

Feminist Semiotics for Social Change: the Mother or the Market by Genevieve Vaughan

© Genevieve Vaughan, 2004. Permission granted to reproduce for not-for-profit use. Author name to accompany text at all times. First published in "Mimesis," 2004.

Summary

In order to understand our present economy and change it for the better we need a new perspective, which spans the distance between epistemology and activism, the market and gender. The hypothesis of this paper is that such a perspective may be founded on the practice of gift-giving and receiving, viewed as an extension of mothering. Gift-giving has been hidden by patriarchy and the market, both of which are social constructions based channeling hidden gifts towards themselves. This paper attempts to sketch the ways in which gift giving forms the basis of communication, especially verbal communication, and it looks at the market as distorted material communication. Not just the market but exchange itself is identified as deeply problematic. In order to facilitate social transformation, gift giving rather than exchange must be brought forward as the mode of the human. An attempt is made to look at exchange as deriving from naming transferred back from the verbal to the material plane to mediate between the not-gifts of private property. This 'incarnation' of naming has a decided effect on our ways of interpreting the world, causing us to validate categorization and substitution while devaluing nurturing and its values. In our semiotic, philosophical and economic investigations we need to correct for this distortion in our perspectives. Restoring the value of gift giving for the interpretation of the world, signs, and the market is a first step in a re-visioning which will allow us to achieve another possible world.

Global Patriarchal Capitalism is not just a *sui generis* economic fact. It is a perverse self-perpetuating system of values and (mis)conceptions which is made up of institutions and of individual human beings who are thinking and acting individually and collectively to carry out artificial agendas based on the social construction of gender. The system in question must be understood in order to change it effectively for the good of all. By understanding it we can avoid reintroducing it into the very solutions we propose, and we can choose alternatives which are radical enough not to perpetuate the problems. Moreover with full understanding we can stand back from the problems and find non violent ways of transitioning from the present system to a better way of organizing society. In order to understand Patriarchal Capitalism we must open our eyes to an alternative which already exists in a widespread way throughout society. This alternative is unilateral gift giving, the consciousness of which must also be re introduced into semiotics in order to allow us to understand the market as an aberrant communicative mechanism.

Because many of our mis conceptions come from our interpretations of ourselves as human beings, if we are to solve the systemic conundrum of global economic exploitation, ecological disaster and devastating wars against the innocent, we need to address the mysteries of signs and of language in a new way. As the Hopi prophecies say,

women must take the leadership. It is time for mothers, the bearers of children (the 'prole-tariat') to be the ones who decide upon the distribution of wealth and power. In order to accomplish this we also need an analysis of present methods of distribution which demonstrate their artificiality, showing that the market itself derives from the distortion of a more basic mode of distribution, gift giving.

Indeed the direct satisfaction of the needs of one person by another is perhaps the basic human interaction. This interaction constitutes the fundamental logical pattern of mothering and of many other aspects of life in which it has not been recognized. Human interactions of unilateral gift giving create relations of communication and community as givers and receivers relate themselves to each other, to the items given and the needs satisfied. My hypothesis in this paper is that gift giving is the basis of communication, and that signs and especially the signs of language can be understood as gift constructions at different levels of abstraction. The market, which denies and cancels gift giving through exchange, is thus a mechanism of distorted and contradictory communication which models and provides a niche for adversarial patriarchal relations.

By looking at language and communication in terms of gift giving we can revise the self image of our species so that we can consider our humanity as based on nurturing not on domination, and act accordingly. We can alter our collective self-fulfilling prophecy. This is especially important if, as I believe, many men are now acting according to the dictates of a false gender definition which extrinsicates itself in self-interest, competition, hierarchy and making war. Even when individual men try not to embrace such a gender definition it is validated in the society at large as the male and indeed as the human identity. By challenging this artificial identity and the system and institutions deriving from it we can eliminate the psychological basis for exploitation and war.

Feminists have long criticized the binary thinking that derives from pairs of opposites such as 'male' and 'female'. I believe that there is a binary pair that is wider than gender or any other and that informs them all. One of the poles is visible and validated while the other is invisible and over- or under- valued, a circumstance which helps to maintain the polarity. The pole that is visible is exchange with the market economy that is built upon it. The pole that is invisible is gift giving, the direct satisfaction of needs with the innumerable practices of care and nurturing that are its elaborations. Each pole has its own logical form. Exchange is self reflecting. It requires quantification and measurement and an equation of value ' $X = Y$ '. The logic of gift giving is simple and unilateral 'A gives X to B'. Its simplicity does not make the gift transaction unimportant or uninformative however.

Living in a market-based society we are already victims of a distortion of our perspective and we must correct for it. Consciousness appears to be reflexive and self reflecting like exchange while gift giving appears instinctive, like breathing. (The gift aspects of breathing come to mind when it is made difficult as it is in environments where air is artificially polluted.) (1) Mothering and other kinds of other-directed interaction have been considered instinctual or irrational (even unintelligent) from the point of view of the market-based society where intelligence and rationality are identified with self interest.

Instead unilateral gift giving creates bonds of community between the giver and receiver (without whose creative reception the interaction cannot be said to be complete). These are bonds of care which bridge interpersonal gaps through the satisfaction of specific needs with specifically appropriate goods and services. Receiving such goods and services also creates bonds of positive responsiveness to the giver by the receiver even when the giver has not given the good in order to receive that response. Gift-giving-and-receiving creates community and brings people together. It also creates an interpersonal relation to the gift or service that has been given and determines human subjectivities as givers and receivers of specific goods and services.

The seemingly innocent interaction of exchange

Not just the market or capitalism but the interaction of exchange itself creates adversarial ego-oriented relations. Where gift giving is directed towards the other, exchange is directed towards satisfying one's own need. By opposing the self interest of one to that of another, exchange causes separation and competition rather than bonding; in order to create an equal exchange it replaces qualitative evaluation with quantification and measurement. The common relation established among exchangers is only a relation to their own mutual exclusion and to a quantity of exchange value. The interaction of exchange, which we enter into every day and through which we acquire our daily bread is actually an exercise in alienation, creating antithetical and harmful human relations. Indeed we practice daily on an individual level the very relational patterns we practice on a large scale in wars where we compete to dominate, retaliate, and make the other country 'pay'. Fortunately we also speak to one another and act in other gift giving ways on a daily basis, creating relations of community on the verbal and psychological levels while we are negating community in our material communication.

Societies elaborate upon the basic theme of gift giving both materially and symbolically and the relations which are created change according to these elaborations. Unilateral gift giving produces mutual inclusion and recognition mediated by the gift, a knowledge of the needs of the other and a response of the receiver to the giver and the gift. On the other hand various degrees and kinds of constraint produce other types of relations. Gifts may be forced vertically upward in hierarchies, thus establishing the power of those above over those below. Gifts may be exchanged, with debt as the basis of a long term relation of subservience of debtor towards creditor. They may be symbolic, marking places in hierarchies as they circulate from hand to hand. They may be given only to view as status symbols or sexual signifiers which create relations of distancing and desire resulting again in power over the 'receiver'. At the same time that these variations on the theme of gift giving are taking place, unilateral gift giving continues to exist in mothering in all societies since it is a basic need of very young children. Unilateral gift giving exists in many other areas of life as well but it is so transparent or devalued as to seem non-existent. In fact in a society based on the market where the main interaction is exchange, giving in order to receive a quantitative equivalent, *do ut des*, we no longer believe in unilateral gift giving or recognize it as such when it occurs. The interaction of exchange is a very strong model, and influences our thinking towards its validation. Moreover the market is actually tendentiously hostile towards gift giving, or at least towards the consciousness of gift giving as such. It asserts itself and the principle of self-interest as pri-

mary. In this way it keeps the gift givers giving unilaterally to it, and maintains its parasitism while concealing it and asserting its own 'independence'.

In order to counter the hegemony of exchange and the world view that derives from it we need to extend the principle of mothering. That is, we need to see the continuity between mothering and the many other areas of life in which gift giving exists. Thus we identify a single thread of gift giving, beginning on one end with unilateral gift giving as evidenced in the mothering of infants, proceeding through communication and continuing in various kinds of complex social gifts such as cooking, giving obedience, teaching, barn raising, volunteerism, charity, social activism, until towards the other end the gift is twisted and doubled back on itself becoming market exchange, with variations then upon exchange which also may repropose some gift aspects, such as various kinds of manipulative giving, the 'deserving' of rewards or punishments, 'supporting' a family, monetary loans, investment, 'giving' jobs, 'giving' foreign aid...with political strings attached etc. On the exchange side I would also have to include such social initiatives which still use the logic of exchange like microcredit and community money systems, in spite of their good intentions.

The basic logical gesture of 'A gives X to B' continues to be a fundamental and creative part of all the transactions along the spectrum even when it is turned back on itself and altered in exchange. In fact exchange is a doubled, immediately reciprocal, self canceling gift. By seeing the continuity with mothering we can understand the various stages of gift giving and exchange as variations on a theme, from straightforward to distorted and even alienated and contradictory transposed mothering rather than as something entirely different and *sui generis*. By showing the basic importance of the logic of unilateral gift giving we can also extend our idea of mothering, recognizing it in places where it has previously been invisible, putting women (as Mother Sophia) back into philosophy. On the one hand this has the advantage that it takes gift-giving/ mothering out of its ghetto (or gilded cage) in the family and shows its fundamental importance for life in all of its aspects. On the other hand it shows that patriarchy and exchange cannot finally hold sway as the only model for the definition of the human. (2)

With the extension of mothering, reframing it as gift giving and looking at communication as gift giving we can construct an idea of the human being as gift giver, *homo donans*. From this vantage point we can make a semiotic analysis of the market which shows that it is a derivative and unnecessary sign construction built upon the concealment and exploitation of gift giving and the accompanying gift values. It is not my purpose to retaliate against men, even patriarchal men. Retaliation is itself an exchange based action. Instead we need to try to give the gift of a solution to our collective problems.

The tangle of issues at different levels which have brought us to this dangerous moment in history can only be addressed by some radical changes in perspective. In order to make an adequate analysis of the market as aberrant sign construction we need an approach which re introduces gifts and gift values into semiotics. The basis for our understanding needs to be gift giving, not exchange, so that against the background of the gift, we can see how strange and vulnerable the market actually is.

Value

As we begin to address these problems we have to keep in mind how much the glasses we are wearing may depend upon the problems themselves. In other words it is possible that a great deal of our present perspective comes from our participation in the market and patriarchy, and their elimination of gift giving. This market view depends on the binary divisions between mind and body, male and female, public and private, quantitative and qualitative, abstract and concrete all of which are oppositions incarnated in the market and echoing the larger binary opposition between exchange itself and gift giving. In order to investigate this construction we need to look at the idea of value. There are implications of value deriving from giving gifts that are different from the value implications of exchange.

Gift giving transmits value from the giver to the receiver through the recognition of needs and the giving of appropriate need-satisfying gifts. The market admits only of exchange value, the communicative value of the commodity in the estranged communication (and therefore, according to our previous characterization of it, estranged mothering) of the market. Gift value is the value that we would give - attribute - to the other if we were unilaterally giving the good to her or him. Since we don't, what would have been gift value (the value of the other) transforms into exchange value and comes back to us as an expression of the value of the commodity, calculated by comparing it with the values of all the other commodities on the market. Use value is the value we attribute to a good by using it to satisfy needs, independently of the way we get it, whether through receiving it as a gift, through exchange, or by producing it for our own consumption.

In gift value it appears that the receiver has drawn the gift to her by her importance ("my baby is so sweet I can't help loving her"). We attribute that sort of value to her as well. She magnetizes us, elicits the gift. When we exchange, we want the product. The person is indifferent to us. In gift giving, the value of the other person is implied by the fact that we satisfy her or his need unilaterally. Gift value is transmitted to the other by giving her/him a use value and when a gift is given the two kinds of value, use value and gift value, merge. The specificity of the gift - or service- qualitatively informs the receiver about the nature and intention of the giver in non verbal ways. The favorite pie that is baked transmits the caring of the giver and the value of the receiver whose wants and tastes are understood and fulfilled. The favorite pie also transmits the fact that the giver is attributing value to the receiver. The pie that is not the favorite transmits other information, including information about the attitudes of the giver and it changes somewhat the value given to the receiver. The division between gift and use depends on whether production is for the other or for the self. Since in exchange, production is for the self, because the value must return to the self, gift value is split off from the use value and transformed. The transmission of the good no longer implies that the receiver is valuable to the giver. What is valuable to the exchanger is a good that will satisfy her or his own need and s/he gives value to the process of exchange and the means of exchange in order to get it.

The product is seen as having an exchange value while it is on the market, calculated in money. Once it is bought and can be used, its exchange value becomes irrelevant; it has

a use value, and it can acquire a gift value again if it is given to others to satisfy their needs. If the gift does not go through the process of exchange it maintains an implication of value as in the gift syllogism 'If A gives to B and B gives to C then A gives to C'. However if it goes through exchange that implication is canceled because in fact 'If A gives to B and B exchanges with C, then A does not give to C'. Gift value is not transmitted from the producer to the user by exchange. At most, after the product has been bought it may be taken up into a new gift process where it is used by someone to satisfy someone else's need. In this case however the original producer of the good is forgotten, and does not pass on gift value to the receiver.

Exchange value is gift value split off from use value and transformed into a relation of abstract qualitative similarity of each commodity with all the other commodities on the market. In fact all the commodities that are produced for the purpose of exchange have in common the abstract quality that they are not gifts, and the work that produces them may be seen as having that same abstract quality. Exchange value is the reciprocal assessment of all the commodities on the market regarding the quantity of abstract labor value they contain. Exchange creates a totalizing exclusive category into which gifts do not enter (at least overtly). The exchange value of a present commodity therefore establishes a potential relation of the exchanger to the commodity of the other which was previously sold and to the future commodity which s/he will eventually buy with the money. The 'gift' of exchange value is just the gift of knowledge about the commodity - of what it is in relation to all the other commodities - the exchange value satisfies that socially based, abstract need to know which is actually a need of all the exchangers regarding all potential sales and acquisitions since each will give up her or his own commodity only for one with an equivalent value. For gift giving, the implication of value is "I give something to you, therefore you are valuable to me." There is a corollary to this however: "I give something to you and not to someone else, so you are valuable to me - more than they are". This also has the effect of giving me the power over the decision. For exchange value the implication is: "I exchange with you for something, so it is valuable to me (while you are not)" Here also the exchanger is valuable because s/he the arbiter of value. Giving to satisfy needs transfers value to the other, while withholding the gift or even the exchange, gives value (in this case power) to the self.

The competition or comparison with others that would be implied by gifts given to one instead of others is displaced in the market onto the products which 'compete' for higher value - and this is registered in something - money- given for them. Then it appears that whoever owns the most money has received the most value. While it appears that the price of labor is similar to the price of other commodities, it only covers the cost of reproduction of the worker. Products and value are created by the work above and beyond the value of the salary. I believe that what Marx calls 'surplus labor' or 'surplus value' may be considered a gift given by the worker to the capitalist and re named 'profit'. It is the exclusion of gifts from the category of exchange that allows us to maintain the illusion that money is 'made' by the use of money or created by exchange.

Psychological basis of Patriarchy and the Market

What I call 'mascultation' is the process in which the boy child realizes that he is in a gender category which is the opposite of the category of his nurturing mother. Until he begins to understand the binary character of his gender name, he lives in a nurturing environment with his mother who is his model. Because babies are born dependent and remain so for a long time, the child must be the recipient of innumerable unilateral gifts given by his mother. In fact this gift environment is all he knows. When the boy begins to understand that his gender name implies he is in a different and opposite category, he has to switch his model of the human from his mother to his father or some other significant male. In doing so he gives up the gift giving that he and his mother shared as the basis for his identity. However, as we shall see gift giving is the basis for everyone's identity and continues to function even when we do not recognize it. For example we will see gift giving in language where it continues to function even though it has been invisible there.

The fact of not recognizing this very creative process in other aspects of life unfortunately makes gift giving seem disadaptive and self sacrificial. Instead it is patriarchy, the system built in opposition to the nurturing identity which creates the scarcity that makes it difficult and it is patriarchal denial which denigrates and disguises the gift. While the boy realizes gift giving is the mothers' realm and not his, gift giving remains an important part of life itself. Constructing any identity without gift giving is almost impossible.

The model that is given to the child to replace the gift giving model is the father, whose identity was constructed in the same way when he was young. This identity is problematic not only because it promotes oedipal challenges but I believe, because it uses the process of naming and the substitution of one model for another as part of its content. Naming the boy 'male' shifts him from one category to another and from one model and social role to another. The word is very important, together with its binary implications. There is no reason for the boy to be considered non nurturing other than his gender construction according to the social interpretation of the term 'male'. The fact that women can be non nurturing and take on what are considered male values proves that the male gender identity is indeed a social construction.

The power of the name over the boy is great. Not only is his identity determined by it but in the wider context Patriarchy itself is constructed around naming and categorization. The market also is constructed as a non giving area of life which functions according to categorization of products as exchange values and naming their value with quantities of money. Authority, law and command are uses of naming and categorization which are characteristic of the patriarchal male role to which the boy can aspire instead of gift giving. His path to achieving them proceeds through competition with his father and his peers for dominance, an aspiration to be 'larger' so that he can be the model, a turning away from emotions (which map needs) and an appearance of self sufficiency. All of these 'gender' characteristics seem to be reason enough for gift givers to give preferentially to males.

Boys sometimes use a substitute for the interaction of gift giving: hitting, to create relations of dominance when, because of their gender identity, they are not allowed to establish relations of community through nurturing. In fact hitting, like gift giving, touches the other person; it influences her or him through giving harm rather than the satisfaction of needs, establishing bonds not of commonality but of domination and submission. Even naming can be used metaphorically for 'hitting' through touching the other by categorization, negative judgments, derogatory epithets and verbal abuse. The interactions of 'hitting' take place on many levels from the schoolyard to the international arena where wars are fought against other countries instead of creating relations with them by unilateral gift giving.

Patriarchy is the elaboration of an artificial identity which functions according to domination and competition in binary opposition to the nurturing mother. The values and rewards of patriarchy are typically those of capitalism to such an extent that we can call our economic system Patriarchal Capitalism. Self-interest, competition, accumulation, dominance and the channeling of gifts towards oneself are the values that move the market and the patriarchal male.

Substitution

It is in the interaction of exchange itself which substitutes not only one product for another but one way of being for another - exchange for gift giving - that we can see the interface between male and female gender constructions and two economies, the market economy and a hidden economy based on gift giving. Exchange for money adds a number of symbolic and practical levels to the interaction of exchange, but it is first the interaction of exchange as such which takes the place of gift giving. The substitution of one product for another is embedded in the substitution of the mode of distribution based on exchange for a mode of distribution based on gift giving and of a model of the human based on the dominant father for a model of the human based on the nurturing mother.

There are thus relationally iconic patterns embedded at different levels in market exchange which are due to a number of factors: the logic of substitution itself; the construction of gender, and its projection into the arena of material property, the consequent de valuing of gift giving; the co-optation of gift giving in the nurturing, maintenance and rewarding of exchange and the system based on it. With the introduction of money there is also the substitution of money for the second product in the exchange transaction, a fact which alters the character of barter, generalizing the equivalent, imposing the quantification and measurement of value, and dividing exchange value from use value (and from gift value). Exchange for money takes the place of, substitutes for, barter which continues to exist alongside exchange for money whenever agreed upon. In a somewhat similar way gift giving also continues to exist alongside exchange which has taken its place as the mode of distribution although giftgiving is much more common than barter, and is continually functionally co opted by exchange.

Exchange, and the market which is built upon it, at the very least provide an arena for the patriarchal male identity to occupy which is non nurturing. They also extrinsicate

many of the elements of the patriarchal identity: binary naming (male or female, exchange or gift), competition, hierarchy, accumulation of power, taking over, taking the place of, as in having power over others (for instance in decisions of authorities or giving commands over another's will by buying his/her labor) This extrinsication of patriarchal elements appears 'real' and feeds back into our view of the world, confirming patriarchy and de valuing gift giving.

A semiotic investigation of the market can look at this aspect of substitution of money for commodities as part of sign construction, of the process in which *illiquid sta pro aliquot*. We might say that all the work that is being done for others in the market, abstract labor, (3) is the 'gift' (then turned back towards self interest) for which money is the material sign. As a means of exchange money also comes to fruition by being given away again, changing hands like a gift, but not a gift. The linguistic character of money lies not only in the various bits of language and numbers imprinted upon it but on the fact that its tokens serve as a quantitative *langue*, by means of which the relations among humans regarding their properties can be altered. Moreover with money there is an important aspect of categorization in which 'naming' a commodity with money causes the transformation of a good into a commodity and its transfer into the category of exchange value. When the commodity is bought, and the money is given in its place it is transferred out of the category of exchange value into the category of use value. If it is not bought it changes category again and becomes waste (... or it may be destroyed, like fruit plowed under, in order for it not to be given away as a gift). At the same time the relations of the human beings involved are changed regarding which properties they possess. The sign character is clearer with money which is a general equivalent than it is in barter where each receives only the individual product of the other in the change of hands. In fact the market itself is the compendium of all the transactions that are taking place at any given time, and its very variety requires a general mediator and an abstraction of value. First money names the commodity as an exchange value and then it names it again relative to all the other commodities on the market, as a quantity of exchange value, according to the endless series of mutually exclusive but reciprocally articulated prices. The value of each commodity is named quantitatively relative to all the others in a compendium of prices which functions like a quantitative version of the *langue* where the paper or metal tokens are the utterances of the quantitative word. Substitution is present in gender naming and change of categories when the father takes the place of the mother as the model for the boy's identity. It is repeated later in competitions for power in which one person takes the place of another. There is also finally, as we have been saying, an important continually ongoing but unrecognized process of substitution where one whole mode of distribution: exchange, is taking the place of another: gift giving. In order to look at this substitution however we need to look at what has been substituted, the gift economy and its cognates. Otherwise the substitute seems to stand alone (fulfilling the patriarchal value of independence, after all).

A quick look at communication as gift giving

My hypothesis is that communication is based on the logic of gift giving. In fact the nurturing which takes place when one person directly satisfies the needs of another, is co-muni-cation. At the material level nurturing actually creates the bodies of others,

who creatively use the gifts that have been given to them to grow and mature. This must happen intensely and repeatedly for many years for young children. Not only are their material bodies created by this nurturing but the psychological subjectivities of the receivers are created or at least deeply influenced by it. Women have been assigned the gift giving role by society and continue to be educated towards it, following the model of their own mothers or primary caregivers.

'A gives X to B' is the formula of a basic transaction in the transmission of signs as well as of material gifts. In fact signs are gifts of gifts, meta gifts. The color or the odor of the flower is a gift to insects by which the gift of the nectar bearing plant is identified. This kind of interpretation of signs as meta gifts is perhaps most easily made by humans who have been the recipients of long term mothering and who create relations through giving and receiving. In fact linguistic signs particularly can be seen as substitute gifts, which take the place of material and/or cultural gifts at another level. By nurturing one another with signs we create each others' subjectivities and our own, both psychologically and, in a mediated way, materially. I am a giver because materially or linguistically I give something specific to you and you are a receiver because materially or linguistically you receive something specific from me. Each person gives unilaterally to others who receive creatively. The roles can reverse in turn taking where each behaves unilaterally however. The basic logic of giving is unilateral. If something is given in order to obtain an equivalent in return the interaction becomes an exchange.

Naming is basically the substitution of a verbal gift, a word, for a non verbal gift - which could be a material object (or less directly an action, a situation, an abstract quality, an imaginary entity). What the name and the non verbal item have in common is their need-satisfying gift character, their ability to be given and received and used creatively by others. If relations can be established between people by giving and receiving material gifts (as happens in mothering), they can also be established by giving and receiving the substitute gifts which are words. These are relations of community and commonality, needs for which arise regarding all aspects our complex external and internal worlds. Our relations to our environment are mediated by our common relations to the words which satisfy our communicative needs. We create our subjectivities in varied and multiple ways regarding our contexts and the many interlocutors we happen to encounter. We receive words and the ways of giving and receiving them from the community we live in and we also receive ways of relating words to each other in syntax in order to give them again.

Communicative Need

Communicative need from the point of view of the gift paradigm is not the need of the speaker, which would fall under the exchange paradigm self-interest rubric, but the communicative need of the listener. We do not bridge the interindividual gap by satisfying our own needs. However, giving communicatively does have effects upon our own personalities and receiving from others does so as well. Nurturing each other not only materially but verbally with words, sentences and discourses makes us who we are for the community and for ourselves. I believe the satisfaction of others' communicative needs proceeds in the following way: Humans need to form common relations regard-

ing all the aspects of our environment, especially those aspects which are or may become important to us in any given moment. These common relations are relations of solidarity and community in which social subjects operate on a par with others as their similars in a world of innumerable qualitative differences. The similarity as beings who are able to perceive things in similar ways and have basic shared needs for food, shelter, warmth and companionship, is constructed by their ability to give and receive similar kinds of need-satisfying gifts. Verbal communication creates the similarity of social subjects by satisfying their communicative needs. These are needs to establish relations to one another regarding the salient aspects of ongoing experience. Anyone, 'A' may notice something in the environment a fact which attributes a certain amount of value to what has been noticed and establishes a minimal relation between that aspect and that person. 'A' sees the potential importance of what s/he has noticed to someone else 'B', who is not at the moment in a value-giving or receiving relation with that item. 'B' therefore has a need for some mediation by which s/he can be put into relation with the item. 'A' gives to 'B' a word-gift which is the socially established means of communication regarding the item, satisfying 'B's' communicative need and establishing a relation between herself and 'B', as well as a potential relation between 'B' and the item as something which now has an equivalent gift which is being presented by one person to another on the verbal plane. In doing this, 'A' has also transformed her own relation to the item into something which has a parallel in the newly established relation of 'B' to the item. Even when the sentences constructed with verbal gifts are negative or hostile towards the listener, there is a level at which the words remain gifts that satisfy communicative needs. The words 'I', 'hate' and 'you' are general social gifts and they are understood as such even when the listener would rather not receive the 'gift' of the sentence in which they are being said.

Inner speech may seem to be an exception to the idea that communicative need is the need of the other. However if we consider inner speech as the internalization of an external process we can see that its telegraphic character may be explained by the fact that most of our communicative needs are already satisfied within us. Only a few communicative needs of the kind having to do with the external process actually arise within us. That is why we usually only have to bring to mind a few key words internally in order to create a relation to the referent as if we had been speaking to another.

Syntax

The syntax by which sentences are constructed can also be interpreted as gift-based. Words are related to each other in sentences the same way people are related to each other: by satisfying each others' needs. For example, in order to talk about a red balloon, a communicative need arises which can be filled not by one word alone but by giving the word 'red' to the word 'balloon', creating a combined word-gift which takes the place of the red balloon in establishing the relations of community of similars between the speaker and listener. On the reality plane, the balloon is seen as having the 'property' red, and it has that property as its receiver for whatever reason and given by whatever giver. The word 'balloon' cannot by itself create a relation between speaker and listener regarding the redness of the balloon. Nor can the word 'red' create a relation between speaker and listener regarding the balloon. Thus each word has a need for

the other word so that together they can satisfy a need of the listener arising from an external situation. The need can be satisfied by giving 'red' to 'balloon' and by giving 'red balloon' to the listener. The relation of the words within the sentence to each other repeats the gift relation between speaker and listener.

The basic noun-verb-complement sentence structure can be seen as giver > gift or service > receiver. Thus in 'The girl hit the ball' 'girl' is the giver, 'hit' is the gift or service and 'ball' is the receiver. Articles, logical connectives and tenses modulate the specificity and the kinds of gifts that are being given and the ways they are given. Because gift giving creates relations, gift-based syntax creates a relational iconicity among word gifts regarding the verbal giving and receiving taking place between speaker and listener. As with the relation of substitution in the market, this iconicity functions to validate the transactions at different levels. It also implies that relations in the world around us are gift-based even when in fact they may not be. That is, a rock is not hard because someone gave the hardness to it but we understand that it is hard because we project property relations onto it which are based on giving and receiving, and then we talk about it using words and syntax which are also based on giving and receiving. However, our present understanding of property relations coming from gift giving is influenced and confused by private property and is certainly as problematic as our understanding of naming based on exchange.

Naming

The aspect of naming, of the substitution which moves our attention from a non verbal gift plane to the verbal gift plane, has been problematic because at a very basic level it provides a model for the substitution that takes place in exchange. Then in turn our concept of naming is influenced by the exchange structure for which naming itself has been a model. . Naming, and its elaboration in the more complex form of the definition, actually are moments in which the gift of a word is first given by someone to someone, satisfying her or his (meta) linguistic need. This gift interaction is not recognized as such by philosophers of language, though they have looked at it often indeed. The name's gift character is not recognized nor is the gift character of what is named.

It is perhaps only by taking this two-pronged approach using the gift hypothesis on the one hand and the critique of exchange on the other that the gift aspects of language can be uncovered. That is because exchange and patriarchy are in serious denial of gift giving at all levels. Instead the substitution aspect of naming is emphasized and its purpose is seen as categorization or evaluation. The service that is performed by the namer or definer is not noticed because we are continually looking through glasses created by exchange.

Exchange, giving in order to receive an equivalent, takes place in order to give without giving. In fact it cancels the other orientation of the gift (or most of it: in a situation of scarcity even agreeing to exchange with someone may appear to be a gift). Living in an economy based on exchange we give value to not-giving and not to giving. Receiving the equivalent in return satisfies one's own need, and is the purpose of the transaction

for each of the exchangers even in barter. At a more complex level the substitution by the material 'name', money, categorizes the product as an exchange value and evaluates it quantitatively. The substitution of one product for another is the obvious part of the interaction, and when money is used in the transaction, the evaluation in an amount of money substituting for the commodity is also clearly important. In the exchange transaction at the material level, gift giving is left aside as unimportant, almost unreal (though as we shall see it is reintroduced later). Categorization and evaluation through substitution and naming with money are practiced repeatedly on a daily basis on the material plane in exchange and they are therefore an ever present model for our idea of what naming may be. By practicing this aspect of naming over and over we influence our thinking towards categorization and away from gift giving. We need to correct for our unconscious use of this model when we are investigating language - and life. Our economic practice influences our theory because it repeats an important aspect of the way we are nurtured with words and come to know- naming- at a material level, with consequences and provisos that contradict the original communicative need-satisfying functions, while at the same time utilizing them.

It is not surprising that we would imitate the process of naming at a material level when we are mediating private property. However this mediation has a sway over our thinking which is potentially very strong just because it repeats a basic moment of our thought processes, on a material level where it contradicts the original gift communication purposes (thus recreating and bridging a perhaps original situation of isolation in that private property is like 'private minds'). If language has a modeling capacity, 'incarnating' our naming process on the material plane while eliminating gift giving gives the form of the naming process as expressed in exchange for money a potentially devastating hidden power over our thinking.

It is perhaps this deeply rooted epistemological connection that makes exchange, the market and its values so virulent. I believe it secretly influences all of western society (and western philosophy) like a radioactive isotope lodged in our bone marrow. It also resides deep within the male gender as the substitution of the male model for the female, according to the use of the gender term 'male' for the child who was previously at one with the mother. In fact the process of exchange also repeats the masculination of the child on the plane of material communication, taking a product out of gift giving by naming it with money as an exchange value, making it not a gift and its producer not a giver. Thus the naming process has a potential feedback loop from exchange into the male gender identity (in addition to its influence upon our thinking generally) while the male gender identity has perhaps been projected into the non giving relations of the market to begin with.

(diagram)

<<<<< theory of naming

naming > male not-giving identity>

exchange { construction of gender

< patriarchal values as market values.

<<<<< Feedback loops

The interpersonal relation-creating aspects of money, the substitute material word-gift or material 'name' are invisible because in fact they are completely different from the relation creating aspects of gifts and word / gifts. In fact money is what it is just because it is a means of exchange, not a gift. The relations it mediates are the mutually exclusive relations of private property and the adversarial and competitive relations of exchange which lead to separation rather than bonding, isolation rather than community. In fact the only common relation of all the participants that is created in the market is the relation to the not-gift, a relation of mutual exclusion in that each is related to his/her property as his/her own because they are related to all others' property as not their own. It is the relation of mutual exclusion which is paradoxically shared, the 'gift' of not-giving, and it is by giving this 'gift' that we construct our social subjectivities as similars. We also have in common the consequences of living in an exchange based society: the loss of the gift and gift value. For example we share the relation to use values we buy which are dispossessed of their previous gift relation-creating value implications. When value is not given to us through gift giving we become hungry for it and frantically seek it by accumulating more and more exchange values and use values. These do not satisfy us however. While gift giving and receiving produces a many-faceted creative subjectivity oriented towards others, exchange limits the self to categorization and judgment according to self interest. The depleted self then becomes greedy for money, material goods and power — the ability to force others to give and to give way

This is a strange situation for creatures who begin life in a gift economy and who communicate by gift giving both materially and linguistically. In our market societies the greatest importance is given to things in the category of the not-gift, and that categorization itself habituates us to the importance of categorization through substitution. In fact we have substituted an exchange economy for a gift economy. This artificial process imposes itself not only ontogenetically, as a child grows up and has to adapt to the economy of exchange but also phylogenetically through the colonialism practiced by countries where the market and patriarchy are more 'developed', upon those which are more gift-based. In fact there is a deep problem connected with this substitution of an exchange economy for a gift economy, just as there is a problem in the substitution of an individual 'male' identity for a female gift giving identity. That is that the gift givers give to the exchangers (the not-givers) as their 'others', a process which gives privilege and abundance as well as value to the not-givers and depletes the givers. This process is

further abetted and encouraged by the not-givers through force and leverage, the creation of scarcity -for example keeping the wife 'barefoot and pregnant', and depleting the economic and environmental context so that scarcity is created where abundance could have been. The many faceted gift subjectivities are created in interactions of giving and receiving with others. Forcing others to give to an exchange- based subjectivity cannot create the kind of creative subjectivity that is constructed through free gift interactions.

Creation of poverty

Wealth is channeled upwards in hierarchies towards the not-givers, a flow which creates a situation of poverty and lack of alternatives for those below, making gift giving difficult and self sacrificial for them. In fact abundance allows gift giving while scarcity makes exchange more viable. People would not exchange if everything were available free and given as gifts. That is why Patriarchal Capitalism needs to artificially create scarcity for the many at the same time that it channels gifts towards the few at the top. Scarcity is created not only by accumulation of wealth in the hands of the few but also by the waste of wealth on non nurturing products such as armaments and drugs, on economic bubbles such as those recently created in the stock market, by individual and international loans, debt and structural adjustment and by corrupt and criminal corporate behavior. The exchange economy with the market which is built around it needs many free and forced gifts in order to function. This need is supplied first by surplus value as a free, though leveraged, gift to the capitalist. We do not see surplus value as a gift because it has been re named 'profit' and appears to be an exchange, a 'return' on investment. In surplus value the free housework of wives can also be counted as a gift which passes to the capitalist through the surplus labor given by the husband. When a woman is the worker, she nevertheless usually does her housework free so the gift is included in the surplus value she produces herself. It has been estimated that women's free labor in the home would add some 40% to the GNP of the USA if it were calculated in monetary terms, more in some other countries. To these free gifts transformed into profit we can add the gifts of nature and the future, the low cost raw materials plundered by corporations and the uncancellable pollution with which they are creating scarcity in the environments of our children and grandchildren.

All of these gifts and many more constitute a sustaining substratum for the market which nurtures it and upon which it depends. By not giving a continuity and a positive value to gift giving the dependency of the market upon gifts cannot be seen. The parasite hides the host and remains unchallenged.

With globalization a new twist in the market has allowed the corporations to categorize many items that were previously gifts as commodities, transferring them from the gift to the exchange economy. For example water, due to pollution and over population, has arrived at the requisite scarcity by which it can become a commodity. This previously free and abundant gift of nature is being seized and privatized to such an extent that it is estimated all the fresh water on earth will be private property by the year 2012. Such previously abundant products as seeds which were traditionally shared among farmers and saved to grow the next years crops have been made scarce by the imposition of

infertile terminator seeds. Traditional species have been patented and commodified by corporations by pretext of invention so that they cannot be produced by their original cultivators without paying royalties. International TRIPS (Trade Related Intellectual Property Rights) laws uphold the rights of the corporations to appropriate the gifts of the many. Even genes are commodified, that biological gift -inheritance- which supposedly gives us language - has become a commodity, re categorized once more by the market. (Surely this is another symptom of the problem).

By privatization resulting in the dispossession and impoverishment of the population, and by the depletion of the environment, pollution and other means of scarcification, corporations diminish the giveability of goods that were previously gifts, free for the public. These goods can no longer be used to materially form the human community. Instead they are used to form the alienated 'community' of exchangers, and the market which is creating the artificial scarcity which allows it to prevail.

Some considerations for social change that we can glean from what we have said above:

Because we begin our investigations from exchange we do not have a viable perspective from which to oppose and dismantle them.

In order to create such a perspective it is important to correct for the biases of exchange in disciplines such as philosophy and semiotics.

The non-gift adversarial relations of exchange are extrinsicated in wars.

The human self image based on exchange and masculation promotes war and violence while a self image based on gift giving would promote peaceful interaction - and create happier multi faceted subjectivities.

The model created by exchange is dangerous because it places a linguistic gift giving activity - naming - on a material level while eliminating gift giving.

Though gift giving is eliminated from the market it comes in through the window at another level because gifts are given to the system of exchange as profit - through surplus value, free housework, cheap raw materials etc.

The situation of parasitism of exchange upon gift giving also repeats itself between countries - first and third worlds.

Globalization is an extension of the parasitism of patriarchal capitalism towards ever new gift areas.

We cannot fix the market by making it more just, because it is based on exchange which, along with masculation, creates subjectivities which hunger for power and excess. It brings with it agendas and values which self perpetuate and cause violence and exploitation.

If language and communication are based on gift giving this is a clear indication of the way we should go to create community and happiness. If the market is based on material non-gift naming, and our practice influences our theory, this is a clear signal of alarm that we should be very careful about a use of categorization that would lead us to anti-gift positions. It is time for the arrow of thought and progress to turn away from its course to disaster, and to support life on earth instead of piercing life through the heart.

Notes:

1. Two recent books, *The Tending Instinct* (2002) by Shelley E. Taylor and *The Language Instinct* (1994) by Stephen Pinker discuss the idea that we are hardwired for those functions. If that is the case perhaps it is the instinct for tending that underlies the instinct for language. But perhaps the metaphor of hardwiring is inexact, too mechanical. From the gift perspective we can see natural processes as gift precursors, from 'genetic heredity' -gift word- to electron 'donation' to the leap of an electric charge across a synapse.
- 2 It is interesting that indigenous societies which have important gift practices can be seen as incorporating mothering in ways that are different from Western Patriarchy. Even as regards potlatch the ability of the chiefs to dominate by being the greatest gift givers seems to me to integrate mothering and to be a better model than domination through force.
- 3 This consideration is an example of how we can use the distinction gift / exchange as a touchstone for our investigations.