

PART THREE



# Verbal Gift Giving



### Tracking gifts and third party relations\*

Communicative needs can arise from the verbal or from the non verbal context. The speaker addresses the listener as having a need regarding the context that s/he, the speaker, can satisfy. If s/he says for example 'The girl hit the ball' she is relating the parts of that experience to word-gifts, which satisfy the listener's (socially educated) communicative needs regarding girls, hitting and balls. By creating a package of word gifts in this way she puts the listener into a relation with the context which is now actual rather than potential, and she changes and socializes h/er own relation to the context, since that relation now has an equivalent in the relation of the other.

In looking at language as gift giving we can see not only that a gift relation is established between speakers and listeners with regard to words, sentences, texts and contexts but that the various linguistic elements give to and receive from *each other*. I believe they do this not according to 'rules' as such but according to transposed functional patterns of giving and receiving of material gifts and services, and according to the implications of value that derive from giving and receiving. Not just words or strings of words, but the way they are put together, syntax, is a gift based process.

In order to try to justify this unusual approach to syntax let me digress briefly. In his book *Grooming, Gossip and the Origins of Language*, Robin Dunbar (2001) makes the hypothesis that language developed from pre-hominid mutual grooming as a sort of verbal grooming which could be performed at a distance. I see grooming as the performance of a service, an activity that is part of mothering or

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nurturing and that is extended into adulthood. That is, grooming is a kind of gift giving.<sup>43</sup>

According to Dunbar grooming is done to maintain the relationships between individuals within the group.<sup>44</sup> Group size, which is correlated with brain size is correlated with social complexity because, Dunbar says, “primate social life is characterized by the ability of the animals to recognize relationships between third parties” I recognize “Jim’s relationship with John as well as John’s relationship with me” (p.63) Presumably the pre hominids’ recognition of these relationships would come about through watching who groomed who in their social group (and Dunbar sees this as the basis of gossip.)

In our terms we could understand the tracking of third party relationships as finding out “who gives gifts or services to whom.” It is a relatively short leap then to ask also “what gives gifts to what?” In a society where gifts are passed on from one person to another and then to another, it would be commonplace to think that someone (or something) had a ‘property’ because she received it as a gift or service from someone else, and that she might possibly give it again. The tracking of the giving of gifts and services and the establishing of relations among third parties could thus also be extended to the gifts and services themselves. With still another leap, it could be extended to the substitute gifts, the verbal products, which are given by humans to each other to establish communicative, community-forming relations. The ‘third parties’ would thus be both the material gifts or services and the words, both gifts and substitute (‘straw’) gifts. The tracking would impute ‘community’ relations among the ‘parties’ much as it imputes community relations among the groomers. I believe that in language the gifts among verbal substitute gifts and the relations, which are thereby formed, are what we call ‘syntax’. If grooming

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<sup>43</sup> Dunbar studied particularly bonobos, great apes who live in female-led tribes and engage in a lot of mutual sexual pleasuring.

<sup>44</sup> My argument here does not depend upon whether or not language actually began in this way though it may have. Rather I am using Dunbar’s idea of the tracking of gifts of grooming among third party group members as an illustration of a process of knowledge, the tracking of gifts and relations among others, which is still taking place.

(nurturing) or giving gifts and services is a basic process of social cohesion it would not be surprising that it would be projected onto other human processes and onto the non human world as well. Syntax works because gift relations are projected into the sequences of verbal gifts we give each other.<sup>45</sup> The kind of property or service (or the grooming capacity) that someone or something has or gives, which is to be used for establishing relations of solidarity with others, is addressed towards others' needs, towards sharing, from the beginning. It is free, not private property. If it is a human activity like grooming or speaking it is also not destroyed through consumption (as happens when an apple is eaten for example) but it can be recreated again and again by everyone and therefore shared again and again. Production is elicited by consumption, and by the understanding of what has been produced for what need.

The verbal gift giving and receiving of language can also be shared by several people at once, in that a speaker can speak to more than one person at a time (while grooming takes place one by one) (Dunbar p. 121). Word-gifts are shared in a general way by the group, which uses them to make innumerable particular sentences and discourses. Sharing verbal gifts also creates group cohesion as opposed to those who do not share them, who speak no language, or who speak other languages. (This sharing gives the members of the group a common ground, a common "property" by which they can categorize themselves as a community among other communities).

It is as if human society had taken the process of mothering, generalized it into gift giving and turned it every possible way, using it at different levels, backwards, re applying it to itself, to its own parts, transposing it onto substitute gifts, and collections of substitute gifts, attributing (giving) it to nature, to culture, to language and to human and non human and imaginary individuals and groups, generally and particularly, in parts and as wholes. Unfortunately these different kinds and levels of gift giving are not being recognized, and we have also drained the gift character out of practical activity, and out of our idea

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<sup>45</sup> A projection is happening now in market society where the exchange relation is what is being projected everywhere with negative, gift defying, results.

of activity, neutralizing it and hiding the gifts, taking the mother and mothering out of the mix. As we do this we are also depriving the mother of her original continuing connection with language, in favor of a bleak paternal Symbolic Order which rules in ignorance of the patterns of the gift.

The reasons why we do not recognize the creative many-faceted gift process are several. First there is the problem of patriarchy, as we have been saying. Second there is the problem of the canceling of the gift by the market processes of exchange, which ideologically appear to be the basic natural human activity and become the norm. Third, there is the problem that the various aspects of gifts and gift giving at different levels in language and communication have been homogenized and made invisible because the levels have been flattened together. Meta levels are placed at the same level as their objects, and meta gifts are unrecognizable because both material and communicative gifts themselves are unrecognized.<sup>46</sup> I believe that language is altogether a gift medium which is all and only about gifts and gift giving. Signs are gifts of gifts. Indeed life itself is a gift giving and receiving process. What is not about gift giving is the non-nurturing 'manhood agenda', together with the mechanisms we have made out of the doubled self-canceling limited and limiting 'gift' of exchange.

### **More about syntax**

In a sentence like 'The girl hit the ball', there is a certain begging of the question of gift giving, since the content 'hit' is a transposed gift. Hitting is like giving, nurturing or grooming in that it touches the other and establishes a relation, but hitting causes harm, and the relation established is one of domination rather than mutuality.<sup>47</sup>

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<sup>46</sup> There are also ways in which activity and passivity seen according to heterosexual gender stereotypes, are played out in the form of the definition, but are just understood as part of the way the definition 'works', further obscuring the gift process (See For-Giving p.230).

<sup>47</sup> Dunbar is curious about the fact that language is located in the same part of the brain as the capacity for throwing. Indeed throwing something to someone is, like speaking a kind of gift giving at a distance, to be received—caught—

Nevertheless we can look at the noun-verb-complement structure of this sentence as transposed giver, gift or service, and receiver. In a sentence like “The girl gave the ball to the boy” there is one kind of receiving that the ball has with respect to the girl’s giving and another kind of receiving that the boy has with respect to the girl’s giving of the ball. The speaker can decide how much of the whole gift process s/he wishes to include in h/er sentence. S/he can say ‘The girl gave’ in which she proposes the subject as giver and the verb as a kind of gift or service. She can say ‘The girl gave the ball’ in which she gives a receiver to the verb. Or she can complete the process with a receiver for the complement: ‘The girl gave the ball to the boy’. Emphasis can be placed on the receiver rather than the giver as in passive sentences: ‘The ball was hit by the boy’. The gifts can be re-applied to themselves, and further gifts given to previous gifts: in ‘The boy hit the ball that was thrown by the girl’, ‘that was thrown by the girl’ is a gift given to ‘ball’ as its receiver.

Questions are a particularly interesting case in that they specify and make explicit the communicative need of the speaker. They are like exchange in that it is the need of the speaker that is in focus, and they are spoken in order to receive a response. For this reason they require a form or at least a specific inflection that is different from the basic verbal gift transaction. Inverting word order seems particularly felicitous because there is an inversion of direction or roles.<sup>48</sup>

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by another. On the other hand throwing something at someone is hitting at a distance. Hitting is masculated gift giving. Without an idea of gift giving and the creation of positive communitary relations, hitting may appear to be the reason for substitution. That is, the use of force may appear to be just necessary for the process of substitution, as when one person takes the place of the other as the one at the top, the exemplar. Then exchange appears to be a more civilized process, which takes the place of such brute force. Re-naming used in the description of syntax employs the process of substitution used by exchange, and like exchange it leaves aside gift giving. My point is that neither the market nor language can be explained without gift giving.

<sup>48</sup> The term ‘effective demand’ is the economic equivalent of the question, in that what is needed is made explicit by the money-words of the buyer. The pat phrase “I am not a mind reader” in answer to those who feel their needs are ignored, is an exchange ego defense against the kind of empathy and other orientation that are part of the gift giving way.” Intuition” unites non verbal

'Giving' is a verb that takes four predicate places. Giving is also a complex action in that it involves a giver, a gift or service and, if it is complete, a receiver. The relation gift-giving establishes is not just between the giver and receiver but also focuses on the gift or service itself. The inclusion of the gift or service in the relation specifies the relation to that particular gift or service. Specific kinds of gifts combine with or can be given to other specific kinds of gifts, which can use or accept them. We therefore have more than just a general sense of mutuality enhanced by the 'release of opiates in the brain' as Dunbar says happens with grooming. We have a specification of mutuality regarding every one of the immense variety of gifts and services, givers and receivers we can be, or find, or produce. The basic noun-verb-complement structure is a complete transposed gift process (giver-gift/service-receiver) in miniature. Many other partial gift processes can be *given to* it in dependent or conjoined clauses and phrases, embellishing and refining the basic gift transaction.

Within the arc of the particular sentence there are even smaller gift interactions, as the various parts of speech combine according to certain restrictions and specifications, which are not *rules* but the '*givens*' of gift giving.<sup>49</sup> Just as there are different kinds of gifts, which are appropriate for different kinds of needs, (we cannot eat the air or wear a mountain) different kinds of word-gifts can be given to and received from each other. Adjectives are given to nouns but not all nouns have the same needs. In 'green leaves' for example, the noun 'leaves' has a need that 'green' can fill, while 'ideas' as Chomsky showed us long ago cannot be modified by (that is, it cannot receive the gift of) 'green'. It does not have that need.

Which needs word-gifts have depends in part upon their linguistic and grammatical character as parts of speech, nouns or verbs etc. On the other hand, we could describe their grammatical char-

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cues and past experience in understanding others even when they do not make their needs explicit with a demand or question.

<sup>49</sup> These gift patterns give the sequential positioning a scope, a *raison d'être*.

acter as collections of kinds of needs. The needs of word-gifts also depend upon the needs of the kinds of things or cultural elements for which they are substitute gifts. Leaves in the world can be green—we can see them as having that property—and green can be the color of leaves, so at the level of reality the one has been “given” to the other. Consequently at the level of word-gifts, we attribute to ‘leaves’ a need that ‘green’ can satisfy. This attribution is a kind of projection of a process we have learned by being mothered, and which has become more complex as we grow up, and it has been mediated by the use of language (that is, the use of language has mediated the multiple possibilities of gift giving but it is also itself a part of the process of gift giving).

Recapitulating: at a general level, we can say that human communicative needs arise regarding green leaves that is, people for whatever reason want to create human relations with each other regarding green leaves and they need a means to create these relations. The needs for these means are satisfied using the verbal substitute gifts, ‘green’ and ‘leaves’. The way this process works is that by using our ability to track third party interactions, we see that a green color has been ‘given’ to those leaves, and is now one of their ‘properties’. Thus on the verbal plane we can give the word ‘green’ to the word ‘leaves’ not only because generally adjectives are the kind of word-gifts that are given to nouns (for which nouns have satisfiable needs) but because needs and gift interactions that are identified on the non verbal, ”reality” plane have been transposed and attributed to elements on the verbal plane. ‘Leaves’ can have a need, which can be satisfied by ‘green’ because people can have a need to communicate regarding those properties and their ‘owners’ which are the color green and leaves. This is done by attributing (giving) a need to the verbal substitute gift and then giving it another verbal substitute gift to satisfy that need. The projection or identification of needs and gifts on the reality plane and their re projection onto the verbal plane can only be satisfactory as an explanation if gift giving-and-receiving is understood as a very basic and important process. But we are all mothered children; our needs have to be satisfied by someone and we learn to satisfy needs in turn

as we mature. The giving and receiving process is the basic human process and its logic can be used again and again whether or not we realize that is what we are doing.<sup>50</sup>

## Conjunctions

Linking words or phrases by ‘and’ is a way in which we give the listener two or more word—or phrase—gifts together. We do this because communicative needs arise regarding both items separately. Neither word-gift has been given to the other word-gift but the speaker gives the listener a word or sentence gift about one of them, together with a word or sentence gift about the other (perhaps deleting one sentence gift in order to avoid redundancy). ‘The girl and the boy threw the balls’. Though the two subjects of the sentence (givers) are joined, they can only be said to be given to each other in a contingent way.

On the other hand, the giving of an adjective to a noun such as ‘red balloon’ expresses the fact that on the extra linguistic level, the balloon has received the property red in an ongoing way. The words ‘the girl’ and ‘the boy’ joined by ‘and’ are given as gifts together to the receiver/listener but the relation expressed, of those two people to each other, is not ongoing in the same way.

The mathematical “translation” of ‘and’ as ‘plus’, as in ‘plus one’, provides the addition or giving of one more to an existing item or series. In fact the items in the series are given to each other to such an extent that a new number name expresses their collection from the point of view of the giver. ‘Three’ expresses the collected gift, the belonging together or aspect of ‘having been given to each other’ of two plus one, i.e., two to which another one is given. (For more on numbers see below)

Interestingly we can see here how the word ‘and’ or the plus sign is not really appropriate for use in the notation of semantic factors

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<sup>50</sup> At the unconscious level of pheromone communication we are giving and receiving physiologically, also without knowing it. That is we are satisfying each other’s needs to know and be known at that level.

such as ‘man’ = + human + adult+ male because the + indicates a somewhat different kind of ‘having properties’ than is indicated when we say ‘a man is an adult male human’. ‘And’ or ‘+’ provides more possibility of disjunction than the use of adjectives to modify ‘male’. In fact both in the conjunction of numbers with + and the conjunction of properties with +, the idea of gift giving and receiving has been further obscured.

Ideas are not green so ‘ideas’ does not have a need that ‘green’ can fill. That is, communicative needs do not arise in people regarding green ideas (barring artificial situations like the need for examples for philosophical and linguistic investigations). Ideas do not ever have the property green (nor does green ever have the property colorless) because it has not been given to them on the reality plane and perhaps cannot be given to them because of degrees of materiality or logical contradiction—though the reasons for this impossibility could be due to anything and do not concern us here. We recognize that ideas do not have that need, and that we do not need to communicate about them in that way so we will not say ‘green ideas’, that is we will not give ‘green’ to ‘ideas’, or ‘colorless’ to ‘green’. ‘Green’ can be received by ‘leaves’ but not by ‘ideas’. You can tell by looking at leaves that they have received that property—just for a quick confirmation—but you do not have any such possibility of confirmation about ideas, in fact no need will arise regarding their being green. (The listener who is the receiver of a communicative gift may have a need to know that ideas are exciting but not that they are green. In other words a communicative need may arise for one but not for the other. That is because there are no contexts in which I can identify a need of the other regarding green ideas that I can satisfy by communicating with h/er using the words ‘green ideas’.)<sup>51</sup>

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<sup>51</sup> When Chomsky first used the example of ‘green ideas’ there was no Green Party. Now reality has changed and the environmental movement has spread everywhere so that Chomsky himself may be said to have green ideas, though like others of his ideas they could not be called ‘colorless’. The change in the social context has produced a change in the needs we attribute to the word ‘ideas’ and the capacity of the word ‘green’ to satisfy them.

## Articles

Nouns need articles in a more constant way than they need adjectives. The reason for this is that communicative needs continually arise among people regarding the way things are being given to them, that is, how things are being selected to be given by the giver. (Selecting how to give to satisfy communicative needs is an activity, which all speakers have to do when it is their turn, so they have it in common). The specific selection gives the listener/receiver a way to discern which of her needs are being addressed, and to know whether it is a need regarding a kind or a need regarding a particular individual. This distinction is a generally useful, even a necessary one, as are those of singular and plural. Pronouns, tenses, case endings have to do with locating the specific givers, gifts and receivers on the so called 'reality plane', which the speaker sees as occasioning the listeners' communicative needs at the moment. The modes of addressing communicative needs regarding the world in its various aspects are culturally specific and linguistic gifts are systematized differently of in different languages.

If we recognize that there are different levels in language we can see that there are other transposed gift processes at a somewhat different level from the noun/verb/complement miniature gift pattern, and gifts made through substitution. Gifts of adjectives to nouns, and adverbs to verbs take place at a slightly different level from gifts of articles or case endings to nouns or tense modifiers to verbs. Still other levels can be seen in negative discourse, both with the use of 'not' and when someone is communicating something negative that does not seem to be a gift, e.g., 'I hate you'. The gift of the negative satisfies the need of the receiver to know so as to be able to behave accordingly. That is, there is a need regarding negation and negativity, the satisfaction of which can be considered a gift at a different level from combination or conjunction for example. The flattening of the levels is another factor in hiding the gift aspects, which different parts of speech have in common. ('Not' seems to be at the same gift level as a positive statement but it is not).

Many of the *parts of giving* can be seen in language: prepositions such as 'to, in, by' can be seen as aspects of gift-giving: 'to' is an aspect of transmission towards, 'in' is an aspect of holding or property, and 'by' is an aspect of the source or giver. English 'have' as an auxiliary verb for the past perfect and imperfect 'I had gone, I have gone' combines the aspect of property with that of a trajectory verb to form the past. 'She has thrown the ball' uses the property verb 'has' to make the past tense of the gift given or received: the subject gave the throwing to the ball, and she remains the possessor of the act which has been done. This use of the verb of property to form the past is not necessary but felicitous and reasonable. It seems to make a property of past actions, something others could track as a given.

Viewing syntax only as brain function, eliminating gift giving, divides the brain from the mind and what is from what should be. If brain function is what is, gift giving is relegated only to what should be. If we incorporate gift giving into our idea of language we can justify morality in a very different way. Our social, communicating and community-forming selves become the basis of our individual selves. We need to do materially what we are already doing linguistically, which we developed as a species from what we were already doing materially. The kind of political and economic behavior that is espoused by Chomsky and Lakoff, can be more easily promoted if we restore gift giving to language. This does not mean that we have to believe in a *tabula rasa*, but that the huge social importance of mothering as laying down the early humanizing gift patterns in ontogenesis and phylogenesis should be recognized. The hostility of man against man (and men against women), which seems to be primordial and natural, is an effect of patriarchy and the market system, which both exploit gift giving and make it invisible.

I have added the following unpublished speculations, which I think may interest readers who have gotten this far..

### **Translating Language into Numbers: a conjecture**

In using numbers we are putting into practice a process we learn from using language, which can be seen as a derivative of linguistic

gift giving and the exemplar-to-many process described above. For example, the word 'three' is easily produced and given and a material exemplar of three items is so immediately formable with our fingers that perhaps we are confused by its availability. Almost anyone can produce this exemplar (with the exception of very young children or people with physical malformations) so that we have in common a visible exemplar for the basic integers, differently from exemplars of most other kinds of things, which are buried deep in our private memories. This disappearance of most exemplars from our memory happens because their function has been made unnecessary by being replaced by words.

Because people have to learn to count, and this can be done by taking each finger as corresponding to some item in a group, more action is actually performed with the exemplars of integers than with linguistic exemplars. The question of the materiality of numbers is similar to the question of the materiality of exemplars and can be addressed in the same way. As in language, the exemplar is replaced by the word-gift as equivalent of the exemplar, with regard to which the other items under consideration are found to be equal to each other. Once we have learned to count, the word 'three' can be given in the place of all sets of three and therefore no set of three needs to be physically given, or given to view, as an exemplar in order to create human relations regarding it or to imply that all sets of three are related to each other as equal. That is, the exemplar has become unimportant in that it has been replaced by the word 'three'. Exemplars of integers can be produced any time on the fingers. But we can say they become merely examples after the concept of each of them and of numbers has been developed.

The basic terms of the quantitative language of numbers are those from one to nine. The rest are adjectival constructions. 14 is an adjectival construction of 4 and 10, 21 of 1 and 20. 4 is given to 10 on the verbal plane, in much the same way as 'red' is given to 'ball'. On the experiential plane we can consider the items also as given to each other or given to view together. The contingent adjectival gift construction has become more permanent in number words.

The 'needs' of numbers are the 'needs' of words, flattened, abstracted, and denatured. These needs are projected onto numbers by us, so that our needs for relations with others can be satisfied regarding the quantitative aspects of our world. We could say that numbers are words in a serial progression with an altered or vestigial syntax.

Quantification has to do with satisfying a need to know, to categorize and sort. The counters are 'unseen' givers and they leave aside other needs while they are counting, that is, while they are performing operations of giving to and giving from (another way of looking at taking from) according to this vestigial syntax. Basic arithmetic processes of adding and subtracting are transposed human operations of giving to and giving from.

Multiplication and division are sorting, according to an exemplar. In these operations we describe a kind of 'many' by indicating the number exemplar or its quantitative word gift substitute with regard to which the items are related to each other as similar. The items forming 20 are related to each other as 2's, regarding an exemplar of 2 (or its replacement, the word 'two'), 10 times so also to an exemplar of 10 (or the word 'ten'). In 3 times 2, and 6 divided by 2, we relate these items to an exemplar or word 3 and to an exemplar or word 2. That is, if we look at 2 as the exemplar, we can see that in 6 there are 3 sets (related as sets to the exemplar of three), which are related to each other as equal in that they are all related to 2 as their exemplar internally. If we look at 3 as the exemplar for the sets internally, we see that there are 2 sets. Multiplying 5 times 10, a person gives 10 to itself the number of times that is related to the word, or exemplar, 5. Multiplication and division take place by relating items to two or more different quantitative exemplars or their word-gift substitutes, together.

Any number can 'need' to be operated on by any other. That is it can 'need' to be added to, subtracted from, given to (receive), given from (give). Both giving to and giving from numbers are equally valuable as operations. The 'needs' of numbers of course are really our needs to collect or sort them as sets. Multiplying a number by itself gives us a way of exploring reiteration and self similarity in that the number is not only the exemplar but also the number of sets and number of times or repetitions of the sets. The difference

between addition and subtraction or multiplication and division is giving *to* vs giving *away*. These sorting processes can serve to calculate quantities of gifts and quantities of needs, a calculation which presumably serves the efficient filling of needs.

We still have the idea of command and obedience regarding numbers. “Give 2 to 3,” “Take away 2 from 3.” These ‘rules’ appear to be abstracted from the practices of giving. They do not eliminate them, however, because the gift practices continue to be used without rules and without quantification as well. In fact the gift processes underlie both qualitative and quantitative giving, and the rules of both qualitative operations (grammar) and quantitative operations (arithmetic) derive from them.

Rule-following requires the suspension of the attention to one’s own subjective state and interpersonal interaction until after the act is done. It can constitute a moment of instrumentality, and appear as a suspension of material and linguistic giving and receiving, even if projected aspects of the gift process are what we are actually using as instruments. In fact I believe that both mathematical and linguistic ‘rules’ are false explanations for the functioning of projected aspects of the gift process that we do not recognize as such.

## Things, words and value

Words as values are not divorced from the relation-creating gift value of the world we live in. That value has to do with gift giving by the material world, by nature, by individuals, by human cultures and communities, in so far as we are able to receive them and gifts are also given to the material world, to nature, to individuals and to cultures and communities, in so far as we and they are able to give gifts and pass them on. If we retain the gift character of our heritage as mothered children we can understand perception as the perceptive reception of the gifts of the world around us. The relation between things and words starts with things<sup>52</sup>—gifts given by and of things

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<sup>52</sup> Similarly Marx said that the relation between money and commodities starts with commodities.(p.)

unilaterally<sup>53</sup> to humans at the level of perception (both individual and collective perception, received both individually and collectively) which causes human relations to things as their receivers (and to other humans as givers and receivers, passing gifts along). If we consider ourselves receivers of the gifts of the environment, projecting the mother, we will receive also the implication of value that we receive when human mothers give to us. This implication of value comes from the unilateral giving of gifts to us by our surroundings, and the word-gifts which represent them also receive this implication of value, which is augmented by the fact that the words come to us as a social inheritance from the linguistic community, transmitted initially by our mothers and families who either give them to us directly, by teaching them to us, or put them there for us to use, by speaking to each other. To this we must add the value we attribute to others when we give the words to them (and they to us), satisfying their communicative needs, as well as the value words give to each other by satisfying each other's needs in syntax.

Words have value or are values ('value accents' Volosinov called them) because they are a means of satisfying communicative needs, because they represent non linguistic gifts, which satisfy a great variety of material, cultural and perceptual needs, and because they are means of transmitting (giving) value. We give value to words in all these ways and therefore Saussure's *langue* represents only one of their aspects, seen in a sort of cross section, the aspect of mutual exclusion by which we recognize them as qualitatively different.

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<sup>53</sup> It is easy to ignore the source of a *unilateral* gift especially when gift giving is itself ignored by a society. Also as we have noted elsewhere, giving gives value to the receiver especially when the giver does not take credit for it. Nature and culture are the source of the givens of our experience and perception. Our perceptive and interpretative apparatus are very active in our receiving of these 'unilateral givens' from outside. While it may actually be the case that our mode of perception transforms what we perceive into gifts by singling out and foregrounding their most important aspects for us, at the conscious level we receive these givens free of charge, as unilateral gifts from our environment. We can also foreground experiences for each other unilaterally, calling others' attention to something, that is, directing their creative receptivity towards it.

Saussure believed the values had no ‘positive content’ but that was because he modeled his ideas upon the marginalist conception of the market in equilibrium (see Ponzio 2006 [1973]), which itself reflects the mutually exclusive relation of private property.<sup>54</sup>

The infinite renvoi from one linguistic value to another, that has been suggested as the process of semiosis by Eco and others on the basis of Peirce’s infinite semiosis (Petrilli and Ponzio 2006), functions like the endless list of commodity equations in Marx’s discussion of the formation of the General Equivalent. If there is no money, each commodity can be seen as equal to some quantity of any other, and similarly any word can be related to any other. Meaning is then made to depend upon the place the word or sign occupies in the chain, or in the system of *langue*. (A hierarchy is the vertical organization of such a system).

Nevertheless the comparison of exchange and meaning, of the market and *langue* opened up the area of the common root of material and linguistic communication, of the homology of material and linguistic production (Rossi-Landi 1975). The dial of the phylogenetic and ontogenetic time machine has to be turned back even farther than it has been however, before the market and masculation, to allow us to understand that the root of the homology lies in gift giving. Thus the description of material production to which the notion or interpretative key of gift giving has been restored will include gift giving not only in the destination of work but also recognize the gift logic in the primary articulations of work. (Rossi-Landi’s “matteremes”) In this light for example, the head of the hammer is given to the peen in a permanent way, and using the hammer gives the nails to the wall in order to create a shelter, which will satisfy the ongoing needs of a family. The linguistic work of assembling sentences and discourses is actually gift work and much of it has been done for us by those who have come before us, leaving us a network of relations between humans and the world, and means to those relations not as linguistic ‘capital’ but as a treasure trove of

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<sup>54</sup> Ponzio also discusses the ‘exchange’ relation between signifier and signified in Saussure. For more discussion on this issue see the final chapter in this book.

free gifts and possible gift constructions that are the result of their own giving and receiving materially and linguistically. Much of this activity might be called 'relational work'. Although it includes the "labor" of abstraction, it is not, or has not been until recently mainly abstract labor in Marx's sense. That is, "linguistic labor" has not been mainly labor for the market. In fact like the other free areas such as water, seeds and air, and traditional practices, linguistic gift labor is now being accessed and taken over for the market by the parasite of Patriarchal Capitalism. The gifts of language, which create relations of mutuality and trust, are used against the linguistic "workers" to extort more gifts of profit from them. Their labor is abstracted by giving it a destination in exchange. This is all the more harmful because the workers have to continue to use the gifts of language to construct their own positive relations, and it may be difficult to distinguish commodified language from free language. Even linguistic commodities function because at a deeper level they are still gift constructions.

By restoring gift giving to the description of material and linguistic production, and by recognizing a value-attributing agency of giving, we can see in contrast with Saussure, that value does indeed have a positive content. Gift-value given by implication, reinforces the social existence, capacity, and esteem of the receiver and the agency of the giver. It also shows that what is valuable is something we need to give our attention to as others have done before us, and that we can pass gifts regarding it on to others, sharing the implications of its value, which enhances rather than diminishing its value for us as well. We can transmit gift value by giving to someone either materially or linguistically or both.

Just as a piece of property is not seen as having exchange value when it belongs to someone, but is only evaluated when it is put into relation with other products by the use of money, the positive value of a word in the *langue* is not seen in its absence or abeyance but only when it is being used, that is, when it is being given. Unless this transmission is taking place in the definition, a special case as we have been saying, or worse, decontextualized as part of a philosophical investigation, the word is always in relation to other words,

to extra linguistic things and to the people who are using (giving and receiving) it.

The positive linguistic value includes the positive gift quality that is given to words by things when words take their place in the construction of human relations. That is, if we project the mother, or at least the source of gifts onto the world around us, we receive the gifts of perception of our natural and cultural environment in a way that implies our value as their recipients and we can transmit or pass on part of this value to others as we share our perceptions with them linguistically through giving them our word-gift substitutes, by this gift implying their value also. There is a use value of the word arising from its function in the creation of a human relation. That is, there is a use value that accrues to the word by being given from one human being to another with the expectation that it will be understood, received and used as a relation-creating gift. Words are instrumental in our creation of species-specific relations to one another, our linguistically mediated relations as human relations.

Value is a social quality, which is derived from gift giving, and should be viewed as separate and prior to exchange value (which is only its contradictory variation). Exchange value is derived from labor for exchange, labor, which is abstracted by the exchange process. However the exchange value of a commodity can also contain some abstract gift labor, constituting surplus value.<sup>55</sup>

Creativity, including linguistic creativity, is important but it is not itself the source of value. Unless creativity has value for others, that is, unless its products satisfy needs and can be given as gifts, it does not have value. It is only play, dis-play or unfortunately, a resource for harmful inventions and consumer manipulation through

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<sup>55</sup> In a gift economy labor is gift labor satisfying the needs of individuals and the community. It is not abstracted or 'homogenized' but maintains its specificity. The distinction between living and dead labor, that is, the present expenditure of labor versus the use of artifacts made in the past (fixed capital) is thus less important than it is in capitalism. Similarly the distinction between labor and what we might call 'activity', between for example, work in the fields and preparing and participating in festivals, is less important.. (See Mann 2000 on the Iroquois gift economy).

the invention of the 'new' as an end in itself—with marketable spin offs. In which case it acquires exchange value.

By passing words and constructions of words, both new and old, on to others, and by giving and receiving material, cultural and linguistic gifts, we mediate a world that is meaningful to all. Thus we can understand the continuity that unites linguistic values and 'human values', meaning in language and meaning in life, and we can also understand the distortion of both that has taken place through the aberration that is the market.

If we recognize the importance of gifts for creating human relations we can see how as receivers we also bond in an ongoing way with our *environment* as the original source of the gifts of perception and of the unmediated and mediated satisfactions of our needs. Our relation to the environment and even to the gifts of our perception will be altered if the gift relation regarding the satisfaction of our material needs is unrecognized or especially if it is canceled by privation and privatization. This is the case when the environment is comprised of private property owned by mutually exclusive proprietors, who deny access to all others. Even the perception of nature is denied to those living in poor urban environments where trees and grass are private property of the rich who always live 'somewhere else'.

Having made it difficult to give and receive gifts freely on the material plane through private property we find an increasing importance of perceptual and linguistic gifts for the development of our subjectivities as givers and receivers. Because the source of material gifts is usually denied to us, and goods are accessible only through participation in exchange, we now do much of our giving and receiving linguistically, not materially. As speakers and listeners we share the collection of mutually exclusive word-gifts, which is the *langue*. As participants in the society we share the mutually exclusive relation to each other's property. In communication this sharing of linguistic gifts ready to be given (the *langue*, the means of giving) provides us with the ability to create ever-new gifts and supply ever-new needs with the means for their satisfaction. It also provides the possibility of our allowing a pass-through of perceptual gifts to each other in a

way that is abstracted, focused and simplified, sensorially less complex than the gifts of unmediated perception. On the other hand perhaps unmediated sensory gifts (without language) would be less able to satisfy our needs because the linguistic giving enhances their gift character by adding to it. The possibility of giving and receiving linguistically arouses communicative needs, which would not exist in that way without our ability to combine linguistic gifts creatively to satisfy them. Because of this we are able to focus together upon some aspects of the world around us and modify them together. These modifications call forth new communicative needs, which we satisfy with new sentences and discourses, and sometimes, rarely, new words. As we give and receive linguistically, materially and perceptually we continually construct our subjectivities as givers and receivers. Presently we are constructing our subjectivities as material exchangers more than as gift givers because we are living in a market-based society and most of the material 'gifts' we do give have to go through the mechanism of exchange. This mechanism also influences our linguistic and perceptual gifts, by focusing them on exchange, as well as exposing them to commodification through advertising and propaganda.

## **Alignment**

Each time we speak to others we are using the gifts of the past to make new gifts, to satisfy new or ongoing needs (communicative needs and, in a mediated way, material, psychological, social and spiritual needs). Even if we speak to ourselves or just think in words we are using the general social gifts for establishing relations (see the discussion of inner speech below). However when we actually speak to others, the sentences that we give are transmitted from one to another. We perform a transitive act, which aligns with or corresponds to the gift structures inside the sentence itself. The miniature gift processes of syntax correspond to the larger scale relation-creating gift processes of speaking and listening (or writing and reading). These in turn correspond to the relation-creating aspects of material giving and receiving. Speaking itself is a process of material production of vibrations of air, which are emitted (given)

by the speaker and received by the listeners' auditory apparatus. Writing is given to the page and received by the eyes. This correspondence of relations is not a reflection or *wiederspiegelung*, though perhaps those theories unwittingly allude to the repetition of gift giving at different levels. Rather, this carrying out of gift giving in similar ways at different levels provides a deep pattern, which holds the levels together, organizes the variety of sentence structures and even allows the possibility of exceptions and variations upon the structures.<sup>56</sup> The pattern of events between interlocutors is the matrix, which holds the focus on the miniature gift processes of syntax even when there are other processes involved, which seem to be different from gift giving. The gift giving between speaker and listener also maintains a gift structure when speech is colloquial, and does not use complete sentences or when on the other hand it is academic and extremely complex and convoluted.

Gift giving is continually going on between speaker and listener. The speaker has to use the social substitute gifts and gift patterns for the construction of her sentences, satisfying the other person's communicative needs for those means. Abundant additional non-verbal phatic gifts of tone, emphasis, body language and proxemics are also given which satisfy the listener's need to know how and why the verbal gifts are being given.<sup>57</sup>

In order to better understand communicative needs we can draw upon Vigotsky's thinking about a passage from Tolstoy's *Anna Karenina* (Vigotsky 1962: p.140) in which lovers communicate with each other in elliptical ways. Vigotsky compared this ellipsis to inner

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<sup>56</sup> The alignment of patterns internal to the sentence with other gift patterns outside it at different levels is similar to the alignment of different levels in the mathematical golden mean, where lines on each level are in fixed proportion to those on other levels external to it. To me this seems to be an unnoticed resonator with the English word 'meaning'.

<sup>57</sup> It is worthwhile looking at the correspondence of grammatical subject and speaking subject in this light as the construction of subjectivity would be informed by gift giving rather than just generic agency while the formation of the creative-receptive subject would be achieved by alignment of grammatical objects of various kinds with the listener.

speech in which we do not usually speak to ourselves in full sentences but usually only use a few key words. Vigotsky believes that inner speech is an internalization of external, interpersonal speech. I think that in inner speech we are satisfying our own needs for a relation without actually creating the relation externally. We use the general social means, words, for this purpose, a fact, which socializes and organizes our thought. However we do not need to form complete sentences since we already understand many aspects of our subject matter. The need is already satisfied. We don't need to relate ourselves socially to everything in our internal (or external) context because much of it is already a given. It already 'belongs' to us. There is no need for the mediation. If needs arise for more specificity or clarity we can use a few words mentally to satisfy those needs for ourselves.<sup>58</sup> Moreover because we are not speaking to someone else we are not actually enacting the relation-creating giving and receiving process with another person. That is, the 'glue' of alignment with the interpersonal gift is lacking, so our internal speech can be 'unglued'—somewhat outside the syntactical gift form.

There seems to be a principle of 'economy' or good stewardship in language by which we do not over-satisfy a need nor do we satisfy needs we don't have. If we do not have a need to think a word we don't think it. Although we have an abundance of word gifts, our inner discourse can be telegraphic because we do not need to satisfy as many communicative needs of our own as we would if we were satisfying someone else's (and academic discourse is the contrary).

Material needs are being ignored by patriarchal economics where they are considered relevant only as 'effective demand'. Similarly communicative needs have been ignored by patriarchal academia in general. We have not been asking questions specifically about communicative needs because we have not been noticing gift giving.

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<sup>58</sup> Our subconscious usually seems ready to supply us with any words we need although, under pressure of a need at a different level, perhaps a psychological need, it can refuse to give us the 'right' word, thus creating a verbal symptom or sign of a problem, as Freud showed us. The wrong gift would thus come about through the conflict of needs at different levels both of which the subconscious giver is trying to satisfy.

(There has been no “effective demand” regarding communicative needs, that is, the questions have not been formulated). Psychologists talk about the ability to put oneself in the place of the other, and to understand that they have ‘mental voids’ we need to fill. However they do not use the terminology of needs because the gift paradigm does not appear as a possible interpretative key. It is as if the language of cognitive psychology and language acquisition had been sanitized to keep gift giving out.<sup>59</sup> It is therefore a big challenge to try to restore attention to communicative needs to the interpretation of language, and attention to material needs to our thinking about economics. Recently questions have been raised about the legitimacy of the market system, questions which in the North derive to a great extent from ‘putting oneself in the place of the other’ (sometimes even literally by traveling to the South, as in the World Social Forums). In recognizing and trying to satisfy the need for social change, the anti-global movement has opened the way towards a paradigm shift. It has not yet recognized however that the shift that is needed is one towards the gift paradigm and mothering.

Patriarchy has invaded all aspects of life, carried by the market. It has also ridden inside the Trojan horse of a scientific method that has expurgated gifts and qualitative understanding in favor of rule-based neuter, neutral, ‘objective’ and quantitative knowledge and a technology that substitutes mechanical for human processes. The study of language has also been modeled on such an approach.

I have been trying to show how an alternative approach in this area might begin, but a thorough description of language in terms of needs and gifts is an immense project, and the restoration of needs to the attention of economics is a revolution, hopefully a peaceful one. In order to take up these projects, which are interconnected—because of the importance of language, signs and gender for epistemology and of epistemology for economics—we have to work from

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<sup>59</sup> Perhaps this has to do with the conceptualization of a need as a lack, bringing up castration issues? I have always considered the phrase ‘nature abhors a vacuum’ as purposely misleading in that the positive sense of filling a void is transformed into hate of the void.

both directions, critiquing patriarchal structures on the one hand while revealing and restoring gifts and gift based structures on the other. Both the critique of Patriarchal Capitalism and the foregrounding of the hidden but already-existing alternative are necessary and useful as a two pronged approach, a kind of pincher with which to grasp the paradigms and distinguish them from each other. It is as if patriarchy only uses the index finger while disentangling the threads of misunderstanding requires also enlisting the support of the opposable thumb.<sup>60</sup> The fact is that some of the leading anti-global activists continue to embrace the Patriarchal exchange paradigm and epistemology, and in the end this keeps the paradigm from shifting for everyone.

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<sup>60</sup> See chapters on pointing in For-Giving.