

## Revealing *Homo Donans*: Liberating the Unilateral Gift from Commodity Exchange

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Résumé de l'article

L'éducation de l'enfant dès sa naissance fournit un exemple de don unilatéral rendu nécessaire par l'impuissance de l'enfant qui ne peut échanger un équivalent contre ce qu'on lui donne. Cette transaction matérielle, le don et la réception de biens et de soins, crée des schémas interpersonnels de base de la communication matérielle, qui sous-tendent la communication verbale. Ils diffèrent des schémas créés par l'échange de *quid pro quo*. L'économie de marché est composée des deux types de transactions, mais des dons unilatéraux sont donnés et reçus par le mécanisme de transaction d'échange afin de créer du profit. Réinterpréter les soins maternels comme une économie communicative libre pointe vers une redéfinition de l'humain comme *Homo Donans* et fournit une issue au scénario de fin du monde auquel le capitalisme nous a conduits. En utilisant les idées de Marx, Vygotsky, Rossi-Landi, Sohn-Rethel, Lakoff, les découvertes de la recherche récente sur la petite enfance, la neurobiologie interpersonnelle et le féminisme patriarcal moderne (Goettner-Abendroth) et matricentrique (O'Reilly), je propose un changement radical vers le paradigme du don.

# Revealing *Homo Donans* : Liberating the Unilateral Gift from Commodity Exchange

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“Empires create colonies, colonies enclose the commons of the indigenous living communities and turn them into sources of raw material to be extracted for profits. This linear, extractive logic is unable to see the intimate relations that sustain life in the natural world. It is blind to diversity, cycles of renewal, values of giving and sharing, and the power and potential of self-organising and mutuality. It is blind to the waste it creates and to the violence it unleashes.” (V. Shiva 2020 : 161)

Any discussion of the economy now has to address the great crisis in which the planet is embroiled and to which Capitalism has mightily contributed. Many feel that our species deserves the apocalyptic fate it has prepared for itself even though only a small fraction of us are actively responsible or reap great benefits from the system. I believe we do not know what is wrong and so continue to repeat and intensify the thinking and behavior that are leading us to the matricide of Mother Earth and the fratricide (and sororicide) of entire populations of humans and other species. Accessing the common root of material and linguistic communication allows for a perspective that is both obvious and hidden. Embracing this perspective exposes our misconceptions and points towards a new beginning. In order to do this, I will talk first about the coexistence of two economic paradigms, then about common roots of language and the economy in maternal care, then about the market economy as an altered gift economy and finally about language as a verbal gift economy.

## The Coexistence of Gifting and Exchange

There are two main economic paradigms in the world today, one based on gift giving the other on exchange. The gift paradigm is hidden and is almost always functioning in a context determined by exchange. This creates many difficulties in that gifting is often interpreted as exchange, and without a consistent meta level description to guide its practitioners, it can indeed become exchange. My hypothesis is that the model of unilateral gifting that motherers<sup>1</sup> present to infants and young children provides original schemata that underlie both material and linguistic communication. In our capitalist society, *quid pro quo* patterns of exchange that only begin to be understood and learned around 3 years of age (Berti & Bombi 1988 : 175-77), upstage and contradict an original other-oriented gift logic, imposing contradictory frameworks for its interpretation and rendering it negative, suspect and invisible as such.<sup>2</sup> By providing a description of gifting that takes into account its problematic coexistence with exchange, the maternal economy can be revealed and restored as an original pan human economy that is presently eclipsed and subjugated by the market. In fact, *quid pro quo* exchange has been taken as the norm and the free distribution of goods to needs without exchange seems aberrant, aneconomic. Considering the free distribution of goods to needs as constituting the first and basic economy challenges the hegemony of the market over the semantic field of economics, diminishing the market's importance and revealing its exploitative psycho-social underpinnings. The working model of unilateral gifting is presented to all infants because they cannot survive on their own and do not understand *quid pro quo* exchange. It is under the influence of this first economic model of free gifting that the earliest human relations and language develop, based on turn taking and the imitation of giving rather than on the obligation to give back. The mother-child interaction is thus more like a conversation in which each takes a turn in giving sounds, smiles and gestures than like obligatory *quid pro quo* market exchange. How this happens is beginning to be revealed by new infancy research and interpersonal neurobiology, which I will be discussing below.

Although the maternal gift model has been problematized and displaced by the model of *quid pro quo* exchange, it continues to exist everywhere among adults. Welfare projects, charities, volunteer associations, service professionals and compassionate individuals all negotiate a fine line between gift and exchange because there is no consistent understanding that connects the varieties of gifting to their roots in the maternal economy. Consequently, gifting is not validated as altogether 'normal' and explanations are sought for it in exceptional individual motivations and religious and moral precepts. This perception of abnormality is intensified when the context around the gifting provides scarce resources and self-sacrificial behavior is needed to maintain the practice. The self-sacrifice of some tends to discredit the practice for others, making it appear too difficult, so it does not generalize or 'scale up'. It is not obvious that it is the context, which in our society is determined by the capitalist market, that is responsible for the difficulty of the gifting and the lack of resources. On the other hand, receiving is also problematic in a paradigm where scarce provisions for life must be earned or deserved as the outcomes of market exchange. Receiving without deserving by

exchanging seems to diminish rather than enhance the value of the receiver and in the context of the market s/he seems 'less than' the giver. However, the receiver is a necessary part of the gift interaction. In a gifting community, h/er position would be normalized and celebrated and s/he would also become a giver in turn in other moments, participating in the circulation of the gifts. The various narratives about what is happening in contemporary gift initiatives usually do not take into consideration the extraordinary influence of the market context, with the result that unilateral giving is blamed for its lack of success or considered impossible.<sup>3</sup> In fact, I believe that almost all the present criticism directed at gifting and at mothering is due to the over-valuing of the market context, which appears to be a 'given', an unappealable fact of life.

Another important difficulty is that in the context of the paradigm of exchange, gifting can indeed turn into its opposite and become a hidden or overt manipulation for advantage or power over the receiver. Since there is not a coherent meta level and no warning signs are provided, organizations and individuals can manipulatively 'gift' others, creating oppressive long-term relationships for their own advantage. Cronyism, political gifts and favors, and the system of international 'gifts' and loans all fall under this rubric. Corporate bailouts, fiat money, even wars that are created as gifts of markets to arms businesses, all use gifting in the service of exchange. On the other hand, in the absence of a clear and collectively understood framework of gifting and in a context of real scarcity, receivers who do not themselves eventually become givers, and takers who have no limits, can also drain the community of would-be givers of their gifts and destroy their capacity to give.

## The Blind Spot

I believe that as a culture, we are blind to the existence and importance of unilateral giving as the commonplace underpinning of much of what we do. This blind spot is due in part to the centuries-old ambiguity of our attitude towards the role of mothering where unilateral giving has to take place for the survival of young children. Free giving and receiving form the earliest and most significant patterns of interaction in early childhood and, although later they are displaced and distorted by the patterns of commodity exchange, I argue that they form the unrecognized first (and long term) structure of both material and linguistic communication before body and mind begin to be seen as separate. Free maternal giving-and-receiving are the original communication because they actually form the bodies of the communicators – the people in the community.

We have not understood the market as distorted communication because we conflate communication with exchange, which we consider completely normal. The maternal gift model has been assimilated, eclipsed and replaced by the model of commodity exchange not only as an original human capacity but even as an important aspect of our species' presumed exceptionalism. Instead exchange is a doubling of the gift, a way of playing it backwards, making it contingent upon the equivalent return (would-have-been) gift. It overrides the nurturing relations with a relation of self-interest between adversaries, a relation of categorization, quantification and equivalence, which appears to be 'adult' in contrast to gifting

as childish or 'primitive'.

Before the market there is free gifting both phylogenetically, in the history of the species (Narvaez 2013), and ontogenetically in the story of every life. Believing that the earliest human interactions are based on *quid pro quo* exchange, we access the 'narrative' of who we are as individuals and as a species several chapters after the beginning of the book. We don't realize that the gift is a continuing hidden subtext, which could change the whole story and its ever more probable tragic ending. It is my devout hope and wager that by uncovering the maternal gift economy subtext, we may be able to radically change our self-concept as a species and pull back from the destruction that we are presently inflicting upon each other and Mother Earth. The evidence of the last millennia seem to show that we are a greedy and power mad species and that as such we deserve extinction. Instead my own intuition is even more tragic : We are doomed because we do not know ourselves. We are not Mother Nature's mistake. To have arrived at the present dire moment must mean that we have been doing something deeply wrong and that we do not realize what it is – or we would have corrected it. To self-and-other destruct because of ignorance of ourselves is even more tragic than doing it because of a real incorrigible flaw. Here is what I believe the problem is : We are a deeply maternal species that does not recognize its true nature.

I believe that what is causing the present catastrophic planetary situation is that we have left out the maternal gift model and have replaced it with the model of exchange and what is worse, with exchange for money. We have started too far downstream from the origin and cannot see where and when the stream was diverted. It has become urgent to find the cause of our matricidal behavior. When we do go back to the origin, we find it has not been destroyed and that the solution is already there. We do not have to invent something new, only return to that necessary part of life, the unilateral maternal economy that has accompanied us through the centuries because it is indispensable to the continuation of the species. With this return comes the recognition of unilateral giving-receiving as a pattern that can be practiced and diversified in innumerable ways.

## **Mauss**

The gift economy as understood by Marcel Mauss and his many followers<sup>4</sup> requires three steps : giving, receiving and giving back. As he sees it, the human relation created by the gift is due to the obligation of the return gift, whether immediate or delayed. The fact that mothering is necessarily unilateral provisioning when the child is small, that it takes place of necessity in all societies and that this unilateral giving and receiving itself creates human relations, is generally ignored by anthropologists. While the mother (1) may expect to be nurtured in turn by the child when s/he is older, young children do not know this, so for them the first life model is one of free maternal giving. Children embrace this model and give as well, participating with others in this early communicative economy. It is my contention that the patterns or schemata of this unilateral giving-receiving create the basic structure for both linguistic and material communication. The first two steps – giving and receiving - stand alone and can (and must) be repeated by the

motherer without a return gift while the child is small. The child has to actively receive the gift (for example by sucking the nipple) and s/he certainly interacts with the motherer. (As Freud recognized, s/he necessarily gives the 'gifts' of urine and feces). But the mother/child interaction is not an exchange, rather it is mutual experience of giving and receiving. The maternal model is propagated through this repeated experience and by imitation rather than by obligation (as would happen in exchange). The model of unilateral need-satisfying giving and receiving is the first and most basic one for human life. Even when it is overwritten and exploited by the market economy and market ideology the maternal economy continues to inform and sustain us. In any society, infant care has to be provided unilaterally and free to the receiver. I believe this free maternal economy is the basis of all other economies and that it is actually the basis of both material and linguistic (and other sign) communication.

As soon as Mauss's third step of giving back is made necessary, the early logic of both maternal gift and linguistic-sign communication is altered. Often anthropologists think that the obligation of the return is necessary to create an ongoing relation (Douglas 1990) but the repeated unilateral gift already creates a continuing and oft-renewed relation of mutuality and trust between motherers and children. A more complex relation among adults may indeed be created also by the obligation to return the gift among groups that practice 'gift exchange', but in all societies, it is necessary for everyone to have been the receivers of their motherer's gifts and thus at the same time to have received the *model* of unilateral gifting. Thus, indigenous gift exchange and reciprocity take place on the background of the unilateral maternal gift just as much as does Capitalist market exchange with its more abstract and alienating relational consequences.

### Satisfying Needs

While gifting to satisfy the material needs of others may be recognized as meaningful (as when altruism supplies 'meaning in life'<sup>5</sup>) I believe that meaning in language remains mysterious just because we do not see it as satisfying the needs of others but mainly of our own. Without the centrality of the maternal model we miss the possibility that we are doing the same thing on two planes, the material, where we satisfy the life-needs of others, and the linguistic, where we satisfy their cognitive and communicative needs. In both of these areas the practice is largely 'altercentric' (Braten 2007). Its source is motherer-child giving-receiving, which lays down patterns that continue to be used throughout life even when they are unrecognized because the patterns of exchange are so much more evident. Unilateral gifting in childhood and beyond creates human relations of mutuality and trust between giver and receiver through the fulfillment of positive expectations and these are relations of reciprocal inclusion or at least of 'joint attention' regarding the material or verbal products (gifts) that are given.<sup>6</sup>

It is my hypothesis that giving and receiving provide the deep schema for communication both on the material plane and the verbal (and non-verbal) sign planes. In this light, the (maternal) economy can be seen as material communication and language as verbal communication.<sup>7</sup>

Both have to do with the circulation of gifts. However, all too soon the market intervenes. In capitalism everyone is required to adjust to market exchange as a specific case of altered material communication in which what circulates are commodities, which are directly categorized in the exchange transaction itself as not-gifts. (In this regard, I will be discussing Alfred Sohn-Rethel's critique of the 'exchange abstraction' below.)

## Mothering

Mothering is quite diverse over different historical and cultural situations but the vulnerability of infants requires a basis of care that cannot be eliminated if the child is to survive – and many do not. The elements of this care began to be studied with Freud and psychoanalysis in the light of its effects on the psychology of adults and older children. After a period in which Freud, Piaget and Skinner considered the infant as solipsistic (Meltzoff and Brooks 2007) infancy studies have expanded into an extensive field, beginning with the work of John Bowlby (1969;1973 ) on 'attachment theory' and continuing with the brilliant work of researchers like Trevarthen (2011; 2015), Braten (1998; 2007), Meltzoff (2002; 2007) to the present studies on interpersonal neurobiology (Schoore 1994 2003), (Siegel 2012). Even when early childhood has been studied, with very few exceptions (Stern & Brushweiler-Stern 1998; Stern 2000) a focus on mothering itself has usually been absent.

This lacuna has also been influenced by the feminist problematization of 'essentialism', which has the aim of liberating women from the imposed destiny of the maternal role into the 'freedom' of the market and equality with men.<sup>8</sup> Unfortunately, despite the work of Gilligan (1982), Ruddick (1995), and Noddings (1984) which is now finding its outlet in the movement for an economy of care, the critique of essentialism has short-circuited the recognition of the principle of unilateral mothering-gifting as a functional pan human economic and communicative principle and it has delayed its generalization to all. In fact, considering unilateral gifting as female gender-specific blinds us to its functionality in all areas of life. Recognizing it as species specific instead of gender specific can also begin to shift the focus of struggles over gender identity towards understanding that in Capitalism the entangled economic paradigms of gift and commodity exchange have been falsely matched with one sex or the other. In fact, since the model of unilateral maternal gifting is available to infants independently of their sex, the maternal gift economy is not gender based in the beginning. It is only later when the model of the exchange economy begins to be understood that a categorization of males as not-gifters and not- maternal begins to be pertinent for them.<sup>9</sup>

## Interpersonal Neurobiology

An interesting move towards a somewhat more central focus on mothering in a different field is a shift towards the integration of attachment theory and neurobiology in what is being called 'interpersonal neurobiology', as developed in numerous works by Allan Schoore (1994; 2003; 2012), Daniel Siegel (2012) and others. Here the brain, especially the right hemisphere of the brain of the mother,

is seen as actually interacting with the right hemisphere of the infant. The mother holistically (and mostly subconsciously) regulates the preverbal child's emotions and the child's right brain registers and learns from her regulation how to self-regulate and co-regulate. (Schoore 2003) participating with her in dyadic co regulation. "Attachment can thus be conceptualized as the interactive regulation of synchrony between psychobiologically attuned organisms. This attachment dynamic, which operates at levels beneath awareness, underlies the dyadic regulation of emotion." (Schoore 2000)

Moreover, astonishingly, "the rate of synaptogenesis in the developing infant's brain is a remarkable 40,000 new synapses every second and brain volume increases from 400 g at birth to 1000 g at 12 months" (Schoore 2015 : 2-3) During this tremendous growth spurt the social experiences the child has with h/er motherer are incorporated into the neural connections while the potential connections that are not used disappear.

Daniel Siegel elaborates, "Given that interpersonal relationships guide how we focus our attention and therefore how our neural firing patterns emerge, our social experiences can directly shape our neural architecture. Put simply our relational connections shape our neural connections." (Siegel 2012 : 15) This process, which begins in early childhood, continues throughout life.

Most of the interpersonal neurobiological researchers come from the disciplines of psychotherapy, psychology and neuroscience, so they tend to concentrate on psychological rather than material interactions. However clearly, the material interactions of giving and receiving are the most fundamental ones because they are necessary for life. They are the substrata for the psychological interactions. Interpersonal neurobiological research shows how nurture (gifting) becomes nature, influencing the timing and the type of expression of genes after birth. Because without nurture infants die, the patterns of the giving and receiving that keep them alive are necessarily the original and most salient shapers of 'our neural architecture' across cultures. The growth of the brain, the neuron activations, the prunings and the emotional responses all arise within the context of free unilateral gifts and gifting. At the level of practice, of daily life, all of the developments of the brain in early childhood take place in what is for the child a free gift economy.

The infant not only receives the free gifts of the motherer but also and more importantly, the model of free gifting and the interactions that go with it.<sup>10</sup> Of course, s/he also has to actively receive, sucking at the breast then later mouthing or chewing the food she is given, grasping the spoon or the toy, exploring the environment, etc. At the same time the infant expresses her "innate intersubjective sympathy" (Trevarthen 2011) imitates and engages with the motherer communicatively and cognitively, and participates early on in proto conversations, giving and receiving smiles, laughs and utterances in a kind of joyful, even musical, interaction that has been found in every society in which it has been investigated worldwide. (Trevarthen & Delafield-Butt 2015).<sup>11</sup> These precocious interactions are based on turn taking (Gratier *et al.* 2015), and on imitation, not obligation and they are different from and prior to economic exchanges.



## Gift Work and Gift Value

The mother's unilateral gifting to the child and the child's reception of the gifts are usually not considered economic by the mainstream because they are not remunerated. They are simply called 'activity'. Instead I am affirming that free unpaid work is the fundamental case of work and that the fundamental economic interaction is the free need-satisfying gift. In humans this requires the discernment and identification of the needs and the procuring, preparing and provisioning of something that will satisfy them appropriately and will be acceptable to the receiver (as well as cleaning up afterwards). This gift work usually requires physical and mental attention and effort, exploration of possible ways of satisfying the diversifying needs, procuring (including buying), making or assembling different kinds of things and learning different kinds of procedures that will satisfy the variety of needs repeatedly and in many different contexts and situations.

It is important to recognize also that gifting implies the value (relevance, worthiness) of the receiver. In fact, if the receiver had not been important to the giver in some way s/he would not have given to h/er to satisfy h/er needs. I call this implication of the value of the receiver 'gift value'.<sup>12</sup> It can register as self-esteem in the consciousness of the receiver and it can also be recognized by others as the value or importance of one who has been given to. The long-term product of free maternal work is the healthy, happy and self-confident growing child and finally adolescent and adult who is able not only to receive but to give and give value to others. The receiver of gifts can give again following the model of the motherer, s/he can give the gift forward, creating a chain of gifts and a gifting community.<sup>13</sup> In fact, there is a gift syllogism : if A gives to B and B gives to C then A gives to C. When this circulation of gifts is extensive it creates a common ground that unites the community, implying their common gift value for each other.

It is clear that giving and receiving is a basic and important interaction for everyone (and those who can continue to participate fully in this economy long term are fortunate to do so).

Such gifting requires a certain amount of abundance and is rendered difficult by the extreme duress of poverty and the depletion or cancellation of the free gifts of the environment, such as clean water, fertile seeds and unpolluted air. Nevertheless, those who live in extreme poverty often sustain each other through gifting. It is wrong to say that some people in the Global South live on less than \$1 per day. They live on that and the gift economy.

Although the maternal gift economy is not recognized, it is the foundation of every economy. *Quid pro quo* exchange comes later. At around three years of age in our market-based society, children begin to recognize *quid pro quo* interactions and to be able to participate in them. (Berti & Bombi 1988). They usually achieve a competent grasp of the market by early adolescence.

## The Social Nexus of Commodity Exchange

Considering gifting as economic allows us to see that both gift and exchange are kinds of material communication. More precisely, it allows us to see exchange

as alienated gift giving, alienated material communication. In Marx's detailed explanation of commodity exchange and money in the first book of *Capital*, gifting is basically unseen. Prior to commodity exchange Marx refers to the form of "directly associated labour... which we find on the threshold of the history of all civilized races". (Marx 1996 [1867] : 64). Though he does consider the production of the 'patriarchal industries of a peasant family' unit, he does not discuss the specificity of the other oriented labor that nurturing involves nor does he realize that this labor implies the gift value of the receivers within the family.<sup>14</sup> Thus, he doesn't see that the exchange value of commodities is gift value denied and transformed. The 'other' is now the other exchanger, who is now not a receiver but a buyer and does not receive the implication of gift value because the value now is not of the person who receives it but of the commodity (hence 'commodity fetishism') for which s/he gives a monetary equivalent in exchange. The work is not for known others as it would be in nurturing, but for others in general and therefore it is abstracted from the particular situation. Everyone who works for the market in Capitalism is in this same condition, so everyone's work is 'abstract labor', abstracted from the gifting interaction. This is the case in the market even if after the commodity is bought, it is used as a gift in nurturing.

Within the maternal nurturing interaction use value and gift value are combined in the implication of value that takes place through the satisfaction of the needs of a particular person. However, exchange contradicts and cancels the gift and gift value (the implication of the value of the other) is split into exchange value and use value. That is, it is divided on the one hand into what the product is worth for others in general, when it is seen in its relation to all the other commodities on the market and calculated in money as its exchange value. On the other hand, its nurturing, need satisfying, value-conferring capacity, is also cancelled because its use value is also seen in general, not in relation to any particular other. In fact, if it is bought by someone who uses it h/erself, the product is neutral; it has only that use value, not gift value. However, if after it is bought it is used as a gift to satisfy another's need, it would again imply gift value, the value of the other for the giver.

Maternal gifting provides the basic schemata of unalienated other-oriented communication with goods and services and I contend that these also serve and are elaborated as the schemata for communication with signs and language. Unfortunately, these original patterns of material communication are soon distorted by the introduction of exchange which has the form of playing the gift interaction both forwards and backwards, reversing the schema, making it contingent and consequently cancelling the gift value of the other (who no longer receives a gift) and replacing it with the exchange value of the commodity. In the market, attention is no longer given to a particular other as receiver but is displaced onto the commodity as the means of exchange with some one of all the other potential exchangers engaged in the market at the moment. The role of the giver and the gift value of the other are eliminated in favor of the role of the exchanger and the value of the commodity, which is divided into use value and exchange value.<sup>15</sup>

Use value is the capacity for use of the product by anyone, but in the exchange process it is held in the store abstracted from the actual use by any particular

individual, and from the use it would have had instead if it had been a personally given unilateral gift. That is, it would have bestowed (given) gift value on the receiver by implication thereby potentially enhancing h/er self-esteem and well being<sup>16</sup> and it would have been a probable factor in creating a relation of mutuality and trust between the giver and receiver. With the commodity, the relation to the particular other is replaced by a relation to all the other participants in the market, that is to the other producers in that branch of production as well as to the other potential buyers of that product. This is an abstract relation and through the process of exchange, it locates the commodity as having (an exchange) value within that context. Where the personal satisfaction of the other's need by someone gave value to the other, the production of a commodity for exchange gives value to the product in the exchange process as calculated in money and in relation to all the other products on the market (and specifically in that branch of production), None of this implies the gift value of the receiver. The would-have-been gift is split into use value and exchange value. The fetishistic relations between things take the place of the relations between persons as Marx says. And what are the relations between persons that the relations between things take the place of? The relations of the maternal gift economy.

### The Exchange Abstraction

Alfred Sohn-Rethel (1965,1978) talks about how the commodity (as a use value) is suspended from use and even from decay, placed in an abstract inaccessible position in a store, waiting to be exchanged. He does not have the idea of the gift or gift value but his discussion of the real abstraction addresses the conundrum.<sup>17</sup> In fact, the product is abstracted not just from use but from gifting and gift value as soon as it is destined for sale. It becomes relevant only in regard to its probable exchange as expressed in the amount of its value calculated in money, and all of its qualities are seen only in that light.

Exchange is derivative of gifting because it is only the gift schema made conditional upon an equivalent return by the receiver, requiring a doubled-back and equivalent 'gift' that is therefore no longer a gift. This reversal is a mechanism of implication that changes the logic and psychology of provisioning completely, changing the mode of giving (of 'distribution') from other oriented to ego oriented, from the construction of a relation of mutuality and trust to one of individualism, competition and mutual suspicion. Although after the product is bought, it can be used again in a gifting interaction, the transaction of exchange does not confer value on the other but upon the product and on the money that takes its place as the quantitative expression of its abstract and general social exchange value.

According to Sohn-Rethel, the interaction of exchange has become our 'social nexus'. "To talk of the social nexus, or, as we may call it, the social synthesis, we have to talk of exchange and not of use. In enforcing the separation from use, or more precisely from the actions of use, the activities of exchange presuppose the market as a time- and space- bound vacuum devoid of all interchange of man with nature" (1978 : 29).

To my mind, exchange has taken the place of motherer-child gifting which

was/is the original social nexus and it has altered the relations based upon gifting, which nevertheless continue underground in many parts of our lives.

Without the idea of the maternal gift, exchange seems completely natural and the starting point for reasoning about communication whether material or linguistic. That is, the abstraction of exchange seems completely real, while what is not abstract seems somehow less-than, humdrum and inferior because unquantifiable, like housework for example, or... mothering. (This reversal creates a perfect fit with patriarchal misogyny). Thus, what is free and not abstract does not seem like a good starting point for reasoning about economics and language while the social artefact of the exchange process and the exchange abstraction appear to be a basic and necessary human interaction.

The interaction of exchange presupposes and even demonstrates that if a product is exchanged it is not a gift. This is actually a counter-factual process of categorization however, because there are important gifts that are hidden in the process and not recognized as such. In fact, these concealed gifts have been reconceptualized and renamed 'profit' and they motivate the whole market mechanism. They are the gifts coming to capitalists from unpaid surplus labor, from the unpaid domestic labor of women and men, to rich countries and corporations from poor countries and from the unpayable plunder of the free gifts of the environment. These gifts merge and flow unseen through the conduits of the economy, propelled by its gift denying-and-appropriating mechanisms to finally reach the capitalist entrepreneurs or corporations, where they are rebaptized 'earned profit' and join other accumulated gifts in reservoirs of capital, ready to be reinvested<sup>18</sup>. This process depletes the broader context of gifts by channeling them away from the many to the few. The market is said to be the distribution of goods in scarcity, but it actually creates the scarcity that gives it this function. Then if too much abundance nevertheless accrues, wars are created to waste the excess gifts and/or to cycle them once more through the hands of the super-rich.

Looked at in this way there are two economies, gift and exchange, locked in a parasitic embrace. This is particularly clear in the spread of commodification to previously free gift areas like water, fertile seeds, fertilizer, indigenous knowledges and now the internet. The market with patriarchal ambition as its internal motivating engine, is parasitic upon the maternal gift economy, which is still practiced unwittingly by almost everyone. In fact, most of us practice both paradigms of gift and exchange in our relations with others and also in relation to ourselves as we negotiate our internal conflicts between the compassionate impulses of the maternal gift model and the 'rational' self-interest of the model of *homo economicus*.

Exchange is mainly quantitative and it abstracts and causes a cancellation of or a hiatus from gifting, which is qualitative. As Sohn-Rethel (1965 : 6-10) says, it is an abstraction in reality, that influences our thinking, making our conceptions ever more abstract because our material interaction is abstract, and we experience it daily without recognizing its bizarre character. Making monetized exchange the 'social nexus' of our culture discredits gifting and overshadows it. As the gateway to provisioning, exchange has power over life and death and eventually deprives

the many of the 'means of gifting' (just as the workers have been deprived of the means of production by privatization). Commodity exchange is like a hidden radioactive isotope embedded in the body politic, influencing everything we do, including our thought processes.

This abstract and purely social physicality of exchange has no existence other than in the human mind, but it does not spring from the mind. It springs from the activity of exchange and from the necessity for it which arises owing to the disruption of communal production into private production carried on by separate individuals independently of each other. (Sohn-Rethel 1978 : 57)

According to Sohn-Rethel the 'exchange abstraction' was the real world experiential basis of the Kantian a priori categories. In fact, he sees Western philosophy itself as deeply influenced by exchange, beginning with Ancient Greek Pre-Socratic philosophy which arose at around the same time as the first coinage of money in Lydia circa 600 BC.<sup>19</sup> The second historical period Sohn-Rethel references is the Renaissance with the birth of Capitalism and the influence of the exchange abstraction on the abstract ideas of space and time used in science. While some consider the influence of the exchange abstraction to be positive in that it gave a socially real basis for these ideas, we can try to imagine what science might have been like without that abstraction.<sup>20</sup> The history of wars, armaments and pollutants could have been quite different. Considering the present-day convergence of quantum physics with traditional Native American teachings may give us an idea of how knowledge of the universe could have developed on the basis of the gift economy and without the exchange abstraction. And how our economy could be reconceived now on that basis and in accord with the world view of quantum physics and Indigenous traditions (Parry 2015).

Perhaps we can understand the exchange of commodities for money as a material mechanism of the collective 'extended mind' (Clark & Chalmers 2010 [1998]) that influences us behind our backs. Exchange divides mind and world, subject and object, and diverts our attention away from gifting, making us validate what is categorized as an exchange value and devalue what is categorized as free (including the unpaid labor of the domestic sphere and the infinite gifts of Nature). Without our knowing it, we have prejudiced ourselves against our collective source in Nature, mothering and the free economy and we over value the ability of some of us to find increasingly clever and lucrative ways of plundering the gifts of the many and the Mother.

The exchange abstraction hides the plunder. Ironically the immense capital accumulated by the few is made up of the unrecognized gifts of the many. The system that discredits gifting creates and is motivated by an insatiable desire to capture infinite gifts. If we can realize that this is the problem that is driving us and all the other species to extinction, we can address it collectively and individually.

I believe gifts imply the value of the receiver even when they are extorted or plundered. This may be one reason for the pride and complacency of some capitalists, who have received exorbitant gifts and thus an implication of their value, from those who provide the surplus labor in their corporations as well as from the 'many' in society who buy their products at the market price (where

surplus value is translated into hard cash). Perhaps it is this implication of the value of the receiver of gifts that motivates not only the self-esteem of our children but the pride and greed of the plunderers at all levels of the Capitalist system. It is possible to understand the psychology of those who continue to profit by exploiting all the gifts of the Earth and all her species as based on this 'gift value' that allows them to continue in positive self-esteem in spite of the terrible consequences of their acts. Ironically, having received in this way, they often also take the initiative themselves to give, becoming gift givers, philanthropists. Thus, paradoxically, giving becomes a privilege and a reward of the gift-exploiting system while people at the least privileged level also survive by practicing the gift economy as I mentioned above. "There is a crack in everything, that's how the light gets in" (Cohen 1992).

### Language as the 'Social Nexus' of the Maternal Gift Economy

Not surprisingly, the model of unilateral giving-receiving has also been unseen in the study of language despite the fact that children learn to speak during the time in which they are being most intensely nurtured. Perhaps this is due in part to the conception of the newborn as 'solipsistic' that was held by Freud, Piaget and Skinner (Meltzoff & Brooks 2007) but has now been superseded by the new infancy research of the last decades, that conceives of the infant as a highly social and alert participant in life. (Trevarthen 2011). The discovery of mirror neurons (Rizzolati & Sinigaglia 2008) has allowed a new perspective on the possibilities of unmediated knowledge of the other through one's own unconscious neuronal simulation of the other's activities. This crosses the interpersonal divide and would allow the giver to know what it is for the receiver to receive and vice versa, for the receiver to know what it is for the giver to give. Still, schemata structuring this most important and necessarily interpersonal giving and receiving interaction of the child and mother have not been proposed. The ubiquity of the model of exchange and its abstraction from gifting seem to have created a blind spot regarding gifting even in maternal care, where it is most obviously center stage. What seems to be lacking is a conception of what Italian philosopher Luisa Muraro (1991) calls "the symbolic order of the mother". Or perhaps more pertinently it is the real order of the mother that is lacking, the recognition of the importance of free mothering as the original human work (the long labor of care that comes after the labor of birthing).

The influence of the exchange abstraction bleeds over into the investigation of signs and language, making other instances of the patterns of gifting invisible. For example, a leading researcher on children's conceptual and perceptual development, Jean Mandler writes: "Nothing comparable to word order of subject, verb, and object exists in events, nor does tense, aspect, mood, or verb transitivity; these are not observables but rather distinctions that aid communication of information about events..." (2004 : 274).

My position in this regard is just the opposite. I believe it is the schema of the giving and receiving interaction that begins with motherer and child and extends throughout life that is projected onto or found in events, mapped into language and also aids "the communication of information about events". From childhood onwards, our own giving-receiving interactions are both internally and externally

experienced by each of us and are observable by ourselves and others.<sup>21</sup> These interactions crystalize in a schema or schemata that can give rise to the transitive syntax of subject, verb and object or the ditransitive syntax of subject, verb, object and indirect object, whether this is expressed in word order as in English or using other syntactical devices as in many other languages. The gift schema repeats itself in myriad ways in child care and in many other aspects of life and indeed is so ubiquitous that it becomes as invisible and as commonplace as the lifelong gifting process of breathing out and breathing in – and almost as necessary. Recognizing and/or projecting it is the way of knowing the world that we mothered children have in common, while enacting it verbally and non-verbally, intentionally or unintentionally allows us to communicate with each other about it. However, it is invisible to us for various reasons one of which is perhaps its very simplicity. Then it is rendered invisible a second time by the foregrounding of its contradictory derivative, the schema of commodity exchange. And because exchange abstracts from gifting as we saw above, it is not surprising that in a market economy even researchers on children and language would not recognize the schema of the gift on the external, ‘in events’.

## Homology

A radically different perspective from Mandler’s, though still lacking the hypothesis of the gift, is that of Marxist semiotician Ferruccio Rossi-Landi, who understood language as work. compared linguistic and material production (and exchange) according to what he called the ‘homology of production’. Because Rossi-Landi held that it is with the whole of society that humans communicate he believed that “in studying one system or the other, we are basically studying the same thing” (1983 : 69).<sup>22</sup>

Rossi-Landi’s begins his discussion of “language as work and trade” in this way : “if we don’t want to admit that something human exists for man without the intervention of man himself, we must cling to the principle that all wealth or value, however understood, is the result of work that man has performed and can repeat”(1985 [1965] : 35). He starts his “homology of production” comparing artifacts or ‘utensils’ with language and builds in complexity to culminate with linguistic capital and money.

Considering the ‘activity’ of gifting as work would have an important effect on the homology of production, giving it an earlier start. It would allow us to see the construction of utensils and of language as parallel developments of schemata of gifting coming from the maternal economy. This may have been the case even for tools and language in the Pleistocene, when maternal gifting was perhaps even more necessary than it is now. In gatherer-hunter groups during 99% of our genus history humans lived in child centered supportive communities (Narvaez 2013) and now in ontogenesis, maternal care based on free giving and receiving is still the antecedent of tool use and language (and of the understanding and practice of market exchange). Thus, gifting can provide the original schemata that underlie much of what we do in all areas. As I have shown, free giving and receiving usually remain unseen, obscured by the *quid pro quo* exchange relation. They are not

considered part of production but of reproduction. Work seems not to have to do with maternal care and in fact it has been difficult for economists to recognize and quantify what work is in the domestic sphere (Waring 1988).

Despite our mother-blindness, if we consciously entertain the gift hypothesis and look for gifts, we can find them. In the case of Rossi-Landi's homology the construction of basic tools like a prehistoric spear or a modern day hammer can be seen not so much as the neutral work of assembly but as the giving of a stone point to the shaft of the spear or the giving of a head to the handle of a hammer. Different foods are given to the pot where they are given to each other, merge in a soup and then are given from the pot to the people waiting at the table to receive them.

At the lowest level of Rossi-Landi's homology between material and linguistic work (Rossi-Landi 1977 : 70-120) he proposes 'matteremes' and phonemes as basic elements that may be assembled on both the material and the verbal planes to make further units that are more complex : 'objectemes' and monemes, that can be assembled again to make tools and words. According to Rossi-Landi, these elements are assembled through 'work'. I propose that the assembly itself, the work, is a process of giving the pieces to each other. If the assembly is indeed to be called work, it is gift work, the purpose and the method of which is the satisfaction of needs. For the material objects Rossi-Landi uses as an example the hammer, which has a head, parts of which are called the face, the peen and the eye. The face is used for hitting, the peen is the back part that sometimes has a claw for extracting nails, and the eye is the place where the handle is inserted. My contention is that each of these parts satisfies a need either in the construction of the hammer itself or in the larger building process of which the hammer is a part, the 'giving' of the nail to the wail, which satisfies the need of a way to permanently attach a beam.

Regarding the language side of the homology, Rossi-Landi says "We can also further transpose the hierarchy of material objects to the linguistic field and specify that monemes divide into lexemes (also called semantemes) when they constitute the significant nucleus and morphemes when they serve to modify the nucleus. Thus 'love' and 's' are both monemes but the former is a lexeme, the latter a morpheme" (1977 : 84). Together they make up a completed word. That is, for Rossi-Landi the pieces are assembled in a working process to make the tool on the one hand or the word on the other.

In my terms, the giving of the 's' to 'love' satisfies the need for a way of indicating the third person singular. The word 'loves' is then given a subject, for example 'he' and an object, 'you' and together they are used to satisfy the listener's communicative and cognitive need to know about someone's feelings. I believe also that the gift relation takes place inside the transitive sentence itself. The subject 'gives' the predicate to the object. Then of course the speaker gives the sentence as a whole acoustically to the listener. This creates a relation between speaker and listener as giver and receiver of an assembled word-gift that satisfies the listener's communicative and cognitive need. It also creates a relation between the interlocutors as speakers of the same language, identifying them at least to some extent as members of the same community, givers and receivers of the same kinds



of (linguistic) gifts. As I have been saying, this interaction can be seen as a multilevel reprise of the schema in act when the motherer gives to the child something that satisfies the child's material need, thereby creating a relation of mutuality with h/er in regard to that kind of thing.

This assembly of gifts made of gifts cannot be considered in the same way as work for exchange on the market. It is gift work, work that satisfies specific needs and gives value to the receiver before and beyond the exchange abstraction. Even when we are saying something negative about the receiver, we have to use the gift structure, or s/he will not understand. As someone who does understand, she is like us, part of the same (linguistic) community. The use of the same gifts and gift structures affirms our commonality despite the negativity.

Language is primarily not exchange but turn-taking in gifting verbally unilaterally. It is acquired in the early years before children learn to practice *quid pro quo*. Language develops in the maternal gift economy and continues according to that matrix throughout our lives, educating us towards living together in society, albeit ideally, as we practice satisfying other's needs with linguistic gift products that circulate in the community ... except when language is used for the purposes of exchange. In fact, although they are made of word-gifts and word-gift constructions, lies, propaganda and advertising are not gifts, since they are not given to satisfy the communicative and cognitive needs of the receivers but, like exchange, to satisfy the need of the 'givers', using the receivers as means. Word-gift constructions have been transformed into commodities.

## Metaphor

Lakoff and Johnson (1980) have investigated not homology but metaphor in the functioning of language. Their source of comparison is not artefacts or the market but the individual human body and they have identified a large number of bodily metaphors for understanding the world, consisting of schemas that are projected or mapped from a source to a target area.

They began their approach, and with it the field of cognitive linguistics, with a positive reaction to the work of Michael Reddy (1993[1979]) who critiqued the 'conduit metaphor' for communication. Reddy collected some one hundred fifty examples in English of this complex metaphor that presents language as a conduit where ideas are objects that are put into words and travel through the conduit from which they are extracted by the listener/reader. Some examples of these metaphors are: 'putting ideas into words', 'getting your real attitudes across', 'I gave you that idea', 'Your real feelings are finally getting through to me', 'Your concepts come across beautifully' (311-312) Reddy felt these metaphors were misleading and Lakoff and Johnson agreed.

To my mind giving-receiving is the underlying theme, with or without a conduit. In fact, one can see how the singularity of focus that leaves out gifting may be misleading in this statement by Lakoff in 1990 regarding the metaphor of connection. "Our first link is the umbilical cord. Throughout infancy and early childhood, we hold onto our parents and other things, either to secure our location

or theirs. To secure the location of two things relative to one another, we use such things as string, rope, or other means of connection” (1990 : 274).

Certainly, the umbilical cord is the conduit par excellence and is not used just to secure our reciprocal locations like a string. It provides maternal giving of nutrients through the placenta to the fetus in the womb and is a primary factor in the prenatal mammalian gift economy (see Jordan [2017] for a discussion the gift economy in the womb). As I mentioned, interpersonal neurobiology shows that important connections continue to be established between motherers and infants after birth. Alan Schore describes their right brain to right brain communication and mutual regulation (2000) during the period in which they are most intensely giving and receiving.

Reddy proposed as more appropriate for language the toolmaker’s metaphor, in a thought experiment in which he saw the receivers reconstructing the speaker’s meaning according to a blue print which would guide their choices from a shared repertoire. These choices were made according to trial and error until the product appeared to be functional. To my mind both the conduit metaphor and the toolmakers paradigm reference the giving and receiving interaction, the conduit metaphor perhaps more obviously but as I have been saying, gifting also functions as a basic blueprint for language at many levels : the interpersonal, the morphological, the lexical and the syntactic and, as I just said, the satisfaction of needs can be seen in both the assembly and the use of tools. Moreover, if it is correct to say than Rossi-Landi’s homology of utensils and linguistic constructions have an underlying source in giving and receiving, Reddy’s blueprints and tools could be traced back to that source as well. The use of blueprints for language would then not just be a hit or miss selection regarding which pieces might fit but an assignment of need satisfying gifts according to their syntactical positions and interactions as to which would appropriately satisfy and/or elicit communicative, cognitive (and relational) needs. The blueprints could also be seen as schemata facilitating this process.

I don’t think ideas are put into word conduits and extracted by the listener. I do think we give linguistically in order to satisfy needs and by satisfying them we create relationships with each other and to the world. We are able to do this because as members of the same linguistic community, we share both the needs at a certain level of generality and the means of satisfying them in the particular. Following the gift processes that we instigate, words merge, as we give them to each other.<sup>23</sup>

### ***Homo Donans et Recipients***

If language is not ‘work and trade’ or tool making and market, but a unilateral verbal gift economy, a number of distinctions can be seen. For example, it functions (differently from the market) in relative abundance, where words and other verbal gift constructions (eg : sentences, discourses) are freely available to the speaker and listener (or writer and reader), aided when necessary by non-verbal gestures, signs and facial expressions, giving freely (and sometimes unconsciously) to the other indications about the specific ways of receiving the speaker’s communicative

gifts. Specialized languages and academic discourse encroach upon the common space, privatizing it to some extent, but for those who speak them, they also provide abundant gifts.

Language as gifting is other oriented, that is structurally it is turned towards satisfying the communicative and cognitive needs of the other, thereby creating a human relation with h/er. We have to use the words our interlocutor knows and the schemata based on gifting that her language provides. In contrast with what happens in the material exchange economy, we give the receiver something she already has (or knows) and we don't lose it when we give it. We give h/er a word or words, which we combine at the moment with other words, which s/he already has, in gift-based syntax for which we both already have the gift based schemata, which we learned in giving and receiving interactions with our respective motherers in childhood.

In an article about the African Khoekhoe gift economy Yvette Abrahams writes: "Not having private property or owning land was a basis for the Khoekhoe gift economy because if I have enough and you have enough, then the gifts take on a social symbolism." This giving and receiving in abundance is a key to the functioning of language and to the social nexus of a future generalized gift economy freed from commodity exchange. The other oriented schemata of the maternal gift still exist in language though they are overridden and made invisible by the exchange abstraction in capitalist patriarchy. "In the old days, gift giving used to symbolize social exchange (sic). The Khoekhoe consider it very rude to refuse a gift, because what it means is, 'I don't want to know you. I don't want to accept you as part of my particular social structure.' When you give me a gift, it's saying you want to be part of me. Me giving you a gift is saying, 'Yes, I like you. Let's be in a community together.'" (2007 : 218).

Interlocutors in linguistic communities everywhere have used the same gift schemata before and (at least most of) the same word-gifts, though possibly differently combined, ever since early childhood. The word-gifts create relations, and function (almost automatically) according to the gift patterns within the sentences themselves. Giving to the listener (and with some provisos also the reader) linguistically also gives h/er gift value and identifies h/er as a member of that community. The exchange economy blinds us to the importance of the satisfaction of needs beyond or without exchange and this is why we usually don't see satisfying needs as an aspect of linguistic or even of material communication. A philosophy based on gifting in language and in life is waiting in the wings. It can begin with an epistemology in which perception can be considered the reception of the perceptual gifts and affordances (Gibson 1979) of the eco-social niches in which we live. Some of these gifts and affordances are signs which we ourselves consciously and unconsciously give and receive.

In capitalism the maternal gift economy is still widespread but it is invisible or suspect because its aspects are given other names that do not allow us to recognize their underlying maternal continuity: 'ethical or religious behavior', 'charity', 'duty', 'solidarity'. When it is seen in individual traits unilateral gifting may be called 'altruism' or 'generosity', but even 'profligacy', 'stupidity', 'naïveté',

'sacrifice', 'masochism' or 'co-dependence'. On the generalized negative side there are also Eurocentric categorizations of gifting such as 'uncivilized', 'childish' or 'primitive' behavior, and as I mentioned above, there are tendentious translations into market-based categories like 'profit' and the resulting collective gifts that could have been the commons, transformed by privatization and exploitation into pools of accumulated gifts called 'capital'.

The coexistence of market exchange and gifting hides gifting and does not allow a consistent meta level description of it, so the thread of the gift that unites many human and humane experiences cannot be seen. That gifting has anything to do with communication and language (supposedly our most important species-specific trait) and that this has anything to do with mothering/being mothered, is also invisible. Whether or not we do gifting in our individual lives seems to be due to our individual character and not to a hidden paradigm at large in our society. In another turn of the capitalist screw we are taught now to consume (receive) for the good of all, to 'contribute' to the motor of the market and to make as much money as possible in order to do it well.

Looking at Sohn-Rethel's (1965;1978) explanation of the exchange abstraction one wonders how much the abstraction continues to influence the disciplines of economics, semiotics and linguistics, how it influences their embrace of the exchange paradigm both theoretically and practically, justifying every new scheme that finds new gifts to plunder, now mining the gifts of the widespread internet and our most intimate inner sanctums, misappropriating our choices for the purposes of advertising, propaganda and surveillance. In Italy friends of Rossi-Landi (1921-1985) bemoan the end of a long-ago epoch of '*Semiotica di sinistra*' ('Left wing semiotics') and in fact both semiotics and economics are now engaged in making money in and through the market while the ship of state is about to sail over the edge of a flat earth.

There are many initiatives now for social change, many attempts at alternative economies. There are eco villages with people trying to practice the gift economy, many projects that practice and promote it and a growing number of individuals who try to live it. There are many writers on gifting and some, like Charles Eisenstein (2011), have successfully spread the idea to a multitude of readers. However, the important connection with the unilateral, maternal gift economy has rarely been made. The movements for social change, for peace and the environment, against racist violence, economic violence and violence against women, could more consciously frame the solutions to these grievous problems as gifts to society that they are trying to give. All of us can shift our thinking towards the gift paradigm, which we still have within us, and find our way out of the trap of the exchange paradigm. Recognizing the maternal gift economy as an integral part of the make-up of the human species can bring us back from our alienation as *homo economicus* and as *homo sapiens* 'in denial' to our true potential as *homo donans et recipiens*, the giving and receiving being, in sintony with *Terra Mater donans et recipiens*, gift giving and receiving Mother Earth.

## Notes

1. Defined as family or community members including siblings and fathers, even entire villages and paid caregivers. (The infant does not know the caregiver is paid). I realize that birth mothers are the ones who are usually responsible for this important, detailed and intimate work.)
2. It is ironic that so many parents in Euro-America try to teach their little children about exchange and money – to give them a “headstart”.
3. Derrida (1992) considered unilateral gifts impossible because they would give an ego boost to the giver. Yet if everyone were doing it, there would be no particular ego enhancement. In fact millions of motherers do unilateral giving to children and it is simply “their role”.
4. See the *Revue du MAUSS – Mouvement Anti-Utilitariste des Sciences Sociales*, founded in 1981 by Alain Caillé and continuing to the present without however any reference to the maternal economy. Apart from a few fleeting mentions, the same can be said regarding the many European American sociologists, anthropologists and social critics who have engaged with and elucidated the gift economy. Among them are Hyde (1983), Strahern (1988), Weatherford (1988; 1991) Derrida (1992), Weiner (1992), Godelier (1998), Zemon-Davis (2000), Caillé & Godbout (2001), Raymond (2001) Eisenstein (2011), Bruni (2012) and many others too numerous to mention. Feminists writing in France in the 70’s and 80’s proposed maternal economies in opposition to the market in a way somewhat similar to mine, but mostly within the framework of Freudian and Lacanian psychoanalysis. Irigaray (1985 [1974]), Kristeva (1986) and particularly Cixous (1975). More recently, there are feminist theorists and economists who are proposing an economics of care within the market, Joan Tronto (1993), Nancy Folbre (2001), Riane Eisler (2007), and many others.
5. See, for example, the Center for Compassion and Altruism Research and Education at Stanford University – but not connected to mothering (<http://ccare.stanford.edu/>).
6. It is now accepted that the “nonverbal, pre-rational stream of expression that binds the infant to its parent continues throughout life to be a primary medium of intuitively felt affective-relational communication between persons” (Orlinksky & Howard, 1986 : 343, quoted in Schore 2019).
7. A possibly apocryphal derivation is com-muni-cation : giving gifts together.
8. The lacuna has been partially filled by the work of Andrea O’Reilly and Demeter Press, which since 2006 has been publishing a large body of work regarding mothering and feminism. Now O’Reilly is proposing a “matricentric feminism” (O’Reilly 2016). German philosopher Heide Goettner-Abendroth (2012) has established the field of Modern Matriarchal Studies, which presents Matriarchy not as a mirror image of patriarchy but as a continuing social form based on maternal values for all. Anthropologist Peggy Sanday (2002) writes on *Women at the Center in Minangkabau Matriarchal Society in Western Sumatra*. This work was preceded by Indigenous writers who recognize mothering like Paula Gunn Allen (1986), *The Sacred Hoop* and Barbara Alice Mann (2000), *Iroquois Women : the Gantowisas*. To this brief nod towards a focus on the maternal model must be added political initiatives like the Mothers of the Movement : mothers of Black victims of violence and murder in the USA, the Madres de la Plaza de Mayo in Argentina, the CoMadres of El Salvador and maternalist currents of feminism and activism in the Americas, Africa, Asia and around the globe, all of which would require a wide treatment that is not possible here.
9. Second wave feminists like Dorothy Dinnerstein realized that involving more men in childcare would diminish patriarchy. That is, in my terms more males would embody the model of the unilateral maternal economy. Perhaps this would decouple gifting/nurturing from its identification with gender.
10. Mirror neurons and kinetic identification and imitation can account for the assimilation by the child of the maternal gift model from the beginning.
11. Trevarthen’s concept of the mother-child interaction can be seen from the following (2011 : 119). “As thinking adults depend upon years of practical experience, reasoning about facts and

causes, and language to sustain their knowledge, beliefs and memories, and to understand one another, it seems quite absurd to suggest that a newborn infant has intersubjective mental capacities. But detailed research on how neonatal selves coordinate the rhythms of their movements and senses, and how they engage in intimate and seductive precision with other persons' movements, sensing their purposes and feelings, gives evidence that it is so. The developmental and functional neuroscience of the human brain agrees. Indeed, it seems that cultural intelligence itself is motivated at every stage by the kind of powers of innate intersubjective sympathy that an alert infant can show shortly after birth. We are born to generate shifting states of self-awareness, to show them to other persons, and to provoke interest and affectionate responses from them. Thus, starts a new psychology of the creativity and cooperative knowing and meaning in human communities". The maternal gift economy provides the context in which the infant can develop in this way and the child's interactions with the motherer in protoconversations play with giving and receiving at another communicative level.

12. Recently the exploration of gifting from a marketing perspective has proposed terms like "bonding value", "the gift's value in the world of ties and their reinforcement" (Skageby 2010). This is different from the implication of value of the receiver herself, which is at least in part the implication that s/he is intrinsically valuable.
13. Peirce's chain of interpretants leading to further interpretants in chains of finite or infinite semiosis can be seen in this vein of giving the gift "forward". See Vaughan (2015 : 200, 272-273.)
14. He considers also "a community of free individuals, carrying on their work with the means of production in common, in which the labour-power of all the different individuals is consciously applied as the combined labour-power of the community. All the characteristics of Robinson's labour are here repeated, but with this difference, that they are social, instead of individual." He divides the work into the share required by the individual's needs and that required by the needs of the community. However, he doesn't include "reproductive" work, mothering work, the nurturing of individuals by individuals – which is both social at a different level and individual (Marx 1996 [1865] : 64).
15. There the gift reappears as an aspect of marketing, so the product is sold to give as a gift and carry the intention of the buyer to the receiver... so the more it costs, the greater the gift.
16. One only needs imagine the contrast with the child's desperation when h/er needs are not satisfied.
17. "...commodity exchange is abstract because it excludes use; that is to say, the action of exchange excludes the action of use. But while exchange banishes use from the actions of people, it does not banish it from their minds. The minds of the exchanging agents must be occupied with the purposes, which prompt them to perform their deal of exchange. Therefore, while it is necessary that their action of exchange should be abstract from use, there is also necessity that their minds should not be. The action alone is abstract. The abstractness of their action will, as a consequence, escape the minds of the people performing it. In exchange, the action is social, the minds are private. Thus, the action and the thinking of people part company in exchange and go different ways." (Sohn-Rethel 1978 : 28-29).
18. Although it is notoriously difficult to calculate in monetary terms, "household production is now recognised as an alternative or parallel economy to the market. Rather than being a satellite to the market economy, the household economy is best considered a binary star" (Ironmonger 2001). If we add to this free production the global "ecosystem services", which have been estimated at some \$125 trillion a year compared to the monetized economy's \$75 trillion world GDP (Costanza *et al.* 2014), we can see that the market economy actually floats upon a sea of gifts.
19. Richard Seaford (2012 : 1) has explored this relation between money and abstraction, showing that the kind of individual self-concept, including the idea of a "unitary self-consciousness" or a "soul" was altered in both Ancient India and Ancient Greece under the influence of the invention of money
20. For this reason, those who are trying to live an alternative economy should avoid commodity

- exchange or at least hold it in abeyance.
21. Perhaps this is also hidden by the fact that the speaker and listener or giver and receiver and their gifts do not seem to be external “events” yet as participants in the interaction they are events and parts of events both externally and internally to themselves.
  22. “Moreover, one must bear in mind that human beings do not communicate only through words but use the whole social organization. Therefore, as Rossi-Landi stated, we must elaborate a theory for understanding the two fundamental modes of human behavior : production and circulation of goods (as commodities) and production and circulation of sentences (as messages)” (Bianchi 2015 : 13).
  23. The linguistic faculty of “merge” so significant for Chomsky can be seen as the giving of grammatical parts like prefixes and suffixes to “roots” or adjectives to nouns, and in fact sentences/messages and texts can be understood as forming complex “packages” of gifts made of interrelated gifts.

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## Abstract

The nurturing of the infant from birth onwards provides an example of unilateral gift giving made necessary by the helplessness of the child who cannot exchange an equivalent for what she is given. This material transaction, the giving and receiving of goods and care, creates basic interpersonal schemas of material communication, which underlie verbal communication. They differ from the schemas created by *quid pro quo* exchange. The market economy is composed of both types of transactions, but unilateral gifts are given to and taken by the exchange transaction mechanism in order to create profit. Reinterpreting maternal care as a free communicative economy points towards a redefinition of the human as *Homo Donans* and provides a way out of the end of the world scenario to which capitalism has brought us. Using ideas of Marx, Vygotsky, Rossi-Landi, Sohn-Rethel, Lakoff, the findings of recent infancy research, interpersonal neurobiology and modern matriarchal (Goettner-Abendroth) and matricentric (O'Reilly) feminism, I propose a radical shift towards the gift paradigm.

**Keywords** : Crisis; Maternal Species; Gift Economy; Exchange Abstraction; Homology.

## Résumé

L'éducation de l'enfant dès sa naissance fournit un exemple de don unilatéral rendu nécessaire par l'impuissance de l'enfant qui ne peut échanger un équivalent contre ce qu'on lui donne. Cette transaction matérielle, le don et la réception de biens et de soins, crée des schémas interpersonnels de base de la communication matérielle, qui sous-tendent la communication verbale. Ils diffèrent des schémas créés par l'échange de *quid pro quo*. L'économie de marché est composée des deux types de transactions, mais des dons unilatéraux sont donnés et reçus par le mécanisme de transaction d'échange afin de créer du profit. Réinterpréter les soins maternels comme une économie communicative libre pointe vers une redéfinition de l'humain comme *Homo Donans* et fournit une issue au scénario de fin du monde auquel le capitalisme nous a conduits. En utilisant les idées de Marx, Vygotsky, Rossi-Landi, Sohn-Rethel, Lakoff, les découvertes de la recherche récente sur la petite enfance, la neurobiologie interpersonnelle et le féminisme matriarcal moderne (Goettner-Abendroth) et matricentrique (O'Reilly), je propose un changement radical vers le paradigme du don.

**Mots-clés** : Crise; Espèces maternelles; Économie du don; Abstraction de l'échange; Homologie.

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