

Gift Economy: the Mother Economy

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Abstract: Anthropologists who study gift exchange as an economy and as a social function usually believe that unless there are reciprocal constraints, such as debt and obligation—there are no relations at all. I disagree and believe that mutual recognition, understanding and trust develop between the unilateral giver and receiver, together with positive expectations regarding similar interactions in the future. This is clear in positive mother-child relations. The fact that children can and do take turns, in an ordered sequence and do imitate their mothers does not depend on a relation of obligation as debt (*do ut des* exchange). Instead, it is a learning strategy that develops well in the trust that comes from gift giving. This forms another kind of gift: the gift of taking responsibility for the choice of becoming a role model for the emulation of another as the receiver. It is, of course, the other as receiver who decides whether to take the initiative to emulate the role model.

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Do you recall, during the war in Vietnam, the photograph of the young Vietnamese girl running naked down a road in her country? The photo was made into a poster with the question—Why?—in an evocative caption. I believe that question is not just rhetorical and that if we can answer it perhaps we can stop violence. We need to diagnose what is wrong and then find and adopt an alternative that will help us cure the disease.

Over the years I have developed a theory that tries to satisfy this need. It is not a neutral theory with the purpose of gaining knowledge, as such, but an attempt to solve a problem, which is also an attempt to give a social gift. On the other hand, supposedly neutral patriarchal knowledge has validated male dominance in the fields of politics, religion, technology, and economics for centuries in the West. It has given those gifts of validation to generations of tyrants everywhere.

I realize that many of us at this conference are trying to satisfy this need to answer the question of war and violence. Each of us has started from a somewhat different point, and as a result, there is likely much overlap and some disagreement and conflict of perspectives. I think that together we are creating a collective yet many faceted points of view that will help us understand how to stop war and reverse the trend toward the destruction of planet Earth. Although activism does help us, we first need to recognize what is wrong and how it became dysfunctional and unsustainable. We need a collective shift in the economic paradigm and a shift toward a unified collectively accepted wisdom by way of multiple sources to get it moving.

If we want to stop the present critical problems such as war and economic and environmental destruction, then we should look at the symptoms of disease our society was already evident before the present crisis. One of these symptoms is the shocking centuries-old oppression of women and the exclusion of women's perspective of the accepted understanding of the world. Unless we think that mankind is violent and greedy by nature, I believe the oppression of women tells us that something aberrant, even malignant in the basic relationship between men and woman has been allowed to go on and on. We have been infected by a disease and we should let its symptoms lead us to a radically different perspective from which we can diagnose the disease and devise new strategies for a cure. From this perspective, this diagnosis of the dysfunction of our basic relationship, the solution to the problem of war will also be the solution to the problem of the oppression of women. I believe the colonization and oppression of indigenous peoples is a similar symptom of the same disease as is the destruction of nature.

Women account for seventy percent of the world's people who live in absolute poverty. Women work two-thirds of the world's working hours, produce half of the world's food, and yet earn only ten percent of the world's income and own less than one percent of the world's property. We can take these shocking statistics (at least they were shocking when I first heard them in 1985) as evidence of the 1) moral depravity of men, or 2) of patriarchal capitalism but I think we should actually see them as evidence of a different economy associated with women and a different kind of property, a different kind of relation to things that treats them as relevant to others and for this reason relevant to ourselves as members of the human community. Concealed beneath the seemingly neutral economy of exchange and the market, I believe there is a semi-dormant communicative relational property and there is a concealed and/or forgotten economy: a unilateral gift economy, a mode of distribution which is presently functioning as the host to the market, which is functioning as a parasite upon the gift. It is the coexistence of this gift economy with an economy based on 1) exchange, and 2) the abolition and exploitation of gift giving that causes the social and psychological disease which is now ravaging planet Earth. At this point, as a way to further explain and understand the gift economy, I will share a bit of my personal story.

I first started looking at the idea of mothering and gift giving in thinking about communication. I was born in Texas, had gone to the university and had just married and moved to Italy. In 1964, I went with my husband at the time, Italian semiotician Ferruccio Rossi-Landi, to Bologna to a small meeting of philosophers, psychologists, and literary critics who wanted to apply Marx's analysis of the commodity and money to language. I was completely bowled over by this project and in a way I am still working on it today, 45 years later. Although the journal they wanted to start never happened, my husband wrote essays and books on the subject. I continued to think about the idea, as well, because it was a challenging and fascinating intellectual puzzle. In addition, during those years I became the mother of three daughters and, thus, I realized from personal experience that children learn language before they learn to exchange. Later I read psychologists who said that children do not understand money until they are at least 5 or 6 years old. In addition, I became aware that indigenous peoples (extant and extinct) often did not have markets or money. Moreover money as we know it is a relatively recent invention: only a few thousand years old at most. Though similarities are evident, language could not have been derived from exchange and the market.

So, I thought there must be something else that language could be compared to or even have been derived from that was not exchange. At the same time, I realized that the

metaphor of exchange was very convincing for the people who were using it to describe language; yet, there were some problems; in some ways the comparison just did not fit. Semioticians distinguish between the semiotic axis of substitution and the axis of combination. In applying the analysis of the commodity and money to language I felt the axis of substitution aspects fit, as when money substitutes for commodities in exchange—but not the combination aspects, which I saw as relational. I questioned—could the relations we establish in communication possibly be the same as those we establish in exchange, where according to Marx the relations between things have taken the place of human relations? What could be the human relations that the relations between things have replaced? What was the source of those human relations? Although I lived 'in' human relations and felt them, I realized I did not have a clear idea of what they are. I cannot go through the whole story of those years; I will just present the conclusions that I realized at the time.

After some years, I began to think of mothering, which I was doing at the time, as a free practice similar to the gift giving of indigenous peoples. In addition, I began to refer to mothering as non-sign communication—by which I meant non-psychic transmission—but rather the giving and receiving goods and services. Semioticians might disagree at this point and say that there is nothing that is without signs. Nevertheless, in daily life we do identify some objects and processes together with their consequences as material. We eat food and breathe air—we do not eat or breathe signs as such. Giving and receiving materially is communication in the sense of making community, making the bodies (and minds) of the people in the communities by the direct satisfying of needs transmissions among people. These direct transmissions create positive relations of mutuality and trust, which I identified then as the relations among humans, which the relations among commodities have replaced. They require attention to needs of the other on the part of the giver and creative receptivity on the part of the receiver. This unilateral interaction already creates a relationship that starts from the giving and receiving of attention by the giver, continues with the selection and procurement/fashioning of something or the performance of an action as a service to satisfy the need, and the receiver's creative response to the use of the gift or service.

Anthropologists who study gift exchange as an economy and as a social function usually believe that unless there are reciprocal constraints, such as debt and obligation—there are no relations at all. I disagree and believe that mutual recognition, understanding, and trust develop between the unilateral giver and receiver, together with positive expectations regarding similar interactions in the future. This is particularly clear in positive mother-

child relations. The fact that children can and do take turns, in an ordered sequence, and do imitate their mothers does not depend on a relation of obligation, debt or *do ut des* exchange. Instead, it is a learning strategy that develops well in the atmosphere of trust that comes from gift giving. This comprises another kind of gift: the gift of taking responsibility for the choice of becoming a role model for another's (the receivers) emulation; it is, of course, the other as receiver who chooses whether to take the initiative to emulate the role model.

The material communication, which is the direct unilateral satisfaction of needs, is the opposite of exchange and the market in which each exchanger gives only in order to satisfy one's own need by receiving an equivalent return. The logics of the two are different. Gift giving is transitive, other oriented, and its goal is the well being of the other, whereas exchange is intransitive, self oriented, and adversarial. The interaction of giving and receiving creates a set of positive human relations. Giving again, as in passing the gift on by following this model, extends these inclusive relations to a wider group and, thus, the model becomes socially validated and institutionalized. In exchange we assert our reciprocal indifference while finding the equal value of our objects, but in gift giving we transfer value to one another by implication and, thus, we become similarly other-oriented in the process: if the being of the receiver were not valued by the giver, in some way, one would not have satisfied the other's need. In exchange we give value to ourselves by implication: if we had not wanted to satisfy our own needs we would not have satisfied the others' needs.

We need to be able to keep these two logics and motivations distinct; though at times they seem to mix appear as compatible, confusing the two makes gift giving invisible as it keeps mothering limited to the nursery. If we stop generalizing about exchange we can see that the logic of gift giving actually extends far beyond child care to almost every aspect of human and natural life.

Our capitalist society, based on exchange and self-interest, keeps us looking for the key to self-interest in all our interactions; it discredits other-orientation, which is made to appear sentimental, moralistic and unreal. In this light, any discussion of mothering as other-oriented seems to be a relic of essentialism. I submit that we should look at the other-oriented logic as functional and ubiquitous and engaged in by both women and men. By revealing this logic in the rest of life, we give the idea and practice of mothering a much wider scope; we allow the idea and practice child care to be seen as only one instance of a process that takes place at many levels and in many areas throughout all societies.

The idea that gift giving is a widespread fact may not be obvious, at first; this is because the gift processes have been concealed and misnamed for various reasons since the advent of trade. One reason is that in misogynist societies, prevalent in the world where males dominate females, gift processes are psychologically burdened and discredited by their connection with mothering and women. Another major reason is that the logic of exchange is highly valued and in use instead of giving as a metaphor or the interpretative key for understanding all kinds of interactive processes; but, perhaps the main reason is that the system based on exchange has artificially created a context of scarcity everywhere, which makes gift giving difficult. This is done by the channeling of wealth to the few, and by wasting wealth: wasting it as a resource, as civil society, and as civilization itself on war and other symbols and manifestations of power. Scarcity leads us to blame and discredit gift giving for the difficulty that is actually created by the context in which it is made to take place. In the context of abundance, gift giving is easy and even delightful. Forced to exist in a context of dire strife and impoverishment, however, gift giving becomes extremely difficult, to the point that we tend to see it as sacrificial and even masochistic.

If we can uncover, rename and dignify gift giving we may see that far from being a violent or even a suicidal species we are actually the most mothering and nurturing of species. From this point of view, moreover, unilateral gift giving is the original logical thread with which we have woven everything else as the echo of nature. Even patriarchy and the market are twists and loops of this thread.

Gift processes have been captured by religion and philosophy, as well, which treat them as individual moral choices instead of generalizing them by looking at them as economic processes on a par with exchange. Looking at gift giving as economic, a mode of distribution of goods directly to needs, allows us to look at maternal values as the ideological superstructure of this economic base. This displaces the theoretical problem of whether women (or mothers) are more moral than men. It is not a question of morality but rather of the psychological effects and the worldview of the hidden economy, which women as mothers and housewives are required to practice. When men practice the gift economy, as they do in matriarchies, the same effects are present for them.

The categorization of gift giving as non-economic or merely domestic presently serves patriarchy; it narrows the focus of exchange and the market, absolves it from the direct attention to needs, and makes such attention seem 'instinctual', 'moral', 'spiritual', or only pertinent to charity or intervention by the state. By categorizing the unilateral gift giving of mothering as economic, we unite the domestic and the market spheres and reveal the connection between domestic labors, all other kinds of unpaid labor, and the gifts of

nature and culture. This allows us to see how small the market sector of life really is and how it is nourished by the vast sea of gifts.

Within the framework that embraces gift giving and addresses the problem of male dominance, the human values can be found. Human values are political as well as personal and engage a radically different economy and its ideology. Human values are the values that are not relativist nor imposed by law, not even moral law. Instead, they are the values that derive from a different kind of economic behavior, which has beneficial relational and psychological effects, and which we continue to engage in at many different levels even though we are trapped within the market with its mindset and its parameters.

This is the reframing of the role of mothering as an economic role and of the reframing of language as having important aspects of gift giving. This shift in perspective allows us to see that both language and economics have a common root in mothering, a root which has been invisible because our lenses have been crafted by patriarchy and exchange and the use of their metaphors. When, with the imposition of patriarchy, legal codes of crime and punishment, taxes and tributes and market relations, the ancient gift giving mother as a virtual goddesses were overtaken and overwritten, the substitution of one ideology—or set of frames—for the other took place. The unity of the source was concealed. The Bible says “The word was god and without him nothing was made that has been made.” Yet, words, and things that we make, are nothing if we cannot give and receive them. By giving and receiving them, we create relations with others and form the material, cultural, and mental/linguistic community. The gift process is the process of the mother at the level of the verbal and at the level of the material communications.

By proposing this original unity we can also understand the substitution aspects of language as functioning originally within the gift paradigm. This creates a double giving as it provides the change of level from material to that of material plus verbal; it forms a verbal gift giving plane where we begin to create human relations to things among people by giving and receiving verbal proxy gifts; these are combined with each other according to syntax which, I believe, is also based on giving and receiving—among words themselves. If words are substitute gifts and if language preceded exchange, it is probable that the substitutions that make up exchange come from or are influenced by the substitutions we had already used in language, rather than the inverse.

As I was working on the application of Marx’ analysis to language, I wrote an essay in which I showed that money has many of the aspects of a word; in fact, money is a holophrastic: a one-word material language, transferred back onto the material plane.^[11]

As a material general equivalent it is also the prototype of exchange value and repeats the one to many position that is typical of patriarchal relations—of father to family, king to subjects, general to soldiers etc., as shown in the work of J.J. Goux, 1973.^[21]

Once this transfer took place and the word was, so to say, reincarnated as money, legislating that distortion of gift giving and gift relations, which is exchange, the distortion began to appear as socio/physical normality and we began to receive it as a given, a gift of reality: the way things are. Thus, exchange has taken and continues to take the place of gift giving as the social nexus, and the substitution aspect of *semiosis* repeats itself horizontally on the material plane. That is, horizontally, money takes the place of (substitutes) commodities again and again while the whole macro-nexus of exchange vertically takes the place of (substitutes) the macro-nexus of gift giving, dominating it. At the same time patriarchal religions occupied the imaginary with male deities bent on punishment, revenge, and expiation (cognates of exchange) and who make masculine power and creativity—rather than birth and care—the source of human life. In this context, we can see phallic-centrism as the structural similarity between the conceptual prototype, the father, money as the reincarnated word and the phallus, all of which make men the authorities on everything; thus, patriarchal interpretations of language and of economics appear to be the only possible interpretations, since gift giving/mothering has been excluded from their identities a priori.

If instead we look at language and economics as ways of communicating—of creating both individuals and community—we can see that the exacerbated one-to-many prototype structure is not necessarily reality but is another symptom of our social disease, on a par with the symptoms of war, racism, imperialism, and the oppression of women as sexism. Indeed, the symptoms go together because domination is nothing other than the hierarchy in which the one is able to force the many to give to him, by making verbal commands downwards while they give flows of gifts upwards.

By ignoring, trivializing, or minimizing the act of gift giving we over-value and over-validate exchange as the only or best way of organizing distribution and social interaction. The metaphor of the market spreads throughout our thinking. We use the expressions: an exchange of glances, conversational exchanges, the marketplace of ideas, and the marriage market. However, this use of the metaphor of exchange conceals and makes us misidentify many interactions of unilateral gift giving as exchange and assimilate them to the market. This has happened with the description of indigenous economies in terms of *gift exchange*, for example, when perhaps what is actually happening is gift giving by

taking turns. In a context which is not determined by a market, the gift moves by enacting a pattern of *mothering and being mothered* at a variety of levels and by following the logic of community-making in the act of passing the gift on to the next.

Reciprocity in this situation does not have the defects of exchange because it remains a variation of the mothering process rather than a variation on the market process. Once the market enters the scene, however, reciprocity can become exchange, which is the manipulation motivation of *do ut des* may slip in.

The Two Logics

Although it may seem much simpler than exchange, almost too simple, gift giving—as the direct unilateral satisfaction of needs—is powerful. It is transitive; relational, other-oriented, and implies the value of and respect for the receiver. Exchange is an intransitive, impersonal and/or insincere interaction that is oriented at the level of self-interest, and, thus, implies the value of the self in using others as the means to self-interest. Gift giving, by contrast, gives or brings us

- primarily qualitative values, while exchange has mostly quantitative values
- primary attention to the other and the needs of the other, while exchange gives primary attention to the self's own needs, and
- awareness of others and promotes consciousness of the other while the self orientation of exchange makes itself reflecting.

Though our idea of consciousness is more qualitative than quantitative, in the paradigm based on exchange, it follows the equation of value, x amount of A = y amount of B, and we value a self reflecting consciousness at the expense of our awareness of others. Self-reflecting consciousness even appears to some as the most advanced moment of the evolution of the Universe. Instead I believe that we should give more value to another's tending consciousness, a consciousness that tends towards the other as well as cares for and about the other. The appropriate image for this kind of consciousness would not be a mirror but rather a transparent view.

The receiver, as a central part of the gift process, has to receive the gift creatively for the transaction to be complete. In exchange, the other exchanger has merely to buy the product and does not actually have to use it. Because gift giving focuses on the other, it is inclusive and open to cooperation, whereas exchange is exclusive and competitive. Exchange, in fact, is an adversarial transaction: each person tries to get more out of the deal than the other.

The giver recognizes the need of the other and makes or procures something which satisfies it. Receivers can respond to the satisfaction of their needs by recognizing the source of their good and, thus, respond with gratitude, though this is not necessary for the transmission of the gift. The gratitude does serve as a sign to the giver that the other has received the gift. This is a rudimentary, simple situation of transmission, which may have a number of variations. At this basic level giving is inclusive and establishes positive bonds, while exchange breaks bonds through competition, reciprocal independence and indifference. Therefore, it is not indebtedness that creates positive social relations, but rather the original transmission of gifts that satisfy needs. Indebtedness happens when the giver is giving in order to receive. However, givers can exercise giving just to satisfy the needs of other. Otherwise givers can give as the way to propose their model of behavior so the other can emulate the giver.

The market has the category of effective demand, which excludes gifts and gift giving and only counts the needs for which money already exists in the hands of potential buyers. This alters, to a considerable extent, the character of needs, and those who are in need, which are seen as pertinent to the market.

The market creates artificial needs through consumer advertising; at the same time, the market takes our attention away from needs, in general, so that needs have no explanatory power nor are they seen as requiring an explanation. Gift giving is usually a straightforward transaction; if or when it becomes a manipulative transaction, it then becomes an exchange.

Market exchange has within it two levels of transaction: 1) the surface level of at least a semblance equality and justice, and 2) the deeper, more obscure level of eliciting and leveraging unequal gifts in every individual transaction, which comes to the fore in sales and deals and in the market as a whole; at this level, the flows of unacknowledged gifts renamed as profits are created from, a) the domestic economy to the market, from b) those who have less to those who have more, from below to above, from c) the global south to the global north, and from d) the Earth mother to the species of man-unkind. Indeed, the market establishes and maintains control of the many by taking the gifts of all and creating the scarcity, which thus is considered to be its premise, its *raison d'être*.

Indeed, planet Earth would and does provide abundantly for all plants and animals. It would that is if scarcity had not become the artificial creation as a convenient offshoot of the burgeoning profits and the enormous waste of wealth on wars and the trappings of power, all of which the market covets. The figure of 80 billion dollars would be enough

to satisfy all the basic needs of all people on Earth; yet, the USA has now spent at least \$500 billion on the war in Iraq (at the year 2008) and will spend up to \$3 trillion, by certain credible estimates. This colossal wasted wealth, which represents a massive destruction of material and human resources, will never be part of the nurturing, life-giving and sustaining economy. In fact, this insane obliteration of wealth has imposed many new needs upon us in its destruction of people, infrastructure, and nature.

Psychological Cognates

A number of psychological cognates of gift giving and of exchange are apparent and easy recognize. However, we usually treat these cognates if they were just aspects of the nature of things. For example, telling the truth satisfies the need of that others, as receivers of information, have to know; therefore, truth telling fits with the logic of gift giving, while lying is oriented at self-interest and is consonant with the mode of exchange which we nevertheless validate. Perhaps this resonance with exchange is the reason why advertising and propaganda are acceptable to us – even though we know we are being manipulated by them. Thus, revenge as payback to the perpetrators for their offences and justice as payment for crimes are part of the paradigm based on exchange and the market. Indeed, after Sept. 11, as he was preparing to take revenge upon the attackers, G. W. Bush advised everyone to go shopping. In contrast, the ideals of a restorative justice and work to understand and cure the reasons behind crime fit with what I call the gift paradigm: the framework within which we focus on satisfying needs.

I believe the way we define the male gender in Western culture coincides with and validates the exchange paradigm, or even causes it to occur. In fact, boys are taught from their earliest days that they are the gender that is the polar opposite of that of their mothers. Since the most evident relational characteristic of mothers for their children is that they give care to the children themselves, this opposition implies that males do not nurture: it is not their role to engage in unilateral gift giving. They replace the mother as the prototype of the human with the father who has gone through a similar process himself as a child and, therefore, usually does not engage in nurturing, either. I will have to leave the complete description of this process, which I call masculation, to another time, but suffice it to say here that gift giving/nurturing becomes perceived as a forbidden, even shameful activity for boys. Emotions as the maps of the needs of others and oneself become taboo, so that boys will not be tempted to respond with nurturing gifts and service—or ask for them. They often replace nurturing with physical violence, which also touches the other and establishes relations, not of mutuality and trust but of domination and submission. They exchange blows in order to create dominance or

an equality of force. These same patterns repeat themselves at different social levels and become the unquestioned rationale for war among nations, which are themselves organized in hierarchies as maintained by violence.

Many of the stereotypical differences between males and females in our society can be seen in this light and institutions—the market, educational institutions, and the armed forces all function according to the values of the artificially miserly masculine identity and the drive to be the dominant prototypical male at the top. These values of masculation become detached from any obvious connections with gender as such because they are projected into our social institutions. Thus, women can and do participate successfully in the institutions, though they are often constrained into gift giving positions by way of the device that is the lower pay scale for their equivalent work.

Emotions are the maps of and to our needs. Men's independence is the freedom from dependence upon their mothers and, thus, upon being the overt receivers and givers of gifts. Nevertheless, men do receive many gifts in preferential treatment by feminized women and within the system in which motivation lies in taking the hidden gifts of profit.

The market is an arena opposed to giving, an arena that cancels gifts through exchange. Thus, the market is the perfect fit for personalities who want not to nurture but nevertheless want to achieve the position of the prototype: the one-to-the-many as the dominant male. Indeed, the values of patriarchy and capitalism have merged to create a patriarchal capitalism-capitalist patriarchy. Self interest, competition, individualism, greed, and domination: the drive for wealth and power are all motivations that serve the functioning of the market. At the same time the values that come from gift giving, which include compassion, cooperation, solidarity, and love are discredited as weak, inexistent, and/or unrealistic.

We accept the likelihood of pre-formed selves, even though selves are actually made through gift giving or exchange. This is to say that our subjectivist mentality develops and is determined by our participation in these patterns. Giving in order to satisfy the many needs at different levels is an informative experience and creates a variegated subjectivity. Exchanging to satisfy only one's own needs is more of a single-minded and monolithic experience. Agency can also be seen in this light, both in language and life. The basic noun-verb-object pattern can be seen as the giver and the gift receiver as in the linguists' often-used example, 'The girl hit the ball'. 'Girl' is giver, 'hit' is gift and 'ball' is receiver. If we look at language as gift giving then the speaking subject is giver and the listener is receiver. The agency of the speaking subject coincides with the subject of the

sentence as the giving agent. Agency in life is often the agency of giving, though we have learned not to see it as such because, 1) violence has taken the place of giving and, thus, is viewed as agency, too, and 2) the market relations cancel gift giving and make agency appear as neutralized, thus irrelevant.

Indigenous Giving

Indigenous peoples are as old historically as the Europeans ethnic nations; therefore, the Indigenous have had just as much time as Europeans have had to elaborate upon gift giving: to weave what is, for everyone, an original and ever present thread of mothering into a variety of formations. Some indigenous societies have patriarchal practices of domination that are merged with gift practices; some have symbolic gift giving that creates an elite class; many have traditions and rules of reciprocity. Generally however, indigenous economies, especially matriarchies, remain much closer to the logic and values of maternal unilateral gift giving than our exchange economy does.

It stands to reason that when an adult economy continues to be based on gift giving rather than on exchange and the market, no break exists between childhood and maturity. This contrasts what happens in a market economy where children, who are necessarily brought up as receivers and givers, have to adapt to an economy of not-giving and not-receiving, where any need sustaining good must be, or appear to be, deserved for the payment of work. In a market economy there is an important shift from the gift logic to the exchange logic: a break between one economy and the other so that the gift economy is driven underground. In spite of this break, I believe that gift giving continues as the hidden substratum of exchange while exchange functions in the market as a primary way of taking and suppressing gifts. This is accomplished in part by discrediting the gifts and the givers, and making exchange the only or main model of the social nexus. The break that takes place between gift and exchange may be seen as part of the break between body and mind that informs Western thinking. Thus, it is not only gender but it is gender in the context of the break between giving and exchange that forms the matrix of the binaries which riddle our society. Looking at the natural world as adults through the veil imposed by the terminology and motivations of exchange allows us to exploit nature as we do mothers and gift processes in general.

As I have been saying, the transaction of exchange is one of self interest. It gives value to the self of the exchanger, which neutralizes the thing exchanged and splits its value into use value and exchange value. The gift value, which would have been transmitted to the receiver by implication in the direct satisfaction of the receiver's need, is cancelled.

It may reappear when someone uses the exchange commodity: the use value to satisfy someone's need. For example the housewife uses the use-value; she cooks the food she has bought and gives it to her family, giving them value in the process. However, the original producer is an unknown whose identity has little meaning to the consumer. Instead, in a gift economy the original producer remains in a series of implications, as in the syllogism: if 'a gives to 'b and 'b gives to 'c then 'a gives to 'c. Moreover, the giver's specificity, abilities, and choices for the other are transmitted along with the gift.

The gift community arises and is maintained through the relations of presence and continuity established by this circulation of gifts. In the market the exchangers are equally adversarial as self-oriented and the value of the exchangers is judged or ascertained with regard to how much profit etc. they have, take, or make: how many extra gifts they get for which they have not exchanged an equivalent. This judgment is a categorical inclusion or exclusion according to quantity, not a transitive attribution-implication of value as happens in gift giving.

Market exchange is the way mutually exclusive private property is given while not being given, since the exchangers keep its exchange value in the form of money or another product. Maternal gift giving and gift economies do not have private property as such rather everything or almost everything is potentially givable (Goettner-Abendroth).^[31] It is this kind of givable female property that is given to us by the Earth mother.^[41]

In the market economy where often the only means of production of gifts remains the body, particularly the mother's nurturing body but also the givable and/or sexual body as commodity, and the body whose time is considered private property and alienated for salaried work—we continue to see the body as part of nature.^[51] Perhaps it is this kind of property that philosophers refer to when they talk about the properties of objects; in addition, we can see this metaphor as calling upon the sense we still have of properties as potential gifts.

At the moment, we can look at the gifts that nature offers to us in this way: water, air, and seeds as they are being transformed into commodities in globalizing capitalism. Therefore, we realize that as humans with mothering values—we should take a stand politically: on the side of the gift against the market. Consumerism is the mode of ungrateful receivers who, because of exchange, do not recognize the source: the givers and believe that they deserve the products for which they have exchanged a presumed equivalent and which they consume. It is this consumer attitude that does not recognize the generalized forced economic mothering from which they benefit. Even though the profit of the capitalist and access to affordable goods for consumers depend upon the forced gifts of the producers,

the syllogism 'If a gives to b...etc.' is not applied. The original givers are forgotten. Consumers are denied the facts, the truth, but instead the market compels us with lies and delusion: a false nurturing and socialization of communicative needs. This we consume in huge gulps of advertising that makes us desire the consumer goods to the extent that we will go willy-nilly into debt for them. Restoring a mothering gift economy perspective involves turning towards the source of the gifts we receive with gratitude and insisting that they not be the products of sacrifice. Moreover, we have to nurture our desire and perception with the truth—rather than the lies of advertising and propaganda.

Indigenous people often extend their giving of gifts to nature. As with giving among the indigenous people themselves, this giving to nature carries the implication of a willingness to enter a gifting circle: a communicative community with nature and the aspects or spirits of nature. These gifts to nature and spirits are not manipulative gifts or exchanges; rather, they are unilateral gifts that create relations of solidarity, mutuality and trust, similar to the human relations of community, which are created in the same way. In the circulation of gifts in the spirit of nature, turn taking may be expected; however, this is because the nature participates in a gifting circle with humans—not because nature is exchanging with humans. Honoring our common mother: Earth in this way is a safeguard that protects Earth from the pollution that devastates species and entire systems; therefore we honor Earth because Earth and her spirit of gifting are part of our community: our common unity and part of our socialized individuality as well.

I believe we have to take an important step we must take in restoring the perspective of the gift economy. That step is a huge leap into the all-encompassing and unconditional spirit of devotion to projecting the mother onto nature and society; likewise, we have to stop the mentality of exploiting Earth until our mother has no more to give.

It will move us forward in a sustaining way to recognize the indigenous economies and the gift based episteme as coming from a female and from a male mothering point of view and practice; therefore, we grow as a community by asserting a feminist maternal episteme in the North as the human episteme, countering our own white Euro/American male dominant point of view.^[41] I believe that the neutralizing/neutering terminology of exchange has been projected into science; this detrimental layer of language often hides the gift processes that are actually taking place in nature, though with a totally different type of intentionality than our own.

In this situation, humanity will evolve in the positive sense by way our active projection of the spirit of the mother onto nature; in this way, we reassert our human continuity with the

gift giving processes of the mother and diminish the hold that the parasitic mechanism of the market and exchange have on our thinking. In this framework, we can, at once, re-envision our knowledge as we recognize and appreciate gifts.

Gratitude has to play a part in the renewal of epistemology. That is, knowledge is a response to the unilateral gifts that are given to us through perception and communication of all kinds; the response, which like gratitude, is an embracing understanding of and appreciation for what has been given; it is the ability to use the gifts creatively, and a willingness to enter into community: a bond of unity with the giver, circulating unilateral gifts in turn, passing them on to others. This spirit has to replace exchange as the categorization of value through money with its quantitative taxonomy.

By projecting the mother onto nature and culture, we can create a gift based epistemology which identifies knowledge with gratitude; this paring of knowledge with gratitude is a response to unilateral gifts that are at once of body and mind yet social, as well; it involves the capacity to creatively receive and pass on what has been perceived, assimilated and understood. By contrast, in the exchange paradigm we think of 1) equivalences that have money as the standard of value, and 2) exchanges that have money as the means of exchange. The psychological aspects of these interactions are reciprocal independence and indifference. The epistemological aspects are categorical inclusion and exclusion. In the gift paradigm we transfer to each other the gifts of our responses to our environment by means of verbal gifts. The psychological aspects are the mutuality of care and attention. The epistemological aspects are creatively receiving and giving again, transmission, the creation of mental content as a givable and receivable property. Even our ability to associate, to connect ideas with each other, implies a certain amount of internal capacity to give and a capacity to give among ideas. (Considering that they would also receive from each other and from us, we might say that we project the child as well as the mother.)

The generalization of the mother and reframing of mothering as economic gift giving provides us with a new definition of the human not just as Homo sapiens but as Homo donans recipiens. Since we are adept at setting constraints and limitations that define us, the limiting definition that we are violent and warlike leads us to behave in that way; this rule applies particularly those of us who, from an early age, are taught that because of their gender they are not mothers and, thus, should not engage in any activity that resemble the role of the nurturing, providing mother. I am trying to show that those who give up all that makes up the intricate role that is mother give up an important part of their humanity.

We recognize planet Earth as our common mother, which is the source of the nurturing, the archetype and part of the team of architects of that which sustains us; thus, we receive at all levels; we *know* within a different frame, not as penetration, grasping, categorization, or the invention of something to exchange—but as the creative reception of gifts givable, gifts that we can pass on to others. We place ourselves in a gift-based community with Earth, with each other, and with those who came before and will come after us.

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That is, we see the mind as abstract, within the exchange paradigm, while continuing to see the gift giving body as a part of nature, which is considered the property of its 'owner': the mind. Psychologists suggest we protect our bodies and our time by setting 'boundaries' around our givable property, thus, allowing us to negotiate the paradox caused by the fact that we are gift giving humans living in an exchanged based world.

About the author: Genevieve Vaughan is an independent researcher, activist, philanthropist for social change, and founder of the feminist Foundation for a Compassionate Society in Austin, Texas in operation from 1987–2005. She is the author of *For-Giving: A Feminist Criticism of Exchange* (1997) and *Homo Donans* (2006), and the editor of an issue of the Italian journal *Athanor* titled *Il Dono/The Gift: a Feminist Perspective* (2004). She is also the author of two children's books, *Mother Nature's Children* (1999) and *Free/Not Free* (2007), and has produced a CD of her *Songs for the Tree of Life*. A documentary about her life, *Giving for Giving: Not All Texans Are Like Bush* has just been completed, as produced by Cara Griswold and Becky Hays of Full Circle Productions. Showings can be scheduled and copies ordered from [Giving.Forgiving](#). Genevieve's books and many articles are available free on her web site: [Gift Economy](#). She resides now in Italy and devotes her time to writing and speaking about the gift economy.