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The anthropological fixation with reciprocity leaves no room for love: 2009 meeting of the Group for Debates in Anthropological Theory

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Introduction – Soumya Venkatesan

Two spectres haunt the debate this year, the motion of which is ‘the anthropological fixation with reciprocity leaves no room for love’. The first is that oft-encountered bugbear ‘ethnocentrism’ – Jeanette Edwards asks: ‘Could it be that the search by some anthropologists for love, the determination to find love in the ethnographic record, is because they are also in love with the idea of love?’ In other words, are some anthropologists fixated on love because of its important place in the Euro-American tradition and in ideologies of the individual? A converse trend is the concern that forms or expressions of romantic love in various non-Western locales are influenced by (or even a product of) Westernization and globalization.

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There is, here, a worry about authenticity and the consequent relative neglect of romantic love in particular.

The second spectre relates to the anthropological method and to what we feel we can properly study. A possible answer to the question of why love features so rarely in anthropological accounts might be the claim that love is subjective not objective; it is properly the domain of the psychological not the social. It might be a driving factor, an engine, but is not necessarily observable (however, see Edwards's description of a study that sought to find love in the brain through Magnetic Resonance Imaging) or able to be rendered analytically.

The idiom of love might discursively underpin certain relations or, more strongly, might suffuse them, but the relations themselves play out in forms that can be studied without having to make 'love' the object of enquiry, or mobilize it as a form of explanation. Indeed, seeing love, and subjecting its manifestations to analysis in a way that does not draw on other anthropological staples such as kinship or power or religion remains difficult. This seems to be particularly the case with romantic love, which appears ubiquitous (if we agree with Jankowiak and Fischer, 1992), but which, on closer analysis dissolves into concerns with a large number of other things including reciprocity and gift-giving. As Perveen Mody argues 'anthropology's accumulated wisdom about reciprocity is one of the assets we have when we are trying to write about love'. Mody's claim originates from her own work in India where she conducted research among couples who chose their own life-partners rather than having them chosen by their parents or extended families. The problem of the self-gifting bride (as opposed to the bride gifted by appropriate others), she argues, haunted many of these 'love-marriages' because of the ways in which gift-exchange, reciprocity and obligation were subverted in these marriages. Talk about love became talk about reciprocity, exchange and gifting.

The opposition of love and reciprocity within the motion needs explaining. Love, to some extent, resembles the free gift (a point which Willerslev makes) in that it is an ideal for which people strive. Love disappears as soon as it makes an appearance, only to subsequently underpin the minutiae of the give-and-take of social relations, which then become the focus of attention. To borrow from the title of Richard Wilbur's famous poem: 'Love calls us to the things of this world'. But it remains, again to take from Willerslev, a virtuality that 'is a phantom ideal of purity'. This way of thinking about love opens up a new vista for anthropology, enabling us to pay attention to the strivings that underlie people's adaptations to the 'practical interests and to the exigencies of these interests in everyday social life'. It is powerful and inspirational because it does not mean that we ignore what people do; equally, it makes it impossible to ignore what they say and how or why they recognize what they do as morally problematic or as falling short.

For Povinelli, the problem with the motion is that it sets up a false dichotomy, placing the love, desire, seduction and other 'hot' things on one side and interest, reciprocity – general, balanced, negative – on the 'cold' side. She turns (like her opponent, Edwards) to Malinowski and his insistence that 'kula exchange and

other economic activities must be lodged in the human passions'. Likewise, 'Mauss's logic of the gift is striated with affective powers: the power to persuade, seduce...' In short, reciprocity is not cold calculation, but fully engaging of the passions – desire, affection and love. Why then are the two placed on opposite sides? To answer this question, Povinelli turns to social theory, in particular to Jürgen Habermas and his account of how the family and its forms of intimate human love was believed to be independent of its putative opposite – the market – despite its being profoundly caught up in the requirements of the market. Povinelli goes on to argue strongly that the separation between love and reciprocity, and the qualities, essences and manifestations of each, is itself sociological – a separation that is worth exploring and not just accepting. In other words, the ways we have been thinking of love is in itself an object of interest – manifested in the type of questions we have been asking (including in the motion).

Aside from the opposition of love and reciprocity, the elephant in the motion, of course, was the term 'fixation' – a Freudian and Lacanian term if ever there was one. Both Povinelli and Edwards picked up on the word. Edwards, in particular, explored the possibilities of the term in a little detail and settled on fixation as a process of stabilization. When we stabilize love, Edwards says, turning it into an object of attention, we see many different things – sexual love, comfort love, romantic love, the love of parents for children and vice versa, the list could go on. Arguing against the motion, Edwards makes a strong case for exploring the contents of love in its various manifestations and its diverse relations, but she is obdurate in her stance that love cannot, unlike reciprocity, be an anthropological tool.

Note: Elizabeth Povinelli could not actually make it to the venue to speak as she began to run a high temperature shortly after arriving from the States (the doctor thought it might be the dreaded swine flu and forbade her to leave her hotel room). She heroically gave her paper via Skype to an audience she could neither see nor hear, but who could see her projected on a screen (there was too little time to set up a web-camera on our side). She was also not able to take part in the discussion. Possibly the result would have been different if she had been there to support Perveez Mody, who made a very strong stand by herself. Povinelli's presentation in this published version is a somewhat revised version of her presentation at the meeting and takes account of the fact that she was unable to respond in person to the questions from the audience and the comments of her fellow debaters.

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Sykes and the four speakers read and commented on the Introduction. My thanks to all of them.

Reference

Jankowiak WR and Fischer EF (1992) A cross-cultural perspective on romantic love. *Ethnology* 31(2): 149–155.

The presentations

Proposing the motion – Jeanette Edwards

It is fair to say that love has not been of central concern to anthropology of the social or cultural bent. With notable exceptions, it neither regularly nor often appears in the indices of ethnographic accounts and is strikingly absent from the literature on what has been dubbed the ‘new’ kinship studies. One exception, to which I will return, is Yasushi Watanabe’s fabulous ethnography of Protestant elite and Irish Catholic families in Boston, USA.

Anthropological attention to love has tended towards its governance. Abu Lughod’s classical work on Bedouin love poetry, for example, addresses the way in which the poetry of the vulnerable recited out of hearing of the less vulnerable carries subversive messages and expresses feelings and desires which elsewhere need to be held in check. The work of our esteemed opponents should also be mentioned here. Elizabeth Povinelli writes eloquently of the governance of love, sociality and carnality in liberal settler society in her marvellous book *The Empire of Love* (Povinelli, 2006) and Perveen Mody (2002) insightfully and sensitively problematizes ‘love-marriages’ in India presaged by the introduction of civil marriage laws by the colonial administration.

Notable and noteworthy exceptions aside, what constitutes love and how it is lived is rare in the ethnographic account.

Now we could argue that the reason for love’s absence in the ethnographic record is that anthropology *has been* fixated with reciprocity and this fixation with reciprocity has screened out/ignored/left no place for love. Where informants see/feel/experience/practise love, anthropologists read off exchange/social structure/reciprocity. Social structure was, of course, the hallmark of classical anthropology in both its French and British versions. For Lévi-Strauss (1969 [1949]), the reciprocal exchange of women created the necessary bonds of alliance between groups which, amalgamated over time, constituted social order. For Malinowski (1932 [1929]), love belonged to the domestic sphere designed for the care of children and the reproduction of society. For Mauss (1990 [1924]), reciprocity was the basis for social solidarity, and *contra* Malinowski, the free gift an impossibility: love and reciprocity are one and the same thing and care, attention and solicitude demand return no less than the ceremonial gifts of kula.

It could also be argued that the absence of love in ethnography is related to its perceived interiority. In Western thinking (from which anthropological theorizing borrows heavily), love is abstract and located within the individual: an emotion, a feeling, a sentiment; a personal and private affair that cannot be apprehended by the anthropological observer. In addition, and significantly, in EuroAmerican versions, love, more often than not, carries benign baggage. It hints at altruism and shouts care, solicitude, compassion. For Michel Foucault (1978), eternal and transcendental love, in disinterested mode, emerged with modernity. However, my co-debater will convince you of the broader purchase of virtual love: an ideal that can never be attained.

My task here is to persuade you to disengage love as ethnographic reality from love as anthropological tool. I will argue that anthropology's fixation with reciprocity, leaves no place for love – and that that is no bad thing. In arguing for the motion, I am arguing against current tendencies to universalize love, to export a particular version, and to read it mawkishly as an unmitigated good. In the process, I urge us not to conflate the ethnographic (where love is ubiquitous) with the theoretical (will love really serve as a decent heuristic?). But first, let me dispose of the third term of the debate – the elephant in the room, as it were – fixation.

Fixation, in common parlance, connotes an obsession and usually an unhealthy obsession. Whether we buy into psychoanalytical theory as useful (or even necessary) for anthropological thinking or see it instead as something that cannot be ignored because of its insidious and extensive influence on liberal Western society, it is nonetheless wired deep into Western ideas about the self and other. From a psychoanalytical perspective, a fixation is an obsessive attachment: an arrest of the libido at an immature stage of development. It is tempting to argue that anthropology's fixation with reciprocity is a sign of its immaturity: arrested development even. And tackling love, head on, with all its manifestations, will augur its coming of age. But that is an easy swipe: a cheap jibe. There are after all other ways to read fixation.

Fixation refers to the process of stabilizing a chemical substance prior to examination. There is an analogy to be made here. In order to have a debate we need to stabilize (to fix), albeit temporarily, some of its terms. As Marilyn Strathern put it:

You cannot have a public debate without holding some of the terms steady – whereas in the real world nothing stays still and it is likely that the terms with which we speak are not just evolving but co-evolving in relation to one another. (Strathern, 2004: 53)

Fixation also refers to the process of looking closely and intently: to the action of concentrating (fixing) the eyes directly on something. So, putting aside the problem of privileging the visual, let's fixate on love for a moment.

It comes in many shapes and sizes: sexual love, romantic love, love between kin, the love of parents for children and vice versa; there is love as an ideal, as compassion, devotional, spiritual. In the English language the one word 'love' has a lot of work to do. Other languages (and Greek is often cited here) differentiate between

various modes of love. Different idioms are used for love that is passionate and sensual; or volitional and thoughtful; or virtuous and dispassionate; or for the deep affection such as that between parents and children or between siblings.

The Anthropology of Love and Anger, edited by Joanna Overing and Alan Passes (2000), reveals numerous idioms and understandings of love across indigenous Amazonian societies. All refer in some way to sharing, compassion and kindness – to ‘other-regarding virtues’. For the Enxet of Paraguay love is something *done* – ‘if it is not manifested in actions, it does not exist’ (Kidd, 2000: 118). For the Piro, consolation, an aspect of loving well, is not a special act ‘but an intensification of the general sociability that characterizes Piro village life’ (Gow, 2000: 50–1).

Romantic love, it has been argued, is the product of particular social configurations: of either stratified societies with a leisure class and a rich literary tradition, or small-scale societies which encourage mobility and individual decision making (Jankowiak, 2008). One response to this argument has been to turn to the historical record and to literary traditions. To Arabic and Persian poetry, for example, which influenced notions and acts of courtly love in the Europe of the Middle Ages. A kind of love which, in its time, was a radical departure from the social imperatives of marriage and procreation. In this vein, scholars have tracked and mapped the influence of Persian and Sufi rhetoric, transmitted via Muslim Spain, on the French courts of the 12th century (Rougemont, 1956, cited in Davis and Davis, 1995). Another response has been to look more closely and intently at the ethnographic record.

Thus, William Jankowiak and Edward Fischer, in a paper published in *Ethnology* in 1992, turn to the Standard Cross Cultural Sample of 186 ‘cultures’. After dropping 20 as unsuitable for their purposes, they go on to identify romantic love in 88.5 percent of cases – a large enough percentage to show that love is, if not a universal, at least, in their words, a ‘near-universal’. This a startling claim which begs the question of what they see in the data that prompts them to make it.

First they define romantic love as ‘any intense attraction that involves the idealization of the other, within an erotic context, with the expectation of enduring for some time into the future’ (Jankowiak and Fischer, 1992: 150).

Second, evidence for its presence is determined by any one of the following indicators:

1. accounts depicting personal anguish and longing;
2. the use of love songs or folklore that highlight the motivations behind romantic involvement;
3. elopement due to mutual affection;
4. native accounts affirming the existence of passionate love;
5. the ethnographer’s affirmation that romantic love is present. (Jankowiak and Fischer, 1992: 152)

Of interest is the ability of the authors to recognize love when they see it. They also feel able to differentiate ‘real’ love from lust, from companionate love

(elsewhere comfort love) and from instrumental love. The love they are interested in comes unbidden; is as unstoppable as it is pure of motive. It is characterized by longing and obsession and can only be assuaged by possession.

I am reminded of a conversation with three women, my age more or less, living in a town not far from here. We are talking about IVF (in vitro fertilization) and the donation of gametes and about what they identify as the stress and 'heartache' of infertility. Marcy Gray is thoughtful, hesitant – she doesn't want to sound illiberal – but she's not sure. She has reservations. She wonders whether, in the grander scheme of things, IVF and the donation of eggs and sperm, and surrogate mothers, are such a good idea. Is it good, she asks us, for women to be putting so much store in 'getting a child'? In her words:

I think it's a bit like the idea of people being in love with the idea of being in love. I think it is like (pause), women who haven't got children think it's going to be this wonderful experience and, you know, they're going to have this baby that they'll love forever, [that] they'll always love and it'll be a rosy glow (pause). And for a lot of women, and for a lot of the time, it's not like that.

Could it be that the search by some anthropologists for love, the determination to find love in the ethnographic record, is because they are also in love with the idea of love?

Seventeen years after its publication, we might feel compelled to unpack some of the assumptions in Jankowiak and Fisher's important study. But it is too late. The article has had a life of its own. Unhitched from its moorings, it has picked up momentum and, in its travels, its findings have become fact (Latour, 1987). A paper in a 2005 issue of the *Journal of Neurophysiology* begins:

Intense romantic love is a cross-culturally universal phenomenon. In a survey of 166 contemporary societies, Jankowiak and Fischer found evidence of romantic love in 147 of them; they noted that the remaining 19 cases were examples of ethnographic oversight; they found no negative evidence. (Aron et al., 2005: 327)

The claim is repeated the same year in the *Journal of Comparative Neurology*: 'Early stage intense romantic love is regarded as a human universal or near universal experience' (Fisher et al., 2005). The reference given for the claim is Jankowiak and Fischer (1992).

These two neuroscientific papers report on a cross-disciplinary study that used fMRI (functional magnetic resonance imaging) technology to look at the brain activity of 49 people: 17 of whom were intensely in love, 15 recently dumped and 17 still in love after an average of 21 years marriage. Co-author of both papers, biological anthropologist Helen Fisher, has a long-standing research interest in the biological and evolutionary mechanisms of love. She writes of three 'core brain systems' involved in love: lust (which entails the sex drive or libido); romantic or passionate love; and comfort or companionship love (which entails deep feelings

of attachment to long-term partners). Each has evolutionary benefits, initially facilitating the choice of mate and subsequently hanging on to them long enough to reproduce and rear children. Fisher acknowledges that they may spill over into one another. You have to be careful of casual sex, for example, as sex drives up dopamine in the brain and pushes you over the threshold – from lust to love in no time – and the flood of oxytocin and vasopressin at orgasm provokes feelings of attachment more appropriate to companionate love than lust.

Recently she has focused her attention on romantic love which, she points out, is a drive more powerful than the sex drive, and which stems from the motor part of the brain. It starts when another person (all her examples are of the opposite sex) takes on ‘special meaning’ – they stand out among the crowd. The identification of a ‘special one’ is accompanied by ‘intense energy, elation, mood swings, emotional dependence, separation anxiety, possessiveness, a pounding heart and craving’ and, most significantly, ‘obsessive thinking’. ‘It is as if someone is camping in your head’, she writes.¹ Given her choice of simile, it is perhaps not surprising that Fisher has taken the opportunities presented by developments in fMRI to look for love in the brain.

Looking carefully and intently at the images of brain activity when research subjects were shown a photograph of their beloved, the researchers found that love engages ‘neural systems associated with motivation to require a reward’ (Aron et al., 2005: 332). It fires the same areas of the brain that had been identified in studies which had looked at brain activity on receipt of three of the other good things in life: cocaine, money and chocolate (not all at once!) – that is, dopamine-rich activities.

How should social or cultural anthropologists respond to this truth? For the purposes of this debate, we could use it to support our argument. There you go – we might say – love is always about reciprocity even at the physiological level and even if unrequited: it is a longing that requires a fix. It follows, then, that if you have a complex model of reciprocity, which includes, for example, its dark side (Narotzky and Moreno, 2002), its compulsion, the obligations to take as well as to give, then you don’t specifically need ‘love’. Alternatively, we could accept the biological truth of love (black box it) and investigate what meaning it accrues in specific historical, cultural and ecological niches. But if not pusillanimous, is it not too easy, or at least too predictable, to go down the social constructivist route? Is love really, as used to be thought of kinship, the cultural construction of natural facts? Furthermore, which biological truth will we plump for? We can expect to see the neurosciences prevailing for a while as imaging technologies get more sophisticated and various and diverse parts of the brain become visible in intriguing and fascinating ways.

Surely our task is to keep asking if it really is possible to identify a universal category of sentiment and practice – that is, love – outside the moral and political conditions within which it acquires and transmits its meaning. Will ‘love’ really do as a heuristic device – as an anthropological tool with which to understand heterogeneous social practices that we might gloss as love? Which or whose version of love shall we use as our reference point?

The re-emergence of an interest in kinship in social anthropology can help us here: can give us some traction on how to think of love in the light of the recent biological and evolutionary interest in the topic. Biological kinship used to be thought the raw material from which complex and complicated kinship systems were wrought. Anthropologists were secure in their knowledge of what kinship was and their task was to see what mattered in the cultural contexts they studied. David Schneider (1984) was not the first to argue that there is no such thing as kinship. Although his provocative statement fell on more receptive ears than Rodney Needham's (1971) earlier and similar claim, there were other more or less tetchy attempts to underscore ethnocentrism in the anthropological study of kinship. Now, while Schneider may have both overstated and understated his case, there was much mileage to be got out of the realization that anthropologists had taken their own folk understanding of kinship abroad and from his criticism that anthropologists had too frequently ignored the 'content of kinship'. Crudely speaking, attention to content and to how people theorize the constitution of persons and relatedness has been one of the things that differentiates the so-called 'new kinship' from the old. It is time, I argue, for anthropology to look more closely and intently, on the content of love.

The so-called 'new kinship' studies were fuelled partly by developments in new reproductive and genetic technologies with an attendant explicitness about the component parts of relatedness. They presented an opportunity to unpack the same folk models that anthropologists had been accused of exporting. At the same time, changes occurring in conventions of marriage and reproductive patterns in industrial, industrializing and post-industrial societies were grist for the mill. For large sectors of the population in Britain, for example, the stigma of illegitimacy had all but disappeared and families were being combined and recombined through serial monogamy and cohabitation, as well as divorce and remarriage. It became possible for heterosexual, homosexual, bisexual and transsexual couples and individuals to find solutions to involuntary childlessness: through adoption (national and transnational), by substituting ova or sperm, or by hiring wombs. Love features strongly in all options and bonds are forged and maintained through care, attention and solicitude. Bonds are also broken and kinship is as much about conflict as it is conviviality, and is characterized by animosity as well as amity.

Recent studies of Euro-American kinship have released biological elements from the black box and have revealed an interdigitation of substance and abstraction: a hybrid of what is given and what is made. Like kinship, love in its Euro-American guise is also a hybrid. On the one hand it has to be worked upon – effort has to be put in to it. As Ursula Le Guin writes in *The Lathe of Heaven*: 'Love doesn't just sit there like a stone; it has to be made, like bread, remade all the time, made new' (1971: 158). On the other hand, it comes unbidden, uncalled for. It takes over despite our best intentions. Neil Gaiman puts the following words in Rose Walker's mouth in volume nine of the epic comic series

The Sandman (1996):

Have you even been in love? Horrible, isn't it? It makes you so vulnerable. It opens your chest and it opens your heart and it means someone can get inside you and mess you up. You build up all these defenses. You build up this whole armor, for years, so nothing can hurt you, then one stupid person, no different from any other stupid person, wanders into your stupid life.

Here love is not only a duplex, but also duplicitous: treacherous, a betrayer. It acts on the person despite themselves.

I mentioned Yasushi Watanabe's ethnography at the beginning of my pitch. It is replete with love. His fieldwork is in Boston, USA and his informants members of upper-class Anglo-Saxon Protestant families – known locally as the Boston Brahmins – and working/lower-middle-class Irish catholic families. For both, Watanabe observes, love is strongly idealized as the primary drive for marriage and happiness; love 'should transcend sociocultural categories such as race, nationality or class, and it is left to children to decide how they form affective relationships' (2004: 79).

In fact, for the most part, both groups are homogamous: they marry within their own class, religion and race. This love is partisan: moulded by parallel demands and desires. Here love is choosy despite (or perhaps because of) its freedom to choose.

In the north of Morocco, women say they do not fall in love before marriage. They know that if they did they would have sex with their betrothed and this would be disastrous. Considered loose, they would be swiftly abandoned (Davis and Davis, 1993, 1995). Their male peers, on the other hand, fall in love passionately, regularly and frequently both before and after marriage. They suffer no oprobium for, and no shame is attached to, pursuing, cajoling, wooing and being in love, wholeheartedly, with many women, single or married.

For this audience, it is clearly a truism to say that love is not universally the same the world over. We know that love has many manifestations and that its discursive and rhetorical renderings are integral to how it is experienced. Indigenous Kaingang in Southern Brazil know that, with time, married couples develop a nodule at the nape of their neck. Like an organ, it embodies the way in which they have become woven together – entwined with each other.

Nancy Scheper-Hughes (1992) describes how in the Alto Plano of northern Brazil love is measured, eked out in conditions of severe deprivation: love is rationed and not automatic. The cost of expenditure is not, in crude terms, worth the effort. Scheper-Hughes is talking about the love of mothers for their newborn infants, and how they withhold love and tears for babies who will not survive. But do they keep themselves in check – disciplining their 'self' – in their knowledge of the odds; or is it that the weakly infant is not fully human? The mundane, quotidian and harsh world of the Alto Plano is populated by angels destined to return from whence they came.

I am not saying that we ignore renderings of love which attach to it an autonomy and a will of its own, or dismiss out of hand understandings of love as basic physiology, but that these renderings are as ethnographically interesting as the lump at the base of the neck or the (unexpected) absence of effective and affective ties. Judith Butler remarks that there can be ‘no reference to a pure body which is not at the same time a further formation of that body’ (1993, cited in Mahmood, 2004: 18). The same can be said for love. There can be no reference to a pure love without it also being a further formation of love. A fixation with reciprocity has the virtue of directing our attention to the various and diverse relations of love – to its ideals as well its manifestations – and away from narrow, albeit big, understandings of it as internal to the individual and a universal property of human being. It allows us to ask different questions about who and what elicits love; of what it is constituted; its limits and imaginaries; its bathos as well as pathos; cruelties as well as enhancements; virtualities as well materialities. Maybe it comes down to whether by fixation we mean sustained care and attention or obsessive and exclusive attachment – a bit like the love we know and love itself.

Of course, if you believe as I do in the ethnographic project, then you will have to vote for the motion. Anthropological attention to reciprocity – to the forms, materialities, consequences, imaginaries of social relations – kind and cruel, positive and negative – means there is no place for love.

Note

1. See: <http://www.helenfisher.com/about.html> (accessed October 2009); see also Aron et al. (2005).

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Opposing the motion – Elizabeth Povinelli

The following is a revised version of the comments I presented at the Group for Debates in Anthropological Theory (GDAT). I presented the remarks from a hotel bed in London where I was suffering from the swine flu. I passed out before I could help my partner in the question and answer, thus this edit can be understood as, if not a set of answers to the questions, a clearer formulation of my initial argument.

I

Before beginning my comments, I would like to thank the GDAT for inviting me to speak against the proposal, 'The anthropological fixation with reciprocity does not leave any place for love.'

There is much to say about the rhetorical structure of this proposal. Perhaps the first thing to note is the language of desire that connects its opposing sides. Even as the proposal separates reciprocity and love, placing the one in opposition to the other, its invocation of the psychoanalytically suffused concept 'fixation' transforms an anthropological theory, reciprocity, into an anthropological affect: a moment in which anthropology's desire is tied to an object that should have long ago been superseded. If fixation is the interruption of the telos of human development, then reciprocity is the relational moment anthropology refuses to give up in order to mature into love. Or so the proposal seems to suggest.

And so, although I have agreed to speak against this motion, I want to begin by noting a deep bias within it. What is it to say that the anthropological relationship to reciprocity is one of fixation? Is it not to presuppose that anthropology should have long ago given up this relational-concept and for a more advanced one – that it should leave behind a version of the human who is caught in the calculus of exchange and acknowledge a form of exchange that exceeds the logic of exchange? Does love exceed this calculation? What if love is also a fixation? 'I am fixated on finding love', we can imagine someone, perhaps ourselves, saying. Is there any moment when love as the object of love reveals itself as a fixation? What is love as opposed to desire and fixation? Here a fixation with reciprocity, there a desire to overcome this fixation, and there a love freed from such regressive concerns. Should we be focusing on anthropological fixations rather than their objects? And what of these objects – reciprocity and love? Are they meant to be different kinds, qualities and relations? On what basis? Are interest and reciprocity cold concepts while desire, love, passion, seduction are hot concepts?

Rather than beginning by wandering through the thicket of the proposal's rhetorical structure, I want to begin by opposing the proposal in a more straightforward way. I want to argue that the proposal that the anthropological fixation with reciprocity does not leave any place for love is false on face value. Please note, I am not arguing that I agree with the ways in which anthropology has opened a space for love, or even that it has a very clear sense of the stakes of differentiating various forms of love, desire and sociality. I am just arguing, in the first place, that the literature on reciprocity is rife with the passions, some of which are at least cognates of a language of love.

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So the first point I wish to assert is that the proposition is false in a *prima facie* sense. It can be easily shown that anthropological models of reciprocity have referred to and been propped up by one or another language of love (desire, intimacy, passion, seduction). We might critique what place is made of love and what love is thought to be (typically heteronormative in its orientation). But one need merely take a voyage across the classical literature in social anthropology to see how a language of love, passion and seduction slices through the anthropology of reciprocity.

As is well known, Bronislaw Malinowski differentiated his functionalist anthropology from Radcliffe-Brown's structural-functionalism on the basis of the difference between the study of social passions and desires and the study of social rules and laws. Thus, to understand kula exchange and the other economic activities described in *Argonauts of the Western Pacific*, the anthropologist must take into account the human passions that are accounted for and fulfilled in the circulation of objects. The function of society is to fulfil human passions and desires – and thus the ethnographer must seek to understand what concerns his subject 'most intimately' (Malinowski, 2008: 25).

Marcel Mauss (2006) did not ignore the critical function of the passions when developing Malinowski's work in the Trobriands into a general theory of reciprocity. As Maurice Godelier (1999) notes, Mauss's logic of the gift is striated with affective powers: rather than understanding the gift from the point of view of the demand to give, receive and reciprocate, we can understand the gift as dependent upon the power to persuade, seduce, wait and make others wait, a waiting that increases the desire for the love object. Indeed, this play of seduction and delay creates a *fixation* on the absent object. Thus while the total social fact may seem to proceed in a somewhat mechanical way – prestations and counter-prestations – once started, in fact, as Mauss himself insists, the dynamic begins with a form of love (seduction) and depends throughout on another form of love (frustrated desire) that creates another form of love (fixation).

Likewise, in *Elementary Forms of Kinship* (1971), Claude Lévi-Strauss, building on Mauss's theory of gift exchange, built into his theory of reciprocity a model of desire. As is well known, Lévi-Strauss argued that the prohibition against incest is the rule that performatively entailed human culture, even as, in being universal in form if not content, it remained tethered to the nature of man. In being the transition from nature to culture, the prohibition against incest partakes in both nature and culture. But, as with the prohibition against incest so with human forms of reciprocity: the impulse to move women and goods from one social group partakes in natural and cultural forms of desire. For Lévi-Strauss an insatiable heterosexual male desire lies somewhere within and between nature and culture. After all, Lévi-Strauss claims, 'marriage is a[n] eternal triangle, not just in vaudeville sketches, but at all times, and in all places, and by definition' (1971: 41) and this eternal triangle is constituted by the fact that women have an essential value in group life and thus the group intervenes either in the form of a 'rival', who, 'though the agency of the group, asserts that he had the same right of access as the husband' and 'through the group as a group', which asserts that marriage is social and thus '*a person cannot do just what he pleases*' (1971: 43, emphasis in the original). Denial initiates desire. Men want what they cannot have. But man is like this naturally.

Lévi-Strauss might have revealed a certain French misogyny here, and we might ask whether this modality of desire is the form of love to which the proposal means to refer, but it is clear that some form of desire, passion and love is essential to anthropological theories of reciprocity.

What is true of anthropology is true of social theory more generally.

For some critical social theorists, love is the effect of the evolution of modes of production. Frederick Engels's classic, *The Origins of the Family, Private Property and the State* (1978), would exemplify this way of knitting together forms of exchange and forms of love. He is a bit scathing about certain forms of love. As for the sentiments of Victorian love, Engels writes: 'if strict monogamy is to be regarded as the acme of all views then the palm must be given to the tapeworm, which possesses a complete male and female sexual apparatus... and passes the whole of its life in cohabiting with itself' (1978: 48). But, in any case, love has a place in his theory of exchange – love emerges from the economic structuring of the affects.

For others, love is a necessary affective supplement to the emergence of modern economic forms of circulation. For example, in *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere* (1991), Jürgen Habermas described the constitutive relationship among modes of economic circulation, textual reportage and modern intimacy. He argues:

The public's understanding of the public use of reason was guided specifically by such private experiences as grew out of the audience-oriented subjectivity of the conjugal family's intimate domain. Historically the latter was the source of privateness in the modern sense of a saturated and free interiority. (1991: 28)

As the sociologist Craig Calhoun (1999) and others have noted, this way of reconceiving the family helped lead to a reconceptualization of humanity itself. This reconceptualization rested on excluding the kinds of economic exchanges found in the bourgeois household from the logics of the emerging capitalist market by affectively recoding these household exchanges as intimacy. This affective understanding of some forms of property as intimate love introduced a 'key element of the false consciousness of the bourgeois' (Calhoun, 1999: 11). According to Habermas (1991), the family, and its forms of intimate human love, was believed to be independent of the market, whereas in truth it was profoundly saturated by the requirements of the market.

I could go on – for instance examining Anthony Giddens's (1993) work on intimacy and the reciprocity of practices. But I think I have made my point already. I am justified in opposing the proposal that the anthropological fixation with reciprocity does not leave any place for love on *prima facie* grounds. Anthropology and its cognate fields have depended upon love and a set of cognate affects to account for the animation, form and outcome of reciprocity, and have depended on modes of reciprocity to account for local forms of love and its cognate affects. Thus, when you consider voting today, you must, I believe, consider these ice-cold, passionless facts. Whether you agree or disagree with how they have made a place for love in their theories of reciprocity, these theorists have certainly made a place for love. In the coldest corners of anthropological and critical theory, affect is found working its magic. All theories of reciprocity are also theories of the affects – love included.

3

My second broad point flows directly from this claim, but from the opposition direction. If all theories of reciprocity are also theories of the affects, love included, then all theories of the affects, including love, are also theories of reciprocity. Thus the proposition that the anthropological fixation with reciprocity does not leave any place for love is not merely false in a strict sense. It is also wrongheaded because it is conceptually vague and underdetermined from an anthropological point of view. Let me elaborate.

If I am to accept that an anthropological fixation with reciprocity excludes an equal fixation with love, or negates any conceptual space for considering love, then I must believe that the qualities, essences and manifestations of love differ in their entirety from the qualities, essences and manifestation of reciprocity. But this separation is itself a social rather than natural fact. And this is what I have tried to outline in the *Empire of Love* (2006).

There I examined ‘autology’ and ‘genealogy’ as dominant forms of discipline in liberalism. ‘Autology’ refers to multiple discourses and practices which invoke the autonomous and self-determining subject, and which are therefore linked to, but not exhausted in, liberalism’s emphasis on ‘freedom’ more narrowly conceived as a political philosophy. ‘Genealogy’, on the other hand, is taken to refer to discourses that stress social constraint and determination in processes of subject constitution and construe the subject as bound by ‘various kinds of inheritances’. Autology and genealogy are two coexisting and intersecting forms of discipline that are constitutive of postcolonial governance. They are not descriptive terms but demanding environments. A demand is made on the multitude of non-liberal languages and practices to make sense of their life-worlds within the logic of a division – to explain themselves in its terms.

What I wanted to do in this book was to track how normative ideas concerning love and intimacy operate in liberalism as it emerges across colonial spaces through a series of juridical and theoretical readings. How do we understand the history of liberal love and its Others, with a view to restaging questions concerning trajectories of European Enlightenment and modernity firmly in relation to histories of coloniality, as in much postcolonial theory? Thus the focus there on the ‘intimate event’, that is, a cluster of fantasies variously concerned with anti-miscegenation, inter-racial marriage, bigamy and sodomy, which are shown to be both ‘disrupted and secured by the logic of the exception’ (Povinelli, 2006: passim 175–88). While these fantasies lack a proper referent, they are nevertheless shown to instantiate and subtly realign the centrality of the intimate in liberalism, notably through the governance of the intimate heteronormative couple and the self-sovereignty of the subject whose intimacy is thereby produced and regulated. The ‘intimate event’ might be completely naturalized and made to appear common sense, but is in fact a shifting nexus between ‘micro-practices of love’ and ‘macro-practices of state governance... capital production, circulation and consumption’ (2006: 190), which attains coherence and stability through specific operations, namely by delimiting what the specific domain of intimacy ought to be, conceiving of intimacy as

explicitly normative and construing forms of social organization other than those regulated by the intimate event as different and immoral. Through the mechanism of exception, the intimate event is therefore implicated in the production of difference – including the anthropological fixation of the difference of reciprocity. Love emerges as reciprocity's other only after the autological and genealogical become the name of a division with the social that is outside of history and culture.

It is not therefore an exclusion of love that emerges out of the anthropological fixation on reciprocity. Rather, anthropology has continually reiterated a figuration of love as belonging properly to the free subject. Indeed, the only way that the proposition we are debating can make sense is to assume that reciprocity is an earlier less developed stage, or that it is an altogether different kind of human way of relating to other humans than love.

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Proposing the motion – Rane Willerslev

An aspect of comparative analysis that has remained constant throughout the history of anthropology is the discovery that two events, symbols or thoughts, while so utterly separated by time and space that they could not 'really' be connected, seem, nevertheless, to be the same or to be speaking directly to one another. This is perhaps anthropology's greatest discovery, because it renders possible a secret interconnection of things that could provide a kind of ontological reference point for our generalizations about human life, which cuts across specific cultural, political and historical contexts.

I would like to begin my talk with one such comparison of two statements separated not so much in time as in space. The one is from Jacques Derrida, the great 20th-century French philosopher, the other from a Siberian Yukaghir hunter,

who I interviewed during fieldwork in 1999. Both fragmentary statements are concerned with the question of 'love' and both give in quite different ways eloquent testimony to its nature:

love means an affirmative desire towards the Other – to respect the Other, to pay attention to the Other, not to destroy the otherness of the Other – and this is the preliminary affirmation, even if afterwards because of this love, you ask questions. (Derrida, 2008)

Love was given to us by Jesus. 'There will be no more killings', he said: 'Instead you shall live in harmony with all of God's creatures.' But we are hunters, how could we stop killing? What could we possibly eat if not meat? For this reason Jesus left us. Since then, love is no longer genuine and appearances can be deceptive. (Yukaghir hunter)

To be sure, the two statements seem at first to suggest, at least by implication, two differing theories on the nature of love. Whereas Derrida talks about the ethical imperative of not reducing the infinite otherness of the Other as an act of love, the Yukaghir hunter talks about love as a long-lost attribute, which today is corrupted. However, on closer inspection, both statements are seen to include, much as in the Chinese *taiji* (or *yin-yang*) diagram, their apparent opposites within themselves. Derrida clearly acknowledges that the ethical assertion of loving one's Other unconditionally is an impossible ideal that can never be actualized. Our notion of the Other, he states, is always being conditioned by the horizons and contexts that the subject brings to bear on the Other's alterity and the wholly Other can, therefore, never be encountered (Derrida, 1981: 163).

Likewise, the Yukaghir hunter, seemingly down-to-earth and pessimistic in his account of love, relies on a transcendent God as personifying genuine love. Our actual experiences of love are short-lived and illusory. Its true fabric rests with the inscrutable God that is altogether other than and beyond human experience.

For both interlocutors, therefore, what we conventionally call 'love' in everyday dialogue is not the real thing, but an adaptation of the real to the practical interests and to the exigencies of these interests in everyday social life. Or, to put this another way: what prevents boundless love from ever materializing is the imposition of our actual interests and the social actions required for the pursuit of these interests. As such, boundless love is deemed non-present, non-actual – that is a non-empirical and indeed impossible ideal, which exists only in a 'virtual dimension'.

I borrow the terms 'actual' and 'virtual' from Gilles Deleuze (1989: 54–5). That something is *actual* basically means that it exists in the conventional sense of the word, that it can be experienced, perceived, measured, etc. The *virtual* by contrast does not share any of these characteristics: its qualities are not objective in the normal sense, not perceptible, material, measurable and so on. The virtual – at least in my Derrida-inspired reading of the term – is a 'phantom ideal of purity'

(Derrida, 1995: 244), which does not exist in the conventional sense of being physically given or presented, but may only be imagined as a kind of unthinkable abstraction or paradox, working on a purely imaginary plane.

This, however, does not make the virtual unreal. The recent evolution of the word's general meaning – in phases like 'virtual reality' – unhelpfully associates it with the artificial or merely superficial. But the word's older, now archaic, meaning relates it to the possession of inherent virtues or powers (Hallward, 2006: 30). It is this meaning that I want to bring across. As both the account of Derrida and the Yukaghir hunter indicate, virtual love is *more* real than its actual manifestations. Actual love takes place only in the shadow of the impossibility of its virtual or ideal version.

This dependency of the actual upon the virtual is equally apparent with regard to the problem of 'the gift'. Thus, Derrida writes:

For there to be a gift, there must be no reciprocity, return, exchange, counter-gift, or debt. If the other *gives* me *back* or *owes* me or has to give me back what I give him or her, there will not have been a gift. (1991: 12, emphasis in the original)

From this perspective – which flies right in the face of our Maussian understanding of the gift as reciprocity (Mauss, 2002) – a truly appropriate gift would be the 'free gift', entirely detached from exchange, circulation, recognition or gratitude. For this reason, Derrida renders the free gift – in much the same way as he renders love – a virtual phantasy that can never be actualized. Indeed, for Derrida the free gift and boundless love are synonymous terms for *the* impossible (Caputo, 1997: 162).

This is not to call into question that in everyday life gifts are given for all sorts of reasons and with all sorts of intentions and emotions. The difficult point that we need to grasp is that such acts *also* contain within them – importantly and significantly – a faith in the ideal of the free gift given out of boundless love, which although it is a virtual impossibility is always at work in any actual gift giving. In other words, I am not arguing along Platonic lines for a definite distinction between the physical world of murky impressions and the real world of ideas (Plato, 1945: 514a–521b). The actual does not exist separately from the virtual, and the virtual does not necessarily transcend the actual in some higher plane. Rather, the two dimensions are given as facets of one and the same expression or reality – that is, our actual existence duplicates itself all along with a virtual existence, which, as a kind of shadow image, 'ghosts' its presence (Corsín Jiménez and Willerslev, 2007). The tricky task of the anthropologist is to explore the possible means of extracting or subtracting the one from the other.

Let me try to illustrate this by returning to the Yukaghir hunters. Their distribution of resources follows, in many respects, a traditional hunter-gatherer economic model of 'sharing'. This implies that people are expected to make claims on other people's possessions and those who possess more than they can immediately consume or use are expected to give it up without expectation of repayment

(Barnard and Woodburn, 1991). This principle of sharing affects practically everything from trade goods, such as cigarettes and fuel, to knowledge about how to hunt, but it applies most forcefully to the distribution of meat: 'I eat, you eat. I have nothing, you have nothing, we all share of one pot,' the Yukaghirs say.

The hunters' engagement with the non-human world of animals and their associated spiritual beings also follows this principle of sharing. Thus, in the forest, hunters will ask the spiritual owners to share their stock of prey with them in much the same way as they do with fellow humans, who possess resources beyond their immediate needs. They will, for example, address the spirits of the places where they hunt by saying: 'Lovely grandmother – master of the good and bountiful – your children are hungry and poor. Feed us as you have fed us before.' Likewise, when going on a hunt all aspects of violence are screened out of hunters' vocabulary. Instead, the killing is talked about as a sexual act in which the animal freely offers itself to the hunter's weapon out of love for him. This is perhaps most clearly exemplified in the Yukaghir saying that 'Only if the elk loves the hunter will he be able to kill it.' And, as among many other northern hunting peoples, there is a disclaimer of responsibility recited over the animal's corpse immediately after it has been killed: 'Master, you came to us out of your own free will, because you love us. Have pity on us and do not harm us.'

At first glance, the Yukaghir cosmology could be interpreted as an integrated system, an all-embracing cosmic principle based on the law of the free gift, in which self and other are radically autonomous, share their resources without expecting anything in return and therefore have no obligations or claims on each other of any kind. This is in fact the sort of argument proposed by Nurit Bird-David (1990) in her recent study of how hunter-gatherers relate to their natural environments. Thus, she proposes that for the Nayaka of southern India, the Batek of Malaysia and the Mbuti of Zaire, the forest is regarded as a 'parent', who gives them food in over-abundance with no apprehension of a good deed done or the recognition that they have received or should give something in return – what she labels the 'giving environment' (Bird-David, 1990).

Having briefly outlined my Yukaghir ethnography and Bird-David's intriguing report and interpretation of the sharing economy among hunter-gatherers, we must, at this point, ask some blunt questions.¹ In particular, can we really believe that a group of people, who fully depend on hunting to survive, would kill an animal only when it gives itself up freely to the hunter out of love for him? Our answer will have serious consequences. For if we answer 'yes', we will have aligned these people with some sort of cultural 'death wish', for surely a community of hunters who simply wait for their prey to show and give themselves up would not survive long. Indeed, the ethnographic standard reports of animals having no objection to being killed by the indigenous hunter (see e.g. Rasmussen, 1929: 58; Sharp, 1991: 186–7; Tanner, 1979) bear a strong resemblance to images in Western food industry advertising, which represent animals as being eager to become food

or as participating actively in the cooking process. Is it humanly plausible that hunters, who search for animals on a daily basis, would be ignorant of the fact that the interests of prey not only differ from their own, but indeed conflict with them? Again, in answering 'yes', we will have accepted a 'cuckoo-land', where our ordinary commonplace understandings of reality no longer apply and with the necessary – and highly dubious – consequence that the indigenous interpretations of nature become an expression of some other sort of mind in line with Lucien Lévy-Bruhl (1926).

In a similar way, we must ask if we can believe on good authority that hunter-gatherers really do what Bird-David claims they do: sharing their resources unconditionally, without expecting anything in return. Despite describing the ethos of sharing among the Hadza of Tanzania in much the same terms as Bird-David, James Woodburn (1982) also lets us know how they usually go about hiding things to keep them away from their tribesmen. Likewise, Ernest Burch (1991: 108–9) has argued that sharing is by no means the only form of transaction in hunter-gatherer societies, which include everything from reciprocity and barter to outright theft.

What all of this quite clearly suggests is that not only ought we not to believe many of the elements in the description of unconditional sharing as usually presented in the ethnographic literature, but we also ought not to believe that the hunter-gatherers from whom these descriptions were collected believe it either. Frankly speaking, unconditional sharing pure and simple is nowhere to be found. The trouble with Bird-David's account of the 'giving environment' is that she assumes that the official rhetoric of these hunter-gatherers faithfully matches or corresponds to their own (along with the spirits') motivations and interests during their practical distributing of resources. But this is not so.

Let me give my argument some ethnographic substance by turning to a story that was told to me by an elderly Yukaghir woman, Akulina, who lost a friend and the latter's son to the predation of an animal spirit. The spirit 'fell in love' with her friend, Igor, and kept sending him animals to kill. He could hardly believe his luck. Yet Igor's over-hoarding of animals eventually enabled the spirit to stake out its own claims, which it enforced by dragging the soul (*ayibii*) of Igor's son 'back to its household' and thus killing him. Later, it also killed the father, who fell ill in the forest and died. Igor's luck in hunting had translated into an over-accumulation of the souls of the spirit's 'children' – the animals. This gave the spirit the right to claim the souls of both Igor and his son. Akulina ended her story by warning me: 'If you are too lucky and animals keep coming to you, stop hunting at once. It might be *Khozyain* (the animal master), who wants your soul. You'll never know before it's too late' (Willerslev, 2007: 44–5).

If there is a moral to be learned from this account, it is that 'appearances can be deceptive'. Luck in hunting, which at first seems to result from the generosity of an animal spirit, can turn out to be an act of deception. What the hunter took to be a

free gift turned out to be a cunning trick of reciprocity, involving a debtor–creditor relationship with a definite expectation of a return. So, although the animal spirits are said to be generous, it turns out that they are generous only in a highly unstable and relative sense.

But does this then mean that Bird-David is simply projecting her own romantic sentiments onto hunter-gatherers, inventing what they are supposed to experience, when she suggests that their cosmology is predicated on a principle of unconditional sharing? Although there quite clearly is a gap, an incongruity between what hunter-gatherers claim they and the animal spirits do and what they actually do, I believe there is an important and significant germ of truth in her argument.

Unconditional sharing based in boundless love is indeed the ideal within many hunter-gatherer societies in relation to which all actual forms of transactions are measured and are morally judged. Almost all Yukaghirs ascribe to this ideal of unconditional sharing and regard it as both immutable and morally just. So, when the animal spirit gives the hunter prey with a secret intention of taking his life in return, this only occurs in the shadow of the impossibility of a genuine free gift, in which all the spirit's animals would be freely available to the hunter with no expectation of payback. At the moment it becomes clear that the spirit takes under the guise of giving, having actually put the hunter in debt, a glimpse of its ideal alternative is briefly revealed for it then to flip back into its opposite through the spirit's raking in of credit. In other words, the actual event of the spirit's calculated killing of the hunter comes to stand in conscious tension to the way things ought to be. This is exactly what allows the ideal alternative to be perceived, albeit for only a split second. Thus, we must assume that the impossible free gift inhabits Yukaghirs and spirits alike with a troubling foreignness that unsettles them and operates as a kind of internal critique of the inadequate gifts they do in fact accomplish in their actual engagements with one another.

So, although the virtual ideal amounts to an 'alterity' or 'otherness', which can be experienced only in essentially negative terms – through what it is *not* – it is still something with which people have an everyday relation. The virtual ideal of the free gift given out of boundless love is implicitly at work in any concrete contexts of exchange, barter and even theft as an impossible phantasy or phantom ideal from which these actual transactions are given form, defined and morally judged.

But will not the boundless love of the free gift then be something that is always deferred, never to be experienced in its present existence? For we may ask: does not the virtual ideal lose its empirical grip and spin freely on its own in the empty air of ideality? Not quite. Hunters do in fact encounter those paradoxical and highly unexpected moments in which an elk or another animal simply walks towards the hunter as if it freely offered itself to him out of love for him. Though nothing in the actual world is perfect, these unlikely gift-giving moments, are, I venture to suggest, of paramount importance to the Yukaghirs' continuous faith in and desire for the impossible free gift. Their importance lies exactly in the fact that they signify in an overwhelmingly present and powerful manner how the relationship with the

animals and their spirits ought to be, infused, as it were, with boundless love of unconditional giving, which stands in sharp contrast to how they usually are, corrupted and unpredictable by deception, manipulation and guile on the part of both parties. As such, these rare and hardly possible moments in which the animal gives itself freely to the hunter, provide an occasion for reflection on the fact that what ought to take place is not usually taking place and what has just taken place is the exception.

With these observations in mind let us turn to the key question that interests us here: *whether the anthropological fixation with reciprocity has left no place for love?* It should be clear from what I have been arguing that the unbounded love of the free gift does not belong to the world of the actual or empirical, but is a contemplative and immaterial abstraction that exists on a purely virtual plane. Still, its presence is highly *real* in that it sustains any of all the divergent forms of actual gift exchanges, without which they could not be actualized. A good deal of anthropology's misinterpretations derive from the fact that it has focused almost exclusively on the actual reality of gift giving, with all that this entails of reciprocity, circulation, recognition and gratitude, thus blinding it to the importance of its virtual condition – the impossible ideal of the free gift. For the same reason, anthropology has been incapable of talking about love, pure and simple, but has reduced its nature to its actual manifestations in specific cultural, historical and political contexts. Anthropology will reach its analytical climax only at the moment that it invents a form of thinking that is capable of bypassing the actual and advancing into the virtual ideality of reality itself.

What would such an anthropology look like, which has shifted its perspective from that of the actual to that of the virtual? I am not sure, but clearly the world of lived and recognizable experience dissolves to the advantage of forces beyond recognition, forces too powerful for both the lived and the world. We would begin to approach the very limits of our comprehension. Mysticism may figure as a source of inspiration, for, as Henri Bergson points out: 'The ultimate end of mysticism is the establishment of a contact, consequently of a partial coincidence, with the creative effort which life itself manifests. This effort is of God, if not God himself' (1954: 220–1).

I do not mean to suggest that anthropologists should turn religious or seek 'identification of the human will with the divine will' (Bergson, 1954: 232). Nevertheless, in a number of important ways, my argument about the primacy of the virtual is consistent with the idea of an unknowable creator – a sort of primordial and self-determining force – working alongside its consolidation in actual manifestations and behind which there is nothing. In keeping with the cliché of the divine, we might cautiously think of it as a 'virtual creator', so long as we remember that this creator is thinkable precisely only as unthinkable and that it is not itself presentable and is nowhere to be found, making itself present only through absence. 'It is perhaps in this sense that it is the impossible. Not impossible but *the* impossible. The very figure of the impossible' (Derrida, 1991: 7).

Note

1. Here, as elsewhere in my argument, I take great inspiration from Jonathan Z. Smith, who sees the official rhetoric of hunter-gatherers as a 'means of performing the way things ought to be in conscious tension to the way things are in such a way that this ritualized perfection is recollected in the ordinary uncontrolled course of things' (1982: 63, emphasis in the original).

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Opposing the motion – Perveez Mody

This debate proposes that the anthropological fixation with reciprocity leaves no room for love. And myself and Elizabeth Povinelli are to demolish this as complete nonsense. I have spent many long hours staring at the proposition and desperately hoping that it would make itself explicit to me or help me make my peace with it. The anthropological fixation with reciprocity has produced some remarkably coherent accounts of marriage and kinship in India. Furthermore, they are surprisingly denuded of accounts of love, and have been traditionally employed as a foil to the more romantic escapades of modern Euro-Americanus, the imagined species we anthropologists like to employ for the sake of a bit of alterity. Indeed, as we all know, Louis Dumont's famous work *Homo Hierarchicus* (1998 [1970]) was premised on the notion that in India holism and hierarchy reigned supreme (the goals of society dictate individual actions) while in the West, individualism and equality implies that society exists to support every individual's individualism. The Dumontian emphasis on 'affinity' – the relations established by marriage – was heavily influenced by Mauss (whose lectures he attended in Paris in the late 1930s) and Lévi-Strauss to whom he dedicated an important paper.¹ And while an attendance to affinity was a step forward from descent, it was a step back from anything that resembled an engagement with modern Indian society or its laws, one of which legitimated inter-caste and inter-community marriages way back in 1872.

I, on the other hand, have built what little there is of my modest career on the back of the argument that Indian (read 'Dumontian') anthropology has largely failed to recognize the significance of romantic love in social and political life, thus making me a natural ally of my opponents. Why was Soumhya precipitating such an intellectual crisis by making me argue otherwise? Well, as we all know, she moves in mysterious ways, and I now know that what I have really been arguing all along is that the anthropological concern with reciprocity does leave room for understanding love, and by the by, it can tell you something about divorce too. What I am going to argue today is that anthropology has largely ignored love, but this has not been because of a focus on reciprocity. Indeed, anthropology's accumulated wisdom about reciprocity is one of the assets we have when we are trying to write about love.

Gell tells us that love is constituted through the mutual process of exposure between lovers combined with concealment from everybody else. Love and knowledge for Gell are intimately connected, with every society working as an 'informational universe'. The forms love takes in different societies are an outcome of the forms of 'social knowledge' in these societies (1996: 2). So Gell argues that in a society like Umeda (in the Sepik area of New Guinea) everyone knows everyone and, even in war, one engages in with people one knows personally or through kinship connections. Here romantic love, in the sense of 'love with a relative stranger whom one chooses, out of all possible candidates', is impossible as marriages with cross-cousins are pre-arranged when girls are very little (as Gayle Rubin astutely observes – a person in such a system is 'not only heterosexual,

but cross-cousin-sexual' [1975: 181]) – and here, romantic love takes the form of adultery (Gell, 1996: 2–3). Affairs generated 'lethal knowledge' – the disclosure of which invariably led to allegations of sorcery. Jokingly, Gell warns that '[i]f cross-cousin marriage is the "elementary form" of kinship alliance, then the elementary form of love is adultery' (1996: 3).

In contrast, modern couples need to create a narrative that transforms the arbitrariness of two people picking each other to the exclusion of so many others, and these created courtship histories serve to embed that relationship within their social worlds. Gell speaks of the 'reciprocal exchange of an escalating series of indiscretions through which the courting couple gradually create a lover's pact, not to cheat on each other, sexually or verbally' (1996: 5). The exchange of information by the couple forms the very basis of their relationship. A person chooses another because of the knowledge they have that *all other* potential partners were essentially unsuitable. Information is controlled and transacted in a way that allows persons to cultivate their romantic selves. It is the 'torrent of confidential information' exchanged between two persons and the simultaneous closing down of information for prying others that secures the relationship for the couple (1996: 5). Gell's theory has an elegance to it. It explains Umeda love and love in *Second Life*, the remarkable internet-based virtual world recently documented by Tom Boellstorff (2008), where the gap between the actual and the virtual is mediated by both knowledge and unknowing. Arguably, we have here a prime candidate for an anthropological fixation with reciprocity (a system of knowledge exchange), bringing us nicely to a theory of love!

But back to India where love is far from theoretical. 'Arranged marriages' are often described as constituting a cultural bulwark against the 'social ills' of divorce, social breakdown, homosexuality and single-parenthood so widely discernible in the West. This narrative has become part of a new confidence in the adaptability and modernity of 'Indian culture' and resonates with the exuding confidence of the economic boom in India in the late 1990s.

More recently, however, this confidence has been somewhat punctured, with the omnipresent urban media projecting its fascination with the less salubrious aspects of Indian social life and abandoning the well-versed line of India as the land of marriage. The new rhetoric is that India is the land of divorce, multiple sexual relations and sexualities. Nearly every major city has in turn been branded with the immoral implications of being *the* 'divorce capital' and indulging this moral panic appears to be every national newspaper's favourite pastime.

What I am going to show you is that in my own ethnographic work (Mody, 2008), theoretical concerns about gifts and reciprocity have proven most productive in understanding the actions of love-marriage couples, who are routinely accused of rank disregard for their families' honour and status because they so shamelessly appropriate the giving that must be done by more appropriate others. It is through gifts and notions of reciprocity and obligation that I was able to study and understand love-marriage self-hood as well as love-marriage breakdown. Far from emptying my theory of love, a concern with reciprocity was, interestingly,

closest to my informants' hearts. It explained why they did not favour elopement, even though they were occasionally forced to elope, and it explained why some of my informants married in secret in the city temples or district court, but then returned to their respective parental homes for long periods of time (in one case, six years) in the hope that somehow circumstances would change, and their parents would approve and agree to their choice in marriage. They were acutely aware that the greatest sanction against a love-marriage is for society to ostracize the entire kin group – ceasing to give and take brides; and, in some instances, even sending wives back to their natal homes for the misconduct of a distant kinswoman.

What makes love-marriage appropriate for this discussion is that we have self-giving girls who gift themselves to their husbands in self-arranged love-marriages. By drawing on my ethnography, I hope to complicate the classical narrative about disinterested affinal gift-giving (or *dan*) by showing the complex ways in which individuals (my love-marriage informants) in contemporary urban India construct their own discourses about the moral meanings of gifts. By focusing attention upon what appears, at first instance, to be the very antithesis of affinal marital prestations (self-giving girls who receive upon marriage virtually no gifts from their kin) I hope to show how *dan* and subtle discourses about *dahej* (dowry) bear down heavily upon the very being of such persons and, indeed, of their union in the form of critical censure upon their marriage. What is striking here is the way in which the self-consciously modern and 'progressive' lack of giving and receiving prestations or *dahej* upon the part of the couple themselves – an act that is predicated upon their ideas about equality (and upon which the marriage was pre-figured), becomes an entry point for all manner of questions about the moral fibre of individuals, the very meanings of conjugal love and, most especially, of the place of working women in the home and the destructive power of the female wage in a marriage. These radically diverse models of gifts are to a large extent what pre-figured the marital breakdown between one of my informants and her husband.

I was told about Shefali's marital breakdown shortly after she and her husband had come to a women's group in Delhi that provided legal counselling on family affairs. Her romance with her husband Tarun had seemed promising to begin with, even though she had grown up with expectations of marrying via arrangement. They both worked as journalists and the basis of their friendship and love was conversational – nurtured through shared poetry, long walks by the Ganges and discussions about spirituality. They decided to marry despite their different castes and, anticipating complex and lengthy negotiations with family, they secretly married each other one night by circumambulating a candle (after the style of Hindu marriages) in Shefali's room. Her self-giving generated no small amount of anxiety and the next morning she says she wept as she had never done before. Tarun, for his part told his family he was marrying Shefali and went about boasting to everyone '*hum kuch nahin lenge*', we will not take anything – meaning he wanted no dowry. Shefali says that this deeply offended her brother, as it implied that Tarun was too proud to take gifts from Shefali's family, and, from her brother's perspective, he was refusing to allow them to become proper affines through the gifting of

their daughter and the accompanying gifts that would constitute the proper treatment of wife-takers by wife-givers.

A few months after a court marriage they had a simple religious marriage in a temple to which both families were invited. The day after the temple marriage, Tarun's mother said to Shefali: 'Among your people, don't they give furniture to the girl [on the occasion of a marriage]?' Shefali was stunned by the question and the implication that her people hadn't been forthcoming in giving dowry on her behalf. When Tarun's mother visited her son and daughter-in-law in Delhi, Shefali was rebuked for working all the time at her job and having no time to keep home: 'You are so busy with work. You go early in the morning and return late at night. Is this any way to run a house?' Shefali finally responded by offering to give up work. Tarun said: 'Leave your job? Then what are you going to eat?' Shefali was shocked that he was so dismissive of their marriage and their shared responsibilities towards each other. He was undermining their marriage by indicating that her wage was hers, and his was his. She says of her feelings towards him at the time:

You took me from my home and brought me here [to Delhi]. And you are saying that only if I work will I eat? That means that *I don't have anybody in this world*. What would happen [...] if my hand got cut or my foot got cut?

Conclusion

Shefali and Tarun's marriage was a fairly typical love-marriage in many ways. First, their marital union itself happened as an outcome of a decision between the couple themselves, and this was later communicated to their respective families. Shefali and Tarun's families arranged a low-scale celebration of the marriage. People came but their presence served to make the absence of significant family members more difficult to bear – in Shefali's instance, the elder brother who had taken on the role of her father after his death, went on a holiday as a pretext for his non-attendance at a marriage he disapproved of. When I asked her if he gave her any dowry, she replied: 'No, of course not. There was no question of it.'

The gifts from bride-givers to bride-takers that prefigure Hindu marriages in north India involve the balancing of various strategies surrounding wealth, power, status and kinship, and primarily involve the proper transfer of female sexuality, of male honour and of kin who must be called to attend the celebration and to bear witness to the conjoining of the two groups as affines. In instances of love-marriages, the marriage itself becomes almost a non-event, with the couple having made moral commitments prior to their families even knowing about the affair. Furthermore, as in the case of Shefali, the fact that their love wasn't given the framework of reciprocity provided by auspicious *kanyadan* and dowry weakened it and left her feeling that she was on her own – bound neither to her affinal family, and in turn not properly linked to her natal family. The absence of her father and brother gifting her away amplifies her self-giving as an act of love. To mute this, the couple conceive of love, not as something that they have done, but as a gift from

god, which is pure and full of goodness, and which is bound to carry them through the stormy troubles that may lie ahead. This is how we come to interpret Shefali and Tarun's trip to a temple to seek blessings the day after they have their own personal marriage. The act of self-giving proves too problematic and so, in the absence of the blessings that one ordinarily seeks from one's parents and kin, the young couple must rest their future in divine hands.

What I hope I have been able to show is that affinal prestations are most powerfully rendered precisely in instances where they are absent, where their symbolic meanings are explicitly drawn out and where we can see the ambivalence with which wider society configures this lack. This might lead us to the inevitable conclusion that giving and receiving, commonly glossed in Hindi as '*lena-dena*' is so integrally bound to the ideals of what constitutes and cements a marital union that it becomes impossible to imagine marriage without these gifts. Perhaps it is that with love, as with other relations and processes, reciprocity provides a more dense framework than a sacrifice or a 'pure gift' does. The latter is a wonderful ideal but so very difficult to achieve in practice. The slightest imperfection – in this case, the husband's tactless idealistic bravado in the first place, followed by rather prosaic materialism, plunges the marriage into jeopardy. So, in addition to love being about reciprocity and the exchange of information, as Gell sees it, understanding how love flourishes or not depends on seeing how it gets connected to patterns of reciprocity. Thus the anthropological fixation with reciprocity, far from leaving no room for love, actually serves as a resource for understanding love and the lovelessness of marital breakdown.

Note

1. Entitled 'Hierarchy and marriage alliance in South Indian kinship' (Uberoi, 2006: 159).

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The discussion

Alberto Corsín Jiménez: The introduction to the first volume to the Sphären trilogy by German philosopher Peter Sloterdijk opens with the alleged epigram in Plato's Academy above the front door 'He who is not a geometer shouldn't dare to

come through.’ And Sloterdijk says that what most people don’t know is that there was another epigram below that saying ‘He who does not know who to love shouldn’t dare to come through.’ Sloterdijk uses this to say that philosophy is all about the construction of worlds and about geometrizing the world but actually the tool that we use to shape the world is the tool of love. It brings the world into shape. We’ve heard four, I thought, wonderful accounts of whether love is important or not for anthropological theory but I was wondering if the speakers could give an account of how love fares in their practice of ethnography – not so much in their theories, but when they go to the field does love play any role in their construction of theory? And if their answer will fall on the same side of the line to that answer as in the actual debate.

Jeanette Edwards: How does love play a part in one’s anthropological practice... Now are you thinking anthropological practice in terms of ethnographic fieldwork or are you thinking anthropological practice in terms of anthropological theorizing and writing from that ethnography?

Alberto Corsín Jiménez: Well both. I mean cultivating your informants’ relationships and cultivating your theoretical concepts; how you relate to your theory.

Jeanette Edwards: Well, they’re not the same thing is what I’d say first of all. So I think love in the field, now if you were to divide it in the same ways as the biological anthropologist and you said ‘lust’, ‘companionship’ and ‘passionate’ love, then I would suggest that companionship and comfort love is constantly part of the practice of doing anthropological fieldwork. In some cases lust may be. Now whether it’s part of the anthropological theorizing, I think it depends on the field itself. I think it depends on what materials you are working with. In the work that I’ve been doing on reproductive and genetic technology, love features because it is a preoccupation of the people that I am working with in that particular field.

Rane Willerslev: I do think that it’s worth differentiating between seduction and passion and desire and so forth. And love. I am not sure of the implications for my argument but I do have to admit that I do what I do out of love to a large extent. I mean to the extent to which you can also be blinded by love. I mean, I got blinded by the love for these people to the extent of being put into prison for being involved. So you’re failing to see the consequences of your action because of a love for the people or particularly individuals. Love not an abstract category, of course. It is a major force.

Perveez Mody: I’m quite intrigued by your question because it resonates with the sort of responses that I would get back from informants when they knew that I was working on love-marriage and there was always this slightly playful, slightly voyeuristic questioning – so where are you? Who are you? What’s your

game in this? At first encounters I would just try and be as open as I could and follow 'anthropological best practice' but as relationships developed and people got to know me better and I got to know them better, then we were just ourselves.

Pnina Werbner: I was persuaded both by Jeanette and Perveez, which sort of poses a dilemma. But midway through the whole debate I suddenly realized I had written a book called *Pilgrims of Love*. And since I think of myself as an empiricist and I agree with Jeanette that love as an analytic category is nonsense for anthropology then I was stuck in a bit of a dilemma. And I think Perveez helped me perhaps to resolve it. Now the kind of love that I talked about that was absolutely central to the book was this devotional love of a Sufi to God, to the Sheikh, to the Saint. But I think it raised this thing which Perveez talked about and in a way Elizabeth Povinelli as well of the conjunctural aspects of thinking about exchange with love. This is the idea that there is a motivation, a passion for something that creates organization, exchange, altruistic giving, all kinds of complex ways of behaving in ways of relation to other people, reciprocity we might call it, although not all of it is reciprocal in the case of this particular order that I studied. But at the bottom, at the base of it there is a motivation, a force and people talk about it so I wasn't inventing the word 'love' in English. I was being told by different people about it and I sort of saw it. So yes I think ultimately I would have to go for the structure of the conjuncture or the conjuncture rather than total empiricism despite my tendencies in that direction.

Soumya Venkatesan: My question follows on from Pnina's and also from the fact that Rane brought up Derrida. The feminist philosopher H el ene Cixous suggests that reciprocity is an attempt to subdue, appropriate or somehow make the other commensurate with self. Love, in contrast, she says, is about not trying to eliminate the difference of the other. It is an attempt to engage with the other in a way that is fully accepting of difference and I kind of wondered whether that way of thinking about reciprocity and love might be of heuristic value?

Rane Willerslev: Actually you put it in a much better way than I did during the talk because I think that is the essence of my argument really. I guess it is coloured by a type of Christianity and ethnocentrism. I got baptized [recently] because my child got baptized . . . I was brought up as an atheist but I thought I am going to get baptized as well for purely pragmatic reasons entirely. Nevertheless I had to go to this priest and talk about faith . . . anyway, the idea is that faith is a gift. A gift in the sense that it is actually something you're just given. That's the reason why you can baptize a child who is incapable of saying yes or no. But it's a gift that's simply given without necessarily having to be returned. That's at least one version of it. I'm sure there are other versions of it. And I do think you are right on the spot when you say that reciprocity, unlike the free gift, of faith, is to a large extent a subject-centred transaction. Where you mirror the receiver in your own image so

to speak. And that has nothing to do with love. At least it's a sort of transmuted version of it.

Simone Abram: I'd like a bit more clarity about what is the love that you're concerned with in this proposal because it's [mostly] been about the love of people. Either by people or by spirits or so forth. I was thinking about Kay Milton's work on the love of nature and where that leads us to interrogate the connection between emotion and feeling. Those kind of internal and slightly more psychological effects, which has not really been an issue that has been of interest here. And I wondered what the problem was in terms of love being excluded. Is the problem that emotions are excluded or that we have a very poor ethnography of emotion and is that right for anthropology because perhaps we're not so interested and we don't have the tools to examine internal, sort of psychological processes but we're interested in the outward manifestations of whether it is emotional or feeling and so on? So in which case what about other emotions? Do we also exclude envy? Do we exclude hate? Greed? Is it emotion per se which is the problem here or is it specifically love which is singled out for being excluded or not depending on which side of the argument you're in? So that to look at love of nature or religious love or other kinds of love is quite helpful in order to actually pin down what it is you're concerned about if there is an exclusion or not.

Jeanette Edwards: Just one thing though. I think you would have to then absolutely assume that love is an emotion. This is a particular way of framing love. It is not axiomatic that we understand love as an emotion that emanates from the individual as it were. I think there are other ways of thinking about love in terms of how it is elicited. You know, the questions about how love gets to be attached to that particular object or that particular person is an interesting question, and if we see it as an emotion then we are constantly looking for internal dimensions, which have to be included, but I think that's only one of the many ways of thinking about love.

Rane Willerslev: Well I think it's very good you start off by saying love *of* what. And I suppose in particularly phenomenologically inspired philosophy one would say that basically all thinking is intentional. Thinking has an intentional object whether that is imagined or real. But, at least in my understanding of love exactly as a virtuality, there is no intentional object. I mean love can't be subject-centred. It has to be a kind of virtualist abstraction that decentres the subject completely. And I think by trying to reduce it to a love *of* something or comfort love, sexual love whatever we reduce the phenomenon. We actually miscredit it. It has to be a force outside the actual practices and not the empirical... sorry... force that is fitting in, shaping things. It has a dynamic of its own.

Melissa Demian: I suppose mine is a version of a previous question but I want to press it because I actually think it's important. I think it's worth making at least an

ethnographic or experimental analytical distinction in what is loved. Once you get into the ethnographic question of someone who says they are in love with a non-human other (truck, dog, Jesus), you have to ask the next question which is what kind of reciprocity is this that is mediated by another who is not the same as a human other? Because in this case, the other's intentions are unknowable (or more unknowable than a human other).

Perveez Mody: In response to the point that you made about the unknowability of the other, Gell, and here I completely agree with him, says: don't look here for any love secrets, you are not going to find any because the point about love is that as soon as you start eliciting it and taking it out and bringing it into the public gaze you in fact dissipate its essence. And I think that's perhaps the problem that we academics who like to rhetoricize and talk and think about this face. Because while I was incredibly comfortable talking about what people wanted to talk about in the context of love-marriage, I don't know if I ever really learned about love through that process other than what I knew and shared already. I don't know if I'm making sense. But love secrets is a nice way of saying that there are some things that are in fact problematic for an anthropologist to start delving into because they just dissipate, they dissolve before our gaze. And it's precisely in holding that tension between concealment and exposure that love exists.

Rane Willerslev: I've used four years trying to figure out what you're asking about because the people I work with claim that animals love them and they have imaginary wives with animal spirits that they sleep with and they claim to love . . . My initial attempt was to take these things seriously. I wrote a whole book on it called *Soul Hunters* (2007). To be honest, you fail the moment you begin on this track. Nevertheless I think it's a very important ethnographic or anthropological endeavour to try to take these claims seriously because it's too easy to say I simply can't believe that a car can love you back. But one way of going about it is to look upon love as a potentiality and now I'm actually sad that I use the idea of an ideality. Because in a way it's a potentiality that can be activated. It's a potential force that can be activated in various actual moments. In all kinds of ways. I think that's one way of looking at it at least.

John Gledhill: When I was a small child a priest insisted there was absolutely no connection between the love of god and the love of men and women. His grounds for this was that the Greeks have different words for different kinds of love. You've all made a number of points all about what is the relationship between love in human relationships as seen in Western societies and religious experience. The difficulty I have with that particular connection is I couldn't imagine the kinds of people I've studied over the years in Latin America in their pre-colonial religious systems conceiving of their anthropomorphic deities as things that love them or they love back. What is interesting is they were able to transform elements of those pre-colonial anthropomorphic deities into Christian saints and the Virgin Mary but

nevertheless, I would argue that in these pre-conquest societies there is no trace of the Christian ways of thinking about love. So that raises the kind of question about whether there isn't this kind of fundamental thing in some cultures [and not in others].

Jeanette Edwards: You've given us this beautiful example of how one idea or way of thinking cannot be automatically shifted over to another historical, social or cultural moment and I think that's the slippage that is going on constantly when we're talking about love.

Perveez Mody: But can I just remind you that the motion here is the anthropological fixation with reciprocity leaves no room for love. Reciprocity might be just one of those theories we play with when we're talking about love. This does not exclude all the other possibilities of how we might think about it.

Unidentified person: Not long ago I was told by one of my informants that those who have no enemies have no friends. This makes me think about hate and the relation between love and reciprocity. My question is, do you think hate helps us understand love and reciprocity? And if so in what ways?

Perveez Mody: From my perspective hate is a very strong word and it frequently came up in my fieldwork when couples were killed by their families but it's an interesting thing because when your family kills you they also claim to love you and it's complex and tricky, when hate and love collapse into one act. Because of course, in the context of somebody marrying somebody you think is inappropriate, you kill that person because you hate what they've done but you claim to love them enough to protect them from violating your kinship codes et cetera. It's complicated. I was very careful not to position myself in communities and study those who violated boundaries from within the communities. But instead I positioned myself outside of communities within the urban city space. So I think it was a consideration in how I conceived of thinking about love and love-marriage from the very outset and consequently informed my work.

Jeanette Edwards: I think love and hate are of a similar status in my argument. You can't assume you know what the contours and what the constitution of hate is in the same way as you can't with love ethnographically. It can only be in a sense revealed in the field as it were. Whereas reciprocity actually will give us a handle on hate. I mean there's stealing, there's cheating, there's lying... so you can do hate within as you can do love within reciprocity.

Rane Willerslev: The fascinating thing about reciprocity is that it contains in every transaction a double aspect of generosity and accumulation. And therefore also it contains the possibility of having a mixed emotional relationship to the one you give or the one you receive from. But that doesn't exclude the virtual possibility of

a pure love, which is the equivalent of the free gift as a virtual reality. My own material on hunter/animal is full of love and hate and deception.

Penny Harvey: What do you disagree with about the other side's spatialization of love?

Matei Candea: The way the questions have been going there seem to be two very different models... either you think of love and reciprocity as different forms of relationality: different kinds of relationship. In Elizabeth Povinelli's paper she said we used to call these things cold or hot. But there's also Rane's model which seems to point to a Derridean argument that reminds me of James Laidlaw's work on free gifts and how they can't make relationships. My question is for Jeanette and for Rane. If for Jeanette love is all about relationship then what about unreciprocated love? Is that still a relationship or no longer? And for Rane what about reciprocated love? Is that just two forces clashing in the middle or is that a relation? The broader question is when does a relation stop being a relation?

Richard Werbner: I'm not sure where the areas of opposition are clearly from one side to another. In one part I had the sense that love is an impossibility – it's impossible as a concept, it's impossible as a practice that you're better off not doing with it. Part of my question is: is love an impossibility whereas reciprocity is something that is possible, practical, operational, liveable so on. Where do both sides stand on this?

Karen Sykes: My question comes from the observation that if you sit with Lévi-Strauss's *The Elementary Structures of Kinship* you find the word reciprocity on every page. It is the dominant concept that he uses in order to come to his affinal analysis. If you sit with Mauss's *The Gift* you have the word 'obligation' as the dominant concept on every page. So for Lévi-Strauss reciprocity, Mauss obligation. Now what attracts me to the Maussian project is that obligation is the beginning of fellow-feeling. And his interest in the book *The Gift* is to try and explain why do people feel obliged to give back what they have received. Whereas reciprocity in Lévi-Strauss's hands is a different order of explanation. Now our habit is to think about obligation and reciprocity sometimes as if they were the same thing. But we might very well think that love and obligation are the same thing and I just want to know how the panel members think about where obligation lies in relation to love and reciprocity.

Perveez Mody: I tangled with this a little bit and what I found, in thinking about personhood in the context of my informants, love-marriage couples, was something quite interesting. On the one hand they seem to be acting as individuals in the sense of McKim Marriott and Strathern etc., giving and receiving pulled by the bonds of both obligation and self, and on the other hand they seem to close down [dividual] personhood when it came to seeking legal selfhood, which they have to do when they were being threatened by their families. So I can't subscribe to that idea that

love and obligation are the same thing because what was happening was, in the context of the couple they are the same thing, but in the context of the couple in the world they are not at all the same thing and this had very real effects for them. But I like the way you have formulated the difference between reciprocity and obligation because it really is quite helpful.

Rane Willerslev: At least in a Derridean version or a Levinasian version, love would be an obligation. You are ethically obliged not to reduce the otherness of the other. Why are you obliged? Because you depend on the other. But the moment you depend you actually transform this obligation. It turns to reciprocity. A relationship is defined through a self–other relation – we can only be selves because we have a relation to others through which we define the self. I think that’s where the trick lies. The question is whether you believe, as I do, that from the outset there’s a virtual obligation which is sort of the rock bottom of all social life but the fact is that the moment it becomes actualized at an empirical level, it turns into reciprocity of some sort. With all its messiness. With all its dualities of hate and love and trickery and deception . . .

Jeanette Edwards: And this answers the question on unreciprocated love. There’s always a demand for return whether the return is in physical terms or not.

James Leach: I wanted to disagree with Dick Werbner. I think there has been a real difference and Penny Harvey was helping us put our finger on where the difference is by thinking about space. Because it seems to me that Perveez and Beth have both shown very convincingly that there is space within the theories of reciprocity for love to appear. But what we’ve got against that is a prescriptive position from the other side, which is slightly difficult because it’s diverging. It seems to me that Jeanette’s saying that absolutely there shouldn’t be space because we’re going to get confused for all the reasons that you gave which was convincing. Whereas Rane is saying there should be space for love (but isn’t). So I wondered if you would talk about that.

Jeanette Edwards: Well we talked about this actually just before we started. And we decided that it sounds like we are arguing different things. But in fact we’re coming at the same thing from different angles. So I would suggest that while I say there’s no space for love, all I’m saying is there’s no space for love theoretically. That ethnographically love is ubiquitous. We cannot just turn our faces away from its prevalence and its purchase and its importance and significance in the worlds in which we work. But that doesn’t contradict Rane’s argument that it is actually also about a yearning and achievement of a virtual that cannot be contained.

Rane Willerslev: I agree with Jeanette because the question is ‘Is anthropology an empirical science?’ If it is purely empirical then there’s no space for love, I would say, definitely. And the question is, and I might not have phrased it the right way: If we want to make a space for love we will have to step out of a pure commitment to

anthropology as an empirical science. That is a precondition for accessing or for grasping love. So in that sense we don't contradict each other.

Jens Kjaerulff: So far I'm inclined to vote against the motion. I've been persuaded that the notion of reciprocity indeed can engage matters of love. But I wonder if the potency of force of the notion is not precisely that it is not an emotion but a multiplicity of emotions that are simultaneously at issue. We've heard of love as being a matter of passions, compassion affection, we've heard of comfort love and of lust. And it seems to me that all those things may sound like things that could be an issue. I wonder if rephrasing the motion slightly would be helpful: does the notion of reciprocity adequately engage that multiplicity that love glosses over.

Peter Wade: I'm going to focus on Rane specifically and ask you how you think you really differ from what Elizabeth Povinelli was saying. You should do, because you're coming from what I understand to be basically a Lacanian perspective whereas she comes from what I understand to be a Foucauldian perspective so you should be disagreeing with each other but it seems to me that your arguments sound quite similar because she was saying that reciprocity is full of passions: desire, intimacy, passion, seduction so on, and you say reciprocity is also like that. At the end Povinelli says: if you say that all that passion and seduction and so on [of reciprocity] isn't love then you're actually invoking love as a kind of otherness, the alter, the notion of 'tainted love' if you like. Her point is that there is both a kind of passion or self-interested love and a pure love which is exactly the same kind of balance that you've got in your argument so I can't see the difference between the two.

Rane Willerslev: To my mind all she's saying is that reciprocity allows for a space of all kinds of empirical manifestations of love. I mean as seduction or sexual attraction or whatever. Of course it does. It doesn't contradict my argument. I completely agree. But she doesn't prove, at least in my book, how anthropology should go about talking about the purity of love. You know what I mean? She operates on a completely standard anthropological level, which is to say, well, in these practices there's a multiplicity of emotions at work and of course no one would disagree. But the thing is do we want to strive for purity in our thinking? Could we strive toward that virtual kind of stuff?

Martin Holbraad: My question really follows on from Penny and from James. As the discussion has progressed it has become clear to me that there's actually very clear blue water between the two positions but the problem is that the clear blue water is between the questions and the two positions they're responding to. So both Pervez and Beth Povinelli are basically taking the question as a question as to whether the anthropological theory of reciprocity allows space for the engagement with the ethnography of love. Whereas both Jeanette and Rane are taking the question to be does the theory of reciprocity allow a theoretical space for the engagement with love. That is, should there be a symmetry between these terms reciprocity and love?

Should they be ethnographic or should there be a symmetry? So if you've got two different questions it's very difficult to vote. The only way I can go about voting is by deciding who's given the most interesting answer to their own questions and there I'm afraid I am on the side of Rane and Jeanette. Although as they've just admitted for very different reasons in each case. Because it seems to me what Beth Povinelli was saying earlier was something that we all know if we've done any anthropology at all, which is that the anthropological theory of reciprocity is indeed replete with references to questions of affect etc. It's almost tautological. I think Perveez has shown marvellously the opposite – that the ethnography of love, so to speak, can be replete with the theory of reciprocity and therefore give us a good handle on it. And it was a beautifully presented argument. But the divergence between the other two positions seems to me more interesting and therefore that's why I'm going to vote for it. Jeanette, you are saying that there should be no space for love as a theoretical term, pretty much for the same reasons as Schneider said in *American Kinship*, that it is simply too ethnographically contingent. Whereas Rane is saying exactly the opposite: that love should be a purely analytical term. Purely transcendental. Beyond ethnography. The reason being they are completely different levels. My question to Jeanette would be why is reciprocity not open to the same kind of question? Why is there this asymmetry? Why are we pretty much theoretically (but not ethnographically) silent about a term like love; while the infrastructural term 'reciprocity', which suggests social relationships in nuts and bolts etc. do so much for us anthropologically, for our theory.

Jeanette Edwards: It's a really good question . . . but love has, as I tried to show, so much baggage! It's got a benign sort of gloss to it that gets exported very readily. And I suppose all I'm asking is that particular version of love which you might want to class as Western, liberal, Euro-American, whichever, also requires scrutiny; but instead what's happening is it's travelling in the world as if *that's* love and *that's* where my objection lies.

Perveez Mody: But are we so shy as anthropologists to actually take on the fact that concepts have baggage? I mean, so what if concepts have baggage? We unpack it! That's what we do.

Jeanette Edwards: Why is love travelling so well though?

Alberto Corsín Jiménez: But it's not travelling well if you situate it historically. We have heard some arguments about whether anthropology is ethnography or anthropology is theory. We are reproducing classical cliché-d debates about whether we are committed to empiricism or whether we are committed to theory. And we do it via words like ontology. A year later we use love. It's appalling you know. We should open up to history, to the history of science, we should open up to so many other things. The concept of love does have baggage, but not in the theoretical tradition with which we are inflecting it.

Chris Jansen: We have been talking about love as a state, as something fixed. Someone loves. What would it be to take into consideration movement? Coming to know another is to move like the other. I was thinking about this particularly in terms of Rane's discussion of the hunter and the prey.

Maya Mayblin: I'm just curious that not more people have talked about Christianity or about love as a Christian trope. A lot has been talked about religion and God and I think Christianity has been mentioned once. But Christianity is known as or has been dubbed the religion of love. But it seems to me that long before trendy philosophers like Deleuze were writing about things like the virtual, St Augustine and St Thomas Aquinas were wrestling with very similar issues to what we've been dealing with today. I don't know whether my gut feeling is love has been given rather short shrift in anthropological theory but I would sort of rephrase the motion a bit and say 'It is anthropology's uncomfortable relationship with its Judeo-Christian roots that has left no room for love.'

Nayanika Mookherjee: I wanted to kind of hear a bit more about the modalities of reciprocity, which I don't think we've touched upon that much. We've talked a lot about love. And the kind of love I see as one of the modalities of reciprocity is often when the anthropologist becomes a scholar-activist, wants to kind of take sides, wants to intervene, there's issues of accountability, ideas of justice coming in. So what are the modalities of reciprocity? The second point I wanted to raise was, when I first read the motion, the first thing that came to my head was Don Kulick's and Margaret Wilson's book *Taboo* on sexual love and the whole ethical dilemmas it throws up.

Rane Willerslev: I think it's a brilliant, insightful comment putting movement into consideration and that's the reason why I regret now that I talk about 'ideality' instead of 'potentiality'. I mean love as a potential force. Because movement is actually at the core of it. So, as I said, at the moments where you get closest to the ideal of the free gift is exactly when the animal moves freely towards the hunter and the general hunting technique which is a sort of a corrupted version of this is exactly to make the animal move through trickery but sort of to enforce the ideal without ever reaching the ideal so to speak. So movement is at the very core of it. I think that was a brilliant comment. And to you about faith and love, at least in hunter-gatherer studies, within the past 20 years, with Tim Ingold and all these people, they have been made into Heideggerians. They are just about practices and feeling stones... They become representatives of a very sort of hands-on living. And I took that on board initially and said animism is not about faith. It's about efficacy. It's about creating effects in the world. But I really regret that statement today because there is a greater level of faith within these people that you don't see it in everyday life when you go about observing them, because what you see is their focus on getting things done. But there's this other level of faith that can't be extracted purely from ethnographic fieldwork. And it's the same problem with love. How do we get to these issues as anthropologists if we want to?

Jeanette Edwards: It strikes me that the understanding of love that Elizabeth particularly put on the table for us was one of love, desire, possession. We've also heard of love as a Judeo-Christian, transcendental love, love in devotion and compassion. Now I will just rest my case by saying that those are very specific understandings of love. And, unlike Alberto, I think that they do travel and they don't necessarily get unpacked and that is why you have to vote for the motion.

Perveez Mody: That is why you have to vote for good anthropology because if they don't get unpacked that's bad anthropology. I mean the tradition of love in non-Euro-American, Judeo-Christian . . .

Jeanette Edwards: . . .but even in Euro-American it needs to be. This is the problem. It's that that needs to be addressed.

Perveez Mody: But if you think about the Hindu traditions of Krishna and Mira, or about Sufi Islam the language of devotion is utterly infused with the language of love and oneness with the beloved God. And what I found very interesting in my little unpacking that I did is that my informants chose to rebuke the scorn that people poured upon their worldly love. They would hold this scorn at arm's length by saying their love wasn't in fact bodily, which is what everyone around them said, but that it was other-worldly: 'Our love is a gift from God.' And this was really interesting because they chose to characterize their love very differently from the way in which the community around them did. They said 'This is not about lust. That's what Western people do thank you very much. What we're doing is we're just receiving from God, love from this day onwards.' This was a strategy that allowed them to displace the scorn that was heaped upon their marital beds and push it outwards and say 'no, what we have is pure'. I think the point about pure love that's been floated about is similar to the point about the pure gift that is talked about in anthropology, which is that it is imperilling and it is dangerous, and because of these it precisely can never really be pure.

The vote

The anthropological fixation with reciprocity leaves no room for love.

For the motion (Jeanette Edwards, Rane Willerslev): 40 votes

Against the motion (Elizabeth Povinelli, Perveez Mody): 30 votes.

Abstentions: 10.

Soumhya Venkatesan is a lecturer in social anthropology at the University of Manchester. She has carried out fieldwork in India and is the author of *Craft Matters: Artisans, Development and the Indian Nation* (Orient Blackswan, 2009). She is currently working on gods and god-making in South India. Since 2008, Soumhya has been organizing the annual meetings of the Group for Debates in Anthropological Theory based at the University of Manchester.

Jeanette Edwards is Professor of Social Anthropology at Manchester University. She has carried out extensive ethnographic fieldwork in the north of England and has published widely on kinship and new reproductive technologies. Author of *Born and Bred: Idioms of Kinship and New Reproductive Technologies in England* (Oxford University Press, 2000), and co-editor with Carles Salazar of *European Kinship in the Age of Biotechnology* (Berghahn Books, 2009) and with Penny Harvey and Peter Wade of *Technologized Images, Technologized Bodies* (Berghahn Books, 2010), she coordinated a European-funded project on public understandings of genetics (www.socialsciences.manchester.ac.uk/pug). Her current research focuses on religion and biotechnology in Lebanon and family history and genealogical research in the UK.

Rane Willerslev has a PhD from the University of Cambridge (2003) and an MA in Visual Anthropology from the University of Manchester (1996). In 2006 and 2010 he was awarded Elite Researchers Awards by the Independent Research Councils of Denmark and he gave the Malinowski Memorial Lecture at the London School of Economics in 2010. Since 2007, Willerslev has been the editor of *Acta Borealia: Nordic Journal of Circumpolar Societies*. His main field of research has been hunting and spiritual knowledge among Siberia's indigenous peoples. In 2007, his monograph *Soul Hunters: Hunting, Animism and Personhood among the Siberian Yukaghirs* was published by University of California Press, Berkeley and his book *On the Run in Siberia* is currently in press with University of Minnesota Press. Until recently Willerslev was Professor at Aarhus University and Director of the Ethnographic Collections, Moesgaard Museum and is now Professor in Anthropology and Director of the Museum of Cultural History, University of Oslo.

Elizabeth A. Povinelli is Professor of Anthropology and Gender Studies at Columbia University and a former editor of the journal *Public Culture*. She is the author of four books (*Labor's Lot*, University of Chicago Press, 1994; *The Cunning of Recognition*, Duke University Press, 2002; *The Empire of Love*, Duke University Press, 2006; *The Economies of Abandonment*, Duke University Press, 2011). Her research focuses on developing a critical theory of late liberalism from the perspective of indigenous and queer lives.

Perveez Mody is currently Mellon Teaching Fellow in Social Anthropology and teaches at the Department of Social Anthropology, Cambridge University. She is also a Fellow of King's College, Cambridge. Her book, *The Intimate State: Love-marriage and the Law in Delhi* is an ethnography of self-arranged marriage in urban north India. Her most recent work is on the forced marriage debate, and marriage, migration and kinship among British South Asians in the UK. She has also been working on the exciting new field of the anthropology of care.