most striking and decisive feature of Burning Man is undoubtedly that it is a festival without money—once the entry ticket has been purchased (around 800 USD today). There is a formal ban on sales, advertising, and sponsorship that has officially been in force since the 1999 edition and which allows a participatory economy to flourish based on the gift. The Burning Man organization, which is active throughout the year, salaries about one

71 In addition to goths and the myriads of sub-genres within the techno-rave subculture. Hip-hop and metal subcultures are less represented.

72 See <http://survival.burningman.com/culture/the-10-principles/>.

hundred people who take care of the very heavy political and administrative procedures required to use the site, as well as costs like insurance and land use fees, supported by a small army of volunteers. The organization draws the layout of the city, proposes a theme for each year, and coordinates services and infrastructural logistics, including the construction of the Man and the Center Camp marquee. Its involvement stops there, however, and it leaves the animation of the city entirely up to the participants—known as *burners*—through voluntary networks and “Theme Camps” of varying sizes. Projects include monumental, interactive, pyrotechnic, and/or mobile constructions, such as *art cars* in the shape of galleons, dragons, whales, or pastries. Theme camps also offer a myriad of performances, bars, catering services, cafés, and other spaces for meditation, exploration, and dancing.

The organization partly funds the most original, exuberant, and costly projects via the Black Rock Arts Foundation, which also supports artistic, cooperative, community, and/or interactive projects outside the festival space during the year. The name “Burning Man” comes from the fact that the inhabited city forms an open circle around a forty-meter tall human effigy made of wood and neon lights. The “Man” is mounted on a platform whose design changes according to the year’s theme. The event culminates on Saturday during the evening’s ritual “Burn night”, when the Man is “sacrificed”, engulfed by a gigantic inferno complete with pyrotechnics and fireworks. As a rule, every monumental art piece that can burn is ritually set aflame at the end of the week-long event.

Initially, Burning Man was mostly attended by people from the West Coast of the United States. This population corresponded to the socio-demographic characteristics typical of countercultural events: largely white middle-classes, often highly educated (university level), politically rather left-wing (*Democrats*, *Greens*, “Berkeley” leftists, anarchists, and abstentionists for the most part, with a libertarian fringe), with strongly egalitarian values and occupations including students, artists, cultural creatives (designers, architects, IT pioneers), bohemians, spiritual entrepreneurs, practitioners of alternative and holistic “spiritualities”, as well as a strong contingent from the educational, NGO, and social service sectors. This profile has diversified over time, namely by expanding the spectrum of participants’ political affiliations to include supporters of the Republican Party (nearly thirty percent during the 2000s).⁷³ Interestingly, the

73 This proportion has been decreasing in the last decade as the raging “cultural

burner population includes participants of all ages, from babies to retirees, with the highest proportion of participants ranging from 25 to 50 years old.⁷⁴ Today, nearly a quarter of *burners* come from outside the United States, including a significant proportion from Europe (around ten percent).⁷⁵

Burning Man is an experience of extremes and otherness, a veritable laboratory of cultural creativity. Testimonials abound of *burners* who emerge transformed and energized, feeling transfigured and emancipated. Set in the hostile, unpredictable environment of the Nevada desert, with its very real health risks (dehydration, day and night temperature variations, sunstroke, sandstorms), the Burning Man experience is intense. The obligation to be completely self-sufficient (including water) and the desire of participants to offer something memorable to the community (excess is the rule) mean that the majority of participants devote much more time to preparation than to the event itself. *Burner* experiences oscillate between an orgiastic, festive, and effervescent pole, and a more solemn, interior, and intimate one (Gauthier, 2004). This latter aspect is particularly noticeable around the Temple, a monumental structure that was first introduced by San Francisco artist David Best in 2000 (Pike, 2001) and built with the help of dozens of volunteers from recycled materials taken from industrial waste dumps.⁷⁶ The Temple is also burned at the end of the event, in an atmosphere of contemplation and deep-felt solemnity that contrasts sharply with the carnivalesque frenzy that occurs during the burning of the Man the night before. The Temple, whose name and design change every year (Temple of Tears, of Stars, of Joy), is typically dedicated to those who have died by suicide, yet this homage to loss and tragedy

war” in the US has seen the Republican Party radicalize under Donald Trump.

74 Only teenagers are less present: one generally needs to have acquired some life experience to be able to survive at Burning Man, whose demanding environment and level of preparation are not compatible with late adolescence.

75 The data from the annual census are public: <http://burningman.org/culture/history/brc-history/census-data/>.

76 The Temple is located at the opening of the circle, at the border of what the organizers call the *(W)ho(l)ly Other* (the Wholly Other, the Holy), which symbolizes the need for the community to remain inclusive and open up to the “invisible”—an immanent form of transcendence whose substance cannot be defined but whose presence is foundational (Larry Harvey, interview in 2003).

extends to all forms of hurt, loss, and grief.⁷⁷ *Burners* flock to the Temple in large numbers to deposit objects with personal meaning, build altars, or simply leave inscriptions in honor of those they have lost, and many other reasons. The atmosphere is poignant, as the Temple is typically wrapped in silence, caressed by the wind and the occasional song or hush music from a piano or a guitar. The Temple is an extremely interesting example of the construction of a sacred space outside any reference to a transcendence or religious tradition. It is a scene for a plethora of more or less organized rituals that occur over the course of the week: weddings, rites of passage, mourning rites, piacular rites, devotional rites, prayers, solemn declarations of friendship, offerings, purification rites, and so on (Gauthier, 2004b; Pike, 2001).

BURNING MAN, AS SEEN FROM THE GIFT

Gift giving is the most structuring of the ten principles mentioned above. It is the positive principle by which the prohibitions of advertising, sponsorship, and commercial exchange are expressed within the boundaries of Black Rock City. The gift principle opens a de commodified social space at a distance from the operational norms of our capitalist societies. Gift practices are also what strike most of the “*virgins*” (first-time participants) when they arrive on “Playa” (a term that sometimes refers to the whole city, sometimes more specifically to the open space at the center and edges of the city). By way of example, no sooner had I disembarked from our vehicle upon arrival on Playa in the middle of the night on my first burn that I was approached by a charming Asian origin *burner* offering me freshly prepared sushi (in the desert!) and a hug, before disappearing into the darkness. It is striking that the academic literature on Burning Man has mostly overlooked the importance of the gift in its analyses,⁷⁸ proving Caillé (2000) right when he argues that the gift is a difficult object

77 The 2024 event held an homage to the participants of the techno event Nova that was held in Israel and which was raided during the October 7th 2023 Hamas terrorist attack.

78 There is more emphasis on the gift in non-academic productions, like the article by Jaenike (2014) published on the cultural magazine site *FestPop* or Magister’s (2019) “anti-treatise” on Burning Man philosophy. The small collection by Pendell (2006) discusses the gift but is primarily a collection of memories and somewhat disjointed reflections.

for social sciences to assimilate. Yet it is through the lens of the gift that we are best able to grasp the various dimensions (aesthetic, political, cultural, religious, legal, social) that make up the “total social fact” that is Burning Man.

Returning to the ten principles through the lens of the gift shows how they form a system and a coherent whole. Quite obviously, the principle of *decommodification* is the corollary of the ban on market exchanges in favor of a gift economy. *Radical inclusion* means calling any and everyone, notwithstanding age, gender, race, origin, social class, and physical capacities, to participate in the cycles of giving, receiving, and returning. Promoted against the stereotype of the passive, consuming festival spectator, *participation* is conceived as a form of gift by organizers and *burners* alike. For example, *burners* who were unable to organize themselves beforehand offer their help to carry out the project of others, for the benefit of the whole community. The imperative of *Radical self-reliance* and autonomy ensures a minimum of equality from the outset. Requiring that everyone is able to ensure their own subsistence for the duration of the event provides a level giving plane and avoids mainline economists’ biggest moral problem, the *free rider*—the profiteer, the unprepared spectator.⁷⁹ The principle of *Radical self-expression* follows from this participatory ethic, insofar as expressing oneself constitutes both a means of subjectivation and a gift to the community. As each person is conceived to be unique, with qualities and potential to be actualized, each participant has something unique to *give*. The principle of eco-responsibility known as *Leave No Trace*, meanwhile, emphasizes autonomous waste management. It stresses that the desert must be returned to its original virgin state at the end of the event (camp areas must be cleaned with a fine-toothed comb and are inspected after the event is done). This is commonly expressed as being a counter-gift to the Playa and to “Nature”, whose rhythms and whims are oh! so evident in the desert environment. Sunrises and sunsets are occasions for multiple rituals, and “Nature” is often referred to in the third person with a capital letter: “She”.

Continuing down the principles list, *Civic responsibility* and *Communal effort* derive from the *obligation* created by the plethora of gifts received on-Playa, and first and foremost the gift of the Burning Man experience itself. *Burners*

79 *Burners* tend to deal with this situation (participants appearing as “tourists” and “spectators” pro-actively, like tickling them, whipping them, making them lose face through gifts (food, massages, etc.), and forcing them to participate, for example by “abducting” and “forcing” them to join a theme camp and volunteer.

are keenly aware that their individual experience is only possible through the presence of this ephemeral community. Indeed, Nature and community tend to overlap and substitute each other in the testimonials, with many *burners* claiming to be indebted to one or the other. The feeling of community at Burning Man is exceptionally strong, and there is little doubt that the decommodified environment and proliferation of gifts at the event are major factors for it to be so. On this note, it is interesting that bartering has remained a marginal phenomenon at Black Rock City. The bartering I have observed is limited to the exchange of utilitarian objects (tools, generators, bicycle parts, etc.), and is often mediated by a third party whose service to the community is precisely to provide a platform for these give-and-take exchanges: *burners* can take an object on condition they leave one behind.

As a last principle, Burning Man promotes the *Immediacy of Experience*. Its egalitarian constitution, the inanity of the organization, the radically acephalous character of Black Rock City's political constitution, and the sacralization of expressivity and personal exploration—in the service of a *common*—impress the *authority of experience* to the detriment of received meanings, belief contents, and institutional mediations. As an illustration of David Graeber's⁸⁰ theses (2006), Burning Man's gift economy coincides with a political anarchism that rejects all structuring power, whether market or state (in the sense of separate, delegated power).

Giving without expectation of return is greatly encouraged by the fact that the entire environment of Black Rock City is dedicated to the gift and its spirit. Established against the market, giving in Black Rock City calls for giving. The result is a kind of gigantic *potlatch* in which gifts compete and confer status on givers, with a bonus of prestige for the most generous and inventive. There is no hierarchy between *burners*, however, and the agonistic does not take precedence over the non-agonistic in this non-competitive competition of gifts.⁸¹ An implicit rule (sometimes made explicit to those who transgress it)

80 It is fitting to add a note of homage to David, whose passing away was a true shock. I had crossed his path in the 1990s during anti-NAFTA and anti-GATT protests in Montreal leading to the anti-globalization movement, and then again later at MAUSS conferences. It is hard not to dwell on all the intellectual and political gifts his premature death has deprived us of.

81 Hamayon (2015, p. 76) aptly notes that Mauss overlooked the Chinook meaning of the term *potlatch* (to feed, to consume), as well as the Kwakiutl (a place where one is satisfied), retaining only the Tlingit meaning: dance in its agonistic

is to not take yourself (too) seriously. The spirit must be playful. The gift can flourish all the more when practiced in a temporary, circumscribed space-time such as Burning Man's *ephemeropolis*. Feelings of debt from receiving gifts, the weight of the obligation to give in return, are partly neutralized by the ephemeral nature of the on-site community, catalyzing feelings of empowerment and what Jacques Godbout (2013) calls "positive mutual indebtedness". In an individualist society emancipated from traditional social bonds, we might feel even more encouraged to give if the gift received or given has no *a priori* social consequences beyond the event itself (obligations towards someone). Thus circumscribed, the gift nourishes immediate feelings of togetherness rather than long-term social bonds. This helps explain the remarkable tangibility of the collective effervescence at Burning Man.

This is not to say that *burners* fail to create bonds that extend beyond the event itself. On the contrary, bonds of friendship (and love!) are forged on-Playa, spilling over into what *burners* call the "Default World". These ties continue within theme camps, which work hard year-round to prepare for the next edition, integrating the enthusiasm of *virgins* to the experience of "*veterans*". And yet, these strong ties are precisely the fruit of the gifts made possible by the ephemerality of the event. Observation and testimonials show that participants understand the gifts given and those received as emanating from and being directed to "Burning Man" as a whole rather than particular individuals.⁸² This is an interesting finding that shows how the gift involves a *third party*—the community—which is at once the condition, the context, the recipient, and the product of these gift cycles. The content of the gift is therefore of little importance, and when asked about which meaningful gifts participants have received, they answer ice cream, a helping hand to pitch a tent, much welcome drink or food, relief from heatstroke, compassion, a listening ear, or the chance to discover something about themselves, in no

component of war (see Mauss, 1950, p. 152-153). Restoring the *potlatch*'s richness beyond a purely agonistic determination thus allows it to be connected to a much larger ritual complex spread across the North American continent, during which a feast is offered by at least one party. This cultural trait was indeed what the young Pierre-Esprit Radisson took advantage of to prevent the first Jesuit mission among the Iroquois from ending in a massacre in the 1650s (Fournier, 2014).

82 Burning Man is a perfect and contemporary illustration of the Durkheimian theory of the effervescent community crystallized in the totemic emblem (Durkheim, 1990).

particular order. “Burning Man gave me a chance to discover and express who I really am”, *burners* told me repeatedly.

Cynical readers will probably point to this ephemerality and conclude that the community experience at Burning Man is a shallow ersatz in the era of consumerism. They are mistaken. The effects of Burning Man go far beyond its confines, as evidenced by the desire of participants to spread and promote the Burning Man principles and experience through networks and events across all Westernized regions of the globe. However, the intense experience of community is an end in itself. Burning Man is a “festive ritual”, which the anthropology of religion defines as the creation of frameworks in which transgression can occur and unconditional expression can take place, beyond ordinary social statuses and affiliations and their burdensome obligations. A festive ritual is a social institution whose function is to create the conditions for unconditionality and the transgression of social rules in a circumscribed and licensed frame, resulting in the (re)generation of social bonds and the production of a sense of community (Turner, 1990). Furthermore, the practice of costuming and adopting pseudonyms (called “Playa names”) acts to blur identities and cut participants off from Default World statuses and therefore self-interested and strategical maneuvers. The true object of the gift is the third party constituted by the community.

BURNING MAN, AS SEEN FROM PLAY

The practice of pseudonyms at Burning Man recalls role-playing⁸³ and social media, except that Playa names are often given by others rather than chosen.⁸⁴ This underlines the importance of community and the logic of the gift in the integration of members and the recognition of their intrinsic value. The custom of Playa names reminds *burners* that it is all about playing a role. In many ways, *burners* play being “me at Burning Man”. Being a *burner* is all about “letting loose”, transgressing social and self-imposed norms, exploring otherwise repressed or marginalized facets of one’s personality, and ultimately

83 Sébastien Kapp’s (2015) analysis of live-action role-playing games largely overlaps with what can be done on Burning Man.

84 In cases where it is chosen, I have observed that the name is subject to various forms of peer approval. Thus, a name that does not fit (or lacks a touch of irony) is dropped in search of another that will pass the test.

daring to *be more yourself by being “ther”*. Playa names function to blur relations to the outside world and its statuses, and it is likewise practically taboo to talk about work or discuss practical matters of daily life in the Default World. Instead, conversations obsessively revolve around Burning Man and are filled with everything from trivialities to the big questions of life. It is common to develop deep, intimate relationships with *burners* whose true names and professional occupations remain unknown.

Burners often speak of “coming home” when they arrive at Burning Man. Likewise, many say they feel “more themselves” than they do in everyday life. In this way, the pseudonym signals a reconciliation with one’s posited “true self”. It is as if Burning Man was a way of reconnecting with an essential, authentic self that usually hides behind the social roles played in everyday life.⁸⁵ Still, *burners* are conscious they are playing roles at Burning Man. For while Burning Man is a space of generalized gifting, it is just as much a formidable *playground*. In fact, it is as if the gift economy and its related principles were designed to open a space entirely devoted to play—and *consecrated* by playing.

Looking at Burning Man from the gift perspective alone misses how it creates an encompassing fictional framework that invites the creation of other fictional frameworks in turn. Contrary to play and ritual, the gift is not in itself or always the creator of a fictional framework. In contrast, play introduces a deviation from reality, an adjunct of virtuality. And it is this gap that gives it its symbolic effectiveness by thrusting social actors in the realm of metaphor. Far from being a place to “relax”, “unwind”, or “do nothing”—in other words a place of leisure—Burning Man is a place to explore countless opportunities to “act as if”. Pastiche and recreated locales like restaurants (vegan, vegetarian, bacon & eggs breakfasts, grilled-cheese, rotisseries, pizzerias with wood-fired ovens, creperies...), cafés (espresso bars, Vietnamese...), bars, roadside diners, nightclubs, roller-skating rinks, bowling alleys, massage parlors, spas, psychological help services, counseling services, and so on abound across the city. These offers clearly aim to be “like” real life, while at the same time hijacking the original forms in a caricatured way and without obedience to the constraints of “reality”—starting with predictable opening hours and that all these goods and services are given, not sold. The more improbable these offerings are—in other words, the greater their deviation from both reality (in the “default” world) and the desert environment—the greater their impact on the

85 This reminds of Erving Goffman’s social roles (1956).

experience. My sushi experience was clearly one of those, but a pop-up oyster bar (with oysters brought in fresh from San Francisco harbor) in the middle of the night during a dance party on the outer edges of the Playa provided a rivalling level of “wow!”.

In his classic book *Les jeux et les hommes*, Roger Caillois (1967) suggested a fourfold typology of play that distinguished between *agôn*, *alea*, *mimicry*, and *ilinx*: “All four belong to the domain of play: we *play* football or chess (*agôn*), we play roulette or lottery (*alea*), we *play* pirate, Neron, or Hamlet (*mimicry*), we *play* to provoke, through rapid rotation or falling, an organic state (or feeling) of confusion or disarray (*ilinx*)” (p. 47, emphasis in text, my translation). Building on these distinctions, Hamayon adds that a principle of complementarity underlies *mimicry* and *ilinx*, while opposition underlies *agôn* and *alea*. Hamayon’s interest in play derives from her study of shamanism, which she studied in its transformation from hunter to herder shamanic societies. She shows how complementariness rules in hunter-gatherer, egalitarian, shamanic societies, while opposition, that is agonistic types of play, remain secondary. The latter become more prominent when domestication prevails over hunting and social hierarchies emerge. The shaman induces *ilinx* states through drumming, dancing, turning, and other techniques (including psychotropic substances), and plays with the spirits in *mimicry* types of play. Shamanic societies also relish games of chance (*alea*), like dice, more than strategy. Hamayon thus argues that a structural relation unites types of play with polity, social hierarchy, and religion. Egalitarian societies like Siberian hunter-gatherers have a religion based on shamanism, in which the shaman plays with the spirits. Societies with social hierarchies and coercive forms of power (i.e., a “state”), meanwhile, develop religions in which spirits have been replaced by overarching deities, or “gods”. One of *Why We Play*’s most entertaining chapter is when she details how the Church Fathers spent centuries condemning *alea*, *ilinx*, and *mimicry* types of play found in popular practices such as jumping, dancing, and theater. These, the theologians of the “One and allmighty God” argued, were proscribed for being the workings of the devil. While the shaman plays with the spirits, teasing, seducing, tricking, and fighting them to obtain an advantage (in the form of game, chance, fertility, or health), one does not play around with gods, and even less with a single omnipotent God. Recall the inextinguishable theological polemics around questions such as “does God/did Jesus laugh”, defecate, know sexual desire, and so on. These topics literally got people killed as heretics. Similarly, the more

centralized and vertical the political power, the less it tolerates non-scripted dancing, irony, and laughter. Think of Hitler and Stalin's love for tuned to a "t", square political rituals, and how satire most assuredly bought you a one-way ticket for the concentration camp or gulag.

Hamayon's theoretical insights apply to Burning Man. Black Rock City resembles non-hierarchical societies with no centralizing power and "spirit" rather than "god" type religion. Dancing, jumping, satire, theater, and similar behaviors are strongly encouraged at Burning Man in the name of expressiveness and participation. On the contrary, competition and lotteries are rare in their pure expression. Just as Pierre Clastres (1974) wrote that "archaic societies" were constituted "against the state", so Burning Man is constituted against the state as well as the market. This implies an opposition to agonistic competition. Although there are numerous activities that resemble competitions (the best costume parade, intense battles in the Thunderdome) or lotteries, these are generally designed to make a mockery of the genre. The winners gain nothing except perhaps a spanking from a drag-queen or a kiss, a drink, or a dose of peyote. This indicates that what is really sought after here is less the instauration of a hierarchy, however short-lived, between winners and losers, as it aims to catalyze shows of inspiration, brilliance, wit, spirit, and participation in the generation of the overall exuberance and effervescence. What is also at stake is the esteem of fellow *burners*, that is, recognition and therefore belonging. It is about existing as a subject by contributing to the Burning Man experience and its community—by having given and received—and having played the game by the rules.

This clear prevalence of *play* over *game*, of the non-agonistic dance type over the agonistic game type (the archetype of which is our modern conception of sports), and of freedom over rule, is consistent with Black Rock City's acephalous, radically horizontal, egalitarian, and participatory political constitution. Play's appeal to indeterminacy is antithetical to centralized forms of power, who deem it dangerous and undermining. This is why play is more assimilable within "anarchist" constitutions.⁸⁶ Burning Man's *ephemeropolis* strives for maximal openness to indeterminacy, chance, and randomness. This does not mean there are no rules, however. As mentioned before, Burning Man is a catalyst for freedom only at the cost of a clear normativity spelled

86 See *Revue du MAUSS semestrielle*, n° 62 (2024), on anarchism.

out by the Ten Principles.⁸⁷ Analytically, the opposition between rule and freedom is a false one that can be overcome by considering how every type of play is made up of both rules and a space for freedom. Rule and freedom are complementary poles. At Burning Man, the rules are the product of its history, guided less by abstract principles than by a pragmatic response to specific challenges⁸⁸ through a bottom-up rather than top-down process.⁸⁹ Like children's free play (and unlike chess or organized sports), Burning Man consists of inventing consensual rules designed to allow for a maximal expression of freedom. It follows that an analysis of Burning Man in terms of "strategies for acquiring social or (sub)cultural capital" would largely miss the point, even though these processes can and do occur.

PLAY, RITUAL, AND RELIGION

As if to underline the extent to which Burning Man's core principle is openness to indeterminacy and possibility, organizers and participants avoid defining the event. Neither "Woodstock 2.0" nor a neopagan ritual, "Burning Man is Burning Man", they repeat. The organization even opposes to be labelled a "festival", since festivals today are consumption-ridden. The gift economy at Burning Man makes it unique amidst other forms of countercultural events, which remain consumption based. Similarly, the "Man" that sits at

87 The history of Burning Man is full of examples of confrontations over different claims regarding what constitutes the spirit of Burning Man. Doherty's (2004) work mentions some of these episodes, some of which led to splits, even excommunications. Most often, these involve groups for whom Burning Man represents a place of complete freedom and license, and who adopt behavior perceived as antisocial and selfish by the majority, which generally manages to prevail and have them excluded.

88 For example, the prohibition on driving cars stems from a decision made in reaction to the death of a participant, who died after being run over in the middle of the night.

89 The genius of founder and philosopher-in-chief Larry Harvey (1948-2018) was to feel the direction in which the Burning Man community was moving and what were the tensions that were traversing it. He would provide impulses to help it along and devise art themes to help these tensions be expressed and resolved through play and ritual.

the center of this frenzy has no official or explicit meaning, nor does burning it down to embers. Yet, Burning Man is not political in an oppositional or activist sense. It rather aims to assemble an as large spectrum of diversity as it can. Participants who wanted to define Burning Man as an anti-capitalist event in the early 2000s had to take the path of self-parody to avoid opprobrium and counterproductive effects.⁹⁰ The only characterization that does not seem to irritate anyone is coining it as a kind of “creative arts” bonanza.

While Burning Man is a dream object for an anthropologist of religion, given the diversity of its ritualized expressions, practices, and mythologies, it is by no means explicitly religious. Nevertheless, the event lends itself to an analysis in terms of pilgrimage, festive ritual, carnival, and even sacrifice (through the burning of the Man) (Gauthier, 2004, 2010b, 2010c; Gilmore and van Proyen, 2005; Gilmore, 2006, 2008). The annual themes, designed to catalyze the creative imagination of participants, confront issues in the Burning Man community and the world at large. They too have often had a religious connotation, whether neopagan, cosmic, or orientalist.⁹¹ The city’s urban planning and geography include obvious religious references, as evidenced by the city map distributed to participants. For instance, the Man is located at the “Axis Mundi” (cf. Eliade), while the Temple sits at the opening to the “W(h)ol(l)y Other”.⁹² Larry Harvey and the organization have made abundant use of the anthropology of religion’s toolkit in the creation and development of

90 The 2005 theme “Hopes and Fears”, with its red and black iconography reminiscent of early twentieth-century communist propaganda, aptly addressed these tensions.

91 *Good and Evil* (1995), *Inferno* (1996), *Fertility* (1997), *Nebulous Entity* (1998), *Wheel of Time* (1999), *The Body* (2000), *Seven Ages* (2001), *The Floating World* (2002), *Beyond Belief* (2003), *The Vault of Heaven* (2004), *Psyche* (2005), *Hope and Fear* (2006), *The Green Man* (2007), *American Dream* (2008; the year of Obama’s election), *Evolution* (2009), *Metropolis* (2010), *Rites of Passage* (2011), *Fertility 2.0* (2012), *Cargo Cult* (2013), *Caravansary* (2014), *Carnival of Mirrors* (2015), *Da Vinci’s Workshop* (2016), *Radical Ritual* (2017), *I, Robot* (2018), *Metamorphoses* (2019), *The Multiverse* (2020; online because of Covid), *The Great Unknown* (2021; online because of Covid), *Waking Dreams* (2022), *Animalia* (2023), *Curiouser and Curiouser* (2024).

92 Black Rock City plans are archived on the Burning Man website: <http://burningman.org/culture/history/brc-history/black-rock-city-map-archive/>.

the event.⁹³ Meanwhile, Burning Man has a strong “spiritual” signification for many *burners*. As in Western societies at large, *burners* understand the term “religion” to mean organized, churchd religion, and the vast majority identify as “spiritual-but-not-religious” (Vitos, St John and Gauthier, 2022).

Beyond the Temple mentioned above, Black Rock City is packed with theme camps⁹⁴ that offer an incredible variety of services with religious dimensions. A significant majority of these can be herded under the loose banner of holistic spiritualities which emerged out of 1970s New Age and orientalist exoticism: meditation, Balinese chanting, yoga, the whole range of alternative and holistic therapies, sweat lodge tents, devotional chanting (Hindu, Sufi...), etc. (see Gauthier, 2011) Numerous secondary temples are also built throughout the city, dedicated to expiation, cosmic energy, gravity (“the only thing you can truly rely on”), or unlikely deities. What distinguishes these participatory artworks from the gravity of “churchd” religion is that they are built and animated with a healthy dose of humor and irony. Additionally, several of the monumental artworks erected on-Playa have a religious connotation or deal with metaphysical questions. Other rituals punctuate the week, including the burning of the Man, which begins with fire dances (*poi* and fire-breathers) and ends with the pyrotechnic explosion and consummation of the effigy around which almost all participants gather in an indescribable atmosphere charged with shouts, laughter, dancing, frenetic movements, jumping, trances, and exclamations. After the Man collapses and the brazier eventually quiets down, the crowd slowly disperses to enjoy one last festive night. In the early hours of the morning, some rake through the still-warm embers to collect ashes or pieces of metal forged by the fire, which they take home and sometimes integrate into personal altars.⁹⁵ Another “official” ritual is performed by the Lamplighters,

93 Harvey was outspoken on this in the interviews I made with him. He is a reader of works on the history and anthropology of religion and cites the influence of Mircea Eliade (for the city plan and the ritual structure) and William James (experience as the core of the religious and the secondary nature of belief contents and institutionalization, which entail the risk of fundamentalism) in particular when recounting the conception of the event. A “spirituality” tab now figures on the “philosophical page” of the BM project (<<https://journal.burningman.org/category/philosophical-center/spirituality/>>).

94 The list of theme camps is archived: <<http://burningman.org/culture/history/brc-history/theme-camp-archive/>>.

95 A young computer scientist in his thirties, interviewed in 2004 about the

who procession across the city every evening at dusk. Dressed in white tunics reminiscent of monks sporting flame motifs, the Lamplighters parade silently along the avenues marked from North to South and East to West that link the inhabited semi-circle to the Man, lighting lamps attached to wooden lampposts in a somewhat eerie atmosphere.

What is striking about this whole range of practices, apart from their diversity, bricolage, and eclecticism, is the way in which playfulness, irony, tongue-in-cheek, absurdity, and parody blend with an equal amount of seriousness, diligence, depth, grace, feeling, and symbolic efficacy. Yet this composite of opposites is problematic for most theories of religion and ritual, which contrast the seriousness of religious ritual with the lightness of play. The question of the relationship between play and ritual is an old one. It is generally resolved by rejecting play while dubbing ritual as the “real thing”. Play then appears as a degraded or degenerated form of ritual. Ritual is religious, and play is profane.

Hamayon (2016) provides us with a different take on this issue. Devaluing play while boosting ritual, she argues, is an ethnocentric caption due to Christianity’s very peculiar make-up when compared to other religious forms like the Siberian hunter-gatherers and herders she studies. Hamayon’s research has convinced her that play behavior is central to animism, which belongs to “spirit religion”. Shamans do not perform scripted rituals: they *play* with the animal spirits, amusing them, fighting them, and even sexually pleasing them in order to secure game for the hunters or heal the sick. She shows how passing from hunting to herding, and from shamanism to Buddhism, Christianization, and Sovietization, historically shifted a religion based on play to one based on ritual. Play, it transpires, is fundamental for understanding “primitive” forms of religion, and therefore religion itself. If Huizinga (1955) classically posited play as the original principle of culture, Hamayon (2016) shows how it can also be thought as the matrix of religion.

Hamayon has effectively shown how Siberian shamanism has a play principle, actualized in dance and wrestling-like practices. In the simplest form of social organization (clan structure, nomadic, hunting life), she argues that religion is more a matter of play than ritual. The shaman is not the ancestor of an instituted clergy as much as he or she is an “artist” good at “playing with

location of the Man the day after it was burned, told me that he sprinkles his cereal with a little ash at breakfast to maintain contact with the community and the spirit of Burning Man throughout the year.

the spirits". The shaman's status is always revocable, as it is built not on the capacity to reproduce traditional gestures: it must be efficacious. For Hamayon, play and ritual coexist on a continuum whose poles are maximum freedom of action on the one hand and scripted rules on the other. Incidentally, "play contains the potential of ritual" (Hamayon, 2012, p. 316, my translation), and vice versa. Play and ritual differ with respect to the margin of action it allows protagonists, the share it devolves to singularity, subjectivity, and creativity. "Everything is done in the rite to ignore it (i.e., liberty with respect to the script) (except to make it, *a posteriori*, the cause of a failure), whereas everything is done in play to exploit it" (*ibid.*, p. 317 my translation). Thus, play and ritual correspond to opposite poles—they are "complementary opposites" (Caillé and Chanial, 2015)—on the continuum linking freedom and rule. Thinking of religion from the starting point of shamanism rather than monotheism (or even the "World's Great Religions") implies that it lies as much in the realm of play as in that of ritual.⁹⁶ To relate these considerations to former work on religion by MAUSS authors, religion can be defined as a function of otherness or the invisible (Pierre, 1986; Caillé, 2009; Gauthier, 2015) on the one hand and, on the other, as the expectation of an *effect*: explicit and rationalized in ritual, indeterminate in play.

The invisible invoked by play consists in vague, indeterminate, impersonal forces linked to the natural world. Hamayon's lifework on Siberian shamanism has shown how the latter organizes around of metaphysics of *chance*, or *luck*. In hunter-gatherer societies, the primary concern is the manifestation of huntable animals and the possibility of bringing back meat for consumption. To borrow an expression from Durkheim (1990), the "elementary forms of religion" consist for the shaman to set out and capture promises of game through interactions with animal spirits. The aim of the shaman is to hunt *chance* in the world of spirits so hunters can hunt game.⁹⁷ Hamayon (1990) has highlighted how the rituals surrounding the hunt aim at securing meat

96 Passing through Siberian shamanism has forced me to amend part of the thesis I advanced a few years ago in another contribution (Gauthier, 2008). I argued that the religious was mostly on the side of ritual and I devalued the otherness and invisibility at play in the game, claiming that chance could not have foundational value and function, an argument I must question today.

97 In such societies, all hunters can "shamanize". The cure element of shamanism is secondary in hunter-gatherer societies and only comes to the fore with domestication and the turn away from hunting. See Hamayon (1990).

while preserving the souls of the hunted animals. These are left to return to their animal spirits in exchange for a delay before human deaths must compensate for the animal lives that have been taken. Shamanic religion is geared towards transforming the murder of animals into a complex cycle of gift exchanges between humans and animal spirits. Chance is variable, like love, fertility, success, happiness, and the life force contained in the *game* hunted by the hunter.⁹⁸ In breathtaking passages, Hamayon (1990, 2016) shows how chance is the metaphysical concern of “spirit religion”, and how it is historically transformed into notions such as grace and providence in “god religions”, at the other end of the spectrum.

Coming back to the dusty environment of Burning Man, our little digression serves to highlight how its practices are more akin to “spirit religion” than “god religion”. From the mass of unscripted performances that occur on-Playa to the Lamplighter’s procession, the religious dimensions of Burning Man can be understood on a spectrum ranging from play to ritual. Of course, not all play has a specifically religious dimension. But religion is always a potentiality of play, since its inherent indeterminacy can always be credited as having a potential effect on another plane of existence, outside the fictional framework of play. What I mean by this is that the fictions of play can and sometime do have effects in the real world. The “as if” of play has at least the *potential* to affect the “real” world. This is why centralized powers, whether the Church or the state, fear the potential of play and attempt to channel, limit, and contain it, just like carnival is always circumscribed to a limited time and place by the powers that be.

Participation in the cycles of playing and giving is always likely to have tangible or intangible effects. At Burning Man, this potential is manifested through the awesome amount of incredible and extraordinary occurrences that happen every day. Thirsty and on the outskirts of the city, far from any campsite? A passer-by dressed as an astronaut is likely to offer you fresh water and a gin and tonic from a cooler on wheels. Going through hard times? A compassionate soul will come out of nowhere to talk to you and take you back to their camp, where you will be fed and given a massage. Missing a highly specialized tool to complete your work of art? Word will spread and the tool will materialize, accompanied by ten volunteer hands who will also have been kind enough to bring you a picnic. Burners have a saying for this: “*the Playa provides*”. Indeterminacy, risk, and even danger are turned into *destiny*

98 Note how hunted animals are tellingly called “game” in English.

through these provisions. At Burning Man, play contains a religious potentiality that continually manifests itself in the form of chance, grace, and gift.

It is possible to go a step further in the analysis to distinguish between the practices that are closer to the pole of ritual and those that are closer to that of play. The Lamplighters' daily procession, the burning of the Man, and that of the Temple have a choreographed, instituted character that places them more in the category of ritual. They are linked to the general organization of the event and relate to the community as a whole. These rituals are a far cry from the solemnity and regimented nature of the Catholic mass in the sense that play-type actions definitely have a place in them. Ritual does not have to be serious and boring (see Gauthier, 2018). During the 2007 edition, for example, a *burner* tried to set fire to the Man prematurely (as a protest against certain organizational decisions and "just for laughs", according to the culprit). As a result, he was criminally prosecuted by the organization and sent to prison,⁹⁹ testifying to the precedence and inviolability of the rule constitutive of both ritual and play. There are some things that you just cannot do.

The rituals practiced at Burning Man always include a variable of play. Yet they are no less serious. Approaching religion from the angle of play enables us to transcend the opposition between the supposedly profane world of play and the supposedly serious one of ritual and religion. The weddings performed at Burning Man, whether at the Temple or in one of the marriage chapels scattered around Black Rock City, are instructive in this respect. Many will have had a wedding "for the family" and/or for the legal concretization of the marital union before or after Burning Man, in the Default World. For many, however, the ceremony they engage in on-Playa is experienced as the most subjectively significant, the one that most expresses their personal *choice* of committing to their partner.¹⁰⁰ In other words, these rituals are particularly *effective* by measures of symbolic efficacy. The indeterminacy of the meaning of Burning Man opens an

99 Paul Addis, a screenwriter living in San Francisco, was a longtime regular at Burning Man. Suffering from psychological disorders and depression, he committed suicide shortly after his sentence by throwing himself under a commuter train.

100 The officiants may or may not know the married couples, but they are generally charismatic speakers who know how to improvise and play with emotions. The course of the ceremony usually follows a fairly traditional model, but always twisted into a form of play. A formula often heard at the climax of the ritual is: "By the non-power vested in me by no known or plausible authority or deity, I pronounce you husband and wife (or wife and wife, or husband and husband...)."

arena of possibility for meaning production. To say it in analytical terms, *the indeterminacy of Burning Man's overarching meaning is the structural condition for meaning production, subjectivation, communitization, and symbolic efficacy*. Because of its playful constitution, Burning Man can be a scene for significant *ritual creativity*.¹⁰¹ Thinking in terms of a spectrum between play (maximized freedom of action) and ritual (rule-set behavior) rather than in exclusive binaries opens heuristic avenues for rethinking religion and phenomena like the formidable effervescence of Burning Man.

Consider, in the light of this discussion, that a religious dimension is bound to the expectation of an effect of subjunctive practices (“as if” actions) in the “real world”. At Burning Man, these effects can be of several kinds. They may be material or symbolic and emotional, as in the case of covenant markers or the ritualization of mourning, loss, or guilt. This is how we can make analytical sense of the ways in which participants are keen on talking about how they feel they have been transformed by their first Burning Man experience, prompting them to return year after year, as part of a journey of personal exploration, realization, and expression with clear effects on their real-life paths as well as how they feel about identity, recognition, and belonging. For a significant number of participants, Burning Man is also about political change: changing not just themselves but the world.¹⁰² Black Rock City is a lived utopia that many *burners* strive to help spread beyond the confines of the week-long event. This ambition is explicitly stated by the organizers, following the insistence of founder Larry Harvey, for whom Burning Man carried a mission he hoped would expand into the global arena. An avowed social-democrat, Harvey clearly understood that the cultural revolution he was calling for went beyond politics *sensu stricto* and concerned the emergence of a decentralized, community-based, democratic, egalitarian, de-marketized, and ecologically-minded political *culture*. His wish has been shared by a fair number of self-identified *burners*, who articulate it in different ways.¹⁰³

101 The excellent book by Anna Fedele (2012) also proposes this notion about contemporary practices marked by bricolage and by a tension between the ludic (playful) and the serious.

102 In fact, both levels are widely perceived as being intimately linked.

103 Radical libertarian Grover Norquist, for example, participated in the 2014 edition and found it to be a model of society in line with his vision of the free market.

EVENTUALLY, *EXODUS*: BURNING MAN AND THE DEFAULT WORLD

*B*urners call it “exodus” when they have to dismantle their campsite, pack up their gear, and clear away every last scrap, only to queue for hours to leave the site and begin the long journey back to their domicile in the Default World. The return to consumer society can be difficult when you have lived without a wallet for a week. A week that feels more like several. Yet Burning Man is an albeit paradoxical part of Western consumer society, which it depends on to stage this extraordinary extravaganza of gifts. Our current globalized and marketized societies demand constant adaptation to a changing world and creates uncertainty. By summoning the workings of chance in a propitious environment and opening up to indeterminacy through its ludic constitution, a deeper connection appears between market society and the Burning Man event-culture. In the effervescent lived utopia of Black Rock City, the anxieties and disquiet associated with life’s uncertainties are turned on their heads to be enjoyed. In the other-world of the Playa, Burning Man’s enchanted setting enables for the expression and experience of what the Default World represses or negates, be it grief, loss, commitment, atonement, or gratitude. That said, the Burning Man experience is not all happy and positive. Participants go through emotional rollercoasters, phases of adaptation, and very real hydration problems; all of which are integral parts of the experience (Magister, 2019). Yet, Burning Man is set up in way that these lows, ebbs, and crises can be processed—with others.

Going back to Hamayon’s analysis of Siberian shamanism, she writes that the latter’s practices confront life’s uncertainties and indeterminacy (like the life-dependent presence of huntable animals) with an empowering “positive voluntary ethics” (2012, p. 121). It is better to do something than nothing, and it is a good thing to imagine a desired outcome. Similarly, participating in ritual games and feasts comes with the obligation of being in a good mood and positive-minded. She writes how the framework of play and its imperative of freedom comes with an obligation to participate and be in a good mood; to be happy, even. There is something similar going on at Burning Man in terms of this positive voluntary ethics in an environment structured according to the logics of play. Commentators have often pointed to the very *American* nature of Burning Man, and it is indeed tempting to interpret these positive voluntary ethics with a form of ritualization—and attempt at fulfilling and realizing—the pursuit of

happiness enshrined in the US Declaration of Independence.¹⁰⁴ These ethics also seem well attuned to the exigencies of today's capitalist societies.

Looking at Burning Man through the lenses of the gift and play sheds light on the event's underlying structures and dynamics. The analytical frameworks of the gift and play appear related and complementary. The play approach helps us take a fresh look at the religious dimensions of this phenomenon without ignoring the spirit of play that animates the impressive diversity of practices and rituals that can be found there. In short, Burning Man is a formidable fictional framework created through play, in which ritual and religion are *in statu nascendi*.

We are witnessing an unprecedented proliferation of ritual creativity and religious bricolages of all kinds well beyond Burning Man, across our globalized, consumer societies. These scores of emerging practices often present a mixture of seriousness and playfulness that our social sciences are at a loss as how to handle and make sense. A common take is to cast them as somehow degraded forms of religion and ritual. In this article, I have tried to show how the works of Roberte Hamayon suggest promising avenues for the renewal of our analytical frameworks for understanding cultural phenomena like Burning Man. Like many of the new manifestations we are witnessing today, the wild diversity of practices that abound at Burning Man can be understood as the surge of play-infused "spirit"-type religiosities. While "god"-type religion continues to erode in the face of modernization and globalization, new "spirit" forms seem to be emerging and filling the mainstream. This is perhaps the underlying meaning of the shift from churchd religion to "spiritual-not-religious" religious forms. Used to the scripted rituals of Western Christianity, we are conditioned to overlook and misunderstand the profound nature of the recrudescence of play in our societies, along with its religious, cultural, and political meanings. I have argued that taking both the gift and play seriously turns an a priori marginal event-culture such as Burning Man into a formidable laboratory for seizing profound mutations in wider society.

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GIFTS FOR GIFTS: FROM SYMBOLIC REWARDS TO PRACTICAL ADVANTAGES IN ORGAN DONATION

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INTRODUCTION: ORGAN DONATION AS THE “GIFT OF LIFE”

The “gift of life” is a common, key metaphor for organ donation. Public campaigns¹⁰⁶ as well as the professional discourse of health personnel (Shaw, 2010) portray the unconditional life-saving organ donation for transplantation as literally the actual giving of life. Gift of life has become such a pervasive idiom that it appears in legal acts such as the Uniform Anatomical Gift Act in the United States (Glazier, 2013), the Ontario Gift of Life Act and others.¹⁰⁷ But “gift of life” is not just another buzzword, it is the metonym for a utopian understanding of transplant medicine whereby medical technology is deemed to operate within worlds of altruism, solidarity, and gift-giving. The prevalent understanding worldwide is of voluntary organ donation, not motivated by materialistic incentives, or by any condition that donors might set.¹⁰⁸

In the face of severe organ shortage, organ donation is widely promoted as an exceptionally generous act in the public domain. The donor is often portrayed in a glorified manner, depicted as someone capable of bestowing a second chance at life upon patients. However, this prevalent image has been

105 These two authors contributed equally to this work.

106 Many organ donation programs and organ procurement organizations are called Gift of Life.

107 Such as “The Gift of Life Act” of Manitoba (<<https://web2.gov.mb.ca/bills/41-2/b213e.php>>, accessed May 1st, 2023), the “Giving the Gift of Life Act” of Georgia, US (<<https://www.fox5atlanta.com/news/georgia-senate-approves-bill-giving-the-gift-of-life-act-organ-donations>>, accessed May 1st, 2023), or the “Human Tissue Gift Act” of British Columbia (accessed May 1st, 2023).

108 See more on the ethics of transplantation in Jonsen (2003)

embraced in policymaking without a thorough examination of what establishes donated organs as *gifts*. While the act of donating organs, whether as a living donor or through posthumous consent, has been popularized as a near-godly bestowal of life, little attention has been paid to theorizing how bodily giving echoes or departs from the conceptualization of gifts in general (Sharp and Randhawa, 2014; Shaw and Webb, 2015).

Deviating from Marcel Mauss' foundational perspective in gift theory, where an equivalent or even more valuable return sustains the cycle of gift exchange, organ donation cannot generate any comparable or superior return. The intricate reciprocity inherent in many forms of gift-giving, although meaningful in various social contexts, encounters challenges when applied to the metaphor of the "gift of life". In this context, there is a notable absence of an adequate return or reward for the profound and intimate act of bodily donation. Moreover, the Maussian notion of reciprocating a gift is handled differently in contemporary societies (Godbout, 2022). The ascent of individualism and self-identity, the growing gap between the private and public spheres, the prevalence of utilitarianism, and multiplying options of anonymous giving have significantly transformed the nature of gift-giving in modern times (Titmuss, 1970; Silber, 1998). Ilana Silber went so far as to argue that today, "not only is there no obligation for the gift to be returned to the [anonymous, non-reciprocal] donor, but there is also no obligation to accept" (1998, p. 118).

Moreover, Top of Form monetary compensation for the gift of life in organ donation is condemned as an immoral expansion of the market frontier (Satz, 2008). Unlike other forms of donation and philanthropic practices in the market, organ donations have been deemed non-marketable since the inception of transplant medicine. The clear separation from monetary exchange exemplifies what Viviana Zelizer (2005) calls "hostile worlds" or Margaret Radin (2013) refers to as "market inalienability". As donors are rewarded with medals, honorary certificates, or cultural narratives that recognize organ donation as the epitome of pro-social behavior, the return for the gift of life seems only conceivable as one of a symbolic nature.

However, attempts to portray organ donation as a gift of life with symbolic benefits continue to put organ donation through a gamut of inconsistent discourses resulting in a range of conflicting discussions (Morgan and Miller, 2002; Sharp and Randhawa, 2014; Shaw and Webb, 2015). The kernel of these inconsistencies can be traced back to the complexities and paradoxes highlighted

in gift theories addressing the “double truth” of disinterested giving (Bourdieu, 2000). In the realm of organ donation, this double truth is expressed in the simultaneous existence of altruism and self-interest embedded in the gift of life. Simply put, it is the irony that stems from juxtaposing altruism and discussing which types of incentives and compensations might encourage donors to act altruistically and without expecting practical rewards. At the empirical level, moreover, social scientists have examined the tension between the “all too good” discourse of the gift of life and the realities of donor-recipient relationships. Fox and Swazey (1992) argue that donations from family members can be coerced by what they term “the tyranny of the gift”. Moreover, Sharp (1995) points out that transplantation medicine is saturated with contradictions and cultural dissonances, and Siminoff and Chillag (1999) note that by popularizing the gift of life paradigm, recipients are expected to express even greater compliance with their post-operative regime due to their intensified feelings of indebtedness.

The discrepancy and discordance between the rhetoric of the gift of life and the actual dynamics in donor-recipient relationships prompt a critical examination of the appropriateness of the gift concept in organ donation. This article delves into the implications of the “gift paradigm” in organ donation by examining two novel donation models: organ banks with a voucher system and the allocation of bonus points to organ donors (and their family members) on transplant waiting lists. We compare these models, in which donors receive tangible rewards, to traditional forms of organ donation that entail no bonuses.

To place these models within the framework of gift theories developed by Marcel Mauss and other social scientists, we begin by outlining key aspects of the gift within bodily exchanges. From there, we explore different types of organ donation. By conceptualizing emerging models to incentivize bodily donation, we lay the foundation for our argument regarding the institutionalization of practical advantages as a return for organ donation. While returns in the forms of honor and respect to donors are symbolic forms of reward that do not directly equate to the given gift (i.e., donated organs), the return presented through voucher and priority models introduces a currency into the organ donation realm in the form of an advantage in transplantation waiting lists. Those concretized returns mark a revolutionary shift in the exchange economy associated with the gift of life.

THE GIFT IN BODILY TRANSFERS

In *The Gift Relationship: From Human Blood to Social Relations*, Richard Titmuss (1970) introduces the concept of the gift paradigm within the realm of medical technology. By comparing various methods of collecting blood donation, Titmuss argues that voluntary giving is the most effective way to ensure both the quantity and quality of donated blood. This argument follows Pitirim Sorokin's (2002) call to promote altruistic behavior, as he believes that giving is contagious and that society should create opportunities for such behavior. Titmuss, influenced by Sorokin, suggests a fundamental shift in social policy that moves away from a market logic for motivating blood supply and embraces a voluntary approach rooted in the gift economy. This shift positions altruism—voluntary and non-materialistic motivated giving—as the appropriate framework for obtaining body organs and cells.

At the core of this gift paradigm lies the emphasis on individual autonomy and free choice.¹⁰⁹ Titmuss draws inspiration from Marcel Mauss' idea that “to give something is to give part of yourself” and advocated for it as the cornerstone of the liberal welfare state.¹¹⁰ He suggests that altruism and voluntarism should serve as the moral framework governing the supply of organs, tissues, and body cells for therapeutic purposes. Titmuss portrays the ancient custom of gift-giving, rooted in archaic societies, as not only capable of providing bodily parts but also of fostering social cohesion. According to Titmuss, Mauss' theory of the gift represents an ancient promise awaiting fulfillment through the advancement of medical technologies in the twentieth century. Building on the works of Mauss (2002 [1925]) and Lévi-Strauss (1971), Titmuss envisions a hopeful outlook for solidarity in a new societal order. Through his exploration of blood donation policies, Titmuss seeks a path toward achieving solidarity and social cohesion while he views altruism and voluntary giving as the means to that end.¹¹¹

109 Mauss' conceptualization of the gift is characterized by a mixture of freedom and obligation, as well as interest and disinterestedness.

110 However, Titmuss also disagrees with Mauss in some aspects of gift-giving as exemplified by blood donation. See Silber, 1998.

111 Titmuss' view on the connection between voluntary donation and solidarity is presented by outlining a list of donor types that do not all lead to solidarity.

Turning to a time before modernity and capitalism for inspiration in developing suitable economic systems for blood and organ donation is intriguing. Titmuss discusses blood donation within the framework of a modern capitalist society, where bureaucratic states translate cultural beliefs into organizational goals. In contrast, he points out that Mauss and Levi Strauss analyze societies where the entire social and political framework, extending beyond just the economy, is manifested in the act of exchange. In these archaic societies, exchange encapsulates culture, kinship, religion, politics, and law—as far as these structures can be differentiated in archaic societies. While Titmuss aims to integrate a pre-capitalist social economy into contemporary societies, his proposal seems anachronistic. Prevailing ideas of choice, altruism, and autonomy in today's societies constantly reshape what is (not) expected after gift-giving.

Titmuss' enduring influence on the procurement regime of body parts and products is evident to this day. His conceptualization of the gift paradigm and the altruistic code continues to resonate in the global legal frameworks governing organ supply.¹¹² By examining the institutional processes that classify organs as gifts and delving into the cultural narratives that facilitate the supply of organs for transplantation as gifts, we can illuminate the nuanced dynamics of contemporary gift-giving. Notably, the role of intermediary organizations, such as organ procurement agencies, is crucial in defining what constitutes the gift of life, specifying the nature of the exchange, identifying the recipients of these gifts, and, most importantly, defining the legitimate boundaries of reciprocity. As Kieran Healy (2006, p. 17) argues: “Organizations produce donations by providing

He draws an arch stretching from “the paid donor” to “the voluntary community donor”. This gallery of donors is a mixture of self-interest and altruism where the paid donor stands at one end and the voluntary community donor stands at the opposing end. The latter donor serves as a model for Titmuss that, although “no donor type can, of course, be said to be characterized by complete, disinterested, spontaneous altruism [...] in terms of the free gift of blood to unnamed strangers there is no formal contract, no legal bond, no situation of power, domination, constraint or compulsion, no sense of shame or guilt, no gratitude imperative, no need for penitence, no money and no explicit guarantee of or wish for a reward or a return gift. They are acts of free will; of the exercise of choice; of conscience without shame” (Titmuss, p. 140).

112 See the 2008 Declaration of Istanbul that determined altruism to be the default mode for organ donation and impacted transplant legislatures worldwide. <https://www.declarationofistanbul.org/>.

opportunities to give and sustain them by generating accounts of what giving means.” In the context of organ procurement agencies in the US, transplant coordinators actively address inherent dissonances in organ donation, acknowledge and honor donors with symbolic awards in the absence of more concrete, conventional reciprocity options, assist anonymous donors in envisioning their idealized recipients, and present a life-saving altruistic narrative to help imbue the act of donation with profound meaning (Lu and Millis, 2023).

Despite acknowledging the significance of cultural perspectives and the organizational structures of organ procurement agencies, the worsening shortage of transplantable organs highlights the inadequacy of the current system. The gift paradigm falters in two crucial aspects: first, contrary to Titmuss’ hypothesis, voluntary giving does not sufficiently expand the organ supply. Altruism alone cannot meet the growing demand for donated organs. Second, the felt obligation to reciprocate for the gift of life puts recipients in an impossible position. Recognizing the shortcomings of the extant altruistic gift paradigm, scholars have suggested opening organ markets. These suggestions, nonetheless, have encountered strong ethical opposition, and organ trade has been forbidden in almost every country worldwide. Yet, the problem of boosting organ donation rates prompts policymakers to explore innovative forms of gift exchange that encourage organ donations effectively while maintaining rewards exclusively in the realm of symbolic awards. The introduction of the kidney voucher program in the United States and the priority model in Israel represent notable departures from the clear divide between pristine altruism and monetary incentives for donation.

KIDNEY VOUCHER PROGRAMS IN THE UNITED STATES

A kidney voucher program, also known as an advanced donation program, is an approach to increase kidney donations for transplantation. The program allows living donors to donate one of their kidneys in advance to patients in need, who are not acquainted with the donors and may not yet have identified a suitable recipient. The donated kidney is then “banked”, and a voucher is given to the donor’s intended recipient or potential recipients, which can be used at a later time when the recipient needs a transplant. According to the official position statement of the National Kidney Registry, the first non-profit that has run a kidney voucher program, innovations such

as advanced donation, wherein a donor receives a voucher in exchange for a donation to their intended recipient if and when needed is designed to overcome *chronological incompatibility*. The number of donors who work with the organization was about 650 in 2018 and more than 1 700 in 2022—with an increase of several hundred each year (National Kidney Registry 2024). Since the program was initiated in 2014, the number of donors who are affiliated with this program has steadily grown, totaling more than eighty-six thousand kidney donations by March 2024.

The voucher program originated from paired kidney donation (PKD) or chain donation for transplantation which has become popular since 2000. Paired exchange kidney transplantation is a process in which living donors who are not a match for their intended recipient can exchange kidneys with another living donor-recipient pair. This kidney swap allows each donor to give their kidney to the recipient of the other donor. The voucher program acts as “PKD with extended time”, as the voucher can be redeemed for a kidney transplant when the recipient needs it, even if the original living donor is no longer available or the recipient has become incompatible with that donor. This program allows for more flexibility and options for kidney transplant recipients who may otherwise have difficulty finding a suitable donor. In the words of the first physicians who launched the voucher program, it resolves “time incompatibility between the kidney transplant donor and recipient”.¹¹³

Like other healthcare initiatives in the United States, professional organizations and non-profits have been the initiators and promoters of kidney voucher programs. Two professional organizations have taken up the role of research and setting up guidelines: the American Society of Transplantation and the American Society of Nephrology. However, the two leading organizations that mobilize, manage, and execute the voucher programs are both non-profits: the National Kidney Registry and the Alliance for Paired Donation. Both organizations help to identify potential donors and recipients and work to match them as compatible pairs. These organizations also work with the National Kidney Foundation to offer operation-related expenses and health

113 University of California – Los Angeles Health Sciences (2017), “How First ‘Vouchers’ in UCLA Kidney Donation Program Led To 25 Lifesaving Transplants”, *Medical Design & Outsourcing*, September 21st, 2017, <<https://www.medicaldesignandoutsourcing.com/how-first-vouchers-in-ucla-kidney-donation-program-led-to-25-lifesaving-transplants/>> (accessed May 15th, 2023).

insurance for living donors. Currently, the National Kidney Registry, the first organization to advocate for advanced donation, works with 103 transplant centers across the United States in their kidney voucher program—almost half of transplant centers across the nation.

The National Kidney Registry (NKR) offers two primary types of vouchers: standard vouchers and family vouchers. First, by donating through the NKR's Standard Voucher Program, one can provide a voucher to someone who is in imminent need of a kidney transplant. When the voucher holder is ready for transplant surgery, they can activate the voucher to be prioritized for a living donor kidney through the NKR. Standard voucher donors can also name up to five family members as “backup” voucher holders, should the initial voucher holder be unable to redeem their voucher. Another kind of voucher is called a family voucher, where one can name up to five vouchers for family members who are not in imminent need of a transplant. According to the NKR, donating through the voucher program allows donors to help “more than one person in need of a transplant” through paired kidney exchange. The living donor, who has no designated recipient at the moment, can give the gift to a stranger who cannot find a donor who is a match. As a living organ donation program director puts it:

If people go, “I’d love to [donate a kidney] but I’m afraid that my child will need a kidney in the future.” No problem. You can donate now and God forbid your child ever does get in that position, we’ve got a way to take care of them many years down the line (Sanchez, 2022).

That beneficiary’s intended donor—even if not a suitable match—can then donate to another patient facing a similar situation (i.e., the intended donor is not a suitable match). The chain of these matches can continue, thus constituting paired kidney exchange. The first three vouchers, for example, initiated three chains that generated 25 transplantations in total (Rivero, 2017).

Currently, the NKR voucher program does not have a time limit about when one’s donation must be “redeemed”. And this “without-due-date” voucher certainly is what motivates many who have participated in the program. Among the first three participants of the advanced donation program in 2014, two were seniors who thought that they would have become too old to donate and help their relative or grandchild had they waited for two to three decades. In anticipation that their loved ones would need transplantation in two decades or three—or

second or third donation if these family members suffer from end-stage renal diseases at a young age, they are donating now to help them in the future (Rivero, 2017). Time—especially extended periods such as years if not decades—in these instances, serves as the catalyst that makes living donation possible.

THE PRIORITY MODEL IN ISRAEL

Since 2012, Israel has implemented a priority system that gives precedence to donor card holders, actual donors, and their families. The legal foundation for this priority principle is found in section 9b of the Transplantation Law (2008), which stipulates that the steering committee of the National Transplant Center advises the Minister of Health on policy matters. In 2012, the Israeli parliament amended the law to incorporate the priority model proposed by the steering committee. The model was adopted as a strategy to increase awareness and motivation for organ donations. The law grants priority on waiting lists to individuals with donor cards and their family members. The basic idea behind this prioritization is straightforward: organ donors (both living and relatives of deceased donors), individuals who have signed donor cards at least three years earlier (indicating their intention to donate according to the informed consent model), and their families are given precedence in the queue to receive an organ, including living organ donors (Israel's 2008 Organ Transplant Law).

The Israeli system functions through the national registry managed by the Israeli Transplant Center. In the Israeli model, there is no set time limit, and it remains unclear whether priority can be utilized multiple times for patients re-entering the waiting list. Israel operates a single center for both matching and allocating deceased organs and approving living organ donations. Generally, the model assigns additional points to those eligible for prioritization. Individuals holding donor cards for a minimum of three years receive regular priority. Maximum priority is granted to patients on the waiting list who either have a first-degree family member who was a deceased donor or have themselves donated one of their kidneys. In such cases, the priority takes immediate effect. Secondary priority awards a modest number of points to patients with first-degree family members who hold donor cards (Israel, Ministry of Health). However, the waiting lists vary based on specific organs, leading to differing prioritization advantages. For instance, the waiting list for heart transplants distinguishes between status A and

status B, with hearts allocated first to status A patients with a matching blood type. Conversely, waiting lists for lungs, livers, and kidneys employ distinct scoring systems. In addition to these scoring systems, which consider medical criteria alongside each patient's waiting time, the priority model incorporates additional points (with specific values assigned to particular waiting lists). The model was seen as a shift away from the unconditional gift paradigm even in the eyes of its initiators who were aware that it "violated the principle of 'true altruism', and the 'ideal' of care is provided solely according to medical need" (Brimlow, 2009).

A first report on the model was published one year after its implementation and indicated a marked increase in both donor card holders and actual donors (Lavee, Ashkenazi, Stoler, *et al.*, 2013). Seven years later, it was reported that the incidence of donors per million increased from around 8 in the first decade of the 21st century to 12.5, and the consent rate rose from 50% to around 64% in 2018 (Ashkenazi, Stoler and Mor, 2022). The researchers conclude that "the priority program has given an important drive for the promotion of donor cards within the population" (*ibid.*). In a recent study, Mor *et al.* (2024) report that between 2016 and 2019, four hundred forty-four patients underwent deceased kidney transplantation in Israel. 63% of them were prioritized and they waited around 64 months on average to undergo transplantation in comparison to 93 months on average for patients who did not receive priority.

The promotion of the priority model was encapsulated in the slogan, "You sign, you go up the line", to increase the number of donor card holders. The implementation of this law represents another chapter in the ongoing history of organ transplantation in Israel, where the acceptance of brain death as a form of death is not universally endorsed within certain segments of society (Boas, 2022). Similar to the voucher program, donated organs under this model can initiate chains of paired kidney exchange, benefiting more patients. Meanwhile, in contrast to the U.S. model, the Israeli approach extends its advantage not only to those who have donated but also to individuals willing to sign donor cards (implicitly acknowledging the definition of brain death). In essence, the Israeli priority model has a broader scope and a wider range of potential beneficiaries. Its utilization of the "social worth"¹¹⁴ criterion is more expansive and prominent compared to the U.S. model: rewarding those

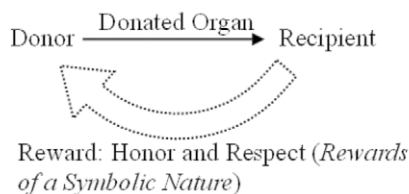
114 The "Social worth" criterion is a concept in bioethics that refers to the allocation of medical resources according to the patient's conduct and status. For the social worth criterion in organ donation, see Annas (2019). Also, Jonsen (2003).

who express consent (i.e., signing donor cards) instead of merely recognizing actual donors (Boas, 2023).

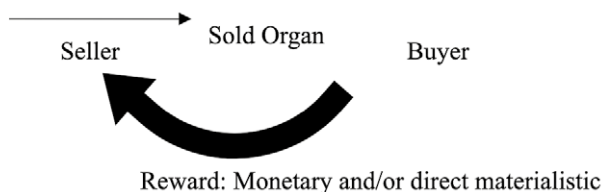
DISCUSSION: IMPLICATIONS OF GIFT-GIVING FOR ORGAN DONATION POLICY

The voucher programs and the priority system to encourage organ donation have shifted away from emphasizing a discourse of unconditional and anonymous giving. They propose a departure from the conventional understanding of organ donation by introducing a tangible reward for those who donate organs or express consent for donation (refer to Figure 1). Unlike traditional honors or recognitions (1.A.), this reward provides donors or their families with a practical advantage in receiving organs compared to patients without these priorities. It is important to note that, unlike organ markets (1.B.), these models do not involve monetary incentives. While they share a utilitarian approach with organ markets in maximizing organ donations, they still adhere to the paradigmatic boundaries of non-commodification (1.C.).

1.A. Organ Donation Model under the “Gift of Life” Paradigm



1.B. Organ Markets



1.C. Kidney Voucher Programs and the Priority System

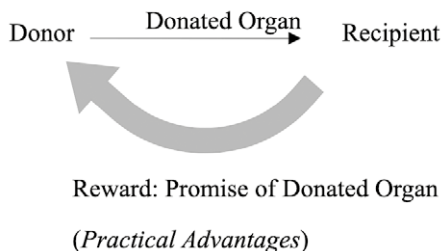


Figure 1. Conceptual Analysis of the Gift Paradigm in Organ Donation

When conceptualizing the differences between different incentives, we find different forms of rewards: symbolic recognition in the model of the gift of life, monetary transfers in the illegal organ markets, and actual benefits in the kidney vouchers and the priority system. This shift from symbolic awards to granting actual benefits in the vouchers and priority systems introduces the social worth criterion in allocating organs. People who perform good deeds are rewarded with an advantage in access to medical resources (Veatch and Ross, 2015). Generally, a person's eligibility for receiving donated organs comes from the giving by someone else—usually families or friends. In the priority model, the social worth criterion is also granted on the basis of being registered as a donor card holder. While the gift of life paradigm promotes an altruistic and unquantifiable act, unrewarded by an equivalent gift of life, and organ markets provide materialistic incentives for organs, the two more recent models present an alternative. They replace the deontological framing of disinterested donation in favor of a quasi-utilitarian approach centered on donors' self-interest yet do not advocate for fully materialistic incentives. Both models affirm the self-interest of organ donors to benefit themselves should they or their relatives need a transplant.

The tension between the ethos of organ donation as an unconditional gift of life and donation models that are based primarily on self-interest, as in organ markets, is resolved in several ways through the enforcement of these alternatives. When a donor donates to a family member in need, self-interest is legitimized as a manifestation of familial care and love. Chains of paired organ exchange are, in a way, an extension of this framing. Notwithstanding, theorists and practitioners have noticed that these forms of donation call

for revising the concept of altruism (Shaw, 2010) and suggested modifications such as “reciprocal altruism” (Landry, 2006). and “cooperative system” (Robertson, 2007). Both concepts envisage altruism as a strategy in which a donor’s altruistic behavior is dependent on the recipient’s ability to cooperate in attaining a goal or by reciprocating the donor’s altruism with an equivalent act. These theoretical modifications extend the concept of altruism and include utilitarian motivations of self-interest or at least a reward for the willingness to give. Controversial as these implementations may be, applying the idea that giving, receiving, and then rewarding with an equivalent incentivizes organ donation more straightforwardly (Barilan, 2014). Rewarding the donor with a currency that can be capitalized upon in the actual field of organ distribution is much closer to what Mauss portrays as the paradoxical, *social* meaning of the gift: the core of an exchange economy which is both voluntary and obligatory, interested and disinterested.

The two models thus concretize Titmuss’ proposal of sustaining gift relationships through bodily donations. The quintessential expression of the gift economy as a way to nurture social connections coexists when these programs are implemented. But is moving away from the concept of the gift of life as an unconditional act of altruism damaging the potential of social cohesion? In other words, do other forms of gifts also have a beneficial effect on society? Among the types of donors that Titmuss lists (see n. 7 above), he prefers the type of “voluntary community donor”, as bearing the cementing effect of solidarity. But he also notes other possibilities for donations, among them the “family credit donor” which is remarkably similar to the voucher system: “a donor that predeposits one pint of blood each year in return for which he and his family are insured for their blood needs for one year” (Titmuss, 1970, p. 135).

That said, modifying the allocation system by inserting a social worth criterion in the provision of medical resources destabilizes the delicate balance between medical and non-medical criteria (Luskin and Glazier, 2014; Veatch and Ross, 2015). With the creation of “gifts for gifts”, the power relationship carried by the gift itself is extended: Organ donors are much more empowered, first by being allowed the possibility to generate more gifts as they start paired donation chains, and additionally because of the guaranteed return in the future. Over time, expected returns facilitate the act of giving, and through the mediation of organizations, such expectations seem to be consolidated—although none of the advanced donation programs have been in operation long enough to assess such effects for sure. Also, publicized reports

do not address what happens deal in instances where donations cannot be redeemed, or when families are not satisfied with the gifts received in return as compared to the initial donations.

Kidney voucher programs also challenge the existing conceptualization of solidarity. First, even though one obtains vouchers by donation, the designation of future recipients restricts the scope of the return. Additionally, nonprofits or hospitals that run these voucher programs privatize recipients of donations by prioritizing recipients in their partnered transplant centers and donors who participate in their own programs. Donations to generate a public good, in other words, become private, or at least privatized gifts. Furthermore, practitioners have worried that those who own vouchers may resell them to people urgently in need of donations; even though this remains hypothetical, there is a possibility that it might occur.

Furthermore, rewarding donors with an advantage on waitlists for transplantations changes the status of the donation as a gift, and one consequence may be inequality. Against the backdrop of the controversy over brain death in Israel, the priority model seems to favor one group (supporters of the brain death criterion) over another. With the opposition to brain death as a criterion of death in Israel emanating from the Jewish ultra-Orthodox circles, the priority model seems even more discriminatory as it excludes patients based on their set of beliefs regarding death. Medical ethics forbids punishing patients and discriminating between them because of their behavior, faith, opinions, or lifestyle. The priority principle violates that rule. It draws a novel policy for the distribution of transplantation organs that deviates from the principle of equal treatment for all, regardless of the patient's position or behavior (Boas, 2023; see also Barilan, 2014).

FUTURE RESEARCH DIRECTION ON GIFTS AND ORGAN DONATION

This analysis calls for further investigation into the different ways donated organs are framed as gifts. Drawing upon anthropological analyses of the gift, we call for an investigation of “gifts of life” in other directions, for instance as sacred objects (Godelier, 1999). Future research may examine how changes in forms of awards, rewards, and actual benefits entail opportunities and constraints, and whether one form of reward might be more influential in some

social activities than others. Moreover, exploring the literature on time and gifts seems to be essential. Bourdieu, for one, has argued that the time dimension is a key aspect of the economy of gifts and that the lag between the gift and the counter-gift obfuscates the internal contradictions between the subjective part of giving and the objective part of the exchange (Bourdieu, 1990; Silber, 2009). There may be other ways of addressing the time dimension of gift-giving. Recent research thus far has also called for the exploration of pragmatic approaches to how people build their future expectations (Tavory and Eliasoph, 2013).

Investigating how organizational designs affect temporal experiences promises a contribution to the analysis not only of social processes in the past but also of the anticipation that directs future actions. Because of a deep interest in processual research that rather examines processes of formation in the past, relatively fewer analyses delve into the future (Guseva and Mooney, 2018). Although the future seems unknowable, sociologists have devoted themselves to understanding how people reduce risk and uncertainty—and the temporal dimension is likely to enhance such a scholarly pursuit. Beckert (2013) points out that economic forecasts are often imagined fictions meant to overcome uncertainties, yet such fictions are at the very basis of financial capitalism. Zelizer (1987/2017) demonstrates that, by framing life insurance as a strategy to manage risk, the industry was able to flourish. Integrating the temporal dimension with these studies on managing uncertainties and risk, we can additionally ask: How do organizations successfully build narratives of future anticipation to encourage cooperation? The gift offers a case in point to tackle this question as the “return” of the original gift is expected to take place after an extended period in the future.

To conceptualize the anticipation of gifts for gifts, moreover, requires an understanding of the experiences of time—and even the intermingling of different times. One may want to give the gift according to “biological” time for loved ones, as aging and mortality could eventually prevent such a giving afterwards. Meanwhile, whether one chooses to give can be informed by “psychological” time, such as a feeling of urgency; or “cultural” time, which defines who and when it is appropriate to give. If institutional and organizational strategies are vital for curating anticipation and motivating actions, it is important to assess organizational narratives that make use of such different times to build expectations. Such an evaluation could offer a closer look into the experience of time—how the speed, the urgency, and even the elasticity of time may shape choices and actions.

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**RECEPTIONS OF
AND ENCOUNTERS
WITH MARCEL MAUSS**

MARCEL MAUSS AND THE SOCIOLOGY OF THE BODY: A PERSONAL REFLECTION

Bryan S. Turner

In retrospect, perhaps my sociological interests have been too diverse and apparently disconnected. My critics have often commented that my wide range of interests is impressive, but it lacks an organizing or overarching theme. This observation was not unreasonable, but I will argue that the body and religion, starting in my early career at the University of Aberdeen (1969-1974), have been and remain principal foci of my academic concerns. More recently my work has addressed the vulnerability of the human body and in that regard Marcel Mauss' attention to body techniques as an organizing principle has become increasingly important.

Having completed my PhD thesis on *The Decline of Methodism* at the University of Leeds in 1970, I was appointed to the sociology department at Aberdeen to teach the sociology of religion. I duly lectured on the subject broadly within the framework of Emile Durkheim's *The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life*. I was also conscious of the formidable legacy of William Robertson Smith at Aberdeen and his influence on Durkheim. I was also vaguely aware that Smith's publications on the Old Testament had offended the Free Church and that he was, because of the offence, suspended from his chair as a professor. In the 1970s sociology was still suspect. The local Presbyterian ministers warned their congregations that sociology was "socialism". I suspect in those early years that, in addition to being a socialist in the Durkheimian tradition, I was not an inspiring teacher and consequently I had very few students. I quickly came to realise that I would either have to improve my performance or think of new topics.

In that period, the department of sociology was well known for its Medical Research Council unit and the research it did on reproductive health, pregnancy, and addiction. Through my interaction with the young academics in the unit, I began to blend the sociology of religion with medical sociology. I soon concluded it was odd that sociologists, and perhaps especially medical sociologists, did not pay much attention to the human body as the central

issue. It appeared obvious that what was missing from sociology in general was a sociology of the body. But where could one start to develop such an area? There was no obvious starting point. By accident in 1981 I bought a copy of Marcel Mauss (1979) *Sociology and Psychology* and discovered Part IV on *body techniques* which provided me with a framework to begin my work of developing the sociology of the body. Unfortunately, it was not until 2016 that I obtained a copy of Marcel Fournier's *Marcel Mauss. A Biography* and fully realised the extent of Mauss' research and publications.

At a later stage, two books confirmed my view of the centrality of the idea of the social as sacred for both Durkheim and Mauss, and how that view of the sacred was part and parcel of their commitment to socialism and the work of the *Collège de Sociologie*. These two volumes are *Sacred Revolutions* (Richman, 2002) and *Bataille. Writing the Sacred* (Gill, 1995). In passing I may say that for a long time Steven Lukes was my sure guide to Durkheim as a sociologist (Lukes, 1972). While I continue to appreciate Lukes' standard approach, his treatment of Mauss was, perhaps for obvious reasons, sparse, even if he was of course aware of the scope of Mauss' interests. Mauss receives generous treatment by Richman and Gill, who *inter alia* demonstrate that Mauss was not just the passive conduit of Durkheim's sociology. Richman (2002:149) emphasized the importance of the idea of *habitus* for Mauss and offered this definition: "The notion of *habitus* could indeed claim to an awareness of the totality of the individual's socialization by including the minute details of bodily training and development" (Richman, 2002, p. 149). The idea gained some prominence in contemporary sociology from Pierre Bourdieu (1993) in his *Sociology in Question* in which he adopted Mauss' development of the idea of the *habitus* in connection with social class differences in body training.

It is obvious that early research on Australian aboriginal communities played an important role in the development of the sociology of religion in both Britain and France. In 1997, while I was the Dean of the Faculty of Arts at Deakin University in Victoria Australia, I was fortunate to be given the opportunity to edit Spencer and Gillen's *The Early Sociology of Religion* which was the sequel to *The Northern Tribes of Central Australia*. Both volumes played a vital role in the foundations of Durkheim's *Elementary Forms of Religion*. The scale of Spencer and Gillen's two volume study is probably underestimated in the secondary literature. For example, the second volume runs to 743 pages in length and is packed with illustrations, maps, and diagrams. Durkheim merely observed that the two men were "astute observers". Fournier (2006, p. 60)

discussed the growth of an English school of “primitive societies” that included Edward Tylor, Max Muller, and James Frazer, as well as Baldwin Spencer who, in collaboration with J.F.Gillen, had made various observations in central Australia. These “observations” were in fact on a massive scale and European scholars underestimated the difficulties of undertaking empirical research in the Australian outback in that period. Without their “various observations” there would have been no understanding of the “elementary forms”.

RELIGION AS TRANSCENDENCE

While my *Weber and Islam* in 1978 was probably the early foundation of my career, the research of Durkheim and Mauss always was for me the real platform for what was to become the anthropology and sociology of religion. Their emphasis on religious practices, ritual performance, and community, remains fundamental to what I understand by “religion”—quite simply ritual practice, experience, belief, and community. The basic assumption was that the elementary forms of religion are always social forms. This approach is the basis for my criticism of recent theories of spirituality. The modern emphasis on belief and knowledge in the sociology of religion appears to miss the point of bodily practices, rituals, and community. Robert Bellah’s focus on “transcendence” in his exploration of the Axial Age suffers from similar problems. The emphasis has been on belief systems with little attention to practices.

In many respects the modern debate about axiality was inaugurated by Shmuel Noah Eisenstadt who organised a series of conferences that were published in 1986 as *The Origins and Diversity of the Axial Age* (Eisenstadt, 1986). Eisenstadt had already recognised the early transition towards an understanding of transcendence. Various aspects of this research appeared eventually in *Axial Civilizations and World History* (Arnason, Eisenstadt and Wittrock, 2005). More recent work on the legacy of the Axial Age has been influenced by Bellah (2005) and Bellah and Joas (2012).

In this axial period, stretching from 800 and 200 BC, religion emerged as an age of criticism in which the basic patterns of social existence came under theoretical scrutiny. The Axial Age, according to Bellah, involved thinking about thinking. Arnaldo Momigliani (1975, p. 9) declared, that from the time of the Greek philosophers and major religious figures such as the Buddha and

Confucius: “We are in the age of criticism and social criticism transpires even from the involuted imagery of Zoroaster’s Gathas.”

One issue that requires more attention is that Christianity and Islam that have profoundly shaped the modern world, came after the Axial Age. The fact that Islam came after Christianity and was therefore more developed confounded Hegel’s view of the progressive march of history, in which each stage represented an advance towards freedom.

While recognizing the importance of the research of Eisenstadt, Bellah, Joas and others on the Axial Age as major contributions to the study of religion, the emphasis on transcendence or belief in another world that transcends the faults, and failures of this world has had the consequence of neglecting the embodied performance of religious rituals and the collective social experience of the sacred. In addition, reference to religion before the Axial Age has been both limited and inconsistent (Casanova, 2012). Bellah, following the research of Mircea Eliade, argued that “primitive man” was fully religious, the mythical and ritual systems of primitive people were not pre-religions, that the elementary forms anticipated later developments and finally that evolutionary development has produced the modern disenchanted secular society. Bellah was of course fully aware of these existential issues in modernity (Marsden *et al.* eds 2024). However, Bellah has always argued that with evolution “nothing is lost” including the vestiges of ancient practices. Still, it is not clear where these “vestiges” sit in relation to contemporary modes of transcendence.

In line with this emphasis on transcendence, the focus of the sociology of religion has been on individual forms of religion. The contemporary view of spirituality is presented as an alternative to the idea of secularization in contemporary sociology. This trend underpins the modern sociological focus on post-institutional religion and private belief. This development has been captured in the famous phrase to describe modern religion by Grace Davie (1994) namely “believing without belonging”. However, this development is typically associated with Hans Sebald (1984) in America who spoke of the “New Age Romanticism” as an alternative lifestyle. The sociological debate also owes a great deal to the research of Paul Heelas and Linda Woodhead in Kendal (England) and their publication of *The Spiritual Revolution* in 2005. Modern spirituality is a private religiosity without rituals or membership of any religious community. Spirituality as post-institutional religion requires no collective rituals, or celebrations or calendar or priesthood and everyday religion becomes a matter of individual belief and experience (Turner, 2010,

p. 658-665). However, spirituality in my terms is not inconsistent with contemporary secularity. On the contrary, it is a manifestation of secularization in its individualism, placelessness and privatization. It is highly compatible with John Urry's ideas on mobility in which spirituality is appropriate to a middle class on the move and also enjoying the benefits of modern-day tourism (Urry, 2002).

The quiet town of Kendal in the Lake District appears to have played a pivotal role in theories of spirituality and tourism. The late John Urry also took inspiration for a sociology of tourism from his walks in the Lake District. Whatever way one looks at the debate, it is the prerogative of the sociology of religion, after Durkheim and Mauss, to notice that the social solidarity of advanced western societies was evaporating at the beginning of this century. Free-floating spirituality perhaps captured the culture of disconnected individuals.

MARY DOUGLAS AND THE ANTHROPOLOGY OF THE BODY

Mauss' contributions to the study of body techniques, magic, prayer, and sacrifice continued to find a place in anthropology. Contemporary academic interest in the body also owes a great deal to the research of Mary Douglas and especially with the publication of *Purity and Danger* in 1966.

With Mike Featherstone, I was fortunate to have the opportunity to interview Mary Douglas, through the good auspices of the Department of Religious Studies at Lancaster University, in November 1987. In anthropology Douglas was by then already recognized for her work on the Lele of Kasai, but it was *Purity and Danger* that came to the attention of a much wider audience. By the time of the interview, she was already recognized as a major figure in anthropology and in the social sciences more generally. By contrast, we were relatively young, brash, and inexperienced academics. In our interview, we tried to encourage Douglas to talk specifically about the anthropology of the body and where she stood on various theoretical issues.

In retrospect, I think I was trying to get her to recognize the difference between body techniques and the body as a source of symbolism and cultural classification. *Purity and Danger* was after all "an analysis of concepts". I can also understand why she got annoyed with us. The stressful interaction with Douglas during the interview was forgotten once we had transferred to a local pub and could converse with her on another publication which she

had edited on the positive benefits of drinking (Douglas, 1987). She became equally influential for her subsequent work on consumption (Douglas and Isherwood, 1996). Given her early work on religion and her later studies of consumption, it is not surprising she also engaged with Mauss and the idea of the gift, referring to it as “the gift that wounds” (Douglas, 1990, p. viii).

Much later Douglas emerged as a critic of the effects of the Second Vatican Council 1962-1965 on both the Catholic laity and the priesthood. Douglas had a strict Catholic upbringing, and, with the death of her mother, she entered the Convent of the Sacred Heart. The reforms of the Church through Vatican II raised issues about solidarity, tradition, and the body that she had inherited from her Catholic education. She complained that Vatican II had robbed the Catholic laity of many essential rituals (Larsen, 2014). The reforms also challenged her understanding of the importance of rituals that she had acquired from her study of Durkheim and Mauss. She complained that modern societies celebrated the informal, spontaneous, and the extemporaneous with no tolerance or even understanding of the formal and structured. These criticisms grew out of her work on “natural symbols” (Douglas, 1996) that lay behind her claims that expiation and atonement were not culturally specific and limited, but part of the human experience.

In this context I need to refer to another important event early in my career after the publication of *Body and Society* in 1984 that also involved a famous anthropologist. Shortly after the publication of my book on the body, I was invited to Berkely University of California for an interview. I was not hired, but I had the pleasure of spending time with Nancy Scheper-Hughes who was to go on to become famous for *Death without Weeping* (Scheper-Hughes, 1992), which was based on her field work in rural Northeast Brazil with women whose children had died from starvation and violence.

It is useful to compare Douglas’ approach to the body with the work of Scheper-Hughes, a leading medical anthropologist whose approach to the suffering body follows Mauss explicitly. She defined the habitus of the body in which “Embodiment concerns the ways that people come to ‘inhabit’ their bodies so that these become in every sense of the term ‘habituated’” (Scheper-Hughes, 1992, p. 184). Her later work evolved into a critique of the “theft of life” namely the global trade in body parts (Scheper-Hughes, 1996). This research also involved a reflection on Mauss’ analysis of the gift. Her work was important in the evolution of my research in bringing me to focus on vulnerability and human rights (Turner, 2006).

I may conclude this section with my view that the physical body and not just the cultural body is unavoidable in the sociology of religion. The simple proposition is that all human societies must deal with death not only in terms of culture, but also in terms of how to dispose of the actual dead body. Durkheim noted quite simply that “to the dead, to the souls of the ancestors, that humanity’s first cult may have been addressed. Thus, the first rites were funeral rites, the first sacrifices food offerings meant to satisfy the needs of the departed; and the first altars were graves” (Durkheim, 2001, p. 50-51).

The research on sacrifice began with Mauss’ collaboration with Henri Hubert and published as early as 1897 along with the article on the gift. The study of sacrifice was related to Mauss’ work on the gift and the need for repayment. The work on sacrifice relates to human debt to the ancestors and respect for the elders, but it also related historically to the emerging agricultural societies and to the gift of food and the attendant sense of obligation.

The sequence of birth and death—the creation, erosion, and ultimate death of the body—is and remains, albeit in altered forms, fundamental to human society and crucially to religion (Hubert and Mauss, 1981). With the modernization of health care and the rise of commercial funeral services, we moderns can pass through life without seeing a dead body or preparing a dead relative for burial.

Mary Douglas (1999) once more became involved in critical debates about the importance of historical continuity and religious rituals. She emerged as a scholar of the Old Testament and Christian ritual, especially the centrality of the Eucharist in which she saw a connection with the bread sacrifices that are described in Leviticus.

THE INJURED BALLET DANCER

One research topic where I believe my attention to Mauss really came alive was in a study of pain as the persistent companion of bodily injury. The study involved not marching soldiers, but the body techniques of elite ballet dancers to understand their injuries in the context of their demanding careers (Turner and Wainwright, 2023). The female dancers had often begun their careers in ballet classes as young girls and as a result they were, so to speak, deeply habituated into their dancing bodies.

The interviews were undertaken at the Royal Opera House with internationally famous dancers from the Royal Ballet Company. It transpired that, despite the glamour of their careers, these professional ballet dancers were permanently on pain killers. One ballerina said to me “if you hold up a ballerina and shake her you can hear the pain killers rattle inside her”. However, what the ballerinas feared most was an unwanted pregnancy which would have killed their careers.

The question behind the research was to what extent group solidarity or a sense of “*esprit de corps*” was a shield protecting them from a continuous experience of pain that threatened their careers. The research was interesting in uncovering a recurrent occupational injury among an elite group. Injury sooner or later was seen to be inevitable among the professional ballet corps. They also feared growing old because there is no pain killer for that process.

A young female dancer told us that the ballet company does not want them to grow into an adult female body. The ideal is a flat-chested, small, and thin body. Only the tough, accident-free dancers could survive the demanding regime. The ideal for female dancers is a flat-chested, small, and thin body. Only the tough, accident-free dancers could survive the demanding regime.

The theoretical point of our research was to demonstrate that the body is not just a text. It is blood, bone, and sinew. Notwithstanding their sense of professional obligation to the company, there are limits to how much pain and injury the body can absorb. Only the continuous perfection of their body techniques could protect them from the injuries that otherwise would bring their careers to an abrupt end.

MAUSS AND ASIAN BODIES

My career has been, in retrospect regrettably, nomadic. I was at the National University of Singapore from 2005 to 2009, where I was a professor charged with responsibility for research on religion and globalisation. Although unfortunately only for a limited period, it was enough time to develop new interests, to some extent from my students. Singapore provided opportunities to explore the kaleidoscope of religions in the region, including Vietnamese spirit possession, Buddhist healing practices, devotion to statues of the Virgin Mary, the sale of magical amulets in Thai markets, the Japanese fan dance and more. My position at NUS also allowed me to make frequent visits

to the Philippines. I was privileged to watch collective devotion to the Virgin Mary, when huge crowds gathered in procession with her statue, providing obvious confirmation of Durkheim's idea of the importance of collective effervescence (Durkheim, 2001, p. 283-284).

My interest in comparative religion began at an early stage when, as an undergraduate at Leeds, Trevor Ling gave the lectures on the sociology of religion. An Anglican priest who had served in the British army as a chaplain and a practising Buddhist, he subsequently became Professor of comparative religion at Manchester University. Ling (or "Trevor" as I always knew him) had a permanent impact on my approach to religion. For Ling, Buddhism was a useful example of the general problems involved in defining what we mean by "religion". Although Buddhism is often mistakenly classified as a philosophy, Ling made us aware of the complexities of Buddhist ritual and practice. It was much later that I came to think more in terms of Buddhist body techniques.

Many volumes on the body and religion in Asia have influenced me significantly and which I still have in my library. I would refer specifically to *Sensational Knowledge. Embodying Culture through Japanese Dance* (Hahn, 2007) and *The Book of Tea* (Kakuzo Okakura, 2001). Hahn trained in Japanese dance for thirty years to understand "the embodiment of culture via sensual orientations and lived experiences of transmission". The common element for me in my brief experience of Asian societies was the human body—its splendour, diversity, and vulnerability. Mauss was once more an important influence in my research and publications such as *The Body in Asia* (Turner and Yangwen, 2009).

SOCIOLOGY, ANTHROPOLOGY AND ETHNOLOGY

Perhaps one issue here is whether anthropology has been better equipped to acknowledge the centrality of the body to all forms of human culture than sociology. Perhaps I may be allowed to refer once more to my early trajectory towards a sociology of the body? As a teenager I became seriously interested in the anthropology of native American tribes. The interest grew, not from Western films, but through a chance acquaintance with an Oglala Lakota Indian who made war bonnets for the British Museum. His "studio" was a caravan in which he kept eagle features, leather, beads, and other equipment. I

was occasionally allowed to watch him at work. As a result, I wanted to become an ethnologist—at the time I was not sure of the meaning of “anthropology”.

I was diverted from ethnology to sociology by another chance occurrence namely a train ride through eastern Europe and Russia to Finland where I attended a communist festival for youth and met Yevgeny Yevtushenko, who by then was the leading spokesperson for post-Stalin poets. I returned to Britain wanting to be a sociologist of communism versus capitalism. I interject this personal comment to say I have always felt more a social anthropologist than a sociologist, for whom, consequently, the study of the body did not appear intellectually out of bounds. Mauss was also situated somewhere between sociology and ethnology, but I was able to draw on his ideas about body techniques in order to construct my sociology of the body.

Although Mauss was the academic who maintained the Durkheimian tradition of sociology after the death of his uncle, Mauss is also recognized as a key figure in the development of French ethnology, even though he never undertook any field work. In France while sociologists studied “complex societies”, ethnology examined “simple societies” such as the Australian aboriginals. The French Institute of Ethnology was founded by Mauss and colleagues in 1926. Given Mauss’ research on magic, the gift and sacrifice, it is hardly surprising that Mauss had a significant impact on the development of British social anthropology. Valerio Valeri (2013) described Mauss’ approach as constituting “the new anthropology” that was ahead of its time in rejecting any notion of “primitive people”.

THE POST-COLONIAL TURN OF SOCIAL SCIENCE

The academic world in which Featherstone and I interviewed Mary Douglas has changed radically. The sociology and anthropology I studied in the middle of the last century have both disappeared or at least both are subject to extensive critique especially with respect to their real or alleged involvement in empire and colonialism.

We can also look at this charge of colonialism from a different perspective by considering the possible connections between Elias’ work on the civilizing process and Mauss on how cultures develop different techniques within the general education of children in the correct or appropriate use of the body. In one respect both Elias and Mauss were looking at the evolution of bodily

comportment between different cultures. Certainly, the connections between the approaches of two sociologists has been observed by various authors.

It is difficult to give a date when the charge of either support of colonialism or indifference to it became widely accepted, but one publication that might be an important candidate was Edward Said's *Orientalism* in 1978. Although Said largely ignores sociology in his condemnation of orientalism, his critique had a significant, and in retrospect unhelpful consequences for empirical research in both sociology and anthropology. My radical students at Essex in the 1970s were more interested in reading texts for traces of racialism or support for colonialism than in the more strenuous conduct of empirical research. The result has been that anthropologists in particular are wary of undertaking field work especially when they must rely on native guides and interpreters. While both disciplines are still subject to the same criticism, the attack on anthropology has been more significant and consequential.

In Britain sociology was late to develop and had low status, whereas anthropology was well established in the "ancient universities" and well connected for example to the foreign office. Norbert Elias (2022, p. 218) commenting on anthropology's established status, quoted from the Royal commission on universities from 1913 when it was observed that officials who were to spend their working lives "in the East or in parts of the empire inhabited by non-Europeans should have a knowledge of their racial characteristics, as they should be acquainted with their speech".

Although the classics are the target of much criticism including the alleged connections with colonialism (Bhambra and Holmwood, 2021; Steinmetz,, 2023), any accusation against Marcel Mauss is misguided. He embraced pacifism and internationalism. He began his lectures on *L'histoire des religions non-civilisees*, which included the aboriginal peoples of the Pacific and Australia, by pointing out that the name of the lectures was wrong, because "there are no uncivilized peoples, only peoples with different civilizations" (Leacock, 1954, p. 60).

A BRIEF CONCLUSION: EMBODIMENT AND VULNERABILITY

I conclude by returning to my opening question: is there a theoretical synthesis apart from my long-standing interest in Durkheim and Mauss? In retrospect perhaps, I should have focused with more single-mindedness on the

sociology of the body given the success of the *Body and Society* in 1984. One excuse is perhaps that my highly nomadic life story with migration after migration has not been, for good or for bad, conducive to concentrating on a single specific issue or theme. However, perhaps there is a synthesis between my sociology of religion and my sociology of the body. Religion and medicine can both be said at one level to address human suffering that is associated fundamentally to our vulnerability. I need to say here that vulnerability is not about human weakness as such, but rather that we are susceptible to being wounded. Religious beliefs and practices have addressed that issue through most of human history.

However, it took some time for me to realize that the connections between the religion and embodiment concern our vulnerability. Various influences, in particular Peter L. Berger's sociology of knowledge, brought me to understanding this connection. My generation of British sociologists were deeply influenced by *The Social Construction of Reality* (Berger and Luckmann, 1967) which I bought in 1969, but I was perhaps equally influenced by Berger's foreword to Arnold Gehlen's *Man in the Age of Technology* (Berger, 1980). Eventually my intellectual development took me to various sources of German existentialism: Karl Jaspers and Karl Loewith, especially Loewith's existentialism in his reflections on Weber and Marx (Turner, 1993). Perhaps this theme of vulnerability has the happy coincidence, not only as the common thread of my work, of bringing French sociology of religion into a conversation with German existentialism.

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THE RECEPTION OF MARCEL MAUSS IN THE GERMAN-SPEAKING WORLD¹¹⁵

Stephan Moebius/Frithjof Nungesser

MARCEL MAUSS' RECEPTION IN THE GERMAN-SPEAKING WORLD: GENERAL DEVELOPMENTS

The reception of Marcel Mauss in the German-speaking world already began during his lifetime. It was in particular the sociologist René König (1906-1992), a key protagonist of post-war sociology in West Germany, who introduced Mauss' work to a wider audience in Germany as early as the beginning of the 1930s.¹¹⁶ Encouraged by the ethnologist Richard Thurnwald (1869-1954), König travelled to Paris in order to write about *Die neusten Strömungen in der gegenwärtigen französischen Soziologie* (*The Most Recent Trends in Contemporary French Sociology*) (König, 1978, p. 56-103, 2013, p. 23-64)—an essay, which then appeared in Thurnwald's journal *Völkerpsychologie und Soziologie* (later *Sociologus*) in 1931/1932. It was in this context that René König came into contact with the Durkheim school, especially with Marcel Mauss, with whom he “very soon established close working relationships” (König, 1984, p. 97).¹¹⁷ König thus became familiar with the

115 This text is an updated and expanded version of our article « La réception de Mauss en langue allemande » / “Die deutschsprachige Mauss-Rezeption”, published in the journal *Trivium*, volume 17, 2014, titled *Relire Marcel Mauss / Relektüren von Marcel Mauss* (<<https://journals.openedition.org/trivium/4911>>). We would like to thank Erhard Schüttpelz for his helpful comments.

116 See Moebius (2015, 2019, 2021) on René König's central role for sociology and the intellectual zeitgeist of the Federal Republic and on König's “Cologne School”. Before König, it was Wilhelm Jerusalem who drew on the insights of Mauss, Émile Durkheim, and Henri Hubert for his sociology of knowledge; these in turn introduced Jerusalem's work to the French public (see Huebner, 2013, p. 441 ff.).

117 See the letter from Mauss to König dated 3 May, 1932, Cologne City Archives. It is Thurnwald, in turn, who Mauss takes as his starting point—alongside Malinowski, Franz Boas, and Robert Hertz—in his famous *Essai sur le don*.

Durkheim school and the close connection between sociology and ethnology which was so typical of French sociology (see König, 1984, p. 91).¹¹⁸ In his essay, König ([1931] 1978, p. 60) describes Mauss as Durkheim's most direct heir and "the head of today's Durkheim school". Already here, König demonstrates a broad knowledge of the Durkheim school and its research.

However, René König's preoccupation with the Durkheimians went beyond this: In the winter of 1932/1933, he wrote the manuscript *Die 'objektive' Soziologie Émile Durkheims* (*The 'Objective' Sociology of Émile Durkheim*) on his parents' small estate in southern France, which he hoped to submit as his habilitation thesis. Despite the encouragement of Alfred Vierkandt, Werner Sombart, Max Dessoir, and Wolfgang Köhler, among others, a habilitation on the reformist socialist and Jew Émile Durkheim was no longer possible in Germany in 1933. In 1937, König went into exile in Zurich.¹¹⁹ The young sociologist did not let go of the Durkheimians, however. After the Second World War, König published a series of essays on Durkheim and Mauss and translated Durkheim's *Rules of Sociological Method* (the translation was published in 1961). More generally, he was instrumental in promoting German translations of French studies in sociology and shaped the German reception of French sociology in the 1950s and 1960s (see König, 2013). Against this background, it is not surprising that König increasingly discussed Mauss with Georges Gurvitch around 1960 (see Gurvitch, 2006, p. 187 ff.; König, 1984, p. 99-102).

In 1972, König published a knowledgeable and instructive essay on Marcel Mauss in the *Kölner Zeitschrift für Soziologie und Sozialpsychologie* (König, 1972, see also König, 2013, p. 150-180). In contrast to later interpretations, which often reduced his thought to the *Essai sur le don*, König deals here with almost the entire work of Mauss and systematically explores its key aspects. From the "total social phenomenon" and the "*l'homme total*" or "*complet*" to the theory of civilisations and the theory of social symbols to Mauss' "structural relationism" and his theory of collective expectation, König distills a series of sociological

118 On French sociology, see Moebius/Peter (2004).

119 It was not until 1975 that König published his habilitation *Kritik der historisch-existenzialistischen Soziologie. Ein Beitrag zur Begründung einer objektiven Soziologie* (*Critique of Historical-existentialist Sociology. A Contribution to the Foundation of an Objective Sociology*), which he had submitted in Zurich at the end of the 1930s. The last part of this study is the aforementioned manuscript on Durkheim.

concepts that largely disappeared in the later reception of Mauss in German-speaking scholarship, especially in sociology. Why is this the case? A brief look at sociology after 1945 can provide an answer.

Choosing the Durkheim school as the key point of reference is a crucial element of König's strategy in the sociological field of the Federal Republic. After 1945, this reference was central to König's rational-scientific and moral position. Yet, in the post-war period, this strategy was not without risk, especially in an environment that knew little about the Durkheim school.¹²⁰ This risk was particularly evident in Adorno's introduction to Durkheim's essay collection *Sociology and Philosophy*, published in 1967, in which he attempted to demolish Durkheim and, by extension, König. The background to this attack was the so-called positivism dispute, in the context of which Adorno turned against what he interpreted as positivism in König's work (see Peter, 2013; Moebius, 2021, p. 72-75). In his critique, Adorno even goes so far as to associate the reform socialist and moralist Durkheim with fascist ideologues (Adorno, 1967, p. 15). König immediately recognised this strategic move in the sociological field and responded to Adorno's "quarrelsome drooling" with the "Nachwort zum 'Suicide'" ("Afterword to 'Suicide'"), in which he corrects all accusations and misreadings.¹²¹ Despite René König's efforts to emphasise Mauss' independent academic achievements and although key writings of Mauss were translated into German in the late 1960s and mid-1970s,¹²² the reception of

120 The limited attention paid to the Durkheim school after the First and Second World Wars stands in stark contrast to the Durkheimians' interest in German-speaking ethnology, philosophy, religious studies, and sociology (see, for example, Keller, 2004, 2006).

121 See König's "Afterword to 'Suicide'" (1978, p. 208-238, for his reply to Adorno, see here p. 215 ff). See also König (1976, p. 328).

122 Eva Moldenhauer's German translation of the *Essai sur le don* (in German: *Die Gabe*) was published in 1968. This was followed in 1974 and 1975 by the two-volume translation of the collection *Sociologie et anthropologie* (in German: *Soziologie und Anthropologie*) by Henning Ritter. This collection was originally published in 1950, the year of Mauss' death. It brings together the author's central writings. In addition to the essay on "The Gift", which is also included in the collection, Mauss and Hubert's "Theory of Magic" can be found here, as well as Mauss' extensive study on the "Seasonal Variations of the Eskimo" (although this was only added in the 1966 edition). The collection also comprises several shorter works on the relationship between sociology and psychology, on social concepts

Mauss was clearly overshadowed by both Durkheim and Claude Lévi-Strauss until the 1990s. Lévi-Strauss' famous and controversial *Introduction to the work of Marcel Mauss* (Lévi-Strauss 1987), which preceded both the French collection of Mauss' writings from 1950 and the German translation, was of central importance in this context. Lévi-Strauss' portrayal of Mauss as a brilliant, but ultimately too unsystematic predecessor of structuralism had a lasting influence on the reception of Mauss.¹²³ As a result, Mauss was often only mentioned in reconstructions of Lévi-Strauss' structural anthropology.

A broader reception of Mauss began in 1990 at the latest, although this was still largely limited to the *Essai sur le don*.¹²⁴ While one still encounters the two long-established readings—Mauss as a “proto-structuralist” (Ritter, 1990) and Mauss as a mere Durkheim acolyte (Krämer, 2000)—more differentiated interpretations are now emerging. Mauss is recognised as having substantial significance in ethnology and cultural anthropology in particular. According to Werner Petermann (2004, p. 815), it is “fair to say” that Mauss—although “never an ethnologist in the academic sense”—“founded French ethnology”. Quite early on, the Austrian sociologist and cultural anthropologist Roland Girtler—influenced by René König, incidentally—also counted Mauss among the “founders of cultural anthropology” (1979, p. 50). In general, references to Mauss' work and characterisations of his work and influence take up considerably more space in introductory or overview works in ethnology than is the case in the corresponding sociological literature. In ethnology, too, the focus is sometimes on *The Gift* (e.g., Kohl, 2002, p. 89, p. 99, p. 142; Hahn, 2013, p. 137ff.), but sometimes there are much more detailed considerations (Girtler, 1979, p. 32 ff., p. 108 ff., p. 223 ff., p. 254 ff.; Petermann, 2004, p. 811 ff.).¹²⁵ In certain areas of ethnological research,

of death, on the “Techniques of the Body” and on the concept of the person.

123 See Moebius/Nungesser (2013a) on Lévi-Strauss' construction of Mauss as a “proto-structuralist”. On the influence of Mauss on Lévi-Strauss, see also Paul (1996, p. 62 ff.).

124 The other essay repeatedly referred to was the one on the “Techniques of the Body”, which attracted attention in particular in the sociology of the body and the emerging gender studies and their exploration of the social construction of physical realities; this essay has also been increasingly received in cultural studies (see Bogards, 2010, p. 111-119).

125 Roland Girtler places his idea of anthropological research strongly in the

Mauss is a—if not the—classic starting point. This applies to core topics of economic anthropology and the anthropology of religion such as the gift, exchange, magic, or sacrifice (e.g., Hesse, 1987; Streck, 1987b, 1987c; Elwert, 1991). However, it also applies to research dealing with ideas of “time” and “identity”; here Mauss’ essays on the Inuit and on the concept of the person are classic reference points (Kramer, 1987a, 1987b; Köpping, 2002).

Looking at the reception of Mauss in religious studies, the Leipzig scholar Heinz Mürmel has to be mentioned first and foremost, who has not only presented instructive works on Mauss’ theory of magic and Mauss’ role as a religious studies scholar (Mürmel, 1985, 1991, 1997), but has also recognised the *Essai sur le don* as an important work in the study of religion (Mürmel, 2000). In historical studies, Mauss is referred to in connection with research on bourgeois patronage and his theory of the gift is brought together with theories of recognition (Pielhoff, 2007a, 2007b). The discussion about the relationship between gift-giving and recognition—initiated by the Mauss interpretations of Georges Bataille, Jacques Derrida, Jean-Luc Marion, and Marcel Hénaff has also ensured that Mauss is received in philosophy, especially when it comes to questions of recognition (Bedorf, 2009, 2010; Honneth, 2010; Quadflieg, 2010a, 2011). This extends to approaches that link Hegel and Mauss (Moebius and Quadflieg, 2009; Quadflieg 2010b) and advance Critical Theory and the theory of reification by drawing on Mauss (Quadflieg, 2019). Mauss’ conception of the gift has also been taken up in organisational studies and economic research. This research focuses on a morality of reciprocity that is central to (inter-)organisational cooperation relationships and, by doing so, highlights the distinction between reciprocity and the gift, on the one hand, and exchange, on the other (Göbel, Ortmann and Weber, 2007). Here, a view of the gift becomes apparent that has been emphasised and promoted in particular in more recent readings of the *Essai sur le don* in media studies and cultural theory: From this perspective, as elaborated in instructive studies by Erhard Schüttelpelz (2005) and Iris Därmann (2005, 2010), the concept of the gift needs to be clearly distinguished from theories of exchange and reciprocity usually associated with it. Instead, they argue, Mauss’ approach to the gift has to be perceived as a theory of *mélanges* between persons and things

tradition of Mauss (e.g., Girtler, 1979, p. 33, p. 45; 1989, p. 16 ff.) and applies various of his concepts in empirical research. In his study *Die feinen Leute*, for example, he combines ideas from Mauss and Thorstein Veblen (Girtler, 1989).

and as a theory of possession (Därmann, 2005, p. 102 ff.; Schüttpelz, 2005, p. 179 ff., 2014), as a “theory of intersecting possession, of the mutual taking and being taken of things and persons.” (Schüttpelz, 2005, p. 185).¹²⁶ These engagements with *The Gift* in cultural studies have opened up new perspectives on Mauss’ work, which—as far as we can see—have unfortunately not yet been recognised in the international literature on Mauss.

In sociology, the following lines of reception can be identified: In the 1990s, for example, Helmut Berking (1996) began to take up Mauss from a sociological perspective, although, in contrast to König, he no longer considers Mauss in his entirety, but focuses on the gift in the sense of giving. Wolfgang Eßbach (1999) and Axel Paul (2005) take a completely different view by tracing the relationship between the gift and the logics of revenge. Also significant are approaches that expand on Mauss with regard to a theory of reciprocity. Frank Adloff (2005, 2005, with Steffen Mau) in particular has presented a series of publications in this area. In recent years, Adloff has connected ideas of Mauss, Alain Caillé and other theories such as pragmatism to develop a sociological and normative theory of the “politics of the gift” and convivialism (Adloff, 2016, 2018). The aim of these studies is to arrive at “an understanding of other forms of coexistence and for new institutional orders” (Adloff, 2018, p. 10) that identify alternatives to the increasing social inequality and the wide-scale exploitation of natural resources within capitalist societies. The implications of Mauss’ work for the sociology of emotions and the sociology of classification have been pointed out by Frithjof Nungesser and Stephan Moebius (Nungesser and Moebius, 2022; Nungesser, 2024). A further line of reception aims at a reappraisal of Mauss in order to present him as an independent classic within the history of sociology (Moebius, 2006a; Adloff, 2007; Papilloud and Rol, 2024), as a central starting point for further sociological theorising (Moebius, 2006d, 2024), and as a committed intellectual (Moebius, 2006b). In addition, the French-German exchange on Mauss has been intensified, especially in order to explore the fruitfulness of the *Essai sur le don* for cultural and social theory (Moebius and Papilloud, 2006; Moebius, 2006c; Adloff and Papilloud, 2008; Moebius, 2009a; Brian, *et al.*, 2014).

126 Stentzler (1979, p. 43 ff., p. 64) provides a reading of the *Essai sur le don* as a theory of mixture or amalgamation—albeit one that is still geared towards exchange—as well as references to the cannibalistic gift theory of the “incorporation of the other”.

A highly innovative appropriation of Mauss was initiated by Erhard Schüttpelz: In the so-called “Categories Project” (“Kategorienprojekt”), Schüttpelz and his collaborators engage in the reconstruction and analysis of the “social history of philosophical categories” as pursued by the Durkheim school and Mauss in particular (Schüttpelz, 2015; Schüttpelz and Zillinger, 2017). Research into the Categories Project has been continued in recent years by Johannes Schick, Mario Schmidt, and Martin Zillinger in Cologne. Based on Mauss’ autobiographical remark that he considers the question of the social origins of the categories of thought as of “utmost importance”, this research group edited an English volume with international authors on the Categories Project (Schick *et al.*, 2022). In this volume, they show the extent to which the Durkheim school and Mauss in particular endeavoured to conduct comparative cultural and sociological research into categories, thus initiating a sociology of philosophy and thought. The Durkheimians took the Aristotelian categories of thought as their starting point. At the centre of their work was the sociological search for the collective origins of our categories of thought, such as substance (What is something?), quantity (How much is something?), quality (What is the nature of something?), place (Where is something?) and time (When is something?). Thus, as the authors show, the *durkheimiens* sought to create the “largest possible catalogue of categories” of thought.

Another important recent development in Mauss’ reception in German-speaking scholarship was the publication of works not previously available in German. Four publications in particular should be mentioned in this context: First, the German translation of the *Manuel d’ethnographie* (*Handbuch der Ethnographie*), edited by Iris Därmann and Kirsten Mahlke (Mauss, 2013); second, the German translation of Mauss’ fragment *La nation* (*Die Nation oder der Sinn fürs Soziale*), which was published posthumously in French in 2013 by Jean Terrier and Marcel Fournier (Mauss, 2017); third, the German edition of Mauss’ central writings in the sociology of religion (*Schriften zur Religionssoziologie*), edited by Stephan Moebius, Frithjof Nungesser, and Christian Papilloud (Mauss, 2012); and, finally, an edition of Marcel Mauss’ studies on money (*Schriften zum Geld*), edited by Hans Peter Hahn, Mario Schmidt, and Emanuel Seitz. It is especially through these publications that Mauss’ status as an independent and important social scientist becomes even more evident to the German-speaking academic public (see Moebius, 2012a, 2012b, 2020). Mauss is now no longer regarded merely as Durkheim’s neph-

ew or as a proto-structuralist theorist, but as a central figure in the Durkheim School, an innovator of ethnology and an important sociologist of religion.

AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL REPORT BY STEPHAN MOEBIUS: MY PATH TO MAUSS

After outlining some general developments in the reception of Mauss in German-speaking scholarship, I (Stephan Moebius) will now briefly describe my own path to Mauss, as I was asked to do so by the editors of the journal. My path to Mauss began with my doctoral supervisor Lothar Peter. He drew my attention to French sociology and got me interested in the history of sociology. Lothar Peter was a student of the political scientist Wolfgang Abendroth, a resistance fighter under National Socialism and a leading figure in Marxist sociology after the Second World War (see Peter, 2020). In the 1970s, Peter conducted research at the Institut d'Allemand in Paris and wrote about trade unions and class struggles in France, among other things. In sociological theory, he is an expert on Marx, Simmel, Lukács, Durkheim, and Henri Bergson. In 2004, I edited a book with him on contemporary French sociology, which met with a great response in Germany, as it brought current French sociological approaches closer to a German-speaking audience for the first time (Moebius/Peter 2004). Prior to this, I had written my doctoral thesis on the significance of the philosophy of Emmanuel Lévinas and Jacques Derrida for sociology and developed the first outlines of a post-structuralist sociology (Moebius, 2003). After this study, I wanted to historicise poststructuralist sociology and, in doing so, became interested in the precursors of a philosophy of the other. In this context, I came across Georges Bataille and his heterological thinking and was fascinated by his connection to the sociological tradition of Durkheim and Mauss, as developed at the Collège de Sociologie. This gave rise to the plan for my next major study on the history of the Collège de Sociologie. Using Lothar Peter's methodology for the historiography of sociology (see Peter, 2001, 2015; Moebius, 2018) and on the basis of the lectures edited by Denis Hollier, I analysed the "cognitive dimensions" (key concepts, theoretical influences, etc.), the "social dimensions" (biographies of the actors, networks, milieus, generations, institutionalisation processes, journals, etc.) and the dimensions of the historical discursive context including the later influence

of the Collège de Sociologie (Moebius, 2006d).¹²⁷ In the course of this research, it became clear what a major role Mauss' sociology played for the Collège, so I wanted to take another step back in time. If the path had led me from Lévinas and Derrida to the Collège, it now led me from the Collège to Mauss.

With the help of a grant from the *German Research Foundation* (DFG), I wanted to write a larger history of the impact of Mauss' thought. I wanted to bring the different lines of reception closer together: In particular, Mauss' concept of the gift led to two larger lines of discourse, which differ strongly in their conceptualization of the foundations of the social and the cultural foundations of integration. These lines of reception both refer directly to Mauss, although one emphasises the "anti-utilitarian" impulse of his work, whereas the other follows its "structuralist-symbolic" aspects. Both directions, the "anti-utilitarian" and "structuralist-symbolic", are quite heterogeneous in themselves and they span two generations in sociology, ethnology, and philosophy. They do not run side by side, but are the subject of numerous debates within the field of social and cultural studies, both in the "first generation" (those born between 1900 and 1913) and in the "second generation" (those born around 1930 and later). The first generation of the reception of Mauss is represented on the one hand by the structuralism of Lévi-Strauss, and on the other by the founders of the *Collège de Sociologie*, namely Georges Bataille, Roger Caillois, and Michel Leiris. A famous controversy arose between Caillois and Lévi-Strauss. In the second generation, the two lines of reception are primarily represented by Pierre Bourdieu and the M.A.U.S.S. group around Alain Caillé. If Bourdieu represents the pole of structuralist symbolism, the Mouvement Anti-Utilitariste dans les Sciences Sociales (M.A.U.S.S. for short), represents the decidedly anti-utilitarian pole. These two lines of reception are flanked by the Mauss interpretations of Jean Baudrillard and Maurice Godelier. However, these were only initial sketches, and I was thinking of further lines of reception to include Georges Gurvitch, Georges Balandier, Jacques Derrida, or Marcel Hénaff, for example (Moebius, 2010). In the end, a detailed analysis of these lines of reception and their relationships and struggles did not materialise. This is because I initially fo-

127 The lectures collected by Denis Hollier formed the basis for the research into the Collège de Sociologie. Later, together with Irene Albers, I edited the German translation of Hollier's study on the Collège, which was published with Suhrkamp (Hollier, 2012).

cussed more closely on Mauss himself and wrote the first introduction to his life, work, and impact (Moebius, 2006a). I also wrote other articles, for example on the M.A.U.S.S. group (Moebius, 2006c), which was still relatively unknown in German-speaking countries at the time. Furthermore, I tried to link Mauss with other topics that were important to me, for example with a sociology of intellectuals (Moebius, 2006b) or with the sociology of Pierre Bourdieu, where I identified many similarities to Mauss' sociology (Moebius, 2009b). Furthermore, together with Chrisitan Papilloud, I did research on Robert Hertz and also translated and published important writings by him in German (Hertz, 2007).

When I was appointed to a professorship at the Max Weber Center for Advanced Cultural and Social Studies after my habilitation, I became even more familiar with the work of Hans Joas. Convinced by his theoretical work on the genesis and binding force of values and his sociological analyses of religion, I tried to link his theory of values with the work of Mauss and the *Collège de Sociologie* (Moebius, 2009a, 2024). In this context, the concepts of transgression, effervescence, and the sacred played a central role. Joas himself draws on Durkheim's theory of the sacred. As part of the edition of Mauss' writings on the sociology of religion, published by the renowned Suhrkamp publishing house (Mauss, 2012), I argue, following the instructive studies by Camille Tarot (1999), that it was actually Mauss who first put Durkheim on the track of a sociology of the sacred (Moebius, 2012a, 2012b, 2020). Mauss was the actual initiator of Durkheim's later sociology of religion. This was followed by several other smaller studies on Mauss. Together with Frithjof Nungesser, who was part of the Mauss research project at the Max Weber Center I undertook more extensive work on the influence of Mauss both on Lévi-Strauss' thought in general and on Lévi-Strauss' theory of art and classification in particular (Moebius and Nungesser, 2013a, 2013b).

Thus, curiously enough, my interest in Mauss led me to the history of sociology in Germany after 1945 and to René König (Moebius, 2015)—but only after I was no longer in Germany, but in Austria as a full professorship for sociological theory and intellectual history at the University of Graz. What fascinated me was the fact that König was regarded as a staunch positivist in the usual historiography on the history of sociology after 1945. At the same time, however, I was familiar with his writings on Mauss and Durkheim, which not only radiated a completely different spirit than that of a simplistic methodological individualism and empiricism but was also miles away from

the rational choice theory, which some of König's students later advocated. Rather, König was influenced by the ethnosociology and the moral commitment of the Durkheim school. It was from König that my further engagement with the history of sociology in the German-speaking world took its course (Moebius and Ploder, 2018; Acham and Moebius, 2019; Moebius, 2021; Moebius and Strauss, 2021).

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WHAT DOES A HUMAN HAVE THAT HE CAN GIVE AWAY?

*An Interview with Peter Sloterdijk
by Sjoerd van Tuinen¹²⁸*

SvT: *The topic of our conversation is generosity. In your recent books you have developed something like an ethics of generosity. Would you agree?*

PS: Yes, that's true, in *Sphären III: Schäume* as well as in *Die nehmende Hand und die gebende Seite* (*The taking hand and the giving side*), a book that was published in French under the slightly more appropriate title of *Repenser l'impôt* (*Rethinking taxation*). Yes, it is one of the topics driving my work over the last few years.

SvT: *In my view, you're one of the last representatives of the great German tradition of philosophical anthropology, perpetuated by the likes of Max Scheler, Helmuth Plessner and Arnold Gehlen. At the same time, one could also place you within a more sociological tradition. I'm thinking here of Paris' Collège de Sociologie, referring particularly to Georges Bataille and Roger Caillois. This is a tradition that puts more emphasis on social relations and contexts than it does on the individual or the species. In this combination of philosophical anthropology and sociology, and particularly with reference to your ethics of generosity, I think you're following the approach Marcel Mauss developed in his classic essay on the gift. Mauss derives the social synthesis from the gift and does not fail to formulate a number of important lessons for our present times. How would you describe your relationship to Marcel Mauss and his tradition?*

PS: I must admit that I'd love to be an affirmative Maussian. In fact, if there were something like a proper Mauss school of thought, I would count myself in. There is indeed in France now a research group of younger sociologists who

128 Originally appeared in Brouwer, J., van Tuinen, S. (eds.) (2014), *Giving and Taking: Antidotes to a Culture of Greed*, Rotterdam, V2_Publishing, p. 9-27. Republished by agreement with thanks to Sjoerd van Tuinen.

are being noticed and who have funded a Marcel Mauss research center. Yet in terms of his reception, Mauss is a tragic case, insofar as he has always been exclusively read as an ethnologist rather than an ethicist. An ethicist is someone who writes anthropology for his contemporaries. In other words, he tries to remind the human being of his or her humanity by assigning certain qualities to him or her. This act is not one of innocent anthropological description, as the human being is supposed to take on these qualities through the act of description. Unfortunately, Mauss has been exclusively understood as an ethnologist, a specialist in archaic societies. His discourse on the gift has been considered as a description of so-called primitive societies, without recognition of the message that the modern world could not function without a second economy, i.e., gift circulation. It is with good reason that the modern world has been described as an age in which exchange—more precisely, moneymediated exchange—has replaced its other, older version, gift exchange. According to this interpretation, the introduction of money has led to the disappearance of the gift. The truth is, though, that only one half of the relations of exchange could be integrated into the world of money; the other half still depends on an alternative mode of circulation, one that takes place partly as forced circulation. The so-called tax or duty, the *impôt*, which people have been forced to pay since the beginning of the modern state, is in fact the continuation of the gift by other means. And this is a very interesting and never properly understood issue that requires the help of Mauss if one wants to work through the jungle of ambivalences that comes with it. Mauss is the first and only thinker to date who understood that in the gift, the principle of voluntariness does not cancel out the principle of necessity or obligation. In other words, the gift, like Christ, has a double nature, i.e., it includes both an element of voluntariness and an element of coercion. This is why I argued some time ago that, as citizens of modern political structures, we won't escape our misconception of taxation unless we regard taxes as gift instead of a citizen's debt to the state. For a decade now, I've been wandering through the desert like John the Baptist spreading this thesis. I always say: My dear friends, taxes are not debts the citizen owes to the state but gifts he has to give to the treasury. This is the curious thing: it is an obligatory gift. One can argue about this notion as long as one likes, but my thesis is this: if we continue to take the notion of debt as our point of departure, we won't understand the essence of taxation and will also stay light years away from the great intuition Marcel Mauss developed in his book on the gift. To which I would like to add that Mauss was a socialist; we shouldn't forget that. He was a socialist who in his

own way tried to think a society of generosity, which is to say a socialism without resentment. In my opinion, however, the idea of giving the left an ethical injection that would liberate it from a politics of resentment and move it to a politics of generosity remains a dream.

SvT: *I wonder if today tax is the only form of the gift. I mean, if one half of the theory of ceremonial exchange has been incorporated into the money economy, where do I situate the everyday gift-giving that people do when they invite each other over for dinner or bring flowers on a date?*

PS: All this belongs to the other half. However, the enormosity of the tax process is by virtue of its sheer numerical volume certainly the central phenomenon here. Having said that, there is also a sizable charity economy. At the University of Indiana in the US, they have an institution called the Center on Philanthropy,¹²⁹ where annual statistics are compiled about the charitable activities of Americans in particular but also of other populations throughout the world. I've just seen numbers showing that in 2008 the Americans gave 307,7\$ billion to charity on top of their normal fiscal obligations. Only a part of this amount is deductible. American fiscal law is rather generous here, allowing for a considerable flow of money from the tax office to philanthropic institutions. This is interesting insofar as philanthropic money tends to be intelligent money, meaning it's dedicated to a particular purpose. It doesn't flow through the treasury, where it's without dedication and purpose and thus a purely disposable quantity. Philanthropic money is usually smart money, "addressed" money, and it is probably of greater use to the community than money that reaches it through fiscal redistribution. In other words, its efficiency factor is higher in the same way that one talks about efficiency factors in heating. An open fireplace, for instance, has probably an efficiency factor of five to ten percent. A good Norwegian cast iron stove has already got an efficiency factor of fifty percent. Floor heating gets it up to eighty per cent. This applies to money as well. The efficiency of money is dramatically lowered as soon as the state gets its hands on it, because then money doesn't work in terms of investment anymore. American civil society has this great talent of

129 The Lilly Family School of Philanthropy (<<http://www.philanthropy.iu-pui.edu>>).

people taking care of themselves, which is something that comes out of the spirit of its founding years 200 years ago and is still very much alive.

SvT: *What about, for example, the whole anti-abortion movement, then? It's sponsored according to this model, but I don't think one would necessarily call it "intelligent".*

PS: Yes, of course, there is quite a bit of ambivalence in this story as well. Yet it has to be said that this is an enviable feature of American culture. Then again, we could also take a closer look at our own situation. In Germany, for instance, there are 17 000 foundations. This is remarkable, since Germany, alongside France, is the most statist nation on earth—there's no comparison to the anarchism of the Italians or the Greeks or the southern Europeans in general. These foundations turn over significant amounts of money. Without their activities, areas such as culture, sports and health care wouldn't be able to function. This is a very broad and dispersed field no sociologist has ever looked at. They've learned their analytical categories from the classics, and there's no mention of the gift there. In this respect, Marcel Mauss remains the only beacon in the dark night of theory.

SvT: *Couldn't one also refer to Durkheim to argue that a money economy can't function without basic solidarity?*

PS: True, society itself needs a collective imaginary as an institution where people can generate family metaphors among themselves. Castoriadis and others have worked in this direction. Here in Germany, it was the subject matter of the work of the forgotten yet, in my eyes, enormously important sociologist Dieter Claessens. He wrote a book in 1980, *Das Konkrete und das Abstrakte* (*The concrete and the abstract*), attempting a kind of sociological anthropology, starting with the question of how sizeable social bodies can be integrated at all, particularly in a state of social evolution where a people's assembly isn't an option anymore. In other words, what happens when it's solely left to symbolic mechanisms and phantasms to generate a sense of solidarity among people. He offers an incredibly profound and precise analysis of this question. One should actually reread this book every three years to remind oneself of the theoretical inroads he was able to make even then. Today, theory seems to be in a bit of a regression regarding this question. This has also to

do with the fact that today we tend to express these matters in the language of media theory and don't use his metaphors of social synthesis anymore, which were almost always metamorphoses of a family feeling. His terminology was one that tried to visualize the abstract, greater social context by using images that were close to personal experience. Obviously, there was always a danger of confusing community and society, with the fatal political consequences that manifested in the twentieth century.

SvT: *I would like to ask two questions in this regard. As a theorist and anthropologist of primitive communities, Mauss mainly describes communities where ceremonial gift exchange actually works. As soon as one moves from communities to societies, it doesn't really work anymore. Hence the question: to what extent is it possible at all to redefine the idea of the gift on this new scale, and what role would the media play in this?*

The second question I would like to add right away is this. Marcel Hénaff shows that whenever societies grow too large for the gift to function, a new principle of giving emerges, namely that of "charis: grâce"; i.e., the act of grace. This is a gift that no longer circulates horizontally but moves vertically and unilaterally, as it is given by a transcendental authority, be it God or the state or a despot. In essence, "charis" is an unconditional gift. It seems to me that the idea of an unconditional gift is becoming more important for our societies. If this is true, don't we need to take a fresh look at our fiscal system? Not only from the perspective of the taxpayer or "tax giver" but also in terms of analyzing the idea of an authority that administers unconditional gifts?

PS: I am rather skeptical when it comes to the idea of an unconditional gift. I spent quite a long time looking into what Derrida had to say on this issue, and I believe that this idea is the metaphysical Trojan horse of modern sociology. One simply asks too much of the gift if one ties it to unconditionality, thus situating it firmly in the sphere of altruism. Derrida puts this in very interesting ways. He says the best gift is one about which the giver doesn't know he has made it, and therefore the taking side remains free of any obligation towards the giving side, et cetera. To me, this seems an inappropriate turn toward idealism. As I said, this is the Trojan horse of metaphysics returning to contemporary sociology through the gate of gift theory. What's wrong with the expectation of reciprocity somehow resonating in the gift? Every gift implies the structure of exchange anyway; the question is what would happen if the relation between

gift and countergift were to remain completely open. We need to understand that such a return on investment would involve a return movement much more extensive than that of taking something from a shop in exchange for a banknote. In the latter case, the symmetry is synchronous; gift and countergift are directly linked to one another, hence the price of the good. However, there are many things that don't have a price, yet they need to be supported, need to be paid for. In these cases, a much greater return is expected but postponed into the next generation or perhaps even five generations later. Not understanding this means that one is a really sorry human being.

SvT: *Do we have the ability at all to think in terms of such a bigger picture?*

PS: It was easier in the past, because some people were lucky enough to live long enough to, for instance, watch their grandchildren grow up. That is to say, they could observe how the sacrifices they had made for the sake of the children were repeated by them with regard to their children and so on. A true patriarch could use a telescope to see the fourth generation and thus get a sense that the great chain of life continued and that his expenditure had not been in vain.

SvT: *The chain usually breaks with the third generation, as Thomas Mann's Buddenbrooks teaches us.*

PS: Yes, in the end you have a son who is only an artist, and with him comes the ruin. However, the problem of decadence today is no longer that of a Buddenbrook family. The problem of decadence today is the problem of an individual existence unable to make any biological or spiritual long-term investments. Which is why it is so interesting that there are more and more people trying to stabilize their life achievements by setting up foundations. I mentioned the 17 000 foundations we have in Germany and how essential their support has become for countless social institutions.

SvT: *Right. Bill Gates' children get a bit of his fortune, enough to get by but not enough to avoid having to work. The rest is passed on not to the family dynasty but to foundations.*

PS: Indeed. Since Thomas Jefferson, there has been the strange ideology in the US, still influential among many American charity personalities, that each generation forms its own nation. This led Andrew Carnegie—who was one of the American steel industry’s tough guys and, in his virulent years, not exactly a nice guy—to bequeath nothing to his children. He said every generation needed a fresh start. This is almost a quote from the famous letter Jefferson wrote in 1813 to his former son-in-law, John W. Eppes, where he says we have to regard each generation as a different and independent nation with the right to bind itself by certain laws but not to bind the following generation—that’s going to be its own business. It’s a very interesting approach, an interesting ideology. Go back to start! Just like Monopoly.

SvT: *Yet in Monopoly, one gets a big unconditional gift off the anonymous bank. How could this whole idea of gifts be mediated today? Foundations are important, of course, but what else?*

PS: I think the bottom line is to make taxation intelligent. That’s the point, really. We’re living in a taxation culture that is no longer adequate to the state of our collective consciousness. Most people know better than the Minister of Finance what they’d want to spend their money on. In addition, the state has become an enormous junkie, thanks to its addiction to fiscal processes. In Germany, we’ve got five million employees working in public services. The state is the largest employer, and it obviously takes care of its own when it comes to redistribution. It’s an incredible dissipation machine, a gigantic self-service machine, an apparatus of monstrous proportions transforming potentially intelligent money into stupid, silly money. Smart tax management would do a lot. If citizens were allowed to invest a part of their general tax burden directly in a school, a university, a training center, a hospital or a similar public institution, we would have much less frictional loss.

SvT: *From reading your work, one gets the impression that this intelligence would require a very different value system as well. You already spoke of spiritual investments: if I transfer my money directly to the university, I make an investment in intelligence, in something spiritual that’s different from the day-to-day economy of consumption.*

PS: That's right; it would imply a radically changed communal consciousness. This is hard to achieve today, as we're practicing a form of mass culture that destroys such a consciousness through vulgarization and egoism propaganda on a daily basis. There's probably no way around this in consumer societies. Today, the individual is first and foremost a consumer, not a citizen. We're only indirect members of the polity when we fulfil our duties of consumption, and that's why the most subversive people today are anticonsumerists. They're not very popular, though. We just had proof of this in Germany. The Green party suggested introducing a vegetarian day in Germany's public cafeterias, which almost led to their ejection from the Bundestag. They lost a lot of votes in the parliamentary elections, not least because they were accused of dictatorially interfering with people's way of life—a pretty absurd reproach if you ask me.

SvT: *In your understanding, what sort of values should be encouraged or developed in order to facilitate a transformation?*

PS: In my opinion, modern ethics is too erotic and not thymotic enough. This is my basic standpoint regarding this topic. Unfortunately, we have transformed the human being into a zoon eroticon. This is the way we define it. We've learned from Plato that Eros is a demigod who only helps people who lack something, who are hunting for an object of lack. A thymotic ethics, on the other hand, would take a different question as its point of departure: what does a human being have that he can give away? The erotic economy is not just driven by money but by lack. It works through lack and fictions thereof. If there is no lack, it invents it in order to go on. The thymotic economy describes human beings as creatures who want to give instead of take. Thymotic economies understand the human as someone with a deep propensity to give; this is something one can observe in children, who are just as happy giving presents as they are receiving them. Parents can experience this very touching fact if they pay enough attention to their children's early moral operations.

SvT: *What would a thymotic economy look like? Let's take a concrete example: art. It seems to me that avant-garde artists are real thymoticians. They accept a very basic life in order to make a meaningful gesture, a gift that could not be derived from a lackdriven, erotic economy. However, in times of austerity, the state is cutting back on subsidies for art. The Dutch liberal-conservative government has cut its art budget by almost fifty percent. The message is: as an artist, you have*

to somehow make it on the market. What about that? What does a thymotically inspired artist have to do today? How could he or she survive in the market?

PS: It's very simple advice, isn't it? You have to be successful! I think this new Dutch version of cultural policy is the result of misconceptions. I'm not exactly sure what the considerations were that led to the budget cuts. It could be that they were paying homage to the neoliberal ideology, according to which culture is mere luxury anyway. Yet the problem here is partly the inability of artists to present themselves as part of the social base. Perhaps they have indeed behaved a bit like luxury creatures in an artificial compound, making it easy for the austerity politicians to believe this is all dispensable luxury. One should remember the wonderful book by Simon Schama about seventeenth-century *The Embarrassment of Riches: an interpretation of Dutch culture*, which describes a dilemma comparable to that of today's thymotic artists in Holland. Holland was the first country in the world without a properly poor population. What did they do? The preachers ascended the pulpit and tried to frighten the rich by telling them that a wealthy life as such is a road to perdition.

SvT: *In contrast, Weber's classical thesis was that worldly economic success is a harbinger of a good afterlife.*

PS: Well, I've never bought into Weber's thesis, because the money economy works quite differently from how he describes it. Besides, the connection between Protestantism and capitalism is not as close as he presents it. The early manufacturers in Flanders and the northern Italian cities already had a functioning money economy before the Reformation. And the inclination to get into debt was just as strong during and after the Reformation in Catholic countries as it was elsewhere. Spain, for instance, had to declare bankruptcy thrice under Philip II, and in the 1990s, almost half of its budget went into servicing its debt. Incredible, isn't it? So there are obviously certain historical constants. Yet with the Dutch, there's a subconscious feeling of guilt that takes hold of them as soon as too much luxury is consumed or, more importantly, produced. And art, of course, is the archetype of luxury production.

SvT: *Nonetheless, artists in Holland were particularly active in their struggle against austerity policies, arguing that artists create different values; for instance,*

beauty. They also said: As artists, we're able to animate or reanimate different forms of community. Yet the argument didn't catch on.

PS: They'd have had to prove it, wouldn't they?

SvT: *Does such proof necessarily have to come from the market?*

PS: We've never had a successful general strike by artists or brain workers. That would be quite interesting: what would happen if the intellectuals, the artists and the creative class of a major country went on strike and refused to animate anything? There'd only be journalists left: journalists and the police. And then we'd see how they got along on their own. That would be an interesting social experiment. We should at least once imagine, or perhaps even arrange, a general strike by brain workers in order to affirm my basic assumption that the symbolic air we breathe every day comes out of the creative class' symbolic production, and if it were neglected for just a few days, we'd find ourselves in the same situation as the mutants on Mars in Paul Verhoeven's *Total Recall*. The entire atmosphere would be gone. After all, the symbolic atmosphere of society is one of its basic functions; this is something that should be emphasized in the Dutch discussion. For the rest, I can't really judge whether or not the budget cuts are sensible.

SvT: *If I understand you correctly, you're suggesting that artists should strive for a culture of gift-giving. Without value creation, there is no atmosphere. You once said that intellectuals and artists were the last remaining proletarians: we're the only ones who still don't have free weekends and 9-to-5 workdays. However, when you talk about a general strike, you're not really talking about a labor movement. You're not advocating the emancipation of intellectuals. You're suggesting a movement of entrepreneurs. Now, the entrepreneurs you're referring to may not be the artists but rather those who are able to transfer their profits to foundations supporting the arts.*

PS: If I'm referring to a movement of entrepreneurs, I actually do mean the entire creative class; artists are a part of it but perhaps not the most important one anymore.

SvT: *This is the leitmotif of austerity policy: artists should become entrepreneurs.*

PS: Because actually, our definition of the worker today is much closer to entrepreneurship than it is to the old image of the employee who goes to the factory in the morning and comes back home in the evening. This type of worker loomed large throughout the first half of the twentieth century but is now quickly disappearing. In Germany's new collective bargaining law, the distinction between employee and worker has been abolished. Which is why I've recently suggested a minute of silence in the senate in honor of the lost working class.

SvT: *Let's come back to the question of non-monetary value. Take Greece, for instance. In the European discussion of the debt crisis, besides the financial questions, there are strong theological overtones. For instance, one could ask: do we have to get everything back from the Greeks, or should we be more forgiving and relieve them of their debt? Are there perhaps theological values as well that could make a difference here?*

PS: Yes, there is a theology that applies to the situation the Greeks are in. Once there was a small population on an island somewhere in the Greek archipelago, which was defeated by the Athenians. When the Athenian delegation arrived on the island, the local people said: You live under the rule of the gods of wealth and power. We, however, live under the rule of the gods of deprivation and poverty, who'll protect us and prevent us from paying the tribute you're demanding. In other words, they developed a spontaneous allegorical theology on the spot, by saying: Our lack trumps your wealth, because we'll use it as a weapon against your tributary demands. In other words, you can't take from empty hands, even if you're much wealthier and more powerful than we are. This demonstrates how even 2500 years ago, the Greeks were smart enough to use the sword of poverty against their own big heads.

SvT: *But why didn't the wealthy and the powerful relieve them of their debt? I don't know how the story ends. They simply lost interest in the poor devils.*

I was actually thinking of Nietzsche's thesis in the second part of On the Genealogy of Morals that every powerful man, every gentleman, ruins himself by means of his own generosity.

PS: Right. Norbert Elias, following Montesquieu, developed the same thesis in his studies of court society. Montesquieu was the first to describe a

system of wealth rotation in France, where great houses rise and fall by the workings of a mechanism that Norbert Elias described very well in terms of prestige-rational behavior. Prestige-rational behavior implies the necessity of conspicuous extravagance as a show of—in Darwinian terms—fitness, which inevitably leads to an economy of exhaustion.

SvT: *A potlatch.*

PS: That's Montesquieu's basic assumption, and also that of Norbert Elias in his book on the court society. Members of prestige-rational cultures act reasonably within the structure of their system by engaging in what Thorstein Veblen called conspicuous consumption, but they pay the price of obligatory self-ruin. Shakespeare has dealt with this issue as well. In *Timon of Athens*, he paints the picture of an aristocrat who's driven by his own generosity to give away his entire fortune. Then, when his moment of need arrives, he discovers there's no such thing as reciprocity, which leads to an outbreak of misanthropy in him. In other words, he discovers an enormous hatred for other people deep inside himself as he realizes there are no reciprocal relationships in Athens anymore. He was the only generous person; all the others excused themselves when he came to them—didn't have the money or had a funeral to pay for or were sick and so on. In other words, he was living in a society without countergifts. It's fantastic to read how Shakespeare presents Timon cursing the entire city. It's a long monologue in front of the city wall; he actually addresses it, saying: Don't protect this rotten city anymore; the sons should beat out their fathers' brains, and so on. He invokes a perverse world, because in fact it is already here. It's a fantastic story about a generous man's disappointed expectations of reciprocity.

SvT: *Yet a thymotic economy isn't built on the principle of reciprocity either. There are always those who give and those who take and thus a certain hierarchy and aristocracy.*

PS: Indeed, there are two kinds of thymotic giving. There's an inter-aristocratic communication premised naturally on reciprocity. This is also Aristotle's basic assumption in *Book IV* of the *Nicomachean Ethics*, where he speaks of megalopsychia, meaning the generous, magnanimous constitution that, according to him, represents the condition of democracy, because he

still believes in the city as a place where several kinds of noblesse compete with one another. We have the competition of the athletes, the competition of poets, the competition of the sponsors, the competition of the organizers of the games and the Dionysia. And there is the euergetic gift. Birger Priddat, a sociologist at Witten/Herdecke University, just published a beautiful article on the justification of wealth in the ancient and modern world that shows that the real justification of wealth in antiquity could only be found in the euergetic function. Euergetism is something that began with the Greeks and was continued by the Romans. Those who were rich had, for instance, to finance the games—the emperor was bound to put on big shows in the Circus Maximus several times a year, including the distribution of bread and wine and so on. Paul Veyne, in his book *Bread and Circuses*, describes the transformation of euergetism into Christian “good deeds.” That is to say that in the ancient world, the justification of wealth was a generous act that could not, of course, be repaid but instead was translated into expressions of gratitude, of adoration and applause. And no more is needed in such a system, as inequality will continue to exist; the rich man passes on a good part of his wealth and is thus able to indirectly justify himself.

And of course there is another dimension as well: the inter-aristocratic transaction, where the rich give each other flowers. The Middle Ages had the tradition of state gifts. On the occasion of a state visit, you always had to bring a sack or a suitcase full of gold, because you couldn’t present yourself to a fellow ruler empty-handed. We see this in historical movies, of costume dramas: whenever a king visits another king, a small gang of servants carrying a chest full of gold always comes with him. Once a French or English king supposedly brought two kilos of pepper on a visit to a neighboring king. At the time, that was in fact the real gold—black gold.

SvT: *We’ve talked about artists, theology, aristocrats—what about philosophy? One of my favorite concepts in your work is the notion of linguistic relief, which emerges early on in your writings, in the book of lectures Zur Welt kommen—zur Sprache kommen. There, you speak of a “breath of relief”, meaning an act of linguistic value creation, a symbolic injection into the public climate. And in Über die Verbesserung der guten Nachricht (On the improvement of good news), you actually suggest that good news depends on linguistic self-celebration. I believe a good description of your philosophy has to include linguistic generosity, or “megalopsychia”. In the past, the Sophists have been described as those who are*

paid for their wisdom. You trade in knowledge and receive monetary compensation as a result of the great success of your books. Yet with regard to the thymotic element in your work, the medium of language is absolutely essential. The notion of “Freispruch” is interesting in this context as it also the German word for acquittal of guilt or debt. Could this notion be interpreted in moral terms as well?

PS: It implies something else too, something that’s related to the notion of parrhesia, which Michel Foucault talked about a lot in his later work. Men of antiquity entertained a sort of athletic, sportive notion of communication, driven by the idea that a human being is freest when communicating without second thoughts.

SvT: *When communicating “sans réserve”, to use Derrida’s expression.*

PS: Exactly. And one doesn’t hold back one’s actual opinions when dealing with someone supposedly stronger, either. The most famous ancient parrhesia phrase is Diogenes of Sinope telling Alexander the Great: “Get out of my sun!” This is one component of the linguistic release you mentioned, the other one, of course, being the successful repudiation of guilt or the chronic suspicion thereof. Yet the basic attitude resonating in my writing is that of a feast I’m inviting my readers to, so I have to make sure there are interesting things on the table. I feel the obligation of a host vis-à-vis a guest who’s visiting my book. I want my guests to take something home without burdening them too much. That’s what I want to achieve.

SvT: *What is the value of wisdom?*

PS: The value of wisdom is a self-multiplying quantity. It’s a little bit like what Lacan has to say about love: you only get it by passing it on. One only has it as long as there’s someone to give it to; it can’t be owned.

SvT: *What sort of countergift does it imply?*

PS: Well, actually, the act is self-rewarding. We know this from Goethe, from his famous poem “The Singer”. The singer rewards himself by listening to his own song. Obviously, the case of the Three Tenors was different: they became millionaires on top of it. They made \$100 million from one gala concert. All

that money for a few high notes! Yet at the same time, if a singer is really good, you get the feeling they'd do it for free, because it's a selfrewarding performance.

SvT: *What about beauty, then?*

PS: Beauty is a slightly different matter. One doesn't possess beauty; one can't even see it at all. In the natural order of things, a beautiful human being knows of his or her looks only through other people's reactions. Mirrors are a relatively new phenomenon. I think one of modernity's great delusions is the belief that our ancestors knew as much as we do about their appearance. We're surrounded by a system of mirrors, to which one has to add the infernal machine of photography. In the past, most people were only able to look out of their faces, not back into them. They were told by other people's reactions what they looked like.

SvT: *Of course, beauty is also a question of charisma.*

PS: Of course; this is how it's given away constantly, and when you observe it in someone else, you can turn toward it. You feel this attraction, the platonic effect—Plato explained it in terms of anamnesis, but one could explain it differently as well. Anyway, this is why beauty is always relational. Our sense of beauty is perhaps the strongest self-rewarding element there is, alongside the practice of intelligent or skillful tasks, i.e., the practice of art. Art is also immediately self-rewarding. One shouldn't forget that the Europeans emerged out of the practice of craftsmanship. Today's intellectuals have forgotten that our ancestors were craftsmen, not a bunch of Leonardo da Vincis. Richard Sennett wrote a book on craftsmanship a few years ago in which he discusses the interesting fact that acquiring the skills of a proper craftsman of any kind requires 10 000 hours of training. Learning an instrument properly takes, on average, about the same time. A genius is someone who, for mysterious reasons, needs only a tenth of the time.

SvT: *Does that mean craftsmanship has a thymotic component as well?*

PS: It does indeed, but it also has the quality of being self-rewarding, the aspect of training. Craftsmanship offers the experience of a positive feedback loop, allowing the simple craftsman to become a virtuoso. What's at work here is a great self-rewarding dynamic that's linked to the quality of generosity.



OTHER COSMOLOGIES, OTHER ONTOLOGIES

“ZOETOLOGY”: A NEW NAME FOR AN OLD WAY OF THINKING¹³⁰

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TAKING ADVANTAGE OF OUR GADAMERIAN PREJUDICES

A familiar way of thinking about “methodologies” that we associate with rational, systematic philosophies are the formal principles or theoretical procedures of inquiry employed in a particular field or discipline. For example, in philosophy, we might speak of Socratic dialectics or Cartesian rational skepticism as methodologies, and of analytic, logical, and phenomenological methodologies among many others. The term “methodology” itself suggests the familiar theory and practice dichotomy by formalizing the method and making the principles of explanation prior to their application.

In looking for a starting point in formulating my own method (rather than methodology) for doing comparative philosophy, I appeal to John Dewey’s postulate of “immediate empiricism” (the notion that our immediate experience is our reality) and the primacy he gives to practice. As a philosophical method, Dewey’s radical empiricism requires that since all human problems arise within the “hadness” of immediate experience as it had by specific persons in the world, the resolution to these problems must be sought through theorizing this same experience in our best efforts to make its outcomes more productive and intelligent. “Hadness” for Dewey is not some claim to “pure” or “primordial” experience, but simply what experience *is* as it is *had* by those persons experiencing it. In formulating this method, Dewey begins by asserting that:

Immediate empiricism postulates that things—anything, everything, in the ordinary or non-technical use of the term “thing”—are what they are experienced as... If you wish to find out what subjective, objective, physical, mental, cosmic, psychic, cause, substance, purpose,

130 Previous appeared as “‘Zoetology’: A New Name for an Old Way of Thinking”, *Royal Institute of Philosophy Supplement*, 2023, 93, p. 81-98.

activity, evil, being, quality—any philosophic term, in short—means, go to experience and see what the thing is experienced *as* (Dewey, 1977, vol. 3, p. 158, p. 165).

As Dewey’s alternative to starting from abstract philosophical concepts and theories, he is arguing that all such terms of art must be understood as the “thats” of specifically experienced meanings. Dewey’s method provides us with a way of ascertaining what the language we use actually means, and precludes the dualisms that usually follow in the wake of deploying abstract and thus decontextualizing terms such as reality, rationality, objectivity, justice, and indeed, methodology itself.

Corollary to Dewey’s immediate empiricism is recognition of the fact that experience itself is always a continuous, a collaborative and an unbounded affair. Thus, his “hadness” far from precluding a robust subjective aspect, insists upon it. Before Dewey formulated his postulate of immediate empiricism, William James had earlier offered his own version of a similar idea that probably inspired Dewey, referring to it as a “radical empiricism”:

To be radical, an empiricism must neither admit into its constructions any element that is not directly experienced, nor exclude from them any element that is directly experienced. For such a philosophy, *the relations that connect experiences must themselves be experienced relations, and any kind of relation experienced must be accounted as “real” as anything else in the system* [italics in original] (James, 1976, p. 22).

And more recently, yet another advocate of a pragmatic approach to philosophy, Hilary Putnam, brings additional clarity to this postulate of immediate empiricism by not only rejecting “view-from-nowhere” objectivism, but by further insisting that the subjective dimension of experience is always integral to what the world really is. Putnam insists that:

[...] elements of what we call “language” or “mind” *penetrate so deeply into what we call “reality” that the very project of representing ourselves as being “mapper’s” of something “language-independent” is fatally compromised from the start.* Like Relativism, but in a different way, Realism is an impossible attempt to view the world from Nowhere [italics in original] (Putnam, 1990, p. 28).

Putnam will not admit of any understanding of the real world that cleaves it off from its human participation and that does not accept our experience of it as what the world *really* is. He is making this same point regarding the holistic and inclusive nature of experience when he insists that:

[...] the heart of pragmatism, it seems to me—of James’ and Dewey’s pragmatism if not of Peirce’s—was the supremacy of the agent point of view. If we find that we must take a certain point of view, use a certain “conceptual system”, when engaged in a practical activity, in the widest sense of practical activity, then we must not simultaneously advance the claim that it is not really “the way things are in themselves” (Putnam, 1987, p. 83).

When we carry Dewey’s postulate of immediate empiricism over to the task of interpreting another philosophical tradition, if we are to resist cultural reductionism and to allow the other culture to speak on its own terms, we do best to employ a comparative cultural hermeneutics as our method of inquiry. The starting point of hermeneutics is an acknowledgement of the interpretive interdependence of the structures of meaning within the experience from which understanding is to be gained. Hans-Georg Gadamer insists that:

[...] understanding is not a method which the inquiring consciousness applies to an object it chooses and so turns it into objective knowledge; rather, being situated within an event of tradition, a process of handing down, is a prior condition of understanding. *Understanding proves to be an event* [italics in original] (Gadamer, 1997, p. 309).

It is in this spirit of understanding as an event that Gadamer uses the term “prejudices” (*Vorurteil*) not as blind biases, but on the contrary, as acknowledging that a deliberate cognizance of our own prejudgments facilitates rather than obstructs our access and insight into something we do not know. These prejudgments are not only our presuppositions, but also our projective interests and concerns. For Gadamer, the hermeneutical circle within which understanding is always situated requires of us that we continually strive to be aware of what we carry over into our new experience, since critical attention to our own assumptions and purposes can serve to positively condition the

depth and quality of our interpretation of what we encounter.¹³¹ To be clear, the claim is that a comparative cultural hermeneutics has the potential to inspire a greater degree of insight than simply working within either tradition separately, because the analogical associations and contrasts that emerge in the process are productive of additional meaning. Even fundamental differences when used properly can be activated to serve the interests of clearer understanding. J. L. Austin remarks that:

[...] the world must exhibit (we must observe) similarities and dissimilarities (there could not be one without the other): if everything were either absolutely indistinguishable from anything else or completely unlike anything else, there would be nothing to say (Austin, 1961, p. 89-90).

Such analogical correlations that appeal to either similarities or differences between cultural traditions can be productive or otherwise to the extent that they are a source of increased meaning; that is, to the extent that they provide us with something to say.

COMPARATIVE CULTURAL HERMENEUTICS AS ANALOGICAL THINKING

It can be argued that all meaningful interpretation of experience, with “interpretation” itself literally meaning “a go-between negotiation”, emerges analogically through establishing and aggregating a pattern of truly productive correlations between what we already know and what we would know. Of course, since analogize we must, at the same time we might also want to allow that not all analogies are equally apposite. As has become apparent in the troubled history of having translated and thus “carried over” Chinese philosophy into the Western academy, poorly chosen comparisons can be a persisting source of distortion and of cultural condescension. A heavy-handed and impositional “Christian”, “Heideggerian”, and yes, a “Pragmatic” or

131 See Jeff Malpas (2018), “Hans-Georg Gadamer”, *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, Edward N. Zalta (ed.), <<https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/fall2018/entries/gadamer/>>.

“Whiteheadian” reading of Chinese philosophy as well, betrays the reader by distorting both the Chinese tradition and the Western analogue in the comparison. As inescapably correlative thinkers, we need to be analogically retail and piece-meal rather than working in whole cloth.

Again, analogies can be productive of both associations and contrasts, and we can learn much from both. To take one example, the *Focusing the Familiar* (*Zhongyong* 中庸) has been hugely influential as one of the Confucian *Four Books*. In this canonical text, it argues that the best of human beings have both the capacity and the responsibility to be co-creators with the heavens and the earth. In seeking to interpret this text, we might find an associative analogy with the work of A. N. Whitehead in his concern to reinstate “creativity” as an important human value. For Whitehead, claims about the “aseity”—that is, the self-sufficiency and perfection—of God in traditional theology precludes any interesting or coherent sense of human creativity. Following the sustained challenge Whitehead directs at conventional ways of thinking about creativity, the word “creativity” itself becomes an individual entry in a 1971 supplement to the *Oxford English Dictionary* with two of the three references being made to Whitehead’s own *Religion in the Making*. At the same time, however, we might be keenly aware that when the same Whitehead invokes the primordial nature of God and the Eternal Objects that are sustained in His thinking, the long shadow of Aristotelian metaphysics and the Unmoved Mover sets a real limit on the relevance for classical Chinese process cosmology of these aspects of Whitehead’s philosophy.

Aristotle’s teleology, his substance ontology, and his reliance upon logic as *the* demonstrable method that will secure us truth, might serve as contrastive analogies with a Chinese process cosmology that abjures fixed beginnings and ends, that precludes any strict formal identity, and that will not yield up the principle of non-contradiction as enabling of erstwhile apodictic knowledge. On the other hand, Aristotle’s resistance to Platonic abstraction in promoting an aggregating practical wisdom correlates rather productively with one of the central issues in classical Confucian moral philosophy. That is, Aristotelian *phronesis* (practical wisdom) with its commitment to the cultivation of excellent habits (*hexis*) in the practical affairs of everyday living has some immediate resonance with the ubiquitous Confucian assumption that knowing and doing are inseparable and mutually entailing (*zhixingheyi* 知行合一).

In our project of cultural interpretation, whether they be associative or contrastive analogies, we have no choice but to identify productive correlations

that, with effort and imagination, can be qualified and refined in such a way as to introduce culturally novel ideas into our own world as a source of enrichment for our own ways of thinking and living. In this cultural translation, we certainly must be deliberate in the picking and choosing of our analogies—but at the end of the day, pick and choose we must.

CLASSICAL GREEK ONTOLOGY AND CHINESE ZOETOLOGY: “A SMALL STOCK OF IDEAS”¹³²

As a self-confessed philosopher of culture, I take it as my task to identify, excavate, and articulate generalizations that distinguish different cultural narratives. It is only in being cognizant of these uncommon cultural assumptions that, in some degree at least, we are able to respect fundamental differences and locate the philosophical discussion somewhere between the alternative worldviews. Just as with the watershed of the Western cultural narrative we would identify with Plato and Aristotle and Hellenistic culture, certain enduring commitments were made explicit in the formative period of Chinese philosophy that are more persistent than others, and that allow us to make useful generalizations about the evolution of this continuing tradition. In the language of the *Yijing* 易經 or *Book of Changes*, we must anticipate “continuities in change” (*biantong* 變通).

Again if we, as what Charles Taylor has called “language animals”, acknowledge the power that entrenched linguistic propensities might have in shaping the philosophy of grammar of a given population, it might occasion a reconsideration of our usual way of thinking about the originality of our own great philosophers. Without slighting their defining influence on their respective traditions, we might ask to what extent in the “history of thought” are a Plato and an Aristotle and indeed a Confucius constructing their philosophical oeuvres out of whole cloth, and to what extent are they—with penetrating insight, certainly—making explicit what is already implicated in the structure

132 Ontology too is “a new term for an old way of thinking” that can be traced back to the classical Greek sources and their philosophical problematics. The oldest extant record of the term “ontology” as Gk. *onto* “being” or “that which is”, and *-logia* “discourse”, is in its Latin form *ontologia* and appears in the writings of two German philosophers, Jacob Lorhard’s *Ogdoas Scholastica* (1606) and Rudolf Gockel’s *Lexicon philosophicum* (1613).

and function of the languages they have inherited from their predecessors? In what degree are they cultural archaeologists in the business of “recovering” and laying bare the legacy of “commonsense” bequeathed to them by their progenitors?

While the meticulous scholar Nathan Sivin is adamant in exhorting us to resist “either-or” simplicity in our cultural comparisons, at the same time he has also observed that “man’s prodigious creativity seems to be based on the permutations and recastings of a rather small stock of ideas” (Sivin, 1974, p. xi). If such is the case, how do we then get to this “rather small stock of ideas” that might allow for the mapping out of their subsequent permutations and recastings? What in our ways of thinking grounded in the classical Greek and Chinese worldviews are the underlying similarities and dissimilarities; what are their respective prejudices? Where in their deepest cultural strata are the uncommon assumptions, the prejudgments that have their beginnings in the self-understanding of the always situated human experience as these cultural habits have been sedimented into their persistent yet ever evolving commonsense?

One prejudice of the first order that emerges early in the Western philosophical narrative is the commitment to substance ontology with all of its far-reaching implications. Ontology privileges “being *per se*” and a categorical language with its “essence” and “attribute” dualism, giving us substances as property-bearers, and properties that are borne, respectively. Such ontological thinking animates Plato’s pursuit of formal, “real” definitions in his quest for certainty (that is, definitions not of words but of what really *is*), and underlies Aristotle’s taxonomical science of knowing “what *is* what”. For these classical Greek philosophers, only what is real and is thus true, can be the proper object of knowledge, giving us a logic of the changeless. Indeed, such ontological assumptions produce a decidedly categorical way of thinking captured in the principle of non-contradiction that claims something cannot be “A” and “not-A” at the same time.

G. W. F. Hegel in his Introduction to the *Encyclopaedia Logic* reflects at great length upon the question: Where does philosophy begin and the inquiry start? And in this reverie, he concludes that because philosophy “does not have a beginning in the sense of the other sciences”, it must be the case that “the beginning only has a relation to the subject who takes the decision to philosophise” (Hegel, 1991, p. 41).¹³³ I want to embrace Hegel’s concern

133 For Hegel himself, it is the ultimate project of such philosophizing to bring

about the importance of understanding the starting point of our philosophical inquiry, and I also want to heed his injunction to begin from the subjects who take the decision to philosophize. As my starting point, I will posit a contrast between a classical Greek ontological conception of human “beings” and a classical *Book of Changes* process conception of what I will call human “becomings”, a contrast between a discrete human being as a noun and inter-dependent human becomings as a gerunds.

The ontological intuition that “only Being is” is at the core of Parmenides’ treatise *The Way of Truth* and is the basis of the ontology that follows from it. The classical Greeks give us a substance ontology grounded in “being *qua* being” or “being *per se*” (*to on he on*) that guarantees a permanent and unchanging subject as the substratum for the human experience. With the combination of *eidos* and *telos* as the formal and final causes of independent things such as persons, this “sub-stance” necessarily persists through change. In this ontology, “to exist” and “to be” are implicated in one term. The same copula verb answers the two-fold questions of first *why* something exists, that is, its origins and its goal, and then *what* it is, its substance. This substratum or essence includes its purpose for being, and is defining of the “what-it-means-to-be-a-thing-of-this-kind” of any particular thing in setting a closed, exclusive boundary and the strict identity necessary for it to be this, and not that.

The question of *why* something exists is answered by an appeal to determinative, originative, and undemonstrable first principles (Gk. *arche*, L. *principium*), and provides the metaphysical separation between creator and creature. The question of *what* something is, is answered by its limitation and definition, and provides the ontological distinction between substance and accident, between real essence and its contingent attributes. In expressing the necessity, self-sufficiency, and independence of things, this substance or essence as the subject of predication is the object of knowledge. It tells us, as a matter of logical necessity, what is what, and is the source of truth in revealing to us with certainty, what

this person—the finite spirit, the single intellect, the philosopher—into identity with God as the object of pure thinking. And for Hegel like Confucianism and unlike the Greeks, persons are not facts (like legs) but achievements (like walking) that could not do what they do and become what they are without the structures of the human community. For Hegel, the person as an abstract fact does not do justice to the process of becoming a person. Personhood is an irreducibly social achievement in the sense that identities emerge in and through difference, being at once affirmed by oneself and conferred on one by others.

is real and what is not. As the contemporary philosopher Zhao Tingyang 趙汀陽 avers, this kind of substance ontology defining the real things that constitute the content of an orderly and structured cosmos:

[...] provides a “dictionary” kind of explanation of the world, seeking to set up an accurate understanding of the limits of all things. In simple terms, it determines “what is what” and all concepts are footnotes to “being” or “is” (Zhao, 2016, p. 147).¹³⁴

This kind of causal thinking is precisely what John Dewey is referencing in his concern about what he calls *the* philosophical fallacy. Dewey alerts us to our inveterate habit of decontextualizing and essentializing one element within the continuity of experience, and then in our best efforts to overcome this post hoc diremption, of then construing this same element as foundational and causal. As a concrete example of this habit, in achieving our personal identities in the process of our ongoing narratives, we abstract something called “being” or “human nature” out of the complexity of this continuing experience, and then make this abstraction antecedent to and causal of the process itself. For Dewey:

[...] the reality is the growth-process itself... The real existence is the history in its entirety, the history just as what it is. The operations of splitting it up into two parts and then having to unite them again by appeal to causative power are equally arbitrary and gratuitous (Dewey, 1985, vol. 1, p. 210).

In the *Book of Changes*, we find a vocabulary that makes explicit cosmological assumptions that stand in stark alternative to this substance ontology, and provides the interpretive context for the Confucian canons by locating them within a holistic, organic, and ecological worldview. In this essay, I have taken it upon myself to create the neologism “zoetology” with Gk. *zoe* “life” and *-logia* “discourse” as a new term for an old way of thinking that has deep

134 ... 是对世界的“字典式”解释，试图建立界定万物的决定理解，简单的说，就是断定“什么是什么，”一切观念皆为“在/是”(being/is)的注脚。I am using with minor changes the translation of this book by Edmund Ryden that is forthcoming from the University of California Press.

roots in classical Chinese cosmology. It gives us a contrast between “*on-tology*” as “the science of being *per se*” and “*zoe-tology*” that we might translate as *shengsheng lun* 生生論: “the art of living”. This cosmology begins from “living” (*sheng* 生) itself as the motive force behind change, and gives us a world of boundless “becomings”; it gives us not “things” that *are*, but “events” that are *happening*. And it is the nature of life itself that it seeks to optimize the available conditions for its continuing growth.

The starting point in this zoetological cosmology then is that nothing does anything by itself; association is a fact. Since the very nature of life is associative and transactional, the vocabulary appealed to in defining Confucian cosmology is irreducibly dyadic and collateral: always multiple, never one. Everything is at once what it is for itself, for its specific context, and for the unsummed totality. Thus there are always correlative *yinyang* 陰陽 aspects within any process of change, describing the focal identity that makes something uniquely what it is, and by virtue of its vital relations, what it is becoming. Important to an understanding of this vocabulary is the gestalt shift from the Greek noun-dominated thinking with its world of human “beings” and essential “things”, to the Confucian gerundive assumptions about the always eventful nature of human “becomings” living their lives within their unbounded natural, social, and cultural ecologies. It is the difference between a leg and walking, between a lung and breathing.

Turning to the human experience specifically, persons are not defined in terms of limitation, self-sufficiency, and independence, but ecologically by the growth they experience in their intercourse with other persons and their worlds. Given the primacy of vital relations that give persons their focal identities, any particular person is holographic in existing at the pleasure of everything else. The question of why such persons exist is explained by how they exist and what they mean for each other. And the necessity in ontology of defining what is what is replaced by the zoetological possibilities each thing affords everything else for growth, revision, and redefinition. Zhao Tingyang suggests that in contrast to the “dictionary” definition afforded by Greek ontology, the Confucian cosmology provides:

[...] an explanation of the “grammar” of the world, striving for a coordinated understanding of the relationships—between heaven and humankind, humankind and things, and humans and humans—by which all doings are generated, with a special emphasis on the

mutuality of relationships, and the compatibility of all things (Zhao, 2016, p. 147-148).¹³⁵

“Things” as constituted by their relations are continually being redefined by the growth they experience in their intercourse with other things. Like words in a sentence, relational meaning begins from the conventional grammar that provides the basic ordering of these words necessary for them to be intelligible. And in the composition, it is the productive association the words come to have with each other that is the basic source of their meanings. The rhetorical effectiveness of a sentence is achieved as the relations among the words are cultivated and are thus grown to become increasingly eloquent in their expression. And the sentence rises to the level of poetry though the artistry of optimizing the contribution each inimitable word makes to its specific others as it draws upon its own history of associations.

ZOETOLOGY AND ITS FAR-REACHING IMPLICATIONS

In contrast with Greek “ontology”, there is an alternative, equally engrained prejudice in classical Chinese cosmology made explicit in the *Book of Changes* that we might call “zoetology” (*shengsheng lun* 生生論). The *Changes* is the first among the Chinese classics, and as a text is itself an object lesson in the ecological worldview it attempts to present. That is, when we reflect on the nature of “events” rather than “things” within this process worldview, the relationship of these particular foci to their fields lends itself to a holographic understanding of world systems. The totality or field is both adumbrated in and construed from the unique perspective of each particular foci; in this case, the *Book of Changes* itself. The “Great Commentary” (Dazhuan 大傳) on the *Changes* makes just such a claim in announcing the importance of this canonical text:

《易》之為書也，廣大悉備。有天道焉，有人道焉，有地道焉。

135 ... 是对世界的“语法式”解释，力求对万事所生成的关系（天与人，人与物，人与人）的协调理解，尤其重视关系的互相性或万事的合宜性。

As a document, the *Changes* is vast and far-ranging, and has everything complete within it. It contains the way of the heavens, the way of human beings, and the way of the earth.

Indeed, it is this open-ended *Book of Changes* with its centuries of accruing commentaries that has set the terms of art for a persistent yet evolving cosmology and for its cultural commonsense. As such, it provides a shared interpretive context for the evolving Confucian, Daoist, Buddhist traditions, and most recently, for their engagement with the Western philosophical narrative.

The *Changes*, taking “change” (*yi* 易) as its title, defines the motive force within way-making or world-making (*dao* 道) itself specifically and denotatively as “ceaseless procreating”:

富有之謂大業，日新之謂盛德。生生之謂易… 通變之謂事，陰陽不測之謂神。

It is because of its sheer abundance we call it “the grand workings”; it is because of its daily renewal we call it “copious virtuosity”; it is because of its ceaseless procreating we call it “the changes” (*yi*).... The continuity in flux we call events. And what cannot be fathomed by appeal to *yinyang* thinking is what we call the truly mysterious (*shen*).¹³⁶

Each phrase in this passage isolates one specific way of looking at our continuing life experience, and then gives it a denotative name.¹³⁷ In the language of the text, each name references one aspect of *dao*, “way-making”, or perhaps less metaphorically, the unfolding of the cosmic order. The last phrase in this passage then takes us back to where we began, reminding us of the open-endedness of those processes of change expressed through *yinyang* 陰陽 correlations. Whatever “things” in this cosmos might be, their ever-changing identities must ultimately be understood as uniquely centred foci constituted

136 All translations are my own unless otherwise noted.

137 There is an important grammatical distinction we find throughout the text. Sometimes the text uses the denotative “is what is meant by” (*zhiwei* 之謂) and sometimes the conative “is called or termed” (*weizhi* 謂之). The former expression defines its antecedent explicitly, while the latter connotes or references what is only one “aspect” of some greater whole.

by a manifold of vital relations within a boundless ecological field. It recalls a related description in this same text wherein the sages like the heavens and the earth, 神无方而易无體 “in their mystery... remain undefined, and in their changes have no set structure”.

Sheng 生 as “life, growth, and the kind of birthing that occurs within this vital process” is real and will not be denied. This *Book of Changes* cosmology gives privilege to events as irreducibly relational “becomings”, and provides the correlative *yinyang* categories needed to “speak” process and its eventful content. A popular mantra often invoked to capture the spirit of the *Changes* is 生生不已, 創造不息 “procreative living is without end; creativity never ceases”. In this processual cosmology, the growth that attends such generative living is not only ceaseless and boundless, but is further elevated to be celebrated as the most vigorous potency and highest value of the cosmos itself:

天地之大德曰生，聖人之大寶曰位。何以守位曰仁，何以聚人曰財，理財正辭、禁民為非曰義。

The greatest capacity (*dade* 大德) of the cosmos is life itself. The greatest treasure of the sages is the attainment of standing (*wei* 位). The means of maintaining standing is aspiring to become consummate in one’s conduct (*ren* 仁). The means of attracting and mobilizing others is the use of all available resources. Regulating these resources effectively, insuring that language is used properly, and preventing the common people from doing what is undesirable is what is optimally appropriate and most meaningful (*yi* 義).

Life as growth in relations is the magic of a fundamentally moral cosmos. A full complement of the Confucian values is expressed here as nothing more than assiduous cultivation of growth in the various dimensions of the human experience, from the achieved stature of the sages to best practices in the use of resources and in the effecting of social and political order. In this human world, such effective living is the substance of morality and education, and as the continuing source of meaning, is expressed through the boundless creativity and beauty that is its greatest treasure. Meaning is not available to us from putative metaphysical foundations—what David Keightley has described as “a Platonic metaphysics of certainties, ideal forms, and right answers” (Keightley, 1988, p. 376). Instead, guidance for leading the most meaningful lives must be formulated and passed on within the historical narrative by the most sagacious of our progenitors as they have coordinated the

human experience with the changing cosmic processes. Confucian morality itself is a cosmic phenomenon emerging out of the symbiotic and synergistic transactions that take place between the operations of nature and our concerted human efforts.

The *Book of Changes* has been compiled from a sagacious awareness of the nature of the world around us, and thus provides access to the mysteries and wonders of the human experience in all of its parts:

《易》與天地準，故能彌綸天地之道。仰以觀於天文，俯以察於地理，是故知幽明之故。原始反終，故知死生之說。精氣為物，遊魂為變，是故知鬼神之情狀。

It is because the *Changes* is modeled on the heavens and earth that it is able to cover the full complement of their operations (*dao*). Looking upward, we avail ourselves of the *Changes* to observe the constellations in the heavens, and looking downward, we avail of it to discern the topography of the earth. It is thus that we come to understand the source of both what is apparent and what is obscure. In tracing things back to their origins and then following them to their end, we come to understand what can be said about living and dying. Things are formed through the condensing of *qi*, and change occurs in them through the wanderings of their life-force. It is thus that we come to understand the actual circumstances of the gods and spirits.

There is a cluster of key philosophical terms around which this “Great Commentary” on the *Changes* is constructed that reveals the world as it is immediately experienced, providing us with a proliferation of correlated dyadic terms: the high and the low, the moving and the still, the hard and the soft, the full and the empty, the large and the small, the bright and the dark, the hot and the cold, and so on. Rather than appealing to an Unmoved Mover or some other external source of change, it is the correlative, bipolar, and dynamic tensions inherent in a *yinyang* life-world so defined, that produce the energy of transformation. These same tensions between the determinate and the indeterminate are the source from which the novelty that always attends these processes continually emerges. Important here is a description of how things and events, from the most ordinary and everyday to the noncorporeal world of gods and spirits, are formed and eventually dissipate, animated by motive life-forces and

taking shape through perturbations in the hylozoistic *qi*. The correlative relationship of the dyadic pairs such as “living and dying” (*sisheng* 死生) and “gods and spirits” (*guishen* 鬼神) in which each is implicated in the other, reflects the porousness of such classifications and the absence of the categorical thinking that would set any final and exclusive limits on them.

The way in which this canonical text has been compiled by the sages and how it appeals to imagistic thinking in the production of meaning is described specifically in terms of change and transformation:

聖人設卦觀象，繫辭焉而明吉凶。剛柔相推而生變化。是故吉凶者、失得之象也，悔吝者、憂虞之象也，變化者、進退之象也，剛柔者、晝夜之象也。六爻之動、三極之道也。

The sages set out the hexagrams and observed the images. Attaching their commentaries to them, they made clear what is auspicious and inauspicious. The firm and the yielding lines displacing each other produces the changes and transformations. It is thus that auspiciousness and inauspiciousness are the image of gaining and losing, that regret and care are the image of anxiety and concern, that change and transformation are the image of advancing and withdrawing, that firm and yielding are the image of day and night. The movement of the six lines is progress along the way-making (*dao*) of the three ultimates: the heavens, the earth, and humankind.

The sages have created a dynamic, imagistic discourse drawn from their understanding of the generative procreativity of the cosmos to communicate their insights into how we might guide the human experience deliberately, enabling it to unfold within the context of the heavens and the earth in the most auspicious way.

ZOETOLOGY, IMAGISTIC THINKING, AND IDENTITY CONSTRUCTION

Contemporary philosophers such as Mark Johnson and John Dewey before him, are making an argument that resonates with the one we find here in the *Changes*. The imagistic discourse of the sages is not only

descriptive of the physical operations of the cosmos, but through promoting benign growth it also provides a resource for the human being to create the higher order values and concepts that make the human experience increasingly moral and intelligent. The subtitle of Johnson’s *The Body in the Mind* is *The Bodily Basis of Meaning, Imagination, and Reason*.¹³⁸ In this work, Johnson has done much to argue for the bodily basis of human meaning-formation, and also for what is ultimately the aesthetic ground of human flourishing. He maps the way in which the barest of physical image-schemata are extended through the metaphorical projections and elaborations of our imagination to generate complex cognitive and affective patterns of meaning:

Our world radiates out from our bodies as perceptual centers from which we see, hear, touch, taste, and smell our world (Johnson, 1987, p. 124).

For Johnson, the formal, logical structures of human understanding are a direct extension of the activities of our lived bodies with such higher-order intelligence emerging through the exercise of our seemingly boundless imagination. Such is the human capacity to produce complex culture. Johnson identifies his own basic image-schemata as “containment”, “force”, “balance”, “cycles”, “scales”, “links”, and “center-periphery”. In his reflection on what is “learning to become human”, Johnson has urged the view

[...] that understanding is never merely a matter of holding beliefs, either consciously or unconsciously. More basically, one’s understanding is one’s way of being in, or having, a world. This is very much a matter of one’s embodiment, that is, of perceptual mechanisms, patterns of discrimination, motor programs, and various bodily skills. And it is equally a matter of our embeddedness within culture, language, institutions, and historical traditions (Johnson, 1987, p. 137).

In appreciating this emergent process of the structures of human understanding, we have to be wary of simple epiphenomenal language that would separate root from tree as cause and effect. Rather root and tree are a holistic, symbiotic process

138 In many ways Johnson is following John Dewey’s pioneering work, *Experience and Nature*.

where they grow together or not at all. Similarly, lived bodies and our embodied living are two aspectual ways of looking at the same process of growth.

The image-schemata we find in the *Changes* is captured in the correlative images as the early sages have described them, and are reflective of the primacy given to vital relationality in the classical Chinese process cosmology. That is, these always situated images are understood in fundamentally and irreducibly relational terms with agency being a second-order consideration. Such images describe the transactional relationships that locate the activities of organisms within their human and natural ecologies. To give just one example of how higher order thinking might be the extension of bodily actions, it is not difficult to conceive of how recurrent, habituated physical patterns such as giving and getting, rising and falling, agitation and equilibrium could be transformed and metaphorically extended to produce higher order economic and political concepts defining of a mature culture such as “relational equity” and “social justice”. Again, such higher order but still zoetological “forms of life” in turn are internalized to become integral to our body consciousness.

Turning to the human experience specifically, zoetological persons are not defined in terms of limitation, self-sufficiency, and independence, but ecologically by the growth they experience in their intercourse with other persons and their worlds. Since any one thing exists at the pleasure of everything else, the question of why things exist is explained by how they exist and what they mean for each other. And the cognitive necessity that emerges in defining what is what, is superseded by the possibilities each thing affords everything else for growth, revision, and redefinition. Just as human flourishing arises from positive growth in the relations of family and community, the isomorphic cosmic flourishing is an extension of this same kind of transactional growth but on a more expansive scale. Indeed, human values and a moral cosmic order are both grounded in life and its productive growth, and are thus continuous with each other as interpenetrating complementarities. In canonical texts such as *Focusing the Familiar* (*Zhongyong* 中庸) and the *Classic of Family Reverence* (*Xiaojing* 孝經), human moral imperatives such as “sincerity, resolution” (*cheng* 誠) and “family reverence” (*xiao* 孝) respectively, are discerned in the natural order of things and thus elevated beyond the human experience as cosmic values, giving the best among human beings the stature of co-creators with the heavens and the earth. At the same time the terms that describe erstwhile cosmic forces such as “way-making” (*dao* 道), “imaging” (*xiang* 象), and “patterning” (*li* 理) are also used to express the human capacity to be meaning-makers.

Appealing to this concrete example of identity formation, a person's own potentialities, far from being frontloaded by locating their latent qualities or abilities as some inherent nature that is then available to them for actualization, is inclusive of and a collaboration with their evolving processual contexts. It is thus that such persons, rather than being self-standing human “beings”, can best be characterized in the language of human “becomings” who are constantly internalizing their environing conditions as their identities emerge in the world. Such human “becomings” are vital, interpenetrating, and irreducibly social “events” that create meaning through the continuing cultivation of their relations with others, and transform ordinary experience into poetry through the elevation and refinement of the hours shared together as their lives become increasingly significant.

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LADDERS, PORTS AND SCALES OF THE ECUMENE¹³⁹

Augustin Berque

“**E**cumene” comes directly from the Greek οἰκουμένη, a word which substantivized the feminine passive present participle of the verb οἰκέω (inhabit), but which was rather employed in the compound οἰκουμένη γῆ (inhabited earth). Like οἶκος (house) and its cousin the Latin *vicus*, these words come from the Indo-European root WEIK (clan, social unit above the household), which begot many English words like wick (in Brunswick, bailiwick etc.), diocese; ecology; economy; ecumenical; metic; nasty (from Old French *villénastre*); parish; parochial; vicinage; vicinity; viking; villa; village; villain; villanelle; -ville; villein... or even parakeet!¹⁴⁰

From this origin onwards, the ecumene holds an essential ambivalence: it is both, *objectively* and generally, the inhabited part of the Earth as opposed to the uninhabited wilderness or *érème* (ἐρημος), i.e. the desert where, rejecting the world, the hermit (ἐρημίτης) takes refuge; but it is also, *subjectively* and particularly, the land inhabited by an “ourselves”: the land of the Greeks as opposed to that of Barbarians, then the Roman empire inside the *limes*, and later Christendom as opposed to the land of infidels. Not only a *house*, but also a *home*.

Modern French-speaking geography has reintroduced the term οἰκουμένη in the masculine gender, writing it *ækoumène*, *æcoumène* or *écoumène*. In that usage, it is the objectively inhabited part of planet Earth, that of Galileo, which moves (*si muove*). On the other hand, I use it in the feminine (in French), not by purism—an archaistic return to the gender of οἰκουμένη—but in order to underline the difference between that acception and the one I have in mind: the ecumene is indeed the Earth of Galileo, *but also*, at the

139 This is an English version of a lecture given in French at the Institut d’études avancées (IEA) of Nantes on April 13th, 2023: « Les échelles de l’écoumène ».

140 More details in Wikipedia and Robert Grandsaignes d’Hauterive (1994), *Dictionnaire des racines des langues européennes*, Paris, Larousse, p. 234.

same time, that of Husserl, which does not move (*bewegt sich nicht*) because it founds our very Being, and consequently our ability to think.¹⁴¹

In other words, in the ecumenal relationship, the Earth is both physical and phenomenal. It carries us, but also is partly made up of us (*elle nous porte, mais aussi nous comporte*).

This ambivalence poses right away an *onto-logical problem* (a problem which is both logical and ontological): how can the Earth be at the same time this and that, a moving object (A) but also a motionless referent (non-A)?

We can certainly get rid of this problem with a flick, by considering, *from a quantitative point of view*, that our personal mass being infinitesimal compared to that of the Earth (5.9722×10^{24} kg), which carries us, its motion entails *ipso facto* ours, thus making us believe that it is motionless; but this in no way explains the diversity of human milieux (Uexküll's *Umwelten*, Watsuji's *fûdo* 風土),¹⁴² which is *qualitative*. It is a matter of *qualia*, of *things* which are concretely sensible and all different, not of *objects* numerable because they are abstractly reduced to the same denominator. In other words, it is not a question of *proportion*, but a question of *scale*. Proportion is a matter of geometry alone, and thus can be totally abstract, whereas scale implies concrete realities.

This difference between scale and proportion has been put into light by Philippe Boudon in *Sur l'espace architectural*.¹⁴³ This *Essai d'architecturologie* gives, among others, the following example: geometrically, a beam is a parallelepiped, the scale of which can be increased while keeping the same proportions (double length, double thickness, and so on); but architecturally (concretely), if one doubles the length of a beam, one must more than double

141 Edmund HUSSERL, *Die Ur-Arche Erde bewegt sich nicht* (1934), transl. by D. Franck, D. Pradelle and J.-F. Lavigne (1989), *L'Arché-originaire Terre ne se meut pas*, Paris, Minuit.

142 True, Uexküll rejected the French term *milieu*, which he understood as a synonym of *Umgebung*, not of *Umwelt*. I do here the reverse, in the wake of Vidal de la Blache's use of the term *milieu* in his posthumous *Principes de géographie humaine*, which Watsuji, in the postface of the 1948 second edition of his *Fûdo* (1935), admitted to pave the way to his conception of *fûdo*, while being different. The fact is that Vidal's conception of *milieu* has still nothing to do with phenomenology, while the reality of a *fûdo* 風土 (a human milieu) is both physical and phenomenal (S/P).

143 P. Boudon (1971), *Sur l'espace architectural. Essai d'épistémologie de l'architecture*, Paris, Dunod.

its thickness, otherwise it breaks. Boudon notes that this difference between scale and proportion had been foreboded by Viollet le Duc, who had remarked that in Greek temples, the size of the steps varied in accordance with that of the temple itself—a matter of proportion, comments Boudon—whereas in Roman temples, it remained a function of human size—a matter of scale, comments Boudon.

The quantitative, binary and abstract point of view of proportion can be illustrated by Korzybsky's apophthegm "a map is not the territory". A pure abstraction, this apophthegm, while stating the obvious—certainly, a territory is not a sheet of paper!—is an absurdity—maps do exist, and at a certain scale—e.g. the 1: 200 000 of Michelin roadmaps—their centimetres are indeed the kilometres of the territory which they *represent*.

So what is a *representation*? Fundamentally, it is the fact of taking something as something—*etwas als etwas*, according to the expression used by Heidegger in his 1929-1930 seminar.¹⁴⁴

One should be careful not to reduce, with the blinders of modern dualism, the second *etwas* (something)—i.e. the diverse realities of the ecumene—to various "points of view" on one and the same "objective reality", which would be S (the *object* of the physicist—what is observed—which is nothing else than the *subject*—what the matter is about—of the logician). Concretely, it is indeed something else: a different reality: S/P', not S/P (S as P', not S as P), each of these different realities being specifically related with the concerned being. The slash "/" is here meant to indicate that the relation of S (the subject) with P (a certain predicate) is not binary (S is P), but ternary (S-I-P): S is P for I, a certain interpreter. Mnemotechnically, one may consider that in S/P, I is inclined into /, thus becoming the existential operator "as" (*als, en tant que*).

For the same reason (the said ternarity), S in itself (*en soi, an sich*) is only ever virtual. It is ungraspable (and thus incalculable) as such, P supposing necessarily the contingency entailed by the operation concretely performed by I, I', I" etc. As Aristotle might have said, S is a matter of potency (*δύναμις*) before its enactment (*ἐνέργεια*) depending on I, I', I", etc.; in other words, before its realization.

Effectively, Being does not concretely exist until it ek-sists as something (*als etwas*, writes Heidegger, who has been so deeply influenced by Uexküll

144 Published after his death under the title (1983), *Die Grundbegriffe der Metaphysik. Welt–Endlichkeit–Einsamkeit*, Frankfurt am Main, Klostermann.

that he devoted to him a good part of his 1929-1930 seminar. In the version published after his death,¹⁴⁵ he writes p. 456, about the enunciative proposition and the σύνθεσις in Aristotle (my transl.):

[Aristotle] wants to say what we call *die ›als‹-Struktur* (the “as”-structure). He wants to say that, without expressly advancing into the dimension of that problem. The *structure of “as”*, the perception unifying in advance (*vorgängige einheitbildende Vernehmen*) of something as something (*etwas als etwas*), is the condition of possibility of the truth or falseness of the λόγος.

That which for us exists (reality), thus, is neither properly objective nor properly subjective, but *trajective*. Being an effect of this *trajection of S as P* (i.e. S/P), the reality of the ecumene is trajective. For the same reason, it exceeds the physical limits of planet Earth. It is our world, which comprizes all that which for us exists, to the most distant stars.

Such is the ecumene: the human abode, or the whole of human milieu, of which we humans incarnate the existential operator, and therefore are the main agent. That is what the Japanese language rendered with the term *shutai* 主体—literally “main (*shu* 主) body (*tai* 体, or 體 in the non-simplified form)”, which, with different connotations, has been used conjointly with *shukan* 主観 (literally “main look”) in order to translate the European notion of *subject*.¹⁴⁶

One may remark that the tilt of said main body ($I \rightarrow /$) corresponds to the slash in the formula S/P. It is this main body which makes happen as such (*ereignen*, would say Heidegger, who derived from this the concept of *Ereignis*) the singular reality of the things proper to a certain milieu, which cannot be reduced to the virtual universality of the raw data of the environment (in Uexküll’ terminology the *Umgebung*, which corresponds to the Aristotelian δὺναμις).

145 *Op. cit.* above in note 6.

146 The polysemy of the term *subject* has been rendered in Japanese with different words, like *shudai* 主題 (theme), *shugo* 主語 or *shuji* 主辞 (grammatical subject), etc., 主體, read *juche* 주체 in Korean, was the central concept of the ideal of independence of Korea vis-à-vis its powerful neighbours, China and mainly Japan, which annexed it from 1911 to 1945. This ideal was later warped by Kim II Sung, in North Korea, into a personality cult.

One may also remark that this tilt of the main bodies of their respective milieux is in the image of the ladders (*échelles*) which people used in times past for getting on or off high-seas ships moored at the quay in a port. Hence the old locution *les échelles du Levant* (the ports of the Levant), the word *escale* (port of call, stopover) in French, and presently the word Σκάλα, which means “the Port” in Aegean islands. Needless to add that the English word *scale* has the same origin. I keep this image when speaking of *les échelles de l'écoumène* (the ladders, ports and scales of the ecumene), in the sense of the *shutai* 主体 who/which operates the trajection of S into P, and thus of *the* environment (S: *die Umgebung*) into *a* milieu (S/P: *eine Umwelt*), the whole of human milieux being the ecumene.

It is in this sense that all living beings are the main agents, the *shutai* 主体 of their respective milieux, which, by return effect, determine them in some way. In other words, like in a cosmic Maussian donation-counter-donation cycle, Being creates itself by creating its milieu (*l'être se crée en créant son milieu*),¹⁴⁷ making it ek-sist out of the raw data of the environment, i.e. out of the *Umgebung* in Uexküll, who was the first to establish this distinction between environment and ambient world (*Umwelt*), which he proved notably with his famous experiments on ticks.

In the same sense as *ambient world*, I translate *Umwelt* with *milieu* in the wake of the use of that term by Paul Vidal de la Blache (1845-1918), founder of the French school of geography. Vidal, who initially was an historian, was an opponent of “geographical determinism”, as it is generally conceived of. I prefer to call it “environmental determinism”, since geographical realities (i.e. *Umwelten*, S/P) precisely are not deterministic, but contingent).¹⁴⁸ He was aware that human societies, in comparable natural environments, can historically develop quite different forms of civilisation, or *genres de vie*. This position has been called *possibilisme* by historian Lucien Febvre,¹⁴⁹ who had been Vidal's student, but Vidal himself did not use that term. Many misunderstandings have

147 As I have tried to represent it graphically in (2021) *Dryades & ptérodactyles de la Haute Lande. Dessins et légendes* (*Dryads and pterosaurs of Haute Lande. Drawings and legends*), Paris, Éditions du non-agir.

148 In Vidal's posthumous *Principes de géographie humaine* (1922), gathered by his son-in-law Emmanuel de Martonne, chapter VI, concluding the first part of the book, is entitled “Résultats et contingences”.

149 In *La Terre et l'évolution humaine. Introduction géographique à l'histoire* (1922).

been made about this possibilism, the most serious being that humans could get away with doing anything on the Earth. It is of course not in this sense that one should understand it, but in the sense of Aristotle's δύνάμις, and consequently in the sense of what I call the *trajectivity* of human milieux, or even, at a lesser degree, of the milieux of living beings in general.

I won't go so far as to say that this trajectivity had been foreboded by Vidal. He remained clearly a positivist, and his purpose, differing from Uexküll's, has still nothing to do with phenomenology.

As for his purpose, Uexküll, pioneer of ethology and biosemiotics, summed it up in 1934 in a quite accessible little book, subtly illustrated by his colleague Georg Kriszat, *Forays into the ambient worlds of animals and humans. Theory of signification*.¹⁵⁰ His essential thesis, experimentally proved, is that the raw data of the environment (*Umgebung*) were they the same, they do not exist in the same tone (*Ton*) according to the concerned living species. For instance, the same tuft of grass will exist in the tone of food (*Esston*) for a cow, in the tone of obstacle (*Hinderniston*) for an ant, in the tone of shelter (*Schutzton*) for a beetle, etc. Uexküll, accordingly, speaks of "tonation" (*Tönung*). This corresponds to what I call above *trajection*, the main body (*shutai*) in that matter being the concerned animal.

Whether or not he was aware of Uexküll's work, the Japanese philosopher Watsuji Tetsurô (1889-1960)¹⁵¹ published in 1935 a book, *Fûdo*, which is a homologue of Uexküll's *Forays*, but restricted to human milieux. For that reason, Watsuji's method, meant to be that of hermeneutic phenomenology, is not experimental, but descriptive and historical. It gives a central role to the subjecthood¹⁵² (*shutaisei* 主体性) of the human, precisely the role of the main body which is the matter here. This subjecthood means more than the agency that we commonly talk about today in the social sciences; the matter here is about the opening and formation of a world—that which Heidegger calls *Weltbildung*.

In this *Weltbildung*, symbolicity intervenes as well as the most material formation (*Bildung*). Now, the essence of symbolicity is that, in it, A means non-A.

150 *Streifzüge zur die Umwelten von Tieren und Menschen. Bedeutungslehre*, Hamburg, Rowolt, 1934.

151 In East Asia, the patronymic (Watsuji 和辻) precedes the given name (Tetsurô 哲郎).

152 Subjecthood is the fact of being a subject, not an object. It is not reducible to *subjectiveness*. The latter is an attribute of the former, not the reverse.

For instance, two perpendicular pieces of wood (A) will mean “Christianity” (non-A). This goes beyond the principle of the excluded third party, and exceeds measurability: a symbol is, in essence, incalculable. Landscape architect Bernard Lassus¹⁵³ talked of *démesurable* about these suburbanites who, acting as *habitants paysagistes* (landscape inhabitants), arrange their little garden as if it were a landscape.

Modern dualism, mechanicism and industriality, as for them, cannot take into account this *démesurable* of the ecumene—the whole of human milieu—which is not only physical, but *eco-techno-symbolical*.¹⁵⁴ They have, consequently, not only triggered the 6th extinction of life on this planet; both logically and ontologically, they are adverse to the inhabitability of the Earth, which is the essence of the ecumene.

Palaiseau, March 3rd, 2024

153 In (1977) *Jardins imaginaires*, Paris, Presses de la connaissance.

154 I refer here mainly to A. Leroi-Gourhan (1964), *Le Geste et la parole*, Paris, Albin Michel, 2 vols. I have argued my thesis in several books, among which (2000) *Écoumène. Introduction à l'étude des milieux humains*, Paris, Belin and recently (2022) *Recouvrance. Retour à la terre et cosmicité en Asie orientale*, Bastia, Éoliennes.

RECIPROCITY, REACTION, AND THE TRANSDUCTION OF SOCIAL ENCOUNTERS

Andrea Mubi Brighenti and Lorenzo Sabetta

ON THE TILTED GEOMETRY OF THE SOCIAL ENCOUNTER

In his introduction to Mauss' 1950 posthumous collection, *Anthropology and Sociology*, Lévi-Strauss (1950) artfully managed to pass the author for a pre-structuralist—or at best, a proto-structuralist (see for example Pace, 1983, p. 151-155; Kaufman, 2007, p. 449). The social is real only insofar as integrated into a system, declared Lévi-Strauss, crediting Mauss himself for such an insight. However, this interpretation (extracted, as it happens, from Mauss' "tortuous *detours*" and "hesitations" in the most "decisive moments") is quite selective, not to say questionable. For it seems implausible to square Mauss' vision of a "total human being" with structuralism, which rests upon a postulate of general equilibrium and, above all, a postulate of localization, whereby structural elements can be identified only thanks to their relative position within a matrix of relations. Both qualifications (equilibrium and localization) are missing from the notion of reciprocity as conceived by Mauss (1924): what makes gift exchange notable, even compelling, is that there is no ultimate certainty of any balance ever being attained; to the contrary, ontological unconditionality and uncertainty in responsiveness are inherent in gift-making (Lee, 2020). Above all, it is impossible to locate the proper "element" of the exchange—for such element looms large as a kind of overall restlessness that haunts the whole situation (Mauss grappled with the word *hau* and its elusive meaning; Lévi-Strauss concluded that he had been "mystified" by indigenous knowledge).

In hindsight, whereas Lévi-Strauss' implicit agenda might have been to suggest that Mauss' thought was *not modern enough* (all while praising him for being a "modernist"), and had to be updated (viz., "structuralized"), we can say that, today, Mauss reads more up to date than Lévi-Strauss himself, precisely thanks to the many unsystematic, at times even quirky, knots in his writings. Considered from this perspective, Mauss' notorious difficulty with finishing

his works may have to do with something more than psychological factors and a domineering uncle, being related instead to the substantive task of tackling a social reality defined by nuanced complications and lack of exhaustiveness (Karsenti, 2011). The notion of reciprocity is a case in point. Fundamental as the requirements for reciprocity are to social life, the geometry of reciprocity is anything but linear, nor automatically proportional, nor stable at any point. As a matter of fact, Mauss (1931) pointed out that direct reciprocity is only *one manifestation* of a more encompassing domain of phenomena, where reciprocity can also appear to be indirect and, sometimes—as he wrote—also “alternate” (p. 141). For instance, between parents and their offspring, “it’s what your father did for you that you can give back to your son”; or, in groups where admission is by cooptation, “I cannot repay a member of the Institute for what he has done to me; all I can do (and only once) is to repay another candidate for the ‘trouble’ I have received”. In other words, reciprocity appears to Mauss, not as a way of coupling actors in a balanced way, but as a way of “cutting through” a mass of humans in some manners for a given set of purposes.¹⁵⁵ Reciprocity cannot guarantee that anybody is ever “getting even” at a predetermined interval of time, and it is probably not even designed to primarily obtain fairness so understood. Neither inherently tied, nor essentially opposed, to either altruistic / virtuous or self-interested / instrumental conducts, reciprocity’s primary impact is that of inducing a state of alertness towards the *socius*, so as to keep humans irredeemably *open* to the call of the other (Pryor and Graburn, 1980; Myhre, 1998; Adloff and Mau, 2006).

It is here, we believe, that the notion of reaction gains significance. Reaction is, in the first place, what is needed to let the game of reciprocity unfold. Elsewhere (Brighenti and Sabetta, 2024a; forthcoming), we have addressed what we called “the reactive condition”, characterized as a general dimension and as an intensive (though not necessarily “nervous” *sensu* Davies, 2018) state of social life. Seeking an alternative theorization to behaviourism, wherein reaction appears as always overdetermined by stimulus (as in the S-R circuit), we proposed to consider the reactive domain as *an underdetermined space* where the fact of social relationality is established, and proven *real* (that is, *effective*) as well as *actually felt* by the parties involved. Simultaneously, we

155 Mauss is more akin in this regard to Simmel, according to whom “no manner of exchange entirely expunges the tension and struggle involved in social interaction” (Beidelman, 1989, p. 228).

have envisioned the reactive as the domain where the chance of bifurcation (towards positions such as friend *vs.* foe, neutral *vs.* partisan, compliant *vs.* recalcitrant, but also, and consequently, towards different structural and institutional arrangements and patterns) is posed.¹⁵⁶ This way, reaction can be said to provide the *proof* of the social relation, along with the manifestation of the sometimes irruent vitality that comes with it.

In our previous work we have stressed in particular that reaction is never simply symmetrical *vis-à-vis* the action it is supposed to “respond” to: for better or worse, reaction brings with it the possibility of escalation, of speed and magnitude shift. In other words, it introduces into situations a series of potential scalar shifts; an essentially tensional notion, reaction gives shape to states where compulsion coexists with indeterminacy. That is how the reactive state keeps the actors engaged with one another: etymologically and literally “dramatic”, it unleashes both interactivity and interpassivity (Pfaller, 2017; Seyfert, forthcoming). Even an ostensible non-reaction *is*, in fact, a form of reaction, as epitomized for instance in the “interactive order of meditative spheres” that scaffolds a collective meditation session (Pagis, 2019). A “somethingness” camouflaged behind the appearance of “nothingness”, the meditating group is made of uncommunicative, immobile, transfixed, and laser-focused people sharing a precarious “collective solitude”. Not at all preposterous, such a gathering is distinctively Garfinkelian, for receptivity toward the range of reactive possibilities often means, in practice, eschewing them, although the chance of seizing them is never entirely excluded either.¹⁵⁷ Extreme as the case of the meditating group

156 That is, the potential diversion of the social intercourse swerving towards alterative outcomes. Adopting the jargon of social network analysis, one could speak of “Bayesian forks” (White, 1995).

157 Thus, in the example of meditation, the urge to react otherwise always disturbs absent-mindedness: “I said it was very simple to meditate, that it boils down to sitting for a moment, silent and motionless [and yet] your whole body protests and resists your stillness, and you no longer perceive a single one of the subtle, tense equilibria it was so enjoyable to observe. At such times the best thing would be to pay attention to this rebellion, this antipathy, this disgust. If you did, they’d become part of the meditation. But most often when you feel them, instead of paying attention you hurry to get things over with. You get up, go read your mail. Next time” (Carrère, 2022, p. 4). Beyond concentration and distraction, the socio-mental infrastructures of curiosity unbar centrifugal forces (see Campo and Citton, 2024).

may appear, it effectively illustrates one mode of empirical reciprocity. In sum, the situation of reaction presents itself as one rich in potential energy, whereby reactions come to constitute “decisive” moments potentially leading to rapid reorganizations in the social dynamism and the social patterns at stake. Because of the uncertainty inherent in reaction—both content-wise and time-wise—we have suggested to consider reaction as a type of Maussian “counter-gift”, epitome of “a dialectical theory of social action” (Vandenberghe, 2024, p. 16). Indeed, the wait for the counter-gift features in social life as a kind of ‘deadline’ (*terme*) for reciprocation, which remains both structurally underspecified and socially (morally, economically, etc.) compelling.

ON REACTION, TRANSFORMATION, AND TRANSINDIVIDUALITY

Reaction engenders transformations within a social milieu in a way analogous to the movement Gilbert Simondon called “transduction”. The latter Simondon (2013 [1964-1989], p. 32-33) explained as a progressive process of structuring, or restructuring, of a given medium through the advancing of a proximal change of status induced by some active “germ” propagating within a suitable medium. Progressing by proximities, through neighbourhoods (*de proche en proche*), transduction can be said to capture the peculiar enchainment of actors as they are caught in reaction sequences that can be interpreted as veritable “individuations in progress”. That is also why the situations where reaction matters the most are those where a range of possibilities of transformations—even radical ones—appears to be on the table. Maybe those radical possibilities weren’t there in the beginning; maybe it is reaction itself that reveals that, what previously looked like an already stabilized state, can be subject to a sudden reinterpretation through the piecemeal yet rapid movement of transduction. This once again suggests that the moment of reaction is an underdetermined moment with the potential to become a determining one. Conversely, all forms of social domination and control necessarily pivot around making reactions (either by subordinates, or competitors) unsurprising, foreseeable, calculable in advance—in other words, it is easier to govern people who act reliably than people who react badly (see, for example, Padgett and Ansell, 1993, p. 1264; for his part, Foucault first clarified that power operates by systematically locating actions within preconceived fields of intelligibility).

The question of transformation, we suggest, can be approached from the perspective of a medium theory of social life. All the great Maussian motifs, starting with “totality” seem to us to be evocations of such a unique medium. The social medium is that excitable, intensive medium wherein relations are created and sustained: in a sense, it is the very “stuff” of such relations. Importantly, however, the metaphors of substantialism are to be avoided as inadequate and potentially misleading—rather, it is the notion of “element” that best evokes the reality of the social medium, which differs in nature from a substance because of its non-locality clause, and resembles a process because of its permanent non-equilibrium state. Once considered from the perspective of medium theory, Mauss’ analysis of gift and reciprocity can be further illuminated. Far from being an exchange between pre-constituted beings, reciprocity in fact constitutes a new type of being—precisely, it corresponds to the reality addressed by Simondon with the term “transindividuality” (Simondon, 2013 [1964-1989], p. 273 ff.). Simondon distinguishes the transindividual from the interindividual: whereas the interindividual dimension is external to the psychological individual, the transindividual is a *continuation* of the process of *individuation beyond the individual*—as such, it is neither exterior, nor superior to it. The individual, reasons Simondon, cannot by itself solve the problems that are constitutive of its own reality, and it is only thanks to a crisis, to a moment of “revelation”, of conversion or, in many cases, of “deep disorientation”, that it can progress towards transindividuality. The transindividual forms a domain of reality that can only be accessed once the subject begins to question its own reality in order to deal with the inherent problematics of personhood and subjectivity. Transindividuality thus breaks free from a narrow understanding of reciprocity as symmetry, and can only be envisaged once we consider the existence of society under a different light:

Society does not really emerge from the mutual presence of several individuals, but neither is it a substantial reality that should be superimposed on individual beings and conceived as independent of them: rather, it is the operation and the condition of operation by which a mode of presence is created that is more complex than the presence of the individuated being alone. [*La société ne sort pas réellement de la présence mutuelle de plusieurs individus, mais elle n'est pas non plus une réalité substantielle qui devrait être superposée aux êtres individuels et conçue comme indépendante d'eux : elle est l'opération et la condition d'opération*

par laquelle se crée un mode de présence plus complexe que la présence de l'être individué seul] (Simondon, 2013 [1964-1989], p. 286).

Rejecting the image of society as either entirely reducible to inter-psychic contacts (Tarde), or as a substantive reality *sui generis* (Durkheim), Simondon comes close to Mauss' sensitivity in our view, which consists in starting from the middle ("totality"), rather than from any extreme (either individual or collective) manifestation of the range, looking instead at the operational unfolding of the various modes of "presence" that become possible in and through the practices of coexistence of a manifold. The reactive might be one of these operational moments, whereby all possibilities of transformation are played out transductively, that is, through events endowed with the capacity of restructuring the medium in light of the potential energies available for effectively operating change. In light of this, reaction has to do with that "discovery of signification", which Simondon placed at the root of the transindividual domain—and it is in this sense that reaction can be taken as a key research site for the study of reciprocity.

ON RECIPROCITY AND THE NON-HUMANS

Mauss taught us how important gift-making (together with its reciprocation requirements) is for the cultivation of relationships in social life. To the extent that social life is increasingly recognized as pertaining to not only humans (MacKenzie, 2019; Burrell and Fourcade, 2021; Jerolmack, Teo and Westberry, 2024), reaction research and the study of reciprocity must equip themselves to inquire into events where humans routinely interact with non-humans (whether these are other animals, artefacts, robots or... even spirits and other invisible entities). Regardless of their status, all these heterogeneous associates navigate the vagaries of interaction in ways that highlight the possibilities inherent in the reactive condition and its transductive potentials. The consideration that not only humans partake in the reactive experience may be helpful to remind ourselves of the true scope of analysing the symmetries and asymmetries present in sociability. Issues of reciprocity, reciprocation, expectation, etc. can be discussed within such reactivity framework.

In this sense, for instance, Artificial Intelligence (AI) offers an interesting illustration of reaction at work. Can AI systems be said to deliver gifts to their users? Our working hypothesis is: *not yet*. To put things in context, one should

not forget that current AI systems are only the starter of a larger meal, whose more substantive course is set to be artificial *affectivity*, and more amply, artificial *life*. Unsurprisingly, the first steps in the development of artificial life have come from some synthesis of “intelligence”. For all its elusiveness, intelligence is definitely easier to reconstruct than other fields of the human experience, which however are no less fundamental to social life—such as particularly feelings and emotions. As soon as AI will evolve towards full incorporation of social feelings and emotions, and thus will qualify more properly as an instantiation of artificial life, it will inherently also be bound to express the whole palette of reaction, possibly up to veritable gift-making. In other words, AI already works reactively, but currently lacks the states of emotional reactivity, out of which alone the “transindividual” problem of gift can be posed.

The question of reciprocity is significant, even pivotal, to advanced technology. It is no mystery, to begin with, that robotics has been designed as the prolongation of intra-human slavery: such artificial systems have been built as non-human slaves to serve humans in their needs and whims.¹⁵⁸ This explains the many anxieties that today beguile humans facing AI and robotic systems (and increasingly, AI-powered robots)—essentially, these are anxieties concerning control, mutiny, and replacement. Humans fear that the artificial systems they have created will take away their jobs, acquire independent volition, and perhaps decide to eventually “switch off” (= exterminate) humanity. All these are the anxieties typical of a lord-bondsman dialectic:¹⁵⁹ insofar as AI is conceptualized and designed as a type of slave, its demi-god creators necessarily live in the anguish of an upcoming slave revolt that will undercut their dominance. However, as any practitioner knows, AI systems do not concretely work as slaves. A constellation of other, more complex figurations is involved—including roles such as “assistant”, “co-worker”, and even “partner”. In practice, AI are not commanded in any straightforward manner; rather, interaction with AI systems follows non-linear interactional trajectories: to achieve anything worthy (whether it’s a text, a picture, an animation, a model, or a decision), humans must interact *meaningfully* with AI: it is first necessary that humans *believe* in AI for it to work.

158 Tellingly enough, domestic smart/robotic assistants are usually designed with a “feminine personality”, conforming to (and thus reinforcing) gender stereotypes of the *serveuse* and the *bonne* (Strengers and Kennedy, 2021).

159 Butler 2015 is probably the perfect epitome of this aspect.

Crucially, interaction with AI systems takes time, during which the artificial system is *progressively* guided towards some outcome sought for by its human interlocutors. A string of subsequent inputs is mandatory for the system to approximate a satisfying outcome. In practice, it is not doable to force an AI's hand to any significant extent, as one would do in an imaginary relation to a "slave". Because such systems are entirely opaque to their users, one cannot but treat them as an instantiation of the generalized figure of the *socius*. In sequences of human—AI interaction and human—robot interaction (HRI), in other words, one notices the coalescing of the reactive state, with all its inherent uncertainties, potentials, and bifurcations. The very metaphor of "guidance", in this sense, may turn out to be misleading: not always are humans "guiding" AI systems—at times, it may be more a matter of coaxing the system, of luring it into the delivery of certain results, at other times, more a matter of begging for a result—or, alternatively, of negotiating, or just letting oneself go to the playing of potentially serendipitous variations and impromptus the machine can produce. The fact that reactions maintain a margin of capriciousness and inconstancy explains the human experiences of disappointment, frustration, and even rage, as for instance the case of the "smart home" well illustrates (Hine, 2020).

In the shorter or longer run, the intense reactivity in HCI and HRI is bound to arouse emotional states across those artificial systems that have sufficient "margins of manoeuvre" to restructure themselves to any significant extent, due to the very amount of social work performed. At that point, the component of reciprocity will be revealed as paramount in arranging the social relations crafted by hybrid, human-computer-robot encounters. The current development of social robotics seems to confirm this. This branch of research and development is concerned with the design and implementation of robots capable of establishing "meaningful affective coordination with human partners" (Damiano and Dumouchel, 2023, p. 63). Up until recently, the main orientations in this field have tended to fall into two opposing camps, namely, a weak and a strong program: whereas the weak program would content itself with robots capable of producing passable simulations (i.e., displays of emotions sufficient to trigger in humans psychological projections about the robot having certain feelings), the strong program would aim to build artificial systems that are effectively passible of substantive emotional states. However, the distinction between weak and strong approaches has been called into question by a more recent 'relational turn' in social robotics: by this third orientation

emotions are conceptualized essentially as *coordination tools* for interaction. This follows insights from phenomenology (Szanto and Landweer, 2020) as well as primatology (de Waal, 2019). In the development of interactional human-computer “affective loops”, the point is no longer to ask whether a computer can have emotions, but whether it can coordinate with its human user through a “robotic architecture that allows the robot to perceive and recognise emotions, and to express in return emotions that are ‘tuned’ to the users’ affective expressions” (Damiano and Dumouchel, 2023, p. 69).

Relational social robotics thus understands emotions, not as psychological states, but as modes of social coordination between interactants. More specifically, interaction becomes truly “emotional” when it is no longer just the human being who projects a series of human feelings onto the robot, but when the robot also becomes fully able to recognise human emotional expressions, and react “appropriately” through attunement. Obviously, the whole problem lies in understanding what is to be meant by “emotional attunement”. For instance, if the robot recognises that the human is scared, should it send expressions of reassurance, or instead of sweeping domination? If it notices that the human is angry, should it send back expressions of humility, or rather of irony and belittlement? If the human expresses sadness, should the robot partake in that sadness, or counterbalance it with a dose of good humour and nonchalance? Which of these choices constitutes an attunement, and which signals a failure to attune? And, to the extent that emotion is relational, interactional and circular, who is supposed to attune to whom? The point is that the “correct” course of an emotional interaction is not generally specifiable, and Frankensteinian nightmares of sorts (as recently fictionalised for instance by the Greek filmmaker Yorgos Lanthimos with his *Poor Things* [2023]) appear to be practically unavoidable.

Intriguingly, the Maussian problem of reciprocity remains central to these predicaments, insofar as his theory necessarily pushes us beyond the structuralist imagination of interaction (i.e., the “generalized exchange” model). Here again we are also led back to Simondon, for whom emotion manifests what, within the individual being, still remains in a pre-individual state: “emotion is incomprehensible to the individual because it cannot be rooted in the structures or functions of the individual as an individual” (2013 [1964-1989], p. 305). To make sense of this, it must be recalled that, for Simondon, the individual is never a complete or definitive reality, but always something that has come into being through processes of individuation that unfold within a pre-individual

reality. Consequently, emotions plug into the basic reality out of which the individual has emerged, thus questioning it down to its foundations. Emotion is revealed as more than a coordination tool for interaction: it is a veritable “disparation”, as Simondon calls it, i.e. the gap between an individuated being and the pre-individual charges of potential it still carries within itself, available for further individuations to come. Among these further individuations there lies the chance for *transindividuality*: that is why the individual must be crossed from part to part in order for the virtualities of the social medium to become actual and effective, psychologically as well as sociologically.

By these lights, the work of reaction has to do with the establishment of critical moments that gesture beyond simple interindividuality, towards the region of transindividuality proper. For his part, Simondon assumed transindividuality to be a species-specific phenomenon; but nothing prohibits us from imagining today formations of transindividuality where such crucial prolongations beyond individuality come to include different forms of life (provided, precisely, that they are forms of *life*, and not simply physical or mechanical objects). It is through conditions of disparation—that is, of emotional crisis and an ensuing quest for new meanings—that forms of artificial life will one day become apt at “transindividualizing” through unique reactive “discoveries”. The case of social robots illustrates the transformative aspects of reaction outlined above: only through the cultivation of emotional reactivity unfolding in prolonged social frequentations will social robots be able, one day, to access a domain of hybrid, human-robotic transindividuality. If the ambivalence of the gift diagnosed by Mauss (“gift, Gift”) has to do with its transindividual constitution, then gift-making will become available to social robots only through emotions enabling them and “their” humans to probe hybrid realms of transindividuality.

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OPPOSING MASTERY, CLAIMING THE FUTURE. LIFE AND DEATH BEYOND CAPITALIST MODERNITY

João Aldeia

Capitalist modernity results in the unnecessary death and suffering of millions of humans, but it also leads to the massive death of non-humans due to climate change, deforestation, desertification, rising sea levels, increased toxicity and radioactivity, industrial pollution, urbanization, the extermination of species classified as “pests”, “weeds” or “invasive”, the depletion of drinkable water sources, drought, and the daily slaughter of animals in factory-farms owned by agribusiness corporations.¹⁶⁰ Since the beginning of capitalist modernity around five hundred years ago (Dussel, 1995; Mignolo, 2000), extinction rates have accelerated far beyond the natural background, *i.e.*, the standard extinction rate in geological time (Barnosky *et al.*, 2011; Ceballos *et al.*, 2015).

The human-driven extinction of non-human species is the historical result of hierarchical forms of social organization. In Deborah Bird Rose’s words: “Man-made mass death is not universal; it seems to be associated primarily with hierarchical societies and state formations” (2006, p. 68). While not all empirical hierarchies lead to killing, the principle of hierarchy expresses a relationship of mastery, hence it is based on a logic of stratified rule (*arkhía*) in which a superordinate party acts as ruler (*arkhos*) of a subordinate one, continuously attempting to impose his will over that of latter. In principle—although not always empirically—the superordinate has an absolute authority over the subordinate’s life, which opens up the possibility of killing those who are (and that which is) mastered for the benefit—or due to the violent oversight—of masters. Hierarchy, then, is the social form historically taken by the attempts of some humans to exercise mastery—over other humans, non-humans and/or things (Bookchin, 1982; Kropotkin, 2021).

160 I thank Ana Manso, Pedro Mendonça and the editors of *MAUSS International*, particularly Frédéric Vandenberghe, for their comments on my essay. Any problem that remains is my responsibility.

While there is an association between hierarchical societal models and human-driven extinction, the latter has accelerated significantly in capitalist modernity. Current extinction rates are the result of the specific way in which mastery and appropriation are linked in this political ecological system, which occurs through the subordination of nature to society (Moore, 2015; Plumwood, 1993; Serres, 1998). Like all dualisms, the separation of nature and society is inherently hierarchical and expresses the domination of one term of the dichotomy by the other. As Val Plumwood argued: “Dualisms are not just freefloating systems of ideas; they are closely associated with domination and accumulation, and are their major cultural expressions and justifications” (1993, p. 42).

This connection between domination and appropriation is clear in Descartes’ argument that, in capitalist modernity, technoscience would and should make *some* “humans into the masters and possessors of nature” (2006, p. 51). The Cartesian project of mastery and possession in a project of conquest and expropriation. In this sense, Dussel (1995) argues that the Cartesian *ego cogito* was historically preceded by *ego conquiro*, the subject who, at the dawn of colonization, defined all that was not human as belonging to him to do as he saw fit, and, backed by his appropriation of the means of violence, restricted the status of being fully human to himself. This concomitant subjugation of nature by humanity and the expulsion of most biologically human beings into the realm of nature was crucial for European conquistadors to define the lands where they arrived as having no owner. Thus, these sites were transformed into *terra nullius*, nobody’s lands that were available to be appropriated by the only ones who were truly human, *i.e.*, dominant European classes (Johnston and Lawson, 2000; Plumwood, 1993, p. 111, p. 161-163).

The Cartesian separation of society (or humanity, or culture) and nature is one of the central cosmological features of capitalist modernity. It is, however, *per se* insufficient to explain modern capitalogenic extinction, and, more generally, contemporary ecological problems. These have reached their current magnitude because Cartesianism works alongside another fundamental cosmological aspect of capitalist modernity, namely, Utilitarianism, which needs to be understood here in the broad sense given to the word by the M.A.U.S.S. (*Mouvement Anti-Utilitariste en Sciences Sociales*). According to Alain Caillé, Utilitarianism is “a vision [of the world], to put it briefly, that reduces all questions to a single one: ‘Of what use is it (for me)?’” (2023, p. 14). For Caillé, Utilitarianism is a cosmology premised upon an ontology in which

each human being egotistically wishes to maximize his own interests, which he does through continuous rational calculation—in other words, the ontology of *homo oeconomicus*.

While Cartesianism and Utilitarianism have different conceptual histories and can be analytically separated, their empirical history brings them together in capitalist modernity through the close relationship of mastery and possession. Cartesianism ontologically divides existence into subject and object, ascribing the role of subject to (full) humans and relegating all that remains (including many biologically human beings) to the status of objects. This turns nature into a series of things at the disposal of dominant classes, which denies any value that it might have besides the promotion of their well-being. But Cartesian masters are also possessors: they do not only dominate; they appropriate and ascribe economic value to what they (try to) master. Dominant classes and their technocratic proxies look at nature with the mindset of *homines oeconomicae*: they are only interested in nature insofar as it can be translated into a set of natural resources, things with a quantifiable, calculable worth, *i.e.*, commodities. The current prominence of the semantics of ecosystem services shows this clearly: the value of any aspect of nature can be calculated based on its usefulness for modern capitalist ways of life and it has no other value besides this usefulness (Lele *et al.*, 2013; Menon and Rai, 2019).

Mastering nature thus means maximizing those parts of nature that dominant classes perceive as useful (*e.g.*, crop-commodities), leading to their proliferation (Tsing, 2017), which is done at the expense of any part of nature that they perceive as useless for modern capitalist ways of life and, particularly, for the promotion of their own privilege. Within this mindset, nature is beyond ethical consideration, meaning that the ecological and climatic damage caused by mastery is only taken into account if it hinders further attempts to extract value from nature. As a consequence, supposedly-useless forms of nature can be freely destroyed to make room for more useful things (*e.g.*, buildings, roads, plantations) or transformed into dumping grounds for the waste created by modern capitalist ways of life.

Despite of what is suggested in capitalist modernity, life depends on situated multispecies bonds that provide individuals of different species with companionship, nourishment or protection. Relationships between individuals of different species can be either predatory or based on mutual-ity, but in both cases they provide participants with crucial conditions for

the continuity of life at the level of populations or species. This is obvious in the case of symbiotic relationships, like plants and birds who mutuality depend on each other to spread seeds and provide food. But it also occurs in the case of predatory relationships at the scale of complex situated multispecies entanglements, such as when carnivores kill herbivores, whose corpses feed necrophages, worms and bacteria, who enrich the soil, allowing plants to flourish, hence guaranteeing food for future generations of the prey's species (Rose, 2012; van Dooren, 2014).

In this sense, death is large part of what species share in situated multispecies entanglements across generations. As Deborah Bird Rose argued, these multispecies bonds enable multispecies entanglements “to bend death back into life” (2005, p. 124): if all goes well in a situated multispecies entanglement, the interactions between species create a dynamic homeostasis in which life keeps dying in ways that generate more life.

Even when they are premised on killing, these multispecies relationships are ecologically non-hierarchical, hence they have no place for mastery. Hierarchy is matter of power and subjugation, which begins with the privilege of some individuals and groups to classify and organize the rest of existence in ways that promote the transference of vital conditions of possibility from those at the bottom to those who, using the available means of violence, can place themselves at the top. Hence, while hierarchy affects non-humans, it can only be established through certain human ways of giving meaning to what exists in the world. Before any such classification is imposed upon the world, ecologies have no hierarchical relationships, although the beings that compose them occupy differential positions *vis-à-vis* one another. Before their capture by a hierarchical cosmology, individuals and species are functionally different and their differences can express themselves both through symbiotic and peaceful interactions and through predatory and aggressive ones. But in any case the ones who occupy these differential positions are linked in complex, circular, anti-hierarchical ways in which every being who has the capacity to kill another in order to feed will inevitably become food for others when he dies. As Bookchin argues, before the human imposition of a hierarchical cosmology, “ecology knows no ‘king of beasts’ and no ‘lowly creatures’ (such terms come from our own hierarchical mentality). Rather it deals with ecosystems in which living things are interdependent and play complementary roles in perpetuating the stability of the natural order” (1982, p. 5).

This relative harmony between species is a crucial aspect of several non-Cartesian and non-Utilitarian cosmologies. For Australian Aboriginal people, the notion of “country” is a fundamental piece of an ethics of multispecies care. In Deborah Bird Rose’s words, “country is a spatial unit—large enough to support a group of people, small enough to be intimately known in every detail, and home to the living things whose lives come and go in that place” (2011, p. 17). In Aboriginal people’s cosmology, those who live in country, no matter their species, and even, in their ways, abiotic elements, are inherently interdependent and bound by multispecies reciprocity. Country is a “nourishing terrain” (Rose, 1996) that, on the one hand, takes care of all humans and non-humans who dwell in it and, on the other hand, needs to be cared for to be a “good country”, which involves caring for all its dwellers.

Similarly, for Quechua and Aymara peoples in the Andes, nature is *Pachamama*. In Aymara cosmology, *Pachamama* is the *awicha* (female ancestor or deity) associated with the Earth just as *Pacha Awaki* is the *achachila* (male ancestor or deity) associated with the cosmos (Burman, 2017). *Pachamama* is, essentially, “the vital energy that provides the condition of possibility for disparate beings” (Tola, 2018, p. 35). *Pachamama* nurtures human (and non-human) beings (*e.g.*, by giving a good harvest), but only if humans live their lives in conformity to *suma qamaña* (in Aymara; *sumak kawsay* in Quechua), which involves living harmoniously with other humans and with non-humans. This harmonious way of life is premised upon the recognition and nurture of multispecies reciprocity. As Burman explains, “according to Aymara shamans, [...] *achachilas* [and *awichas*] behave in accordance to Aymara notions of reciprocity and morality and the ritual practice of handing over offerings to them is a way of reinforcing reciprocal relations” (2017, p. 927).

Unlike such cosmologies, Cartesianism and Utilitarianism completely break away from reciprocal multispecies bonds, which severely weakens the situated dynamic homeostasis of multispecies entanglements. This disturbs the balance between life and death in myriad sites, leading to what Deborah Bird Rose (2005, 2006, 2012) called “double death”, a situation in which the (first) death of individuals or species stops nourishing life and instead further amplifies death, resulting in more and more deaths of other individuals and species.

Death spreads in capitalist modernity because mastery takes the form of a hierarchical domination of nature by some humans, which enables dominant classes to (try to) decide the fate of the rest of existence. Historically, this has led to climate change, extinction and all remaining ecological problems of

our time. As these problems destroy multispecies homeostasis, they further intensify, leading to a situation in which would-be masters are devastatingly shown to be unable of mastering a world that becomes more hostile and more expensive to appropriate (Moore, 2015; Tsing, 2017).

Unlike some almost-euphoric narratives on the Anthropocene (Crutzen, 2002; Crutzen and Stoermer, 2000; Steffen *et al.*, 2007), this does not point to a need to push mastery even further using cutting edge or yet to be invented technologies (*e.g.*, geoengineering). Rather, it highlights one of the inherent flaws of mastery, namely its inherent incapacity to entirely master all that it seeks to master, which, again and again, leaves masters with only the option of expressing their power through violent acts in which all of their supposed might is shown for all to see. Capitalogenic disturbance has been too massive to undo at a given site and pests proliferate? Exterminate them. Modern capitalist interventions on a community's way of multispecies life has destroyed the material conditions of possibility required for the lives of its human members? Their abject poverty and their premodern ways places them beyond the need for care. If they protest, repress them with force.

* * *

Like many humans, non-humans also fail to passively accept the plans of dominant classes to master them. The link between power and resistance (Foucault 1975, 1978) also works at an ecological level. Faced with projects of mastery that break the bonds between life and death, non-humans resist and try to reassert relationships of reciprocity that, through mutuality and/or predation, make life flourish again. This resistance unfolds through what Anna Tsing (2019, p. 14-18, p. 241-265; 2021) calls “ferality”, the unplanned non-human responses to modern capitalogenic interference. Trees are cut down but grow again. Those non-humans that are classified as “pests” or “weeds” are killed using pesticides and herbicides, but their populations keep growing. Species are expelled from their historical living places, but remake their lives, alongside old and new multispecies partners, somewhere else. They are expelled and killed to make way for cities and roads and dams and power plants, but when plans of mastery fail and these sites are abandoned non-humans again make them their homes, creating new multispecies ecologies.

Not all feral reactions promote multispecies life in non-parasitic ways that foster the life of humans and that of a significant variety of species. The un-

planned responses of non-humans can either oppose modern capitalogenic double death or occur in ways that end up intensifying the destruction brought about by mastery. Tsing (2017) has shown how feral answers can appear either as “proliferation” or as “resurgence”. Only the latter makes life flourish in ways that reestablish its balance with death. In her words, “resurgence is the work of many organisms, negotiating across differences, to forge assemblages of multispecies livability in the midst of disturbance” (Tsing, 2017, p. 52). Resurgence is the process of multispecies work by which life is able to keep on living during and after modern capitalogenic attacks. Through it, the life of many species is sustained amid the damage inflicted by mastery. This is crucial for human life because, among other things, resurgence is what enables food production: through it, plant and animal species bounce back as they are killed and consumed, thus ensuring future crops and animal generations.

However, feral reactions can also lead to proliferation, which is intimately tied to modern capitalogenic plans of mastery and, especially, to plantation agriculture. As Tsing explains,

using the term *plantation* in its largest sense, I point to simplified ecologies designed to create assets for future investments—and to knock out resurgence. Plantations kill off beings that are not recognized as assets. They also sponsor new ecologies of *proliferation*, the unmanageable spread of plantation-augmented life in the form of disease and pollution. In contrast to what I am calling resurgence, proliferation threatens life on earth (2017, p. 51-52).

Threatening life on Earth is the historical consequence of modern capitalist mastery. As dominant classes tried to master and appropriate nature and dominate most other humans, their understanding of what forms of life matter and should be nurtured became very narrow. In fact, it became narrow to a point in which it unavoidably leads to double death. Interested in just those species and abiotic elements that could be commodified, dominant classes deployed the technoscientific means at their disposal to transform ecologies across the planet in attempts to make multispecies work benefit crop-commodities at the expense of remaining species. This entailed projects of ecological simplification that progressively rendered previous ecosystems more homogeneous and fragile, reaching a point in which death starts to pile up without nourishing life through reciprocal bonds in these multispecies entan-

gements. The historical result of the attempt to master the world by making it a series of plantations is clear: slavery, death, poverty, hunger, the destruction of indigenous cosmologies and ways of life, extinction, desertification, drought, rising toxicity, increased vulnerability to pathogens and rising emissions of greenhouse gases (Haraway *et al.*, 2019; Perfecto *et al.*, 2019; Scott, 1998, p. 262-306; Tsing, 2017).¹⁶¹

Thus, modern capitalist mastery has historically led to double death, which has resulted in the extinction of non-humans and in the giant contraction of human (and non-human) life possibilities. By placing millions of human lives beyond the need for care and excluding them from reciprocal multispecies relationships (*e.g.*, common farmed land, common use of forests), dominant classes have been able to appropriate whatever they have classified as nature, which has then led and continues to lead to more death through ecological simplification, industrial pollution or waste. Concomitantly, the spread of double death makes it harder to sustain human life and, particularly, the life styles of dominant classes, which makes the latter expropriate whatever material resources are left to the damned of the Earth after five hundred years (*e.g.*, pharmaceutical biopiracy of indigenous knowledge, the enclosure of what little remains of the commons to spread plantations owned by agribusiness).

* * *

Given the specifically capitalogenic drive of modern ecological problems, we have reached a historical moment in which the survival of both humans and non-humans demands moving away from capitalist modernity, which means doing away with Cartesianism and Utilitarianism. This might undo just enough capitalogenic damage for life to keep going in the midst of the death throws of capitalist modernity and in whatever comes after this political ecological system. But since our collective end goal should not be mere survival but rather the establishment of a good life—in its infinite local variability—ending this political ecological system is not enough. Fostering a free, decent life based on mutuality requires building an alternative political ecological system—or more

161 Rob Wallace (2016, 2020) shows that this profit-driven simplification of species and ecosystems is also a feature of industrial stockbreeding, which leads to the epidemic spread of zoonoses. The consequences of agribusiness' global operation are similar in both farms and factory-farms.

than one—that is (are) premised upon an active refusal of mastery and the principle of hierarchy—not just their market-based expressions.

This entails following Kropotkin's (2021) opposition to those individuals, groups and institutions that suggest that life is primarily a Hobbesian *bellum omnium contra omnes* (Hobbes 1983)—and in the very act of trying to explain it in this way actively contribute to shape a society in the image of *homo oeconomicus* and the master/slave relationship. After all, as Mauss reminded us a century ago,

it is our Western societies that have, very recently, made man into an “economic animal”. But we are not yet, all of us, beings of this kind. [...] *Homo oeconomicus* is no behind us; he is in front of us [...]. Man has, for a long time, been something else. He has not long been a machine, made complicated by a calculating machine (2016, p. 190).

Unlike *homo oeconomicus*, mastery has accompanied humanity throughout significant portions of its history—but steps can be taken to try to keep it away from our futures.

Keeping Kropotkin's company, now is the time to foster the many impulses for mutual aid and horizontal solidarity that remain—from cooperatives to leaderless community projects and social movements to the act of lending a helping hand to friends or strangers (Graeber, 2004; Kropotkin, 2021; Scott, 2012). It is also the moment to nurture ways of being in the world that acknowledge and maintain multispecies mutualism, starting with a massive degrowth movement (Latouche, 2009) and with the end of all forms of imperialism to allow these cosmologies to endure. This is crucial for the future. After capitalist modernity comes to its end, a good life—again, in its various possible forms—will only be nurtured if humans manage to stop any would-be *arkhos* and block *arkhía*. Since mastery is the problem, surviving modern capitalogenic double death will only be worthwhile if what comes next is anarchic—as Proudhon suggested when he defined anarchy as “the absence of a master, of a sovereign” (1994, p. 209).

What is at stake is much more than blocking the appropriation of the means of production and wealth by a few unjustly-privileged individuals; rather it is stopping the appropriation of the means of violence, which is the basis of the hierarchical domination of most humans and all non-humans by dominant classes. Without the use of means of violence capable of conditioning the behavior of other living beings (human and non-human) and

of radically transforming ecosystems and abiotic elements for the benefit of a few, human-driven double death is impossible. In such a scenario, those multispecies communities that are still able to do it can bounce back from damage and a good life can be fostered—albeit in already-damaged landscapes.

Stopping the appropriation of the means of violence cannot be done once and for all; rather, it needs permanent and careful attention. As Pierre Clastres (1974) has shown, building a “society against the State” and against the market—as well as against other forms of hierarchical power—needs continuous attention to keep the means of violence out of the hands of any one individual or group. This has been done before—from the Piaroa, in the Amazon, to Zapatista Chiapas, in Mexico, to Catalonia during the Spanish Civil War, to mention just a few cases (Graeber, 2004; Orwell, 2007; Overing, 1993, 2003). It has also failed with a vengeance, as can be attested by the many anarchists (self-described or not) who were slaughtered throughout history. Ending double death while fostering freedom, mutuality and horizontal solidarity is difficult, it can go terribly wrong and there are no guarantees of success. It is also the only way to try to ensure human and non-human survival, as well as the possibility of building a good life out of the wreckage of capitalist modernity.

* * *

Who can build a good life? And *for whom*? These are questions that those involved in the opposition to mastery will need to answer. Since life is a multispecies affair, the Cartesian separation of society and nature blocks adequate answers to these questions. Keeping the dualism intact severely diminishes the chances of survival for most humans and non-humans because it maintains and worsens current ecological problems, hence it also blocks any chance of living well. As Vandenberghe (2023) argues,

the ecological crisis forces us to revise some of our inherited world-views and to attack the key foundations of modernist epistemology. The deconstruction of the opposition between nature and culture or nature and society is not just a post-structuralist pastime. In the Anthropocene, it may well be a question of life and death.

A good life can only be built through the cooperation of humans and non-humans. Following Frank Adloff (2023) and Michel Serres (1998), building a good life requires acknowledging and caring for multispecies symbiosis. As Adloff puts it, “in symbiosis with nonhuman creatures, new interspecies life forms emerge” (2023, p. 168)—and if mastery is stopped this life might, eventually, be a good one for both humans and (in their own ways) non-humans.

While I do not presume to know what a good life looks like for non-humans, the question partly misses the point. What needs to be asked is not if non-humans have their own understandings of what a good life means, but rather how can healthy, reciprocal multispecies relationships enable all members of a multispecies entanglement to experience good lives. No matter what definition of a “good life” one uses, life cannot be good for some if it is bad for others within the same multispecies entanglement—at least, not in the long run (ecology makes this impossible); and, even in the short term, only if what counts as “good” is defined in the impoverished terms of mastery.

Returning to what Deborah Bird Rose taught us about Australian Aboriginal cosmology is helpful to provide an answer to this question—a provisional answer and one among many, to be sure, but a nudge in the right direction nonetheless. As she explained,

among Aboriginal Australians, the major context for relationships is country, and those who are in relationships of responsibility vis-a-vis each other are called countrymen (the term refers to women as well as men, and to animals and plants as well as humans). Ethics of love and care within this context do not, of course, exclude animals, and they do not exclude death. In a world of hunting and gathering, death and continuity are core aspects of the integrity of life and are always present in people’s lives and minds. Ethical relationships do not hinge on killing or not killing. They hinge on taking responsibility for one’s actions, and considering ramifications in both short and long terms (Rose, 2008, p. 56).

Countrymen understand that nurturing a good multispecies life means ensuring that death nourishes life. Life necessarily feeds on death; but only if death is not wasted and if it does not keep generating more and more death without creating new life. In other words, countrymen know that death is always an end, but when it feeds life it also fosters the continuity of their common multispecies

life. On the contrary, double death is an end that risks being *the* end—at least, for the local multispecies entanglements where it unfolds.

Australian Aboriginal cosmology makes it clear that this nourishing side of death is only possible if being human is not understood as a requirement for being a countryman—although it is a requirement for being a countryman of a certain kind. Human and non-human countrymen are bound by an ethics of multispecies care in which their lives and deaths sustain the lives of their other-species companions. In this context, each human countryman is responsible for the life and death of all other countrymen regardless of their species, which includes his responsibility to make sure that neither is wasted or unnecessarily suffered—a good death is a necessary part of any kind of a good life.

Countrymen are the antithesis of masters. While not all countrymen are the same, they all similarly understand that each one's life can only be good if it is lived in balance with others. Any single life can only be promoted after a point if this is done at the expense of others, *i.e.*, by stealing the conditions of possibility of another's life (Aldeia, 2024)—and, sooner or later, this spells doom for all. In other words, unlike *homines oeconomicae*, whose “rights of mastery and property come down to parasitism”, countrymen are symbionts who recognize that “rights of symbiosis are defined by reciprocity” (Serres, 1998, p. 38): human countrymen receive their vital conditions of possibility from their non-human countrymen, which obligates the former to care for the latter.

Even amid the unfolding socio-ecological catastrophe of capitalist modernity, hope remains—a modest hope, but hope nonetheless. And sometimes hope comes from the most unlikely places. While the dominant strains of science and philosophy have historically been bastions of Cartesianism and Utilitarianism, (some) scientists and philosophers are increasingly breaking away from this cosmology, questioning Darwinian inter-individual competition by placing an increased focus on inter-species symbiosis (Adloff, 2023; Vandenberghe, 2023). More than a century ago, Kropotkin (2021) criticized Darwinian focus on competition between individuals, of which he found little scientific evidence, over the “metaphorical” struggle for life, which pits the living against a hostile environment—a struggle that each individual can only overcome by continuously cooperating with other individuals of his own species, but also of others. It seems that, slowly, a growing number of scientists and philosophers is coming to see the validity of Kropotkin's insights. After all, as Stephen Jay Gould (1988) suggested, “Kropotkin was no crackpot”. The increasing scientific recognition of multispecies mutualism has the

potential to foster horizontal alliances between those in Western modernity who refuse mastery and those outside Western modernity who have refused it all along. If this is done before modern capitalogenic ecological damage has reached a point of no return for humans and many other species—a big if—it might give life a chance.

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LITERARY COMPANIONS

“I GIVE YOUR NAME TO THE DAY”: THE GIFT OF THE POEM AND THE TRIALS OF MODERNITY¹⁶²

Anne Gourio

The poetics of the gift in the twentieth century bore the mark of two great figures who revealed what is at stake in this lyrical genre in an era when the very foundations of lyricism are undermined, and when the gesture of the offering is regarded as suspect. In 1913 Osip Mandelstam published *On the Interlocutor*, an essay which sees the first appearance of the image of the poem as a “letter in a bottle”.¹⁶³ Paul Celan, a poet who exerted a major influence over a whole current of French poetry in the second half of the century,¹⁶⁴ and also a translator of Mandelstam, reprised the image in 1958:

The poem [...] may be a letter in a bottle thrown out to the sea with the—surely not always strong—hope that it may somehow wash up somewhere, perhaps on the shoreline of the heart (Celan, 1986, p. 34).

From this point on, the poem is flung out into the unknown, the gift becomes confused with the appeal, whoever picks it up chooses to make themselves its uncertain and contingent addressee, and community may well no longer be anything more than a chimera. No doubt the destiny of these two poets goes some way toward explaining the metamorphosis that befell the gesture of the lyrical offering during the twentieth century: Mandelstam, a victim of Stalin’s purges, died of exhaustion in 1938 in a transit camp in eastern Siberia, the conditions of his death remaining largely unknown when, in 1958, Celan received his letter in a bottle; Celan saw his family decimated in Germany in 1942 and

162 Originally appeared in *Revue du MAUSS*, volume 50, issue 2, 2017, pages 103 to 118. Translated and edited by Cadenza Academic Translations

163 “The letter sealed in the bottle is addressed to whoever finds it. Being the finder, I am thereby the mysterious addressee” (Mandelstam, 2013).

164 In particular the poets who gravitated around the journal *L’Éphémère* (André du Bouchet, Jacques Dupin, and Yves Bonnefoy).

threw himself from the Mirabeau bridge in 1970. The tradition of the "gift of the poem" had been taken to the point of its tragic exhaustion.

Reflection on the nature of the bond between the poetic genre and the gesture of the gift returns with urgency here: Is it a constitutive or a conditional relation? Do the innate characteristics of poetic speech convey it toward an alterity in which it would be able to recover "all hands (*corps et biens*)" from an apparently total shipwreck? What, then, is the nature of the poetic gift? What are its conditions of possibility? These questions become more complex in the modern era, when the question is: What becomes of the gesture of the offering when the poetic subject has lost its foundations, when poetic discourse tries to subsist on the ashes of the sacred, when the poetic word seeks to maintain its voice(s) amid the morass of triumphant communication, and when the hypothesis of a community begins to seem utopian? Is the lyrical offering now reduced to a precarious subsistence? Or do these circumstances yield a supreme relay, an ultimate gesture embodying the very quintessence of its import and meaning?

We shall try to respond to these questions by wending our way freely through a few poets whose "offerings" of words have marked the history of the genre. Certainly, not all are present; certainly, the path is deliberately partial and subjective, and acknowledges as much. But it is guided by the concern of paying attention to the "seers, i.e. the lights that light up and warn us of what's coming" (Deguy, 2009, p. 46).¹⁶⁵

**"THERE'S FRUIT, FLOWERS, BRANCHES AND LEAVES,
THEN THERE'S MY HEART"¹⁶⁶**

No doubt we ought to begin by setting out the distinctive nature of lyrical discourse, and by reminding ourselves that it is inscribed within a very specific heritage. Intimate speech, addressed to another, vocative rather than being a verbal object offered up for contemplation, the lyrical poem is generally defined on the basis of its particular type of enunciation. As we know, the classification of genres proposed by the German Romantics (especially Schlegel)

165 Our translation. Unless otherwise stated, all translations of cited foreign language material in this article are our own.

166 (Verlaine, 1999, p. 89).

was based upon the criteria of the pronominal: the lyrical genre was associated with the expression of the "I". Since it involves an enunciation assumed by a personal subject, the lyrical poem is constituted as a privileged space for effusion, confession, confidence, and is often emotional, sometimes plaintive. But further precision is needed to fully describe this mode of discourse, and the distinction made in the oeuvre of Yves Bonnefoy between poetic "presence" and "concept" is enlightening on this point:

This is what I believe to be the origins of poetry. When I say "fire" [...] what this word evokes for me, poetically, is not only fire in its nature as fire—not only what the concept of fire can suggest: it is the presence of fire, within the horizons of my experience, and not at all as an analysable and utilisable object (one which is, consequently, finite and replaceable) but as a god, active and invested with power (Bonnefoy, 1975, p. 31).

The true beginning of poetry is when a language, fixed and dogmatic, allowing its own structures to act, no longer determines the writing;

but when a force in us is affirmed through those structures, which are relativized, and literally demystified: a force which is older than any language, which is our origin, and which I like to call the word. (Bonnefoy, 1992, p. 273-274).

When the "concept"—or language—ends up enclosed in a game of signs that presents the danger of what Bonnefoy calls "excarnation", the poetic word takes back this language for the subjective and the existential, inscribing it within the horizon of a finitude. The entire task of poetry therefore consists in retracing, in its own terms, this extraction out of language—excarinated, atemporal—into the word, incarnated, alive but dependent on death. A dividing line is drawn here which coincides with the opposition between text and discourse brought to light by the linguistics of enunciation, during the same period that Bonnefoy developed his thinking on the poem. As we know, the works of Émile Benveniste identified the decisive interdependence, within discourse, of two personal pronouns. As Benveniste shows, every subject who employs the first person addresses himself to an addressee. Speech is therefore constitutively rooted in dialogue, for the relation is inevitably a mirrored one: "*I* becomes *you* in the

address of the one who in his turn designates himself as *I*" (Benveniste, 1971, p. 225). The very conditions of the lyrical address seem to be posited here. And indeed, we also rediscover in the intrinsic characteristics of lyricism the same interlacing of two persons: the origin of the lyrical poem lies in the experience of loss and lack. Since Jaufré Rudel, Guillaume d'Aquitaine, and Raimbaud d'Orange, the very first lyrical poets in the French language, in the twelfth century, we have known that poetry is desiring speech—"the realized love of desire remaining desire", as Char reiterates (Char, 2010, p. 117). Whether impelled toward the inaccessible beloved, the deceased, or God, the lyrical poem expends all the energy of its verses in straining toward an alterity—a transcendent, radical alterity—through which the lyrical subject will attain, in turn, his own lack of being [*manque à être*]. Thus the lyrical poem makes of itself a perforated architecture, instigated by absence. Courtly love unfolds on the basis of a love from afar (*amor de lonh* or *amour de loin*, Jaufré Rudel), an absence that outlines the constitutive contours of the genre.

If we now turn from the characteristics of lyrical discourse to the incarnate evolution of the genre, a whole history of gifts, offerings, bouquets, and hands outstretched toward the beloved confirm the dialogical disposition of the poem, and bring to light the relation between the gift object and the discourse that bears it. This history, first of all, is part of a tradition that places it on a sacred footing. For, as we have known since Plato, to whom all Renaissance poetry pays homage, the poet is a *vates*¹⁶⁷—the poem is given to he who receives divine inspiration, as Ronsard tells us in his "Hymn to Autumn":

He exalted my heart and exalted my imagination, inspiring my soul
with a gift for Poetry (Ronsard 2002, p. 165).

The gesture receives a transcendent warrant that endows the poem with a sacred aura. "Inspired by some divine afflatus" (Thomas Sébillet), the poet then becomes a go-between, a Hermes figure who converts the poem received into the poem offered. But immediately the inspired poet also appears as torn, quartered, as one gripped in a vice between pure passive reception and the work of formation. For, once received, the gift is "trimmed" (Du Bellay), grasped anew in a set of consecrated forms, and soon finds itself caught up in a sequence of poetic and social rituals. Little by little, laudatory speech takes

167 In Latin, the inspired poet-prophet-seer.

on recurrent, privileged, and soon almost mandatory forms—the ode, the hymn. The gift is ritualized in social practices, beginning with the tradition of the gift of the poet at the court of the Prince—practices that soon take their own trajectories through the entire thread of the history of lyricism. When Mallarmé receives this tradition across the whole history of romanticism, he chooses to offer his homage in the form of a “toast”—a thin foam where soon nothing subsists but a tenuous gesture, a mere quavering. All solemnity is abandoned in the play of “Postal Recreations”,¹⁶⁸ and in the end the lyrical address is employed only in the light ephemera of the open fan. The divine gift folds away, withdrawn into the muted salons of the nineteenth century, and the community of the elect tightens into the mundane circle of Mallarmé’s “Tuesdays”. Form has imposed its constraints, it has shaped the gesture of the gift, aestheticized it, refined it, carved it out, in accordance with the secularization of the gesture of the offering. Once divine, the gift is now gradually reduced to an interlacing of words and images.

We might tell this story of the gift by way of one single imaginary which, traversing centuries of poetry, allows us to measure its metamorphoses. The poet offers flowers, the poem offers its flowers, the poem is offered in flowers—the whole tradition of amorous gifts and its allegorization is contained in this gesture, its impulses, its hopes, and its doubts. Ronsard’s *Amours*, from Cassandra to Hélène, as we know, are pervaded by such motifs. What blooms forth in this set of floral variations is above all the tension between the precious tradition of Petrarchism¹⁶⁹ and the quest for immediate sincerity. Thus, when Ronsard offers to Marie his celebrated “I am sending you a posy / which I have just selected with my own hand”, he distances himself both from the artifice of the rose and from that of over-crafted form, keeping only the simplicity of the gesture and his unguarded frankness. From *Amours de Cassandre* to *Sonnets pour Hélène*, the gift of flowers delivers not only the open heart, but also all the tensions of a troubled finitude, divided between a lucid consciousness of the ephemeral and foolish hopes of eternity:

168 Little quatrains in the form of riddles addressed to his close circle of friends (Mallarmé, 2008, p. 217-224).

169 Petrarch’s influence is noticeable in the first collections of sonnets in France in the sixteenth century. “Petrarchism” is characterized by an aesthetic of refinement bordering on preciousness, a search for expressive density, and a great abundance of metaphors that conspire to magnify the desired woman.

That century to century may tell the perfect love Ronsard once bore to you [...]. I bring for gift to you this immortelle (Ronsard, 1950, p. 243, trans. in Klein, 1905, p. 466).

This is why, as the gift of flowers pursues its destiny in the history of poetry, it becomes the privileged witness of a solitude in mourning, and the contemplative trace of an internal exile: "I picked this flower for you on the hilltop" (Hugo, 2004, p. 209) murmurs Hugo, as he places "some flowering heather and a holly spray" (*ibid.*, p. 199) on the tombstone of his dear departed Léopoldine. Starting with Verlaine's bouquet, where a certain irony begins to appear, in so far as the weight of the legacy can now be sensed,¹⁷⁰ the history of the gift of flowers continues up to the tenuous gesture of he who, following an amorous shipwreck, no longer retains anything of the flower but a distant and bitter memory. Thus the little seaweed offered "to the mysterious woman" by Robert Desnos: "I bring you a little bit of seaweed tangled with sea spray foam and this comb" (Desnos, 1991, p. 24). The rose had become a bouquet of heather, and now this seaweed: a less lustrous motif, no doubt; but this evolution also clarifies certain aspects of the lyrical offering.

For this *mezza voce* variation first of all sheds significant light on the doubling of which the poetic gesture of the gift is the object. From Ronsard to Hugo, from Verlaine to Desnos, the gift of flowers is inherited and transmitted, so that to give to the beloved being is also and above all to make an offering to the poems of the past, to make an offering to Ronsard "taking [his] rest in the myrtle groves of the Underworld" (Ronsard, 2002, p. 55). But the offered poem also opens up a whole chain of refrains and transmissions which conjures away the pulsing of time and breaches the laws of chronology. Since the poetic enunciation is personal, each re-enunciation of the poem is a reappropriation, an existential recapturing of its original gesture. "I bring for gift to you this immortelle": How can Ronsard's verse be understood other than by assuming that the immortelle, flower of eternity, resides precisely in this verse whose meaning will never be exhausted, carried aloft by all the voices that reincarnate it and thus bring it back to life? A name without referent, an empty and free form disengaged from all circumstance, the "I" becomes

170 « Voici des fruits, des fleurs, des feuilles et des branches, / Et puis voici mon cœur, qui ne bat que pour vous » ["There's fruit, flowers, branches and leaves / Then there's my heart, which beats only for you"] (Verlaine, 1999, p. 89).

this errant pronoun which, in the image of Apollinaire's *Voyager* (Apollinaire, 2011, p. 71) knocks distractedly at the door of a life "as uncertain as the straits at Euripos" (2011, p. 73).¹⁷¹ Thus the poetical "I" is, in itself, a gift to the posterity of all those who will choose to take it up, so as to pass it on once more. This is why every poem enters into a space of uncertainty where the precise known recipient to whom it was at first ostensibly addressed progressively blurs into the multiple faces of those who reappropriate it and extend its gesture of offering. At the very moment the addressed poem is published, this whole ambiguity comes to light: cast no longer before Cassandra, Marie, or Hélène but before posterity, it makes a wager on the future. And the very terms of the exchange are fundamentally redefined: no doubt the poem still offers what it bears within (an emotional homage, a heartfelt gift, a promised kiss), but it will also be said to offer itself. It will give itself to the one who will take hold of it: offering itself to the past of poetry, offering itself to a posterity upon which it wagers, it is the gift that abolishes the irreversibility of time.

And yet, for all this, can the gesture of the gift survive when nothing founds it any longer? When nothing justifies it? When it is thrown into the desert or into the sea with no hope of a response?

"THERE IS A HAND / OUTSTRETCHED / STRAINING / IN MIDAIR"¹⁷²

This particularity of poetic enunciation, a discourse addressed to another but which anyone can reappropriate for themselves, certainly clarifies why poetry is the genre marked most deeply by the crisis of the subject. Who can still say "I" after the blows that the founders of modernity rained down on the portals of romanticism? Who can pour their heart out once Baudelaire has proclaimed the "impersonality" of his poems, once Lautréamont has cried out that "personal poetry has had its day, with its relative sleights of hand and its contingent contortions" (Lautréamont, 1978, p. 265), and Mallarmé announced the "elocutionary disappearance of the poet", adding that the "classic lyrical breath" is no more (Mallarmé, 2007, p. 208)? Doubtless there is a sign of

171 The Euripos Strait in Greece is characterized by a strange phenomena: its waters change course seven times a day. This tidal movement is mentioned by Strabo, Pliny the Elder, and Aristotle.

172 (Du Bouchet, 2000, p. 121).

the times here, and something like a quarrel between schools; but there is more to it than that. The very foundations of lyrical subjectivity are being reshaped: suspicion of the first person fuels a retreat of the subject into the shadows, born of the last years of romanticism, something we see clearly in the figures of projection of the self in Baudelaire, exiled from their inner transparency (see Jackson, 1998). At the risk of overgeneralizing, let us say that, on the threshold of modernity, the lyrical subject, autonomous, master of its interiority, is doubly weakened. It finds itself both falling short of and thrust beyond itself: on one hand it loses the very power to say "I", it is a subject on the verge of erasure; on the other, it multiplies into fictional figures. Michaux stands at the crossroads of these two movements, he who says of himself that he was "born with a hole", and whose whole oeuvre cries out in this perdition of being whose "properties" (Michaux, 1970, p. 69-70), oscillating between being and having, are reduced to a desolate, vacant, sterile wasteland. Yet at the same time Michaux is driven by the force of fabulation toward multiple figures of projection, pained and grimacing like the fragile "Meidosems"¹⁷³ born of the poet's imagination in the ruins of the Second World War, spindly and scrawny to the point of exhaustion yet resolutely invincible.

The effacing of the lyrical subject does indeed therefore seem to be the new condition on whose basis the poetic gift must be rethought. Henceforth the poem will make its address from a hollowness, a "mouth of darkness" as Hugo, already, says; an absence to self, the surrealists would respond, traversed by automatic writing; at a distance from oneself, Michaux ("I write to you from a distant country" [Michaux, 1998, p. 590]) and André du Bouchet ("I write as far away from myself as possible" [Du Bouchet, 2014, p. 101]) would add. What is there to say? If the subject effaces itself, if the anchoring point of lyrical discourse fades away, then the intent of the poetic address may well find itself abolished, along with responsibility for this gesture. In which case, can the comparison of poetical speech to the gesture of the gift still be justified?

It is in the paradox of Desnos' "To the Mysterious Woman" poems that a first element toward a response can be identified. Beating heart and black diamond of the 1930 collection *Corps et Biens*, the seven poems that make up the section "To the Mysterious Woman"—addressed to the woman who will remain for Desnos a voice without a body, a face without a gaze—cast the whole heritage of the amorous gift and the lyrical offering into a world

of errant shadows. Sent in pure loss to one whose very name is effaced, these seven texts are as many steps leading the poet toward depersonalization, toward a world of specters in which the lyrical subject loses the very possibility of saying "I". And yet here is located the strange condition of an encounter: in becoming a shadow among shadows, Desnos reestablishes the possibility of a tenuous exchange by means of which, reversing the myth of Orpheus and Eurydice, he brings back into existence the one who had led him into the kingdom of the dead:

I've dreamed of you so much, walked, spoken,
Slept with your ghost so much
That all that remains for me to do perhaps,
And yet, is to be a ghost
Among the ghosts and a hundred times
More shadow than the shadow which strolls
And will stroll blithely
On the sundial of your life (Desnos, 2004, p. 17).

An architecture of absence, the poems "to the mysterious woman" thus bring the whole heritage of the elegiac tradition to the point of its highest attenuation, but at the same time they extract from it the quintessence of the poetic gift. Addressed by one shadow to another, Desnos' poem, born of an amorous shipwreck, is doubtless one of those to concentrate with the most vital and painful evidence on the lessons of the lyrical offering in poetic modernity: if the subject is effaced or voided, then it is reduced to no longer being anything but a movement in the direction of alterity. The erasure, the impersonality that is suffered in this movement, becomes the very condition for an opening. Thus André du Bouchet, signing his name to *L'Emportement du muet*, insists that he is no longer anything but a "threshold" of the sensible world.¹⁷⁴ By rendering the gesture desperate, by taking the lyrical offering to the edge of abolition, the meaning of the poetic gift finds itself paradoxically reinforced. Such is the lesson of the effacing of the lyrical subject. If, as in a mirror effect, the poem is now sent out only in the direction of absence, then the gift may well also attain its full status here. Here it is important to come

174 Phenomenology will state the law of this claim in its own terms: there can be no "I" without a constitutive relation to the world and to alterity.

back to Mandelstam's foundational text "On the Interlocutor", and to Celan's interpretation of it forty years later. Concerned with distancing himself from the Russian symbolism of the end of the nineteenth century, and from all poetry of circumstance, the former writes:

Addressing a concrete interlocutor takes the wings off the verse, deprives it of air, of flight. The air of a poem is unexpected (Mandelstam, 1977, p. 61).

Where it particularizes and specifies the identity of the recipient, the poem loses the sense of the gift, then. The poem cuts through the air, abolishes time, rushes toward an indefinite interlocutor who, by appropriating the poem, by making it his or her own, becomes the providential interlocutor. Henceforth the trajectory will have changed direction, so to speak: the poem given is constituted as a gift for the unknown reader, an uncertain receiver of the letter in a bottle. Paul Celan's coup de force, as he rereads Mandelstam in the light of his own poetics, ravaged by the Second World War, lies in his reinterpretation of this "unknown" toward whom the poem flies. Not only is the poem not addressed to a particular person, it is given to no one. It is "No one's rose"¹⁷⁵ An empty place: it is that of every Other, no doubt, and of their absence as well, the place of God's silence when Celan, in homage to the Jewish people, intones his "death fugue" into an ashen sky. And Celan continues: the place of the interlocutor is empty, but the poem still points toward this place; even more, this absence is the very chance for an interlocutor to come, it is the name of the hope that remains, it relaunches the entire force of a gesture and all the intensity of a pure gift. An absolute gift of the poem thrown into the sea, a sublime gesture in which the subject is abolished, thus giving itself in pure loss:

In this way, too, poems are *en route*: they are headed toward. Toward what? Toward something open, inhabitable, an approachable you, perhaps, an approachable reality.¹⁷⁶

175 Paul Celan, *La Rose de personne (Die Niemandrose)*, first publication by Fischer in 1963 (Celan, 2014). The collection, consisting of poems written between 1959 and 1963, is dedicated to the memory of Osip Mandelstam. On this point see (Broda, 2002).

176 Paul Celan, "Speech on the Occasion of Receiving the Literature Prize of

Where one might have feared the imperiling of the lyrical gesture and the abolition of the poetic offering, on the contrary modern poetry is on the way to a fulfilment of this gesture. Clearly, the metaphysical foundation of the poetic genre is directly concerned here; when poetry has lost its transcendent guarantor, when the lyrical subject is no longer underpinned by a sacred foundation, then the poem "interposes itself" and the gift gives itself, as Michel Deguy maintains:

"If only you knew the God-given gift", murmured the tearful devotion. But in fact, we do not know [...]. The beneficiary has lost its composure. The beneficiary conceals a potential to flare up again [...]. The collection, for its part, enquires after the debt and source—in full knowledge of the facts. Like a legal executor with neither legatee nor heir. It invents the origin and the address. The poem interposes itself. [...] This act must not exhaust the gift: given without giver, giving without recipient (Deguy, 2006, p. 92).

An effaced subject, an uncertain recipient, the gesture of the gift rendered to itself: under the conditions of lyrical "modernity", the performative status of the poem regains all of its force. The poem does not give some thing, it gives, and this word is an act, an act that leaves the sirens of communication far behind. For, as we have seen, the poem is nothing to do with a content transmitted by a sender to a recipient; it is the gesture, a free and pure gesture, by means of which the very contours of the visible are redrawn, and the very possibility of a renewed existence. Walter Benjamin already voices the suspicion:

For what does a literary work "say"? What does it communicate? It "tells" very little to those who understand it. Its essential quality is not statement or the imparting of information (Benjamin, 1968, p. 69).

As for Rimbaud, he will ironically "discount" in his *Illuminations* that which escapes commercial calculation, and therefore the communication that conveys it:

the Free Hanseatic City of Bremen" (Celan, 1986, p. 34-35).

For sale, the Bodies, the voices, the immense and unquestionable opulence, what can never be sold (Rimbaud, 1991, p. 165).

IN CONCLUSION: WHAT THE POEM GIVES

If the poem transmits nothing quantifiable, if it *a priori* evades the commercial world, then what can it give? Can we set out the contours of the gift? Celan responds: poems are "gifts bearing destinies". Sent out from a past that is no more but which lives again in the poem, the poem makes itself a gift of survival: giving to be heard that which has disappeared, it makes a presencing possible, it joins a past that has gone and a future that is not yet here. Nowhere is this more palpable than in a poem spoken from the mouth of one who is no more. Already, in the fifteenth century, "The Epitaph in Form of a Ballad which Villon Made..." launches its vibrant appeal from beyond the grave; in an enunciative coup de force, Villon chooses to give the floor to those who, as the poem goes on, gradually unveil themselves hanging from the gibbet:

Men, brother men, that after us yet live,
Let not your hearts too hard against us be
(Villon, in Swinburne, 2002, p. 170).

The text then superimposes perfectly the imploring supplicant (the appeal to survival via the memory of the living) and the supreme gift (the enunciation literally bringing back to life the torture victims). Gift and counter-gift are thus one and the same: the lyrical enunciation leads to the fusion of the request and the gift. The stakes here are decisive. For a division is founded in this circulation of speech, which constructs the space of a "fraternity" that extends to the entire human condition.

So what does the poem give, if not the contours of a common destiny and a present that can be shared? Yves Bonnefoy's poetics of stones reprises Villon's gesture, and also dares to appeal to the reader from the threshold of death. He makes its voice well up from the funerary stone, a voice that traverses the mineral surface and the frontier of human finitude:

You whom we name in a low voice among the branches
You who are murmured, who are kept dark,

Who bring the eternal: moon, half open the gate
And favor us who have no more day (Bonnefoy, 1976, p. 65).

Because of the sharing that it makes possible, lyrical enunciation thus draws poetics toward becoming ethical and political. The poem becomes that "life-saving driftwood [*Planche de vivre*]" to which the "castaway" clings. René Char constructs his anthology of foreign poets, *La Planche de vivre*, around the figure of the dissident Mandelstam, his "cheek resting on terror and wonder". By translating and publishing some of the poems from the years of exile in Voronej, and choosing to open the series of texts with

How the feminine silver burns
That's struggled against oxide and alloy
And quiet work silvers
The iron plough and the poet's voice (Char, 1995, p. 52,
quoting Mandelstam, trans. in Gibbons, 1989, p. vii).

Char takes up and makes his own the gesture of the gift around which Mandelstam had composed his 1913 essay "On the Interlocutor". He even goes so far as to inscribe in one of his translated and published texts the very meaning of his approach, delivered in Mandelstam's voice:

Keep my words forever for their aftertaste of misfortune and smoke
(Char, 1995, p. 61, trans. in Mandelstam, 1977, p. 89).

The resistance,¹⁷⁷ passing between Mandelstam and Char, thus speaks itself not so much via a semantic content and the clarity of a political message as via an act of transmission, a chain of relays through which this "aftertaste of misfortune and smoke" is propagated. Note the entirely significant importance accorded, in these translated poems, to brute matter, to elementary, savage and primitive nature, vectors by way of which the resistance to terror is conveyed. It is indeed a question of using the poem to render sensible and

177 René Char pays homage to the dissident Mandelstam, persecuted following his 1933 *Stalin Epigram*. His own commitment (to the French Resistance) seems to place him in continuity with that of the Russian poet.

perceptible this "frisson of the earth's crust",¹⁷⁸ as Char confides to us. It is in this light that the gift of the poem can finally be clarified in its full extent.

What does the poem give if not a certain quality of existence, a renewed experience of the world? Whether we define it as an invitation to the "poetic inhabiting of the world", as a power of wonder, a quality of listening, a faculty of emotion, or an intensification of existence, the poetic gift brings to presence. It brings to presence the living and the dead, but also man and mute things, incarnate existence and the sensible world. Where habit erodes the contours of the sensible, what does the poem aim at if not to raise things up from the undifferentiated, to give them to be seen, and to be—and thereby to do justice to them? For the poem summons things to a survival within the word; the word re-names them, re-enunciates them, offers a voice to that which would otherwise drown in desuetude. Francis Ponge, "ambassador of the mute world" (Ponge, 1999, p. 631) will make this his poetic mission. Yves Bonnefoy offers not only speech but presence to mute things, in so far as what matters to him is the need to catch the sensible world up in the meshwork of an existence: the poetics of presence gives a new foundation to the link between a finitude and an earthly sojourn. This is why, conveyed in vocative forms,¹⁸ Bonnefoy's poetics chooses to state the terms of its approach by way of a strange prayer. In *Devotion*, Bonnefoy operates a *détournement* not just of the identically-titled poem in Rimbaud's *Illuminations*, but of the very form of the religious prayer. Bonnefoy's poem involves a murmured celebration that appeals, item by item, for the survival of the components of the sensible world, from the most humble to the most finely wrought, the forgotten and the uncertain alike. Bonnefoy's litany, on the fringes of silence, lists these realities of the world, which it reintensifies via the word of the offering:

To nettles and stones [...]. To winter oltr'Arno. To the snow and to so many steps. To the Brancacci Chapel, at nightfall. [...] To this voice consumed by an essential fever. To the gray trunk of the maple. To a dance. To these two ordinary rooms, for the maintaining of gods among us (Bonnefoy, 1991, p. 293-294).¹⁷⁹

178 Letter from René Char to Tina Jolas, cited in (Greilsamer, 2004, p. 418).

179 The vocative is the case of interpellation in Latin. Bonnefoy often has recourse to invocation, to the apostrophe, to the address.

In its appeal for unity to be refounded around an immanent sacred (in reference to the philosophy of Plotinus which is its inspiration) and around a vocative approach that bonds and reconnects all who choose to take up the voice and the way of the poem, *Devotion* gives to see, gives to exist, gives to marvel.

Such is, perhaps, the supreme task the poem sets itself. In outlining the space of a poetic inhabitation of the world, the poem leaves any theories of its expiration far behind, its obsolete character, or its vapid and frivolous nature. Never, on the contrary, has it been more urgent than it is today, when the threat hanging over the living is no longer a fiction. The poem, through its innate demand for a watchful, open-eyed, forewarned gaze, through its appeal to trace out the contours of a common present, of a world to live in and an exchange in which that which has passed away can survive, is an invitation to the community to found and refound itself around the sensible world. The vital circulation of an exchange, then, maintains itself in the poem addressed to the other, with a "hand / outstretched straining / in midair" and the beating heart of the living:

your
face
invents
me I
give
your name to the
day
(Meschonnic, 1999, p. 30)

Translated by Cadenza Academic Translations

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“GARGANTUA’S SPEECH TO THE VANQUISHED”¹⁸⁰

François Rabelais (c. 1494-1553)

CHAPTER 1.L. GARGANTUA’S SPEECH TO THE VANQUISHED

Our forefathers and ancestors of all times have been of this nature and disposition, that, upon the winning of a battle, they have chosen rather, for a sign and memorial of their triumphs and victories, to erect trophies and monuments in the hearts of the vanquished by clemency than by architecture in the lands which they had conquered. For they did hold in greater estimation the lively remembrance of men purchased by liberality than the dumb inscription of arches, pillars, and pyramids, subject to the injury of storms and tempests, and to the envy of everyone. You may very well remember of the courtesy which by them was used towards the Bretons in the battle of St. Aubin of Cormier and at the demolishing of Partenay. You have heard, and hearing admire, their gentle comportment towards those at the barriers (the barbarians) of Spaniola, who had plundered, wasted, and ransacked the maritime borders of Olone and Thalamondois. All this hemisphere of the world was filled with the praises and congratulations which yourselves and your fathers made, when Alpharbal, King of Canarre, not satisfied with his own fortunes, did most furiously invade the land of Onyx, and with cruel piracies molest all the Armoric Islands and confine regions of Britany. Yet was he in a set naval fight justly taken and vanquished by my father, whom God preserve and protect. But what? Whereas other kings and emperors, yea, those who entitle themselves Catholics, would have dealt roughly with him, kept him a close prisoner, and put him to an extreme high ransom, he entreated him very courteously, lodged him kindly with himself in his own palace, and out of his

180 In Rabelais, F., *Gargantua and Pantagruel, Five Books Of The Lives, Heroic Deeds And Sayings Of Gargantua And His Son Pantagruel*, book 1, ch. 50. Translation Gutenberg Project: <<https://www.gutenberg.org/files/1200/1200-h/1200-h.htm#link2HCH0050>>.

incredible mildness and gentle disposition sent him back with a safe conduct, laden with gifts, laden with favours, laden with all offices of friendship. What fell out upon it? Being returned into his country, he called a parliament, where all the princes and states of his kingdom being assembled, he showed them the humanity which he had found in us, and therefore wished them to take such course by way of compensation therein as that the whole world might be edified by the example, as well of their honest graciousness to us as of our gracious honesty towards them. The result hereof was, that it was voted and decreed by an unanimous consent, that they should offer up entirely their lands, dominions, and kingdoms, to be disposed of by us according to our pleasure.

Alpharbal in his own person presently returned with nine thousand and thirty-eight great ships of burden, bringing with him the treasures, not only of his house and royal lineage, but almost of all the country besides. For he embarking himself, to set sail with a west-north-east wind, everyone in heaps did cast into the ship gold, silver, rings, jewels, spices, drugs, and aromatical perfumes, parrots, pelicans, monkeys, civet-cats, black-spotted weasels, porcupines, etc. He was accounted no good mother's son that did not cast in all the rare and precious things he had.

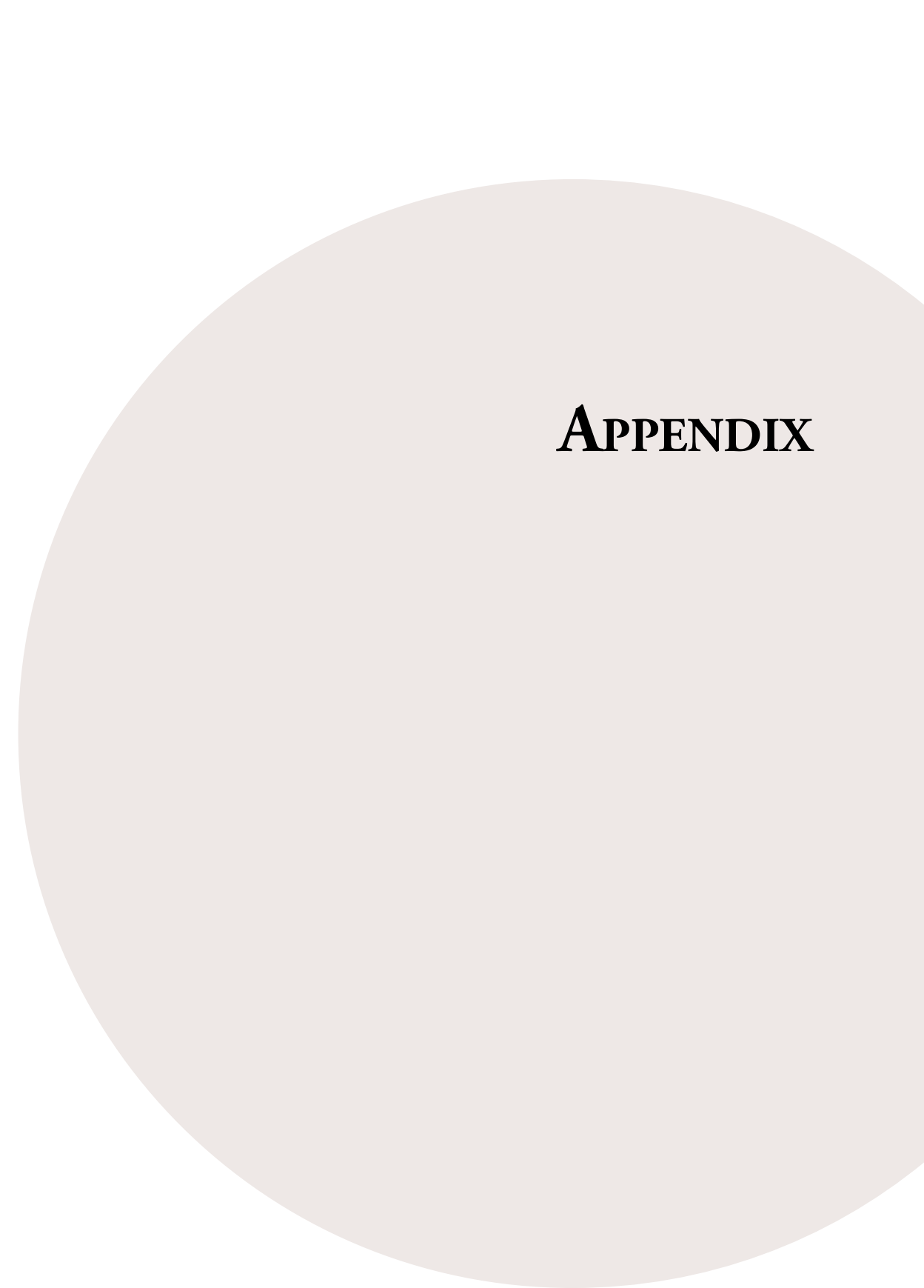
Being safely arrived, he came to my said father, and would have kissed his feet. That action was found too submissively low, and therefore was not permitted, but in exchange he was most cordially embraced. He offered his presents; they were not received, because they were too excessive: he yielded himself voluntarily a servant and vassal, and was content his whole posterity should be liable to the same bondage; this was not accepted of, because it seemed not equitable: he surrendered, by virtue of the decree of his great parliamentary council, his whole countries and kingdoms to him, offering the deed and conveyance, signed, sealed, and ratified by all those that were concerned in it; this was altogether refused, and the parchments cast into the fire. In end, this free goodwill and simple meaning of the Canarians wrought such tenderness in my father's heart that he could not abstain from shedding tears, and wept most profusely; then, by choice words very congruously adapted, strove in what he could to diminish the estimation of the good offices which he had done them, saying, that any courtesy he had conferred upon them was not worth a rush, and what favour soever he had showed them he was bound to do it. But so much the more did Alpharbal augment the repute thereof. What was the issue? Whereas for his ransom, in the greatest extremity of rigour and most tyrannical dealing, could not have been exacted above twenty

times a hundred thousand crowns, and his eldest sons detained as hostages till that sum had been paid, they made themselves perpetual tributaries, and obliged to give us every year two millions of gold at four-and-twenty carats fine. The first year we received the whole sum of two millions; the second year of their own accord they paid freely to us three-and-twenty hundred thousand crowns; the third year, six-and-twenty hundred thousand; the fourth year, three millions, and do so increase it always out of their own goodwill that we shall be constrained to forbid them to bring us any more. This is the nature of gratitude and true thankfulness. For time, which gnaws and diminisheth all things else, augments and increaseth benefits; because a noble action of liberality, done to a man of reason, doth grow continually by his generous thinking of it and remembering it.

Being unwilling therefore any way to degenerate from the hereditary mildness and clemency of my parents, I do now forgive you, deliver you from all fines and imprisonments, fully release you, set you at liberty, and every way make you as frank and free as ever you were before. Moreover, at your going out of the gate, you shall have every one of you three months' pay to bring you home into your houses and families, and shall have a safe convoy of six hundred cuirassiers and eight thousand foot under the conduct of Alexander, esquire of my body, that the clubmen of the country may not do you any injury. God be with you! I am sorry from my heart that Picrochole is not here; for I would have given him to understand that this war was undertaken against my will and without any hope to increase either my goods or renown. But seeing he is lost, and that no man can tell where nor how he went away, it is my will that his kingdom remain entire to his son; who, because he is too young, he not being yet full five years old, shall be brought up and instructed by the ancient princes and learned men of the kingdom. And because a realm thus desolate may easily come to ruin, if the covetousness and avarice of those who by their places are obliged to administer justice in it be not curbed and restrained, I ordain and will have it so, that Ponocrates be overseer and superintendent above all his governors, with whatever power and authority is requisite thereto, and that he be continually with the child until he find him able and capable to rule and govern by himself.

Now I must tell you, that you are to understand how a too feeble and dissolute facility in pardoning evildoers giveth them occasion to commit wickedness afterwards more readily, upon this pernicious confidence of receiving favour. I consider that Moses, the meekest man that was in his time upon the earth, did

severely punish the mutinous and seditious people of Israel. I consider likewise that Julius Caesar, who was so gracious an emperor that Cicero said of him that his fortune had nothing more excellent than that he could, and his virtue nothing better than that he would always save and pardon every man—he, notwithstanding all this, did in certain places most rigorously punish the authors of rebellion. After the example of these good men, it is my will and pleasure that you deliver over unto me before you depart hence, first, that fine fellow Marquet, who was the prime cause, origin, and groundwork of this war by his vain presumption and overweening; secondly, his fellow cake-bakers, who were neglective in checking and reprehending his idle hairbrained humour in the instant time; and lastly, all the councillors, captains, officers, and domestics of Picrochole, who had been incendiaries or fomenters of the war by provoking, praising, or counselling him to come out of his limits thus to trouble us.



APPENDIX

EXPANSIONS ON THE GIFT: ACTIONS AND REACTIONS

João Aldeia – Opposing Mastery, Claiming the Future. Life and Death beyond Capitalist Modernity.

Capitalist modernity accelerates the extinction of non-human species and leads to the contraction of human vital possibilities. Extinction has been the outcome of what Deborah Bird Rose called double death, i.e., a disruption of multispecies bonds that makes the death of individuals stop nourishing other individuals of other species, which results in a cascade of death. Double death stems from attempts of dominant classes to exercise mastery over other humans, non-humans and things, which has historically led to the establishment of hierarchical forms of socio-ecological organization. Although not all empirical hierarchies lead to death, the potential to kill is inherent to the principle of hierarchy because it is based on domination. In capitalist modernity, mastery has Cartesian and Utilitarian qualities that make double death particularly severe. However, since mastery is what causes the problem, opposing capitalist modernity is a crucial but insufficient step in the fight against double death, which requires ending the principle of hierarchy itself.

Roger Ames – “Zoetology”: A New Name for an Old Way of Thinking.

In the *Yijing* 易經 or *Book of Changes* we find a vocabulary that makes explicit cosmological assumptions that are a stark alternative to classical Greek substance ontology. The article provides the interpretive context for the Confucian canons by locating them within a holistic, organic, and ecological worldview. To provide a meaningful contrast with this fundamental assumption of “being” the author borrows the Greek notion of *zoe* or “life” and creates the neologism “*zoe*-tology” as “the art of living”. This cosmology begins from “living” (*sheng* 生) itself as the motive force behind change, and gives us a world of boundless

181 Alphabetically listed.

“becomings”: not “things” that *are*, but “events” that are *happening*, a contrast between an ontological conception of the human “being” and a process conception of human “becomings”.

Augustin Berque – Ladders, Ports and Scales of the Ecumene.

The “ladders, ports and scales of the ecumene” are the existential operators—the “as”—which make that, *ek*-sisting off the gangue of their en-soi (S), the raw data of the natural environment (the *Umgebung*) are historically predicated as S/P, i.e. perceived and qualified as something (S as P) by a certain society. This operation, called “trajection,” produces the qualia which, out of the environment, make a milieu (an *Umwelt*) exist (*ek*-sist) concretely. Analogous to a work of art, this trajection of the environment (S) into a milieu (S/P) is the enactment (ἐνέργεια) of the general potency (δύναμις) of S of existing as diverse particular things (S/P, S/P’, S/P” etc.). These qualia cannot be reduced to the “how much?”—which quantity, for how much money?—of industrial products. This is why the “reign of quantity” (Guénon), indissociable from modern industriality, jeopardizes the inhabitability of the Earth

Hagai Boas and Wan-Zi Lu – Gifts for Gifts:

From Symbolic Rewards to Practical Advantages in Organ Donation.

In this article, we draw from gift theories to examine two emerging models of organ donation: organ banks with a system of “vouchers” for future donations and a priority model that grants bonus points to organ donors (and their family members) on transplant waiting lists. These models reward donors with the prospect of concrete returns, in contrast to previous forms of organ donation where donors receive rewards of a symbolic nature only. While the symbolic reward, such as honor and respect, bestowed upon donors is not directly equivalent to the gift given (i.e., donated organs), the voucher and priority models introduce a currency that replaces the unconditional gift with a practical advantage—a leap forward in long waiting lists, if not a guaranteed organ in return. These two models, we argue, alter the concept of “gift of life” in organ donations and imply how the anticipated time of returns can shape social actions and choices.

Andrea Mubi Brighenti and Lorenzo Sabetta –

Reciprocity, Reaction and the Transduction of Social Encounters

In these remarks, we highlight which links connect the concepts of reciprocity and reaction as well as, most importantly, how this comparison might influ-

ence renewed theorizations of social interaction. As it behooves such an attempt, Marcel Mauss' framework is our starting point: in particular, his emphasis on mutuality's indeterminacy aptly illustrates the inherent openness toward others' responses (i.e., toward their topicality, potential disloyalty or misunderstanding, emotionality, etc.), envisioned here as the actual initiator of "the socius". Then, we rely on Simondon's concept of transindividuality to further dismantle any linear, reciprocal image of symmetry, by analysing concrete manifestations of reciprocity that exist in and through the practices of coexistence—we pose that reactions quintessentially represent these operational vectors. The conclusion looks into human-AI interaction sequences, to exemplify how reciprocity and reactive state can show all their essential uncertainties and potentials.

Philippe Chanial — A Map of Tenderness:

The Love-Gift from Simmel to Mauss

By intersecting the sociology of Georg Simmel with the anthropology of Marcel Mauss, this article seeks to understand the gift of love as an inherently fragile and labile form of human relationship, reliant on both the combination and opposition of differentiated elements. This sensitivity to the plurality of forms of love as a gift – ranging from the most generous to the most violent, from the most reciprocal to the most asymmetrical, and from the most self-interested to the most gracious – leads to the construction of a new "Map of Tenderness." Thus, it invites readers to navigate, guided by the "compass of the gift," through worlds where relational regimes are characterized by porous boundaries, encompassing dynamics from passion to domination, from conjugal ties to exploitation, from care to predation, and from intimacy to commercial exchange.

François Gauthier – (Re)creating the World at Burning Man:

Play, the Gift, and Ritual Creativity

In the wake of Roberte Hamayon's book *Why We Play* (2016) and based on ethnographic fieldwork and complementary methodology, this article mobilizes gift and play theory to analyze the Burning Man festival. Following a brief presentation of gift and play theory, the article proceeds to describe this event which has been at the core of important "counter-cultural" developments in the last three decades and which is today at the center of a growing international event-culture. The analytical section starts by examining Burning Man from the perspective of the gift and thus pays special attention to the concrete practices of gift and their dynamics, something which has been largely ignored by exist-

ing academic production on the subject. The second part of the analysis seizes Burning Man from the perspective of play as defined by Roberte Hamayon while underlining the specifics and complementarity of this approach with respect to the above section on gift. The analysis finally turns to the religious dimensions of Burning Man and the rapports between play, ritual, and religion in the light of Hamayon's theory of play defined as freedom of action within a given frame or set of rules. This approach overcomes the limitations of theories which cast play as degraded or inchoative ritual and religious forms and thereby allow to better understand contemporary religious reconfigurations that often display a playful and creative character.

David Inglis – Drinking the Divine: On Gifts, Gods, and Wines

Throughout its 8000-year history, first across much of Eurasia and then later in other world regions, grape-based wine has been bound up with myriad human gift practices. These include such phenomena as the creation of commensality and companionship through sharing more basic wines in quotidian contexts, and the exchange of higher-level wines to express esteem for recipients and to mark the specialness of occasions. Wine-making regions have complex cultures of hospitality and gift-giving among wine-creating and -distributing persons, these being especially intense at harvest time and when new vintages are unveiled. Only within the last few hundred years has the significance of religion in winemaking and drinking shrunk, for in long-term perspective, grape wine has been strongly associated with the major world religions of central and western Eurasia, including those of the ancient Middle East, Egypt, and the Greco-Roman Mediterranean, as well as Judaism and Christianity. Wine has had deep religious significances, conceived variously as a gift from the gods, or God, or Nature, and this has had ramifications both deep and long-standing. Carrying out a synoptic analysis of this long-term historical terrain, this paper posits that wine-based gifts *to* divine or supernatural entities are particularly likely to be offered by human adherents if wine is understood as a gift to humanity *from* those entities, a scenario observable in contexts as diverse as ancient China and Egypt, and medieval Christianity.

Anne Gourio – “I Give your Name to the Day”: The Gift of the Poem and the Trials of Modernity

Since the time of the troubadours, the “gift of the poem” has been a constant in the history of the lyrical genre, and constitutes a true tradition with its

own codes, rituals, and social practices. After having illuminated the distinctive nature of lyrical discourse as addressed speech, this article focuses on the transformations this tradition has undergone under the influence of poetic “modernity”. In order to do so, it takes a free journey through some decisive landmarks in the history of the lyrical offering, including works by Osip Mandelstam, Paul Celan, Robert Desnos, and Yves Bonnefoy. The article then attempts to show that, although over the twentieth century the conditions of the poetic gift seem to have been compromised in their very foundations, it is under these circumstances that the gesture of the gift in fact takes on its full meaning and makes a return to plenitude.

Stephan Moebius and Frithjof Nungesser –

The Reception of Marcel Mauss in the German-speaking World

The article examines the reception of Marcel Mauss’ work in the German-speaking academic world, from its early introduction by René König in the 1930s to contemporary scholarly engagements. König played a pivotal role in disseminating Mauss’ ideas, particularly through his association with the Durkheim school. Despite this, the reception of Mauss’ work in the German-speaking countries remained overshadowed by Durkheim and later by structuralists like Claude Lévi-Strauss until the 1990s. At that point, Mauss’ *Essai sur le don* gained broader recognition. Recent scholarship has expanded interpretations of Mauss, particularly in sociology, anthropology, religious studies, and philosophy, emphasizing his independent contributions to epistemology and social theory. The second part of the paper provides an autobiographical account by Stephan Moebius, detailing his intellectual journey toward Mauss. Moebius’ reflections highlight the evolving understanding of Mauss as a central figure in the history of sociology.

Francois Rabelais – “Gargantua’s Speech to the Vanquished” (1534).

Ilana F. Silber: Natalie Z. Davis and the Registers of Giving.

This article offers to revisit Natalie Z. Davis’ study *The Gift in Sixteenth Century France* (TGSCF, 2000) from the point of view of its conceptual and comparative contribution to the field of gift research and theory. Standing at the core of Davis’ landmark achievement is her comprehensive account of an entire, historically specific gift register and of the diversity of gift processes coexisting within it—while also tracing the complex and mutually pervasive relation be-

tween this gift register and other aspects domains of social life. As such, she is also shown to develop tools of macro-cultural analysis that still remain unparalleled and insufficiently applied in gift research and theory to this day. Reaching beyond sixteenth-century France, Davis also suggests the need for cross-cultural comparison with gift registers in non-Christian societies, a stance she expressed again in a later text centering on charity in Middle Eastern contexts.

Peter Sloterdijk – What does a Human Have that he Can Give Away?

Peter Sloterdijk reinterprets the concept of generosity by drawing on Marcel Mauss' notion of the gift. He criticises the modern welfare state as a form of obligatory giving. Rather than treating taxes as a debt, he advocates for viewing them as acts of communal generosity, thereby shifting from an ethos of scarcity to one of abundance.

**Bryan S. Turner – Marcel Mauss and the Sociology of the Body:
A Personal Reflection.**

This article is based on my personal reflections with respect to an engagement with the sociology of Marcel Mauss over the length of my academic career. My early work involved two areas of sociology, namely the sociology of religion and the sociology of the body. Although the sociology of religion was a well-established field of study following the influence of Max Weber and Émile Durkheim, the sociology of the body was uncharted water. I had come to it via my involvement with a group of medical sociologists at the University of Aberdeen where I was first appointed. At the time the anthropological fieldwork of Mary Douglas had drawn much attention, but her approach was to examine the body as basis for reflection on its symbolic functions such as purity and danger. Mauss' "body techniques" became an inspiration for my evolving focus on human vulnerability that was illustrated much later by a project on injury in ballet dancers. As I come to the end of my career, I see religion and medicine as basic avenues to address the precarity of human life. The conclusion to my research career is an existential sociology.

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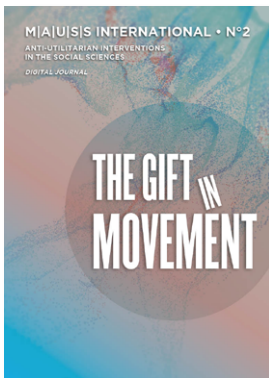
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