

PART ONE



# Discovering the Gift Paradigm



## How I got started

The circumstances of my life brought me to begin thinking about communication as based on gift giving as early as the 1970's but I began thinking about the logic of exchange and the market even earlier. In 1963 as a young woman I married the Italian philosopher, Ferruccio Rossi-Landi and moved to Italy from Texas (USA). The following year he was invited by a group of his colleagues to write about language as seen through the lens of Marx's analysis of the commodity and money in *Capital*. He developed a theory along those lines, which can be seen in his books, especially *Il linguaggio come lavoro e come mercato (Language as labor and trade)* (1968) and *Linguistics and Economics* (1974). I was completely fascinated by this project and spent a lot of time throughout those years trying to fit the pieces of the complex puzzle together. For me it was as if language and exchange (trade, the market) were in some ways really the same thing—but some of the pieces just didn't fit. There was a sense of sharing and cooperation, a kind of life-enhancing creativity in language that was just absent from most commercial relations as I understood them. During those years I gave birth to our three daughters and was taking care of them. Because I had been concentrating on the comparison between language and exchange I could not avoid noticing that they were learning to talk long before they learned about exchange for money and before they were doing anything that might be called work. Maybe, I thought, it is language that comes first individually (and historically) and exchange derives from language. It seemed improbable that exchange could have made the same kind of fundamental contribution to our being human that language made. I knew that the indigenous peoples of the Americas had not had money or markets as such before the European conquest, yet they certainly spoke. Meanwhile I tried not to manipulate my children, or anybody else because that was antithetical to the way I thought human relations

should be. The kind of—if you do this, I will do what you want—exchange, seemed to me to be a negative way to behave.

At any rate at the time I would not have thought of looking at communication as gift giving if I had not been trying to distinguish communication from exchange and to find a way to salvage language from the relations of capital and the market and even from work, considered as the production and use of tools. The theory my husband was developing, while fascinating, did not convince me. There was something else. An image came to me. The construction of Marx's analysis as well as of my husband's theory had a false floor. Underneath it was another layer where there was a hidden treasure, or perhaps better, a spring that was welling up, the spring of what I later began to call "the gift economy."

I spent two years in the US in the early 70's with my children, and used the free time I had there, to write and think about language and communication. From the work I did then I published two essays in semiotics journals and these are now included as the last two chapters of this book. I just want to describe them briefly now to introduce the ideas that developed into a theory of gift giving and language. The first essay is "Communication and exchange"(1980) where I write about communicative need, and describe words as verbal elements people use for communicative need-satisfaction. Money then appears to be a kind of materialized word, used to satisfy the peculiar communicative need that arises from the mutually exclusive relations of private property. The second essay is "Saussure and Vygotsky via Marx"(1981). I had read L.S. Vygotsky (1962[1934]) and linked his idea of abstract concept formation with Marx's idea of money as the general equivalent. In Vygotsky's experiment any item of a set can be taken as the exemplar for a concept of that set, but it has to be held constant or the concept does not develop as such. If the exemplar varies, the abstraction is incomplete and relevant common qualities cannot be separated from

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<sup>1</sup> The fact that the abstraction is not complete alters but does not halt our understanding. There are various kinds of thought processes that Vygotsky calls 'complexes', for example, the 'family name' complex or the 'chain' complex. If

irrelevant qualities.<sup>1</sup> I realized that the general equivalent, money, could be understood as the exemplar for the abstraction of the concept of value in the market. Money measures the ‘common quality’ of exchange value in commodities and leaves aside as irrelevant whatever does not have that quality. Whatever is not commodified does not have the quality of exchange value and thus appears to be irrelevant to the market, outside its “concept.”

Although I had read Malinowsky (1922) and Mauss (1925) as a student many years earlier, I did not immediately see the continuity between gift giving and communication, perhaps because the term used to describe the process in indigenous cultures was gift “exchange” and I had made the distinction between exchange and unilateral need satisfaction. However I remember that by 1978 I had embraced the connection between communication and the gift giving of indigenous peoples. I also realized at the time that market bias was so strong that everyone, including anthropologists, used the term ‘exchange’ without questioning it. There could be a different perspective though, I thought. If communication was based on gift giving, maybe societies that did not have markets used their gift giving for communication. Then exchange and markets could be seen as altered gift giving, altered communication.

In that year also I encountered another important idea, which redirected my thinking. After my divorce from Rossi-Landi, I began going to a feminist consciousness-raising group. There I found out that women’s free work in the home is an enormous unrecognized contribution that women are giving, both to their families and to the economy as a whole. Part of that work of course is childcare, the free services that mothers give to children on a daily basis. Satisfying another’s communicative need is that kind of thing, I realized, a unilateral gift that even without an immediate counterpart, establishes a human relation. Even in dialogue, what is happening is not exchange

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we can stop privileging abstraction perhaps we can re value the complexes. The image of the twisted strands of a rope is shared by Wittgenstein as well as indigenous people talking about human relations.(see Jeanette Armstrong). On the other hand, the family name complex seems to me to be similar to the relational pattern of private property.

but turn taking in giving unilateral gifts. I speak and you understand what I say, whether or not you reply.

Ferruccio had talked about a kind of inevitability of understanding the verbal products that come ungarbled to one's healthy ears and brain, if one knows the language. It seemed clear to me that if it is inevitable that others understand our words, our giving our words to others and their receiving them will not be contingent upon a reply. If there is a reply, it is couched in the same unilateral gift logic as the previous speaker's words. Even questions, which are asked in order to receive a reply, are verbal products, which are given and received as such, unconditionally. That is, they are understood anyway even if no answer is actually given. In market exchange instead, one does not give up one's product except in exchange for money. Both seller and buyer necessarily participate in the *do ut des* self-reflecting and contingent logic of exchange.

As the years have passed since the 60's when I first began thinking about all of this, it has become more important than ever to distinguish communication from exchange, and to refuse to see the logic of exchange as the basic human logic. In fact I think that as a society we have believed acritically in the fundamental value of the logic of exchange and we have consequently embraced and nurtured an economic system that is extending itself parasitically over the planet, feeding on the unilateral gifts of all. These are the unilateral gifts of tradition, of culture, of nature, of care and of love as well as the forced or leveraged unilateral gifts imposed by exploitation, the gifts of cheap or free labor. If we look at exchange as the basic human logic, those who do it best will seem to be the most 'human'. Conversely, those who do not do it well, or do not succeed in the market, will seem to be 'defective', less human, and therefore more exploitable. In Capitalism the values of Patriarchy—competition, hierarchy, domination—have been united with the values of the market. In order to understand this merger and justify some startling similarities in what are usually considered widely different areas, we need to look beyond both Capitalism and Patriarchy to the patterns underlying them.

I used my understanding of the similarity between Vygotsky's

concept formation process<sup>2</sup> and Marx's general equivalent to develop a theory of Patriarchal Capitalism in which neither male dominance nor the market economy is primary. Rather both are caused by epistemological distortions and incarnations of our concept forming processes, distortions that in turn derive from the social imposition of binary gender categories. For this reason the values of Capitalism are similar to those of Patriarchy. In Patriarchy, males vie to dominate, that is, to achieve the general equivalent or exemplar position, which has become not just an element in the distribution of goods on the market or a way of organizing perceptions, but a widespread cultural pattern as well as an individual position of 'power over' others. In Capitalism, those who have the most, who have succeeded in dominating economically, are the exemplars of the concept 'man' extended to 'human'. This masculine race to the top position can be seen at other levels as well. For example it can be seen in the way that nations vie with each other for supremacy, to become the 'exemplar' nation, which dominates economically and militarily. Different areas of life, the military, business, religion, even academia, seem to incarnate the concept form as a life agenda for many people when instead it should be functioning merely as a mental process of abstraction. In each area the 'exemplar' position is invested with special power or value, and is not seen as just any item that is being used as a point of reference for sorting members of categories.<sup>3</sup> In fact a flow of gifts towards the item in the 'top' position is created and

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<sup>2</sup> There are similarities between Vygotsky's experiment and what is presently called 'prototype theory' in cognitive psychology.(Roasch ) In fact Vygotsky could be called a precursor of prototype theory though I have never seen him mentioned in this light. He showed experimentally how categories can be constructed using a prototype.(see ch. below ) On the other hand Marx's general equivalent can be seen as the prototype of economic value. For a good description of prototype theory see Patrizia Violi ( ).

<sup>3</sup> I found the work of Jean-Josef Goux to be very useful. His extensions of the general equivalent to explain positions of social power are more psychoanalytically based than mine, which come from cognitive psychology. While I agree with his critique of these positions as phallic I believe they have an epistemological basis stemming from concept formation distorted by socially constructed gender. Also his view of the phallus as general equivalent of body parts works

justified by the attribution of this special value.

This view of the 'top' as the exemplar allows us to see Patriarchy and exchange as embedded not in our brains or chemistry but in our minds and in society, not as something inevitable but as something we can radically change. It allows us to see the problem as deriving from our socialization of boys into the male gender in binary opposition to something else: a gift giving process, *which is actually the human way*. This socialization varies culturally but the problem has arisen particularly intensely with the Euro-American construction of gender, and the externalization of this construction in the market and Capitalism. Like the male exemplar, which is used in forming the concept of 'human', money, as the exemplar of economic value, is an incarnation of the equivalent position in the concept-forming process. This distorted logical structure can extend to all cultures because it is as familiar to them as the way they think. Patriarchy, which puts the father or male leader in the position of exemplar of the human, can infect previously non- or less patriarchal cultures in a similar way.

### **The exchange paradigm**

Patriarchal Capitalism justifies itself by a worldview I call the 'exchange paradigm', which frames everything in terms of the exchange logic, from the marriage market to military 'exchanges', from justice as payment for crimes, to the equations of a self reflecting consciousness. This paradigm arises from and promotes an area of activity, the market, where gift giving is absent or concealed and where Patriarchal egos find a non-giving field of endeavor in which to practice the quest for dominance. The seemingly neuter and therefore neutral 'objective' exchange approach conceals and denies the importance of unilateral gift giving at every turn, while at the same time making it possible for many hidden gifts to be given to the exchange-based *system*. I just mentioned for example, the gifts of women's free labor in the home. There are also the gifts, which are

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for males but not for females. Then only those having that peculiar psychological construction can become the exemplar of the human.

contained in the surplus labor of workers, and which create surplus value: that part of the labor that is not covered by the salary and is therefore a free gift given to and accumulated by the Capitalist (though constrained and leveraged) from the worker. Innumerable free gifts of nature and culture are given to the system, and through the system to individual capitalists and to corporations. These are not viewed within the exchange paradigm as gifts but rather are seen as 'deserved' by the investor who extracts, privatizes, exploits and pollutes. The gifts, which are given to those at the 'top' are concealed by renaming them 'profit' and as such they motivate the whole systemic mechanism.

Although Capitalism is now being extensively criticized by the anti globalization movement, a clear and radical alternative has not yet been collectively embraced because the logic of exchange itself has not been identified as problematic. While fair trade seems to be better than unfair trade, embracing it obscures the possibility that trade itself foments exploitation. Moreover, the logic of the unilateral gift continues to be unrecognized, discredited, and even sometimes despised. The women's movement, while decidedly anti Patriarchal, is not in many of its aspects anti Capitalistic. In fact the links between Capitalism and Patriarchy have not been clearly delineated. Instead it appears that only by being absorbed into the work force as persons with economic agency in the system, have women been able to free themselves from domestic slavery, disempowerment and 'dependency'. As happens in any situation in which the market takes over a previously free area of the world, causing at least short-term improvements for some of the inhabitants, some women who have been effectively absorbed by capitalism have had an improvement in the level of their lives. They have had an increase in personal freedom but have also become dependent on a market situation that is beyond their control. This state of transition or assimilation, like the transition from pre-Capitalist to Capitalist cultures, gives women a chance to participate in and become conscious of both paradigms. The recognition of a shared gift perspective could link the women's movement cross-culturally internally. It could also link it externally with movements of indigenous, colonized and exploited people of

both genders who continue to participate consciously or unconsciously in the gift paradigm. This is possible if we can leave aside the biological differences between male and female as the determinants of gender and base solidarity on processes and values coming from economic gender identities.

By recognizing ‘female’ and ‘male’ as economic behavior patterns, having to do with the modes of distribution—of gift giving or exchange—we can also look at some cultures as economically ‘female’ and others as economically ‘male’. The two economic ‘structures’, gift giving and exchange, give rise to characteristic and distinguishable ideological ‘superstructures’, which are the value systems and world views that I am calling the gift and the exchange paradigms. That is, the cultures issuing from the practices of gift giving or of exchange have to do respectively with celebration of the other, compassion, and the affirmation of life, or on the other hand with subjugation of the other, egotism, competition and the affirmation of ‘value-free objectivity’.<sup>4</sup> These two cultures co exist at various levels, and, as I was saying, can also be found within the same person, who may also be practicing both economies.

There are various ways of adjusting to the contradiction between paradigms. For example a cutthroat business person can be nurturing towards h/er children and believe in the values of

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<sup>4</sup> Qualitative value has to do with our attribution or giving of importance to the valued item. We sometimes even attribute *intrinsic* value to things (or people). We make this attribution even when we *recognize* the value of something. The attribution of *exchange* value is done through the mechanism of market exchange where the aspect of the attribution as a subjective gift is left aside (or calculated as marginal utility). The cancellation of the qualitative gift from the understanding of exchange value gives the market an aura of objectivity and neutrality, which is accepted by all. Coffee really does cost \$5.00 a pound, just test it by trying to give the grocer less for it. (On value see the discussions below and those in my book, *For-Giving* as well as *Communication and Exchange* and *Saussure and Vygotsky* at the end of this volume). Exchange value displaces other qualitative evaluations on to a sort of competition among products to be the best of their kind, and therefore the most worth the price (as if they were competing for the top position most worthy of the money name, that is to be the exemplar accepted by all).

Patriarchal Capitalism as well as those of the family. Living within this paradox seems to be the right wing way. Another way of dealing with the paradox is to extend the gift values within the exchange economy, as happens in the welfare state, without however shifting paradigms or eliminating market exchange. (Also it remains to be seen how many gifts are given by external sources such as colonies to countries providing welfare internally. In this case the welfare actually consists of gifts given by economically and politically colonized countries.). Both the right wing business ideology and the Social Democratic welfare state position their opposition within the exchange paradigm.

The complex situation we are describing is further complicated by the fact that the two kinds of economic identities are not independent and unrelated but 'male', and especially Patriarchal, economies and cultures are based on the denial and distortion of gift giving and the direction of the flow of gifts towards the dominators. For example, the Global North is now acting as an economic 'male', attempting to extract the gifts of the South, which it is forcing or manipulating into an economically 'female' position.<sup>5</sup>

The market, like the Patriarchal identity, is a social construction that is made to receive free gifts. Because in the 'developed' countries women have been assimilated as market agents and their gifts are now being taken not as direct free work only but as surplus value, they have gained some equality with men as 'economic males' and have achieved some 'economic male' privileges. As the economy of Patriarchal Capitalism in the North has somewhat relinquished its hold on the gifts of women, allowing them more equality with men, and has sometimes been forced by the workers' movements to diminish some of its profits, it has displaced many of its gift-extracting mechanisms into other areas. The new gifts that come from the Global South to the North, are added to other gifts that for centuries have

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<sup>5</sup> In fact any person or entity forced into the gift giving position appears to be female as has happened with 'nature'. The gift characteristics of the category 'female' have been broadened surreptitiously to merge with 'nature' while the category 'male' has been narrowed to exclude both nature and gift giving, and made superior to them.

been flowing from women to men, from indigenous peoples to colonial powers, from people of color to whites, and from the general public to corporations. Patriarchal Capitalism is commodifying previously free gift areas such as traditional knowledge, seeds, species, water, even blood and body parts. Poor women and children are being commodified and trafficked for the sex trade. The 'female' economies of the South, and gifts of nature and tradition are being seized and transformed into new 'food' for the hungry market mechanism.

By recognizing that the market is not an inevitable *sui generis* process however, and looking at it dispassionately as a transposition and incarnation of the concept formation process as it is used in sorting, (particularly in the sorting and formulation of gender) we can approach it in a new way without fear, and we can peacefully dismantle it.

## Subjectivities

The two logics, exchange and gift giving, also produce different kinds of subjectivities. The practice of exchange creates an ego-oriented ego according to its logic of self-interest while the practice and logic of gift giving promote more other-orientation. Exchange is a gift turned back upon itself, doubled and made contingent. It requires quantification while gift giving is mainly qualitative. Exchange is ego-oriented and gives value to the ego, while gift giving is other-oriented and gives value mainly to the other. Exchange places the exchangers in adversarial positions; each tries to get more than the other out of the transaction. The values of patriarchy are implicit in exchange, and drive Capitalism, as each contender struggles to reach the top of the hierarchy to own more and to become Big. The kind of ego that is based on the exchange logic is necessary for the market, while the gift giving personality is eliminated, or is easily victimized and becomes the host of the exchange ego.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Looking at personality formation as deriving from the practice of the different logics, allows us to respond to questions about nurturing men and dominating women. Individuals of either gender can behave according to the economic

One superstructural consequence of ego formation based on the logic of exchange is that consciousness itself is considered in the light of exchange as self-reflecting in a sort of equation of value with itself. The subconscious is thus placed in the gift giving position, giving energy, memories, ideas to this self reflecting mechanism. We might say that our idea of consciousness in its capacity for self-evaluation is made in the image of preparation for exchange. The self-reflecting consciousness floats upon the gifts of the subconscious and of experience, without a clear indication of how those gifts come into the mind. Similarly the market floats on a sea of gifts without a clear indication of where they come from and how they constitute profit.

In individuals, the coexistence and conflict, as well as symbiosis of these two kinds of ego structures, one tending towards others and therefore somewhat transparent to itself, the other tending towards itself, and self reflecting, can be seen as a result of the exchange paradigm, not its cause. It is not that human beings are greedy and therefore create the market and capitalism. Rather, the system has an existence that is over and above that of its individual participants. Patriarchy, the market and capitalism create the human ego structures that are well adapted to their needs. Greed is one of the human qualities that is functional to the maintenance and development of the market as such. Competition for narcissistic self aggrandizement and dominance are played out on the economic plane because otherwise the market would not 'grow' and maintain its control over other possible ways of distributing goods i.e., gift giving. Patriarchy supplies the motivation that drives Capitalism, as well as the individuals who embody the motivation, with the ego structures and belief systems that justify the embodiment. Capitalism supplies the tools and rewards with which individuals and now corporations carry out the Patriarchal agendas on the terrain of so called 'distribution' of goods to needs through exchange.

Mothering, on the other hand, involves the unilateral free distribution of goods and services to young children and a consequent

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logic, which is socially identified with the other gender. However, on a broader scale the logic of exchange dominates, while the logic of gift giving gives way.

creation of human bonds between givers and receivers. Society has assigned this role to women. Although we are characterizing it here as the distribution of goods, mothering is usually not seen as an economic category. In fact by overvaluing exchange and making it dominant, infusing it with Patriarchal motivations, the market devalues mothering, making it dependent and subservient. Categorization itself, of males as not-giving and superior, and of commodities as not-gifts, disqualifies mothering/gift giving as a non-category. Shifting to the gift paradigm allows us to see that the direct distribution of goods and services to needs that is present in mothering can be understood as an example of the practice of an alternative economy. As a mode of distribution, it is present in all societies because it is required, not by the biology of women, but by the biology of children. That is, for a very long period of time, children's biology does not allow them to independently satisfy most of their own or others' needs. It requires and elicits other-orientation and unilateral gift giving from their caregivers.<sup>7</sup>

## **Patriarchy**

Children begin their lives with their mothers in a relation—creating communicative gift economy and they begin learning language at the same time. However binary gender categorizations in language and in society soon intervene and the boy child finds that he belongs

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<sup>7</sup> Perhaps it is partly this fact of being uncategorized that causes the unilateral gift giving that takes place in mothering to be unrecognized by European anthropologists and sociologists, even those who do pay attention to 'gift exchange'. Although mothering, like language, is a cultural universal, it is usually mentioned only as an aside, if at all, by those who study gift giving, from Marcel Mauss to the sociologists of the journal MAUSS. This lack is not only negative in that it distorts the picture of human gift giving generally but it also denies women their rightful place as the leaders of change towards an alternative economic way which they are already practicing and which is embedded in the human practice of communication. The existence of successful gift economies controlled by women in societies such as the Iroquois demonstrate mothering on a social scale. (Mann 2000). but they have been misinterpreted by European scholars and destroyed by colonization.

to a category that is the opposite of that of his nurturing mother.<sup>8</sup> That is, if the mother's most salient characteristic for the child is the unilateral satisfaction of needs, the fact that he belongs to a binarily opposite gender category implies for him that he will not unilaterally satisfy needs. There is very little in the boy's life at this early age that is not part of the gift giving and receiving economy. He learns to deny its importance however, transform it into something else and even take categorization itself as part of the content of his identity. The father (who went through the same process when he was a child) becomes for the boy the exemplar of the human, taking the place of the mother who often paradoxically gives more to the father and son than she does to herself or her daughter. That is, she gives and gives value preferentially to those whose gender identity requires that they NOT give.<sup>9</sup> The displacement of the mother model and take-over by the father of the role of exemplar of the (not giving) human is the seed of the dominance of male over female, categorization over communication, and eventually the exchange economy over gift giving. While the boy exchanges one model for the other, giving up the mother and gift giving and receiving the father and a masculine identity in her place, the mother gives way and gives him up unilaterally, encouraging him to be masculine and very rarely even considering that she might remain as his more human role model.<sup>10</sup>

The ego-oriented human relations of economic exchange are a socially-created opposite of gift relations and they provide a way for society to distribute goods to needs without appearing to mother. The market is an area of life where, by exchanging, we can give without giving and receive without receiving. In fact, in the market we must 'deserve' what we receive, that is, we must have previously 'given' an equivalent for which the present 'gift' is a payment. The equality of commodities and money in exchange cancels out the

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<sup>8</sup> See Nancy Chodorow's *The Reproduction of Mothering*. I call this process, which I also discuss in *For-Giving*, 'masculation'.

<sup>9</sup> This paradox is kept in place by denying importance to the gift giving that is embodied in mothering while on the other hand overvaluing exceptional or self destructive giving, as in sacrifice.

<sup>10</sup> See Olga Silverstein: *The Courage to Raise Good Men* (1994).

gift. Since we get back the equivalent of what we gave, there is no visible transfer of value from one person to the other.

The market is one of the solutions society has provided for the conundrums created by the imposition of binary gender categories upon its children. It is an area of life and a location where people can deny their other orientation and turn production for others to their own advantage, a place where they will not be accused of mothering. The fact that women can participate equally with men in this ungiving arena simply shows that its roots are not biological but social, deriving from a social, not biological, construction of gender.

## Hitting

The escalation towards dominance through competition can be done not just economically of course but also physically, psychologically, linguistically and institutionally, at the level of individuals and at the level of groups. One of the first non-nurturing interactions that boys learn is *hitting*. In fact hitting may be seen as a transposed gift in that one person reaches out and touches the other, transmitting physical energy, not to nurture but to hurt and to dominate. The fact that this is a transposed gift can be glimpsed in such linguistic expressions as “Take that!” and “You asked for it!” Such physical competition permits the one who can ‘give the most’ harmful blows, to dominate.

As many women have noticed, there is continuity in kind between the backyard brawl and war. The same principles seem to apply in both. The technology is different though symbolically concomitant. Since the penis is the identifying property of those in the non-nurturing social category, ‘male’, it is not surprising that the individuals and the groups that are competing for dominance provide themselves with ever larger and more dangerous category markers, from sticks to swords and from guns to missiles. Moreover, competition between sons and fathers for dominance pits those with the smaller phallic properties against those with the larger. Thus in an attempt to achieve the position of the exemplar (the dominant father) groups supply themselves with ever larger instruments of death,

which can destroy ever more people and goods. The aspect of size can then be substituted by the aspect of effect, in that WMDs whether biological or nuclear become the mark of the dominant male ‘exemplar’ nation.

This collective striving to achieve the dominant male position can have the effect of confirming the masculine identity for the men who fight and even for those who are just members of the nation. Women can fight or give support to those who fight or participate in other ways, also just as members of the nation. Society thus provides a way for groups to achieve a collective male identity that is independent from individual biological gender in that both men and women can participate in it. Male dominance is then read as neuter objective *power* over others and both women and men can achieve it as can, at a collective level, nations or corporate entities. Both women and men can also of course participate in a collective male dominant identity of their nation (or corporation) even if individually they are subservient or powerless. Such is the content of patriotism (or company loyalty). Racism is the participation in the collective male dominant identity of the supposed ‘exemplar’ race. Classism is the participation in the collective male dominant identity of a supposed ‘exemplar’ class.

## **Categorizing**

Psychological competition for dominance can take the place of physical competition. Categorizing others as inferior replays the gender distinction over and over, placing some people who are usually also themselves the categorizers, in a ‘superior’ category to which those in ‘inferior’ categories must give both materially and psychologically. At the same time the positive gift giving and receiving that is actually continually being done in material and linguistic communication is unrecognized as such and disparaged—or over valued and made unreachable for ordinary people. In its place we have neuter and neutral ‘objective’ categories which reflect the neutral non giving market categories: exchange value, production, distribution (through exchange) consumption, supply and demand,

monetized labor, commodities, money, capital, all of which are constructed on the back of the gift economy.

The logic of categorization, undergirded by the selection process of the market, determines the kinds of things to which value will be given, and the degree of visibility they will have, effectively leaving out gift giving as an aspect of knowing. Inclusion and exclusion are made to precede the satisfaction of needs, which are “legitimately” ignored if for example, those who have the needs are not included in the category of those having money to pay for the products. The over-emphasis on categorization in the economic realm influences an over-emphasis on categorization in the rest of our thinking. We do not consider our intellectual production in terms of what needs it may be satisfying but only think of it as (giftless) acts of inclusion and exclusion of one kind or another that we are performing.

Gift giving is made arduous by its co existence with exchange. Since gift giving is cooperative while exchange is competitive, it loses the competition by not competing. The context of adversarial exchange creates suspicion in the community and gift giving can appear to be a moral ego trip or a veiled bid for power and recognition. In fact, especially in a context where exchange relations are the norm, gift giving *can* become manipulative, and can be used for ego-oriented purposes, deviating from its unilateral transitive path, and doubling back upon itself. The worst aspect of the competition between exchange and gift giving is that the exchange paradigm really cannot compete in a fair way with gift giving, because living according to the logic of the gift would be life enhancing, while living according to exchange is biopathic. Therefore in order to prevail, the exchange paradigm has created a system that cripples gift giving and makes it dependent on the market for access to the means of giving. By diverting the flow of gifts into the hands of a few,<sup>11</sup> by wasting ‘excess’ wealth on armaments, drugs and symbols of power (skyscrapers, monuments, jewels), as well

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<sup>11</sup> The wealth of the 225 richest people in the world is equal to that of the poorest 2.5 billion people. The 3 wealthiest people have more than the 48 lowest GDP countries. In 1998, 20 percent of the world’s people living in the highest-income countries accounted for 86 percent of total private consumption expenditures while the poorest 20 percent accounted for only

as by privatizing the free gifts of nature and culture, Patriarchal Capitalism *creates* the scarcity that is necessary to penalize gift giving and keep it subservient. In fact even the flow of gifts to the wealthy must be regulated so that not too much will trickle back down. The tide must be kept low; otherwise all the ships would sail away.

Although girl children are not socialized to construct a gender identity that opposes that of their nurturing mothers, and many of them will have to do mothering themselves as adults, they can be encouraged to strive for inclusion in ‘superior’ social categories and to achieve the ‘male’ exemplar position. In a context of scarcity, where categorization itself has become excessively important due to the binary categorization of gender, girls may also strive to be included in the privileged social category of people to whom others must give. Nevertheless, because children require unilateral gift giving to survive, women who have been socialized towards this work (or at least have not been socialized in opposition to it), remain in the gift logic in many parts of their lives, even when they do not have children and even when they have been absorbed into the market and see the world mainly through the eye glasses of the exchange paradigm.

The practice of the gift logic at the material and at the verbal level can take place without our being conscious of it as such. In fact unilateral gift giving is transitive and gives value and attention to the other, while exchange requires quantification and measurement, reflecting back to the exchangers an image of what they are doing. We in the North are accustomed to the exchange way of knowledge and self-reflecting consciousness and so we embrace what we see in that way, which is of course NOT the gift. Gratitude might make us look more at the gifts we receive and give but if we make our gift contingent on the others’ gratitude, the gift is no longer unilateral. In the context of exchange, even gratitude becomes problematic. It risks seeming or actually becoming a payment for gifts received. There is also a sort of scarcity of gratitude because ‘deserving’ appears to be

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1.3 percent. That’s down from 2.3 percent three decades ago) (UNDP 1998—on [www.cooperativeindividualism.org](http://www.cooperativeindividualism.org)).

more honorable than receiving. What is necessary now is to see gift giving and exchange from a broader 'meta' point of view that includes both as modes of distribution and as paradigms, look at the way they interact, and deliberately restore the consciousness of the gift where it has been erased.

### **Other points of view**

It has become commonplace among philosophers to deny that there can be unilateral gift giving. I have already made the case for seeing this tendency as coming from the mind-set of the exchange paradigm and Patriarchy. However I would like to address a few of the objections that are proposed. First I would like to say that even if there were no concrete examples of unilateral gift giving (and I definitely do not believe this to be the case<sup>12</sup>) the logic of the unilateral gift would still function, just as if there were no actual cases of exchange, its logic would still function as a logic.

Derrida and Bourdieu believe that there can be no unilateral gift that declares itself as such since this very declaration would promote recognition and therefore the gift would become an exchange. My answer to this is twofold. First, if we were to generalize gift giving to a whole community, everyone would be doing it. Therefore no special merit would be attached to individuals who do it and recognition for it would be irrelevant. The way to make people 'modest' about gift giving is to change society so that everyone is doing it. Secondly, in giving value to others it may sometimes be useful not to emphasize one's own gift, so that value is attributed directly to the receiver because of h/er own existence not because of the gift giver's understanding and satisfaction of the need. The gift giver thus self effaces, and the child or the husband or boss receives the kudos. This syndrome is fairly common among women who recognize a need of

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<sup>12</sup> Indeed these examples are everywhere, though we do not usually interpret them as gifts. For example Wittgenstein's famous phrase about the task of philosophy's being to 'get the fly out of the bottle' does depend on our unilaterally satisfying the need of the fly.

the other for extra value attribution. Unfortunately, it strengthens the parasite's hold upon and denial of the host (as does the constraint present in exchange). On the other hand in a gift-based community, the attribution of value to the receiver would be more commonplace, and the extra need for the attribution of value might be less. There would also be less room for ego expansion of the receiver through the illusion of deserving.

I believe that an understanding of gift giving as an alternative paradigm and economy can resolve the paradoxes contained in recognizing it, even before it is actually practiced as an economy instead of exchange. First, if we look at gift giving as a fundamental aspect of the human, unilateral gift giving is not just an individual act and it is not very surprising that some people still succeed in practicing it in spite of the dominance of exchange. In fact by recognizing gift giving in the practice of mothering, care giving and housework, for example, we do not create an exchange that would 'pay back' women for the unrecognized gifts they have given through the centuries. Rather we normalize gift giving as a fundamental, though denied, aspect of humanity. Secondly, if women realize that they are contributing to the parasitism and placing themselves in the host position by not acknowledging the gifts they are actually giving, they can perhaps bring the paradigm itself, and the mechanism of the exploitation of their gifts to light. This would both illuminate gift giving as valuable and throw light upon the defects and limitations of exchange. These solutions to the problem of the coexistence of gift giving and exchange come from the generalization of gift giving, and the refusal to consider it only as an individual moral quality or psychological bent or worse, as a condition of oppression due to the unfortunate circumstance of being born into the wrong category.

Perhaps the recognition that is given to someone who is acting disinterestedly is really an excessive enthusiasm, which reflects the longing for the gift paradigm, due to the felt negativity of the self interested self.

Another unrecognized paradox that occurs when the unilateral gift is denied is that those who vehemently deny it are doing so in the name of the truth or at least of disabusing the audience of false

hopes. This is an altruistic motivation, in that the denier of the gifts is trying to satisfy the need of the listeners for the truth, for finding a way to behave appropriately and humanly. (See my definition of truth-telling below p.111). Thus the very motivation of denying the gift is a gift motivation. Such writers want to 'help' their readers by keeping them from hoping for gift giving. (Even the cynical phrase, "there is no free lunch" does not acknowledge the fact that women have been cooking lunch free for centuries).

One particularly widespread problem is caused by the term 'gift exchange' which frames the gift in terms of constrained reciprocity, implying that the relations established have to do with debt and obligation, and do not arise from the gift transaction itself. My attempt here is to start sooner, seeing the relation-creating capacity of the unilateral gift itself and recognizing that it is both widespread and pervasive. Even when there is some part of a gift that has become exchange, the creativity of the remaining gift is such that transactions are carried forward by it. For example, when a gift is returned in 'symbolic exchange' an extra amount is added to it. This addition can be considered a unilateral gift and expresses the 'honour' of the return giver.<sup>13</sup> Like the self-effacement of the giver, the addition of an extra gift to the return gift is a cultural variation, a way of playing upon the logical implications gifts have. The return is no longer just the second half of an exchange, but the reciprocator is now a giver of a new gift in h/er own right, with a generous agency that is different from the balancing of the scales.

Trying to construct an ethic in a situation where unilateral gift giving is everywhere denied is a distorted endeavor. All of the roles: the subject, the other and the collectivity are necessarily misinterpreted. Thus the function of ethics is to try to limit patriarchy and exchange in favor of mutual respect or lack of harm, in the absence of positive gifts and in a situation of market dominance. In spite of the predominance of exchange many people seem to recognize and mourn the importance of gift giving. The appeal to ethics is informed by this nostalgia. However, the only way to actually achieve

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<sup>13</sup> See Godelier? on the addition of 'more'.

a peaceful and compassionate society is through a paradigm shift towards a gift economy. In the meantime, accessing the gift paradigm beneath the exchange paradigm allows us to see functional psychological patterns of transitivity and community that would construct us as human in a way that is different from the ways we are constructed as creatures of the market and Patriarchy.

If we can restore gift giving to our conception of the world (and more so if we can restore it to our economic interactions) we can find ways of interacting that do not require punishment for wrong doing or recognition for right doing, both of which are exchanges. The patterns laid down in gift giving at different levels are the patterns of material and linguistic communication that help to make us who we are. It is their apotheosis and ours, which would allow a felicitous and abundant society for all, not the use of laws based on patterns of exchange to regulate our worst impulses or force 'responsibility' i.e., increased gift giving, in the face of the increased needs caused by Patriarchy and the market. We can transition from one paradigm to the other by taking the responsibility to critique exchange and working to transform society. With the diminishing of exchange, a flow of gifts at all levels would allow for the development of new needs and new individual and collective gifts, a change in our subjectivities, an evolution of the human being away from the isolated patriarchal *homo sapiens-economicus*, towards community-oriented *homo donans*.

