

18. Disjunctures and Intimacies: New Perspectives in Gift Theory

Convenors:

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In this workshop, we propose to examine social spaces and ideologies that are culturally produced by those gift-giving practices that until recently have been overlooked in exchange theory. We invite paper contributions that focus on gifts to heads of states, diplomatic gifts, philanthropy, gifts and donations in politics and corporate world. We are particularly interested in gift gestures that cross borders of politics and both connect and divide social locations (such as, for example, gifts across Cold War boundaries or transnational blood donations). By looking at such under-explored contexts for gift-giving, our goal is to critically revisit the concepts of social distance and identity. Maussian gift theory has been one of the key means of ethnographic imagination of bounded community and direct, face-to-face sociality. In this workshop, we shall ask what trans-local interconnections and disjunctures the focus on gifts can reveal, and what modes of relatedness and cultural intimacy gift-giving constitutes in these frameworks. The workshop shall further, on the one hand, the ethnographic understanding of politics of gift-giving gestures how they transcend and constitute cultural differences and work as means of negotiation of identities and subject positions. On the other hand, we shall look at how, in the material form of such gifts, the identity of givers and relationships between givers and receivers is visualised, and how it is re-interpreted along the phases of these items, social lives.

Spirited Gifts: Ceremonial exchanges between Maori and monarchy

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Gift giving during the reception of guests onto Maori ancestral lands forms an intriguing instance of exchange across social, geographical and conceptual boundaries. British monarchy have been welcomed in this manner since 1870, when the Duke of Edinburgh was received onto Arawa lands in the Rotorua region of New Zealand. On subsequent occasions descending generations of the royal family were similarly received and many gifts were exchanged, some of which have been lent to museums. These gifted collections seem to more openly embody the inter-relational nature of their creation and presentation, than those selected by curatorial staff to represent Maori society. Archival research into these gifts shall be situated in tension with ethnographic fieldwork that enabled experience of the energetic performances of oratory, song and dance that articulate their ceremonial presentation, and thus of the sensuous engagement people have with things. Performance also causes wear and tear, limiting the capacity fragile objects have to mediate intergenerational human relationships. Does this mean that such sensual engagements should be inhibited? This paper suggests that given prevailing academic interests in preserving objects, we may lose touch with the significance of our sensuous engagement with them.

Granted with a fur coat from the tsar's shoulder

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This paper explores passage of gifts from a person of higher rank to those who are inferior to

them in hierarchy. In particular, I focus on various kinds of clothes or details of personal clothes looking at the semantics of emotional as well as ritual aspects of meanings in these rewards. Putting on ritual clothes and simultaneous change of status, giving clothes as an act of transfer, continuity of power, spiritual blessing are characteristic features of various cultural traditions. I argue that receiving of power directly from the Upper spheres, is central to such mythologemes. In Russia in particular, manipulations with a fur coat are typical for operational scheme of the rites of passage. This paper looks at gifts of fur coats from the tsar, as instance of such transfer of power. I use the notion of contagious magic, in looking at how objects, having a direct contact with a body (shoulder,), personal features and special grace can be transferred, established a special kind of corporal-emotional intimacy and fraternity between the leader and his subject.

Making gifts work - from Indian rural artisans to heads of states

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What social networks

are created when an object made by a poor weaver in rural South India is gifted to President Gorbachev, the Dalai Lama or to Diana, Princess of Wales? This paper focuses on traditional Indian craft objects, as they traverse vast social (and physical) distances, representing their makers, the various people who commission/pass them on and finally the Indian nation. Based on fieldwork among weavers of fine craft, mats which became famous when one was commissioned as a gift for Queen Elizabeth in 1953, the paper shows how the boundaries between commodity and gift, myth and material fact are fluid, making the mats agentive at several levels. This does not necessarily extend beyond India. The (however imperfectly) shared idealisation of craft is historically and nationally specific. How Queen Elizabeth viewed her mat is of little concern in India; the mat is important because it was deemed worthy of a Queen. The gift, though commissioned by one businessman, has now come to be seen as the Indian nation's gift to the head of the Commonwealth. My paper traces this process to shed light on objects, people and questions of agency and representation.

Disappointing Gifts: Notes on Anglo-Siamese Diplomacy

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The ethnographic focus is diplomatic gift exchange in early modern Anglo-Siamese encounters (1820-55), when state relations moved from non-existent, to bad, to good. Well-documented major missions are examined, smaller ones to tributary states, and one return mission to London. The Siamese style of gift exchange is considered within diplomatic

negotiation of positions, reminiscent of Chinese Guest ritual, (Binli). Gifts are part of a rhythmic series of manipulative and irksome reciprocities, the high point being the sacred exchange between sovereign monarchs. The theme of Disappointing gift, relates to evaluation of gifts in the context of political negotiation of relationships and understandings that develop during the missions. Modest gifts might be appreciated in a spirit of friendship, but rarely is it enough that it, the thought that counts,. It is hard to distinguish the gift ^ the last object to be unwrapped - from the mode of presentation. The latter at least must be correct to avoid offence. The evaluation of gifts may cause disappointment for either giver or receiver. Disappointment may be contrived, or overcome. Damaged goods may be overlooked; equally gift horses might be looked in the mouth. Unsurprisingly, final return gifts tended to be calculated at the end of the exchange.

Small-scale but Trans-local: Gifts, Commons, Software and Licenses

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Since 1997, in the world of Free Software and Open Source software, there has been much discussion of gifts and gift-economies. Software coders often offer explanations of why they write and freely distribute software without direct remuneration by appealing to "gift-economies" as an explanation. This appeal does not address the classical problems of social structure and solidarity, but attempts to shore up leaks in the widely held economic belief in self-interest. Alternately, lawyers suggest that such behavior is directed at the stewardship of a "commons" in intellectual property licensed for group use. In both explanations, it is taken for granted that such relationships are widely distributed geographically, and connected primarily through the medium of the internet. Social distance thus still depends on recognition, not face-to-face, gestural, or tangible, but textual recognition of copyright licenses, rhetorical recognition of complicity or political alignment, and technical recognition of certain kinds of software, operating systems, or applications. These recognitions constitute globally distributed political communities that share a specific political goal: the re-localization of global intellectual property in small-scale but trans-local communities.

Gifts and the relational non-relation

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Anonymous gifts are entities that cannot be reciprocated since by implication donor and recipient will remain mutually unknown and non-identifiable to each other. This paper discusses different faces of anonymity, in relation to corporeal exchange practices and the reproductive gifts (e.g. human gametes, donor, enucleated eggs from embryonic stem cells) occasioned by ovum-related technologies. Exploring different forms of cultural effacement in such reproductive contexts, I ask whether the activation of non-reciprocity impels the unconditional death of

the gift as former anthropological exchange theory has suggested. Or, could anonymous sociality be the very ground for affirming the presence of the utterly disinterested and so-called 'pure, or 'free, gift?

Voluntarism and Charity: Gift-giving to Others in the Greek context

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In the Greek

context, the traditional way of dealing with the Other is through one-way offers. Studies of greek ethnography have stressed the ability of such gifts to create and underline social boundaries between insiders and outsiders to a community ('filoxenia, - hospitality). On the other hand, in the last 15 years there has been a growth in the emergence of non-governmental organizations in Greece. Training seminars for volunteers, national and international forums, and the professionals themselves form official discourses on how voluntarism should be practiced. The social construction of voluntarism as a disinterested act contains the abolishment of any kind of material gifts, often differentiating the practice to charity. Nevertheless, according to recently completed fieldwork on volunteers working with refugees (where I explore the practice of gift giving and its relevance to the notions of 'charity, and 'voluntarism,), it seems that volunteers themselves resist to such official discourses and continue to give offerings to refugees (clothes, food etc). Often facing the disapproval of the professionals and the 'organization,, many volunteers use such gifts as a basis of negotiating their relationship with the Other.

How to return a gift?: Taonga Maori and cultural property claims in New Zealand

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This paper revisits Maori gift exchange, the classic case cited in Mauss, *Essai sur le don*. Maori kin groups in New Zealand have long cultivated and maintained ties with others through ceremonial prestations of taonga, treasured artefacts, to visiting dignitaries and representatives of the state. Whilst the practice continues, historical transactions have been reassessed in light of post-colonial debates, and the alienation of many old and precious taonga is now often lamented as yet another example of the expropriative legacy of colonisation. But such concerns also extend far beyond the ownership of artefacts to encompass taonga in the much broader sense of valued (material, intellectual and cultural) possessions. This paper examines the significance of recent claims by Maori to enduring rights over diverse forms of property as taonga, including artefacts, indigenous knowledge, genetic sequences, flora and fauna, for anthropological theories of gift exchange.

