

WHAT GIVES (WITH DERRIDA)?

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Introduction: Economy of the Text: Derrida/Mauss/Baudelaire

I want to give my time – here, in this essay – to the current crisis of the secular gift. Today, we mean to give less to the poor – to refuse them work, to reduce their wages, to withdraw welfare and to turn away the beggar. To rationalize the withdrawal of our gift, market theorists have enunciated an ideology of the free gift – the gift that must obligate neither the donor nor the recipient. It is quite remarkable therefore that Derrida (1991; 1994) should have provided the ideologists of the free gift with a philosophical/ literary pedigree. Worse still, Derrida has tried to overwhelm the counter tradition of the gift that is *voluntary yet obligatory* (Mauss in *The Gift* 1950; 1990). To resist Derrida's, insistence upon the aporia of the gift – derived from his reading of Baudelaire's (1970; 1995) story, "The Counterfeit Money" – I am obliged first to reconstruct Mauss's essay, *The Gift*, as well as Baudelaire's story, to re-stage both of them as critiques of the market devalorization of the gift economy. What Mauss teaches us is that social life involves a meta-gift, i.e., an inalienable surplus of labour and service that cannot be reduced to the calculation of contracts. This gift cannot be returned by creating an egalitarian society, anymore than it can be liquidated in the exercise of possessive talents. This is because the surplus value in the gift derives from an economy of collective ability rather than individual need. It therefore complements the inequality of need with an exorbitant gift of civic assurances, as we shall argue in the concluding section of this essay.

1. No Time For Charity

Foreword

Derrida documents the amount of time he has given/spent on the quasi-economic concepts of appropriation, exappropriation, speculation and economy in earlier seminars and publications. As a result, Derrida finds that he has also been working on the notion of the gift more or less consciously for twenty years. What are we to make of this legacy – should we ignore it, for the sake of the gift?

The Time of the King: Derrida's Given Time:

Derrida takes all my time; I give the rest to Mauss to whom I would like to give all. (Signed: John O'Neill)

Why break Derrida's dominion this way? There is no other way (O'Neill 1990). Derrida rules by self-citation, by self-appropriation, by endless writing that observes no economy of argument or reference other than a psychonomics of patristic denomination and self-filiation (witness the foreword):

The King takes all my time; I give the rest to Saint-Cyr, to whom I would like to give all. (Signed: Madame de Maintenon)

Derrida locates the problematic of the gift in a stray remark of Madame de Maintenon, the mistress of Louis XIV. He chides us for our likely surprise at this move, putting us in danger of blindness to the problem of time as a woman's problem, of taking the male's position – and a regal one at that! We are already guilty of phallic indifference to "woman's problem". Which problem? They all come to the same thing, i.e., the all-consuming demand that she give that which she does not have (to give), i.e., phallic time. But is the King or Queen removed from the politics and economy of time? Does a monarch have all of everyone's time so s/he can meet any demands upon her/his own time effortlessly? If no one else has any time that is not in service of the monarch, are Kings and Queens condemned to spend all their time dispensing the only time there is in a regal economy? Such questions simply proliferate because Derrida has suppressed the temporal economy in which everyone lives, i.e., *given time*, time that cannot be owned by anyone, by monarch or by subject. Meantime, we are subjected to Derrida's reading of Madame de Maintenon's "apparent" complaint that she wishes she had more time to devote to charity than her obligations to the king leave her. Anyone can understand this complaint. There is nothing behind its "appearance" except that, having phallicized time, Derrida has to rescue the reference to Saint-Cyr with his own specious gloss:

The King takes all, she gives the rest.
The rest is not, there is the rest that
is given or that gives itself. It does
not give itself to someone, because,
as everyone knows, Saint-Cyr is not
her lover, and it is above all not masculine...

I have stressed the parenthetical "as everyone knows" because this is precisely what is violated in Derrida's epigraph:

The King takes all my time; I give the rest to Saint-Cyr, to *whom* I would like to give all (my emphasis).

The translator has in fact rendered to Saint-Cyril what Madame de Maintenon wishes to devote to the foundation for young girls named after him. Derrida, however, clears up a grammatical error with a sexual gratuity:

Saint-Cyr is a - very feminine - place, a charity, an institution, more exactly a *foundation* of Madame de Maintenon's. Saint-Cyr is the name of a charitable institution for the education of impoverished ladies of good families (Derrida's emphasis).

Here gender troubles simply metastatize. Woman's time like man's time (*le temps*) is masculine. Even the rest of her time is masculine (*le reste*), and, despite Derrida's insistence, not only woman's part left to her by man. A foundation is feminine (*la fondation*). But its patron saint may be masculine (*Saint-Cyr*) while its patron may be either masculine (*le patron*) or feminine (*la patronne*), as it is in Madame de Maintenon's case.

Derrida's strategy of genderizing time introduces (sexual) difference into the economy of time where it has no particular force – any more than it has in grammar. In any case, as he admits, it far exceeds anything in Madame de Maintenon's comment upon her expressed wish that she might have more time to devote to charity. Still, he insists, you never can tell whether or not she was raising the question of gender to explore the inversion of "giving-taking" and thereby opening up the aporia of the gift – i.e., *of the impossibility of charity!*

(Ig) *Nota Bene*: St. Cyril, Bishop of Alexandria rejected the teaching of Nestorius, Bishop of Constantinople, who argued that the Blessed Virgin was not the mother of God (*Theotokos*) but only of a man (*Anthropotokos*) Jesus, who was later divinized for his good works.
(Warner 1985)

2. Derrida's present: the aneconomic gift

The practice of giving is both an element of sociability and of economy (Cheal 1988). Gifts create relations that create gifts. Gifts valued uniquely for their expression of love may nevertheless have been subject to all the laws of material production and exchange that determined their purchase price to the donor. Once given, the lover's gift goes out of circulation while love and fortune last. If diamonds are a girl's best friend, it is because they promise to outlast the two

economies of libidinal and material exchange. At this level, Derrida has nothing to teach us on the time of the gift. How, then, does he appropriate what everyone knows to give it back as what we can learn only from him? Is this not a poor return? He does it by simply rejecting the universal embedding of exchange, gift and debt, and by depriving the conventional understanding (given in the very sources to which he appeals) of their contextual logic:

If the figure of the circle is essential
to economics, the gift must-remain
aneconomic (Derrida 1994: 7).

But there is no society whose members do not understand the language games of economic exchange and of gift exchange that obtain in kin and non-kin relations. Thus we cannot separate gift economies from exchange economies on the ground that the former are primitive, primordial or paradisaical while the latter are modern, individualistic and rational (Yang 1994; 1996). Nor can we simply assert, as does Derrida, that there is "law" in the economy of exchange but "anomy" in the gift economy. This erases any understanding of order in non-state societies in the name of the anti-law posture of Derridean deconstruction. What is at issue in the economy of the gift is the difference between pre- and post-state practices of peace-keeping:

The connection between material flow and social relations is reciprocal. A specific social relation may constrain a given movement of goods, but a specific transaction – 'by the same token' – suggests a particular social relation. If friends make gifts, gifts make friends. A great proportion of primitive exchange, much more than our own traffic, has as its decisive function this latter, instrumental one: the material flow underwrites or initiates social relations. Thus do primitive peoples transcend Hobbesian chaos. For the indicative condition of primitive society is the absence of a public and sovereign power: persons and (especially groups) confront each other not merely as distinct interests but with the possible inclination and certain right to physically prosecute these interests. Force is decentralized, legitimately held in severalty, the social compact has yet to be drawn, the state nonexistent. So peacemaking is not a sporadic intersocietal event, it is a continuous process within society itself (Sahlins, 1965: 139-140).

Because he ignores the institutional contexts of exchange, Derrida's strategy of assigning conflicting temporalities to the economy (cycle) and to the gift (effraction) misreads the social time of the gift. Nothing is exchanged for the sake of exchange – apart from the fiction of Derrida's economics. All exchange occurs to enhance relations of exchange. Therefore all exchanges must in some respect be *unequal* in order to sustain interest in the social and political

relationship that they presuppose. If either trade or the gift were absolutely and immediately reciprocated, the time-binding of social and political relationships would be zero. There is no economy where exchange and gift relations are absolutely rather than contextually separated:

The casual received view of reciprocity supposes some fairly direct one-for-one exchange, balanced reciprocity, or a near approximation of balance. It may not be inappropriate, then, to footnote this discussion with a respectful demur: that in the main run of primitive societies, taking into account directly utilitarian as well as instrumental transactions, *balanced reciprocity is not the prevalent form of exchange*. A question might even be raised about the stability of balanced reciprocity. Balanced exchange may tend toward self-liquidation. On one hand, a series of honorably balanced dealings between comparatively distant parties builds trust and confidence, in effect reduces social distance, and so increases the chances for more generalized future dealings – as the initial blood-brotherhood transaction creates a 'credit rating', as it were. On the other hand, a renege acts to sever relations – as failure to make returns breaks a trade-partnership – if it does not actually invite chicanery to return. May we conclude that balanced reciprocity is inherently unstable? Or perhaps that it requires special conditions for continuity? (Sahlins 1965: 178; my emphasis)

But Derrida can blithely set himself apart from the anthropological tradition on the embedded relations of gift and economy by declaring that he is opposed to tradition in any shape or form. To Derrida "tradition" means repetition and recycling. One only gives what one expects to get back. One has nothing to give that one has not borrowed. This is not for the sons of Derrida:

we are departing, in a peremptory and distinct fashion, from this tradition. That is to say, from tradition itself. We will take our point of departure in the disassociation, in the overwhelming evidence of this other axiom: There is gift, if there is any, only in what interrupts the system as well as the symbol, in a partition without return and without division (*répartition*), without being-with-self of the gift-counter-gift (Derrida 1994: 13).

The Derridean gift – if it exists – must be unconstrained; it must be asocial and unconscious. It must neither aggrandize the giver nor diminish the receiver; it is aneconomic, apolitical and non-sacrificial. We can glimpse its nature in Heidegger's *On Time and Being* (1972), says Derrida, and see it even more clearly in Baudelaire's "Counterfeit Money". But we would be wasting our time to look in Mauss' *The Gift* (1990), as we shall do, but ignoring the Heideggerian side-track.

3. Poisoning The Gift

Derrida's forte is to make difficulties where there are none. This does not mean that there is no problematic of the gift, especially in industrial society. This is in fact what Mauss helps us to address. So, once again, we have to resist Derrida's substitution of Baudelaire's story of the evil gift for Mauss' essay on the good gift. Not to do so, is to surrender to Derrida's own mad economics distilled from reversing the terms of the gift so that anything given and received is a poisoned gift (*pharmakon*). Derrida wants the shoe on the other foot. That is, he wants the gift to entirely (madly) exceed the constraints of exchange. He is convinced that Mauss missed the problematic of the overlap in the two practices. But no one treats this overlap as an absolute contradiction because theorists and agents understand the difference in the social contexts of the gift. Donors and recipients expect a gift to require exchange of gifts of some kind, at some time or other:

Balanced reciprocity is less 'personal' than generalized reciprocity. From our own vantage-point it is 'more economic'. The parties confront each other as distinct economic and social interests. The material side of the transaction is at least as critical as the social: There is more or less precise reckoning, as the things given must be covered within some short term. So the pragmatic test of balanced reciprocity becomes an inability to tolerate one-way flows; the relations between people are disrupted by a failure to reciprocate within limited time and equivalence leeways. It is notable of the main run of generalized reciprocities that the material flow is sustained by prevailing social relations; whereas, for the main run of balanced exchange, social relations hinge on the material flow (Sahlins 1965: 148)

Mauss is concerned to show that gift economies only appear "mad", "excessive" or "primitive" from the standpoint of an economy whose *contract* basis limits trust, time and solidarity. Of course, once the contract economy has achieved dominance over gift economies, it narrativizes this dominion in terms of the rule of reason over madness to assume a philosophical gloss upon its practices; or else it casts the difference between them as the story of the rise of individualism over tribalism and collectivism – to engage a political gloss on the same practices. Thus Mauss' essay is an attempt to restore the suppressed history of the gift economy in order to revalorize its place in a society that is neither-capitalist-nor-communist. A society where there is no denial (repression) of the necessary overlap of gift and exchange is neither an historical nor a political fiction. What is at stake is a cultural universal whose legacy we need to draw upon in contemporary society where we experience a *crisis of liberality* (O'Neill 1994).

Derrida decomposes Mauss' text in four moves:

(I)
he separates the time of the free gift from the time of the reciprocal gift;

(II)
he locates the "madness" (*débandade*) of Mauss' language in the semantic dislocation of the "bound" and the "unbound" gift – "that which does not return to the father or that which does not return in general", i.e., Derridean dissemination, or writing;

(III)
he argues that the play in the language game of giving, taking, receiving is evidence of the impossibility of any transcendental reduction of the gift, i.e., of the impossibility of *the Gift* (Nature, Being, God, Phallus) being *a* gift or partial object;

(IV)
he questions (rhetorically) whether Mauss' *The Gift* addresses only its own impossibility, excusing itself for "taking sides" (*parti pris*) in the question of the gift versus the contract economy.

Derrida's devices reduce *The Gift* to a delirious text that invites its mirror text in Mallarmé's poem, "To A Poor Man" (1961), Baudelaire's poem "Beat Up The Poor" and his story "Counterfeit Money" (1975) whose text Derrida introduces as a reading machine for Mauss' *The Gift*. The reading-effect of these supplementary texts is to deepen the undecidability of the very notion of charity:

Ne t' imagine pas que je dis des folies
La terre s'ouvre vieille à qui crève la faim
Je hais une autre aumône et veux que tu m'oublies.
Et surtout ne vas pas, frère, acheter du pain.
(Mallarmé)

Do not suppose that I am talking madness
The earth opens up old to one dying of hunger
I hate another arms and want you to forget me.
And most of all, brother, do not go buy bread.
(Mallarmé)

But what the texts have in common is their desire to address the very possibility of commonality, exemplified in Mallarmé's poem or Mauss' essay and in any commentary upon them. What Mauss asks is that we neither "rationalize" nor "irrationalize" the act of charity. What he does not do is to archaicize or transcendentalize this demand. Yet that is just what Derrida does in citing Mauss' epigraph (for which Derrida has in turn substituted his own epigraph from

Madame de Maintenon) to displace Mauss' position with his own inquiry into the time of the gift. Mauss adopts several stanzas from a poem in the Scandanavian Edda to introduce his essay on the gift. Whereas Derrida picks out only the last stanza; let us give it with Mauss' summarizing gloss:

It is better not to beg [ask for something]
 Than to sacrifice too much [to the gods]:
 A present given always expects one in return.
 It is better not to bring any offering
 Than to spend too much on it.

The Subject is clear. In Scandinavian civilization, and in a good number of others, exchanges and contracts take place in the form of presents; *in theory these are voluntary, in reality they are given and reciprocated obligatorily.* (Mauss 1990: 2-3, my emphasis)

The value of the longer citation is that one can see from the poem that the gift cannot be extracted from the political economy of alliances. "There are no free gifts", as Douglas (1990) puts it. But not for Derrida's reasons. It is because there is too much at stake in failing to make a friend rather than an enemy. Derrida's insistence on the free gift that lays no return upon the receiver thoroughly confuses Mauss' point that the *subjective* time of the free gift is the other side of the *objective* time of the obligation to return a gift.

Derrida totally ignores Mauss' gloss on the poem. The contrast is not between gift and exchange – except from a later economic perspective – but between the subjective and objective dimensions of an economy of gift-giving that is a cultural universal. Derrida's version of the time of the gift misreads its temporal structure, separating, archaizing and privileging its ideological spontaneity over its material necessity:

The gift, generosity, conspicuous distribution – the extreme case of which is the potlatch – are operations of social alchemy which may be observed whenever the direct application of overt physical or economic violence is negatively sanctioned, and which tend to bring about the transmutation of economic capital into symbolic capital. Wastage of money, energy, time, and ingenuity is the very essence of the social alchemy through which an interested relationship is transmuted into a disinterested, gratuitous relationship, overt domination into misrecognized, "socially recognized" domination, in other words, *legitimate authority* (Bourdieu 1977: 192).

To return to Derrida's substitute epigraph: Madame de Maintenon does not wish there were two kinds of time – one she renders to the king and one she gives to charity. She wishes that she were not "commanded to give" her time to the king to the extent he lays claim upon her. She does not want more time. She knows

that only a change in her status, i.e., once the king is dead, will give her time to devote to her charitable foundation. Yet she need not desire the king's death as Derrida implies. What is at issue is how the political circumstances of Madame de Maintenon materially determine the subjective expression of her complaint uttered in her correspondence with Madame Brinon.

Having painstakingly adopted the positive method of comparative analysis to ground the gift as a cultural universal, Mauss ventures to conclude that we must hold the line against disembedding exchange and the gift. Derrida, however, charges him with excusing himself for taking sides (*parti pris*) on a question that exceeds the bounds of his study! He even implies that Mauss is passing off bad money, referring to a long note (Mauss 1990: 100-102, n. 29) where Mauss argues the case that the current form of money has evolved from a more embodied coinage. The point Mauss makes is that if we do not separate ourselves – as rationalists do – from our own cultural history, then perhaps we can treat wages as payment to a man/woman with a social life larger than is calculated in wages contracted solely for a job. Mauss would be violating his own labour, if all he was doing at the conclusion of *The Gift* was to pull out of thin air a declaration on behalf of the gift economy. But Derrida perversely insists that Mauss' caution is counterfeit. He accuses Mauss of hiding his desire to substitute a gift economy for a contract economy, even though he himself suspects he is simply "paying us with words while talking a lot of hot air" "*nous payer des mots en se payant des mots*" (Derrida 1994: 61; 1991: 84).

Desperate to substitute his own coin, Derrida admonishes Mauss for failing to take responsibility for *The Gift*! He cites Mauss' beautiful concluding pages by underlining any term whose ethico-natural unity (*must/il faut*) can be given a naturalistic/deterministic sense as though Mauss himself had separated what he had shown our cultural history has never completely separated, however harsh the more recent talk of contract and individualism:

...the mass of prescriptive (ethical, moral, juridical, political) "il faut" (it is necessary, one must, one should, one ought to and so forth) that are unleashed in the last chapter titled "Conclusion" and especially in its first subchapter ("Moral Conclusions"). These "il faut" accumulate according to a regular law. Not that the "il faut" are lacking before this moral conclusion. But here they are assumed in a declared fashion and are regulated by a law that may appear strange but that alone can account for the little sentence I began by quoting. No doubt, as with every "il faut," this law of the "il faut" is that one must – *il faut* – go beyond contestation and prescribe. One must – *il faut* – opt for the gift, for generosity, for noble expenditure, for a practice and a morality of the gift ("il faut donner," one must give). One cannot be content to speak of the gift and to describe the gift without giving and without saying *one must give*, without giving by saying one must give, without giving to think that one must give but a thinking that

would not consist merely in thinking but in doing what is called giving, a thinking that would call upon one to give in the proper sense, that is, to do more than call upon one to give in the proper sense of the word, but to give beyond the call, beyond the mere word (Derrida 1992: 62).

But Mauss argues that the myth of a primitive state of nature where men are ruled by violence and domination is more likely as a late capitalist scenario than as a real primitive history from which we have removed ourselves due to the rule of reason and individualism:

The themes of the gift, of the freedom and the obligation inherent in the gift, of generosity and self-interest that are linked in giving, are reappearing in French society, as a dominant motif too long forgotten.

But to note the fact is not enough. One must deduce practice from it, and a moral precept. It is not sufficient to say that the law is in the process of ridding itself of a few abstractions such as the distinction between real law and personal law; or that it is intent on adding other rights to the cold-hearted law of sale and payment for services. It must be said that this is a salutary revolution.

First of all, we return, as return we must, to habits of 'aristocratic extravagance'. As is happening in English-speaking countries and so many other contemporary societies, whether made up of savages or the highly civilized, the rich must come back to considering themselves – freely and also by obligation – as the financial guardians of their fellow citizens. Among ancient civilizations, from which ours has sprung, some had a (debtors') jubilee, other liturgies (of duty) such as choregies and trierarchies, and *syussitia* (meals in common), and the obligatory expenditure by the aedile and the consular dignitaries. We should return to laws of this kind. Then there must be more care for the individual, his life, his health, his education (which is, moreover, a profitable investment), his family, and their future. There must be more good faith, more sensitivity, more generosity in contracts dealing with the hiring of services, the letting of houses, the sale of vital foodstuffs. And it will indeed be necessary to find a way to limit the rewards of speculation and interest (Mauss 1990: 68-69).

Derrida pillories Mauss' modest conclusion, accusing him of hiding hubris behind mediocritas in his appeal to marry reality and idealism. In valorizing labour at the same time as the gift, Derrida argues that Mauss subverts his own cause, making it undecidable. Finally, he spurns Mauss' failure of moral nerve, reducing Mauss' better grasp of the notion of cultural exemplarity to simple naturalism and archaism:

However, the individual must work. He should be forced to rely upon himself rather than upon others. On the other hand, he must defend his interests, both personal and as a member of a group. Over-generosity,

or communism, would be as harmful to himself and to society as the egoism of our contemporaries and the individualism of our laws. In the *Mahabharata* a malevolent genie of the woods explains to a Brahmin who gave away too much, and too injudiciously: 'That is why you are thin and pale.' The life of the monk, and the life of a Shylock are both equally to be shunned. This new morality will surely consist of a good but moderate blend of reality and the ideal.

Thus we can and must return to archaic society and to elements in it. We shall find in this reasons for life and action that are still prevalent in certain societies and numerous social classes: the joy of public giving; the pleasure in generous expenditure on the arts, in hospitality, and in the private and public festival. Social security, the solicitude arising from reciprocity and co-operation, and that of the occupational grouping, of all those legal entities upon which English law bestows the name of 'Friendly Societies' – all are greater value than the mere personal security that the lord afforded his tenant, better than the skimpy life that is given through the daily wages doled out by employers, and even better than capitalist saving – which is only based on a changing form of credit (Mauss 1990: 69).

Derrida simply overrides Mauss' carefully based conclusion. He pushes it into the fairy land of an original state of nature. But this move overlooks the more acute observations by Sahlin's on the evolutionary value of the gift in resolving Hobbes historical nightmare of endless violence:

Like famous philosophical predecessors, Mauss debates from an original condition of disorder, in some sense given and pristine, but then overcome dialectically. As against war, exchange. The transfer of things that are in some degree persons and of persons in some degree treated as things, such is the consent at the base of organized society. The gift is alliance, solidarity, communion – in brief, peace, the great virtue that earlier philosophers, Hobbes notably, had discovered in the State. But the originality and the verity of Mauss was exactly that he refused the discourse in political terms. The first consent is not to authority, or even to unity. It would be too literal an interpretation of the older contract theory to discover its verification in nascent institutions of chieftainship. The primitive analogue of social contract is not the State, but the gift (Sahlins 1972: 169).

Hobbes' fiction of warring nature is a fiction precisely because early human societies always framed their potential conflicts, fear and mistrust with alliances worked through exchange and gift giving. Derrida is unable to pick up Sahlin's acute discussion of the similarities and differences between Mauss, Hobbes and Rousseau because he refers to Sahlin's only through Hyde (1983). He misses Sahlin's point that Mauss embeds the gift in the politics of peace as an evolutionary technique which is quite distinct from any Rousseauesque spirit of generality with which Derrida identifies Mauss. Moreover, Mauss's concept is

absolutely an historicist one rather than archaizing or transcendentalist regression to the original gift.

In a last-ditch struggle with Mauss' "conclusion", Derrida picks up on his citation of a Maori proverb:

Ko Maru kai atu
Ko maru kai mai
ka ngohe nghoe

Give as much as you take, all shall be very well. (Mauss 1990: 71)

Despite everything in the practice of the gift that rules out the equivalence of giving/receiving, Derrida insists that Mauss is invoking the rule of equivalence *as the excess of the gift* (Derrida 1994: 67). But Mauss provides his own gloss on the proverb before citing it. He clearly rejects any notion of an excess over practice or of a higher wisdom than what is wise in practice:

Thus, from one extreme of human evolution to the other, there are no two kinds of wisdom. Therefore let us adopt as the principle of our life what has always been a principle of action and will always be so: to emerge from self, to give, freely and obligatorily. We run no risk of disappointment (Mauss 1990: 71).

Mauss is saying that we have made ourselves human by treating one another *hospitably*. This means we have delimited the power (*potis*) of the master/mistress by treating subordinates as a guest (*hospes*). In other words, whoever is master of him/herself is a despot (*despótés*) but does not behave like a despot in our sense, i.e., an arbitrary potent (Benveniste 1973: 71-83). The master is 'himself' by virtue of his representative authority over a family, not his power to give orders. The master is host (*hostis*) inasmuch as he reciprocates services rendered and in Rome strangers were *not* excluded from this obligation which underwrites all other pacts. To be excluded from such alliances is to be outside of the community of gifts or municipality. Derrida's notion of a non-reciprocal gift derives from the Greek lineage (*dôron*). However, it has nothing to do with (*dósis*), the *dose* of poison (*pharmakon*) with which Derrida loves to mix the gift – all the better to switch Baudelaire's story for Mauss's essay. More importantly, Greek law forbade gratuitous *gifts*, i.e., prestations that are not inherent in an alliance (*dótiné*). Despite Derrida, *dósis* (act of giving) cannot be separated from *dôron* and *dótiné*, i.e., "three words for expressing a gift, because there are three ways of conceiving it" (Benveniste 1973: 57; 1971: 271-280).

4. The Bad Change Artist: Derrida/Baudelaire

Let us now read Baudelaire's "Counterfeit Money" (see appendix) to seek that forgiveness allegedly begged for by the author of *The Gift* ... but which Derrida still insists can only be an open gift.

The upshot of Derrida's account of *The Gift* is to bring forward the question of accountability for any account of the gift – whether in Mauss or in Derrida himself. Here Derrida doubles his own textual apparatus by quoting the whole of Baudelaire's story "Counterfeit Money" within the body of his essay (Derrida 1994: 31-32) and by adding it again as a fold-out for the reader's "constant consultation". Derrida returns to Baudelaire's story after raising the question whether a gift can secure itself against its falsity. The problem is exemplified in Mallarmé's poems discussed earlier as part of Derrida's accusation that Mauss suspected he had in fact made a false gift in his presentation of the moral conclusions to be drawn from *The Gift*. But the question, especially when given a delirious spin on the fictionality of fiction, cannot be withheld from Derrida's own critical account of "Counterfeit Money" and of any other text, as we have tried to show.

To constrain himself – given the license of writing – Derrida (1994: 103-107) frames the story with a few "smoke rings" (volutes):

- (I) the time of woman: structuring the story by her absence from the story;
- (II) the "good hour" of "The Purloined Letter": structuring the story as the repetition of a male couple linked in turn by a quest for a legacy (of money and writing);
- (III) what is Tobacco? a question that structures the story by making it look as though there is, after all, a free gift, i.e., the pleasure one gives oneself in smoking, and, one must suppose, in writing...

Since these are self-indulgent devices, we need only observe how they permit Derrida to make a number of substitutions in the name of the aporia of the (counterfeit) gift. The principle move is to make the question of betrayal a fictional question, i.e., intrinsic to narrativity, raised *in* a story and unanswerable by the story. To raise any question about violations of friendship, of trust and forgiveness exceeds the laws of fiction. As Derrida reads the story, violations of (woman), friendship and charity are not at stake. The only "event" is the "lawless law, the dutyless duty" of a confession that the pauper had received a counterfeit coin. The inability of the friend to appreciate this unmotivated and unnatural gift in looking for a reason for it reveals "*perhaps*" that he didn't deserve the confession – or friendship even! So, dear reader, "*we are still saying perhaps...*"

Can we read Baudelaire's story otherwise? Can we not retrieve the difference between a good and a bad gift even when we consider the difference between legal

tender and the poisoned gift? Isn't it wasting our time to tell us anything else? Derrida leaves us no place for these questions. Yet they are part of every social performance among which story-telling is a major case (Maclean 1988). Between them, the reader and writer struggle over notions of reality, fiction, evidence, value. Every story engages debatable concepts of society, polity, history and economics through which we struggle to enlarge our understanding and to affirm our beliefs (O'Neill 1992 and 1995). Narrativity is not a field of undecidability. Nor is it an exercise in lawlessness and amorality licensed by the (self-defeating) claim that nothing exceeds fictionality. However much or whatever desire a reader may invest in a story, the reader can evaluate the author's treatment, respect and abuse of the contract. A reader is able and entitled to ask whether Derrida's strategy of reading Mauss in terms of Baudelaire is a worthwhile game not only in respect of each *text* but in respect of the larger social question that is the *context* for this exercise. While it may be flattering to be among the "happy few" who bathe in textuality, eventually the price of abandoning the common sense line between complicity and resistance comes into question. It does so because in fact making this distinction is a language competence we acquire from childhood in order to remind our parents of the difference between "pretend" and "real". It is, however, one thing to give a child chocolate coins for Christmas, but quite another to consider it the same game to give deliberately chocolate coins that the child will have rejected by the shopkeeper as illegal tender.

Derrida remarks on the haunting problem of forgery in Freud's past (omitting that Madame de Maintenon's father was imprisoned for counterfeiting). But he displaces the parental violation of the law to the broader collapse of the gold standard which in turn exemplifies a double crisis of capitalism and narrativity. Are we to conclude that without the gold standard we have no standards, no line between truth and fiction or between good and evil? But in the opening of Baudelaire's story there is:

- (i) separation of the site of the tobacconist and the street scene;
- (ii) separation of the coins, gold, silver, copper and counterfeit/coin;
- (iii) separation between rich and poor;
- (iv) separation between greater and lesser charity;
- (v) separation between two friends (i-iv)

ABSOLUTE DIFFERENCE DUE TO COUNTERFEIT COIN

- (A) BETWEEN RICH AND POOR
- (B) BETWEEN FRIENDS
- (C) BETWEEN FICTION AND REALITY
- (D) BETWEEN LAW AND ANOMY

Once one friend has confessed to the other that he is capable of giving the beggar a false coin, we are no longer in the world of difference – whether of talent or possessions – but in a world of absolute evil which exceeds any of the stories that attempt to convey its proportions. The other friend is not stupid because he is not indifferent to the difference between:

- (i) pleasure and evil;
- (ii) the good gift and the poisoned gift;
- (iii) truth and falsity;
- (iv) compliance and resistance.

The beggar is not in a child's game with the rich man – open your hand and shut your eyes to get a big surprise! The gift of charity, like the gift of blood (Titmuss 1970; O'Neill 1992) can only be good and never bad. Indeed, on balance the same must be true of our children's gifts, despite the little lesson of disappointment they sometimes convey. In any case, it will not do to put poison gift labels on all our gifts!

Baudelaire certainly assumed several poetic personae and a variety of social relationships in his shift from romanticism to modernism – but not towards the multiple self of postmodernism (O'Neill 1992c). Baudelaire does not succumb to fragmentation and shock, anymore than he sinks completely into the depths of beauty or of evil. Baudelaire is the scavenger of urban memories, yet absolutely resistant to the past being swept away in the sewers of Paris:

Old Paris is gone - no human heart
changes half so fast as a city's face

and only in my mind's eye can I see
the junk laid out to glitter in the booths
among the weeds and splintered capitals,
blocks of marble blackened by the mud;

there used to be a poultry-market here,
and one cold morning – with the sky swept clean,
the ground, too, swept by garbage-men who raised
clouts of soot in the icy air – I saw

a swan that had broken out of its cage,
webbed feet clumsy on the cobblestones,
white feathers dragging in the uneven ruts,
and obstinately pecking at the drains,

drenching its enormous wings in the filth
as if in its own lovely lake, crying
'Where is the thunder, when will it rain?'
I see it still, inevitable myth,

like Daedalus dead-set against the sky –
 the sky quite blue and blank and unconcerned –
 that straining neck and that voracious beak,
 as if the swan were castigating God! (Baudelaire)

By the same token, Baudelaire is a witness to the evil and suffering in modern life but not its masochistic celebrant (Besani 1977; Sartre 1947). He does not valorize either a personal or an institutional indifference to human suffering in the higher name of poetry. Baudelaire's little prose poems are not just the remains of a collapsed socio-narrative of the Parisian cityscape. They are not the dead end (*cul de sac*) of idealism but moments of self-appropriation and solidarity as experienced in losing one's halo to avoid being run over while crossing the street. Baudelaire's openness to the world is not a function of ego-splitting driven by capitalist decoding of identity and reference (Holland 1993), unless criticism obliges us to remove the poet from the poem to save uncanny interpretation. Baudelaire is a poet of the crossroads (Evans 1993). But at one point he stands firm, refusing to indulge the evil genius of money to transform speculation itself into charity or art, however parasitical upon them it has become in modern times. Without such resistance, the soul finds no mirror.

As I read it, Baudelaire's story rejects the barbarism (*bêtise*) of trying to equate the good deed (*la charité*) and the good deal (*une bonne affaire*) "to win paradise economically". The sophistication of the other equations that first tempt the friend are finally set aside by him because they would complete his own demoralization. Similarly, the reader, with a little help from Mauss, should reject Derrida's valoration of the anomic if not poisoned gift.

5. The Civic Gift: Obligation and Freedom

Today we are in search of rationales for withdrawing the gift of the poor. Curiously enough, we do so by attributing to the poor a disdain for the obligations incurred by charity! In this, we engage a one-sided and unhistorical concept of individual independence whose inviolability is a first principle of political economy. No one should have to give, anymore than anyone should have to receive charity. In other words, no one should be obliged to give or to receive more than is specified in exchange ruled by contract law. The labourer having been paid a wage is owed nothing more by the entrepreneur, who claims to have received from the worker only a specific expenditure of time on a job. In practice, the contract principle is honoured more in the breach: laborers do not work to rule and entrepreneurs recognize that labourers are owed more in the name of humanity and citizenship. This is not poor economics. Nor is it cynical politics. Indeed, Mauss is arguing that our cultural history reveals that it is only when we are tempted to a narrow economism that we endanger both industry and

democracy. This is not a conclusion reached by pitting natural law against the law of capital accumulation in the economy or against the principle of individualism in society. There is no absolute separation between rationality and the social gift. This is because, by any measure of cultural progress, the discovery of reciprocity as a technique for the reduction of tribal conflict and class war is the very sign of reason and humanity. Our future, therefore, does not lie in the pursuit of a narrow materialism moralized by possessive individualism (Macpherson, 1962) and an indifference to class conflict. Such a direction would represent cultural barbarism rather than economic progress. To renege on social reciprocity is to turn the clock towards oblivion rather than to turn it forward:

This is therefore what one may have found at the conclusion of this research. Societies have progressed in so far as they themselves, their subgroups, and lastly, the individuals in them, have succeeded in stabilizing relationships, giving, receiving, and finally, giving in return. To trade, the first condition was to be able to lay aside the spear. From then onwards they succeeded in exchanging goods and persons, no longer only between clans, but between tribes and nations, and, above all, between individuals. Only then did people learn how to create mutual interests, giving mutual satisfaction, and, in the end, to defend them without having to resort to arms. Thus the clan, the tribe, and peoples have learnt how to oppose and to give to one another without sacrificing themselves to one another. This is what tomorrow, in our so-called civilized world, classes and nations and individuals also, must learn. This is one of the enduring secrets of their wisdom and solidarity (Mauss 1990: 82-83).

We must therefore remove the ideological stigma of the public gift by reintroducing its positive capital functions:

- (i) body capital
- (ii) material capital
- (iii) municipal capital
- (iv) political capital

In each of these dimensions, we have created investment sites for a moral economy that sustains the exchange economy based on physical and symbolic capital formation. These two economies are, so to speak, two sides of the same coin – a coin that circulates so long as the moral and material economy are ordered with respect to one another. The cultural record shows that it is ideology that separates the gift from the commodity exchange. Only where the ideology of relationships is cast in terms of relatively atomic individuals is the gift identified with symbolic violation of contract rationality. This in turn explains the market rejection of the notion of a surplus value inherent in all human transactions:

In short, the reality of production is no less repressed than the reality of circulation, and the peasant's "pains" are to labour what the gift is to commerce (an activity for which, as Emile Beneveniste points out, the Indo-European languages had no name). The discovery of labour presupposes the constitutions of the common ground of production, i.e. the disenchantment of a natural world henceforward reduced to its economic dimension alone; ceasing to be the tribute paid to a necessary order, activity can be directed towards an exclusively economic end, the end which money, henceforward the measure of all things, starkly designates. This means the end of the primal undifferentiatedness which made possible the play of individual and collective misrecognition: measured by the yardstick of monetary profit, the most sacred activities find themselves constituted negatively, as *symbolic*, i.e., in a sense the word sometimes receives, as lacking concrete or material effect, in short, *gratuitous*, i.e. disinterested but also useless (Bourdieu 1977: 176-177).

The aporia in the secular gift lies in the double bind of dependence and independence operative between the donor and the recipient. The freedom of the donor contains the poison of dominance and the evil of submission which are incompatible with the practice of citizenship (Yang 1994; Yan 1996). What is at issue here, however, is the very point made by Mauss, namely, that gift exchange – as opposed to commodity exchange – never eradicates the inalienable worth of the persons giving/receiving:

Finally, a great civilization, that of China, has retained from the most ancient times this very principle of law that is our concern. It acknowledges the indissoluble link that binds everything to its original owner. Even today an individual who has sold an item of his property, even a movable good, preserves his whole life through, vis-a-vis the buyer, a kind of right 'to weep for his property'. Fr Hoang has transcribed models of these 'notes of complaint', which the seller hands to the buyer. It is a kind of right of succession over the thing, mingled with a right of succession over the person, and which clings to the buyer a very long time after the thing has been definitively disposed of to another patrimony, and after all the terms of the 'irrevocable' contract have been carried out (Mauss 1990: 63).

Weiner (1992) has shown that the essence of Mauss' point about gift exchange is that its ethical hinge is "keeping-while-giving". In a world of necessary exchanges of commodities, labour and persons, what must be achieved is one's identity and genealogy. This is managed through the retention of those inalienable possessions that are the markers of human identity at birth, marriage and death. Because these "cosmological" markers are produced by women, as Weiner shows, they are the basis for women's distinctive power and the occasion for practical alliances and competition with men:

Power relations are not separate from gender relations but are inextricably lodged at the center of how women and men play out their dual roles as siblings and spouses. The processes of keeping-while-giving project political potential onto every essential exchange, making women's reproductive capabilities as siblings and spouses integral to how power is generated... Throughout the Pacific and other societies of similar political scale, women as sisters and spouses gain their own domains of power through controlling economic resources and protecting inalienable possessions and the various cosmological phenomena that provide authentication of historical, ancestral linkages. When the cosmological source of this authentication is transmitted to material possessions that women produce, the domain of women's power expands. And when women as sisters retain control over inalienable possessions that rank difference politically and therefore authenticate hierarchy, they achieve political authority and power in their own right. In these instances, it is women's control over human and cultural reproduction that is politically vital to the establishment of hierarchy (Weiner 1992: 152).

The confusion in the liberal ideology of the free gift is that it assigns absolute independence to the giver and the receiver where there is none except as mediated by exchange and interdependence. In this case, the gratuity of the gift violates the relationship it requires for its exercise. Moreover, it sets up a false-consciousness with regard to the donor's self-interest and a paranoid suspicion of the unworthy interest of the recipient. This becomes evident in our current malaise with the beggar's gift. Here a local moral world reflects all the strains in our current crisis of gifting. Many cities in the welfare states have practices or contemplate bringing in laws to outlaw beggars or "panhandlers". This is an extraordinary use of the law to exile its citizens, driving them out of mind. While the plight of beggars is not easily determined from the sight and sites of begging, it nevertheless produces contradictory interpretations. Isolated and often homeless individuals, frequently suffering from a number of mental and physical disabilities, are accused of membership in anti-social guilds whose aim is to exploit the charity of those whose pity they inspire – at least momentarily. The work of begging is redefined as a well-paid and well-organized activity whose skills might have been sold in the marketplace were it not for temptations of charity – to which are added tobacco, alcohol and drugs. It turns out that some donors are likewise addicted to their daily exchange with their beggar of choice! The rule of the game in the city of Toronto is *politeness*. Whether or not the request for spare change is met, and no matter how regularly it is made from a spot where personnel may change over time, the agreement is that beggars shall return a pleasant greeting, a joke, or even their own handouts to simulate communication in the information age from which they are excluded. In Toronto the desire is to keep this a private covenant between beggars and donors rather than to let in city politicians who either take without giving or else exercise the

worst form of symbolic violence in taking while lying about the return gift. In the code of beggary, politicians lie lowest.

Toronto is also the scene of a celebrated Ministerial pronouncement on how cheaply the poor might feed themselves at the same time that the city's Daily Food Bank is overwhelmed – and nearly sent its former director to lead the next government of Ontario! Here, too, we encounter the paradox of charity in our society. Nothing moves us like hunger – in ourselves or in others. Here the imagination is material and its gift potentially spontaneous at home and abroad. But industrial and urban poverty is not settled by food. Here food production and circulation does not weave together the whole society as it did in an earlier agricultural phase. Thus, while the gift of food is the material of commensality, it represents a restricted symbol of solidarity in industrial societies. The real test of urban charity is not feeding the poor or sheltering the homeless. Worse still, even these minimal achievements are hampered by the ideology of the free, unencumbered gift ridden with suspicion that its impoverished recipient might be the real beneficiary! Here liberal charity is at an impasse. It fails to enhance social solidarity because it demands the absence of any capacity to make a return gift by the poor, other than a subservient greeting. Even so, this demand hides in its own account the return gift of the poor in keeping the peace. The daily isolation of this local moral world guarantees that its occasions disappear into the black hole of cool civility described in Hobbes' fourth law of (human) nature:

The fourth law of nature, (gratitude). As justice dependeth on Antecedent Covenant; so does GRATITUDE depend on Antecedent Grace, that is to say, Antecedent Free-gift: and is the fourth Law of Nature; which may be conceived in this Forme, That a man which receiveth Benefit from another of meer Grace, Endeavour that he which giveth it, have no reasonable cause to repent him of his good will. For no man giveth, but with intention of Good to himselfe; because Gift is Voluntary; and of all Voluntary Acts, the Object is to every man his own Good; of which if men see they shall be frustrated, there will be no beginning of benevolence, or trust; nor consequently of mutuall help; nor of reconciliation of one man to another; and therefore they are to remain still in the condition of War; which is contrary to the first and Fundamental Law of Nature, which commandeth men to Seek Peace (Part I, Chapter 15) (Sahlins 1972: 178).

But if we are to overcome the ideology of the unconstrained gift as an arbitrary and purely personal response to the face of poverty, we need to ground our charity in the secular but consistent obligations of civic welfare implemented through the state. However we define the elements of basic citizenship, they cannot be left either to the arbitrary exercise of goodwill or to the mean interpretation of other's needs. It does not infringe our freedom to be obliged to

sustain the freedom of others whose vulnerability is broadly understood to undermine their autonomy and to exclude them from the practices of civic solidarity. We need a "good-enough" myth of citizenship if we are to implement "good-enough" measures of employment, health and education. To this end, we need no great calculus of virtue, though we may need to retain a civic sense of what is evil, of what destroys the commons and seeds the wilderness. In short, we must keep in mind the human tragedy that grows every day when some are given food and water but no one's thirst for justice is appeased, when scarcity is doubled by inequality and the abuse of power and privilege. If we retain any hope, it lies in our political capacity for correcting the disparity we have woven into the fabric of our daily lives.

It does not diminish our humanism nor degrade our personality to understand them as anthropomorphic practices (O'Neill 1985) that are culturally dependent upon the recognition that

- (i) no one is self-sufficient;
- (ii) there is no personal security without a measure of social security;
- (iii) everyone is obliged to give and to receive in the name of solidarity and trust;
- (iv) no one is to be excluded from the round table;
- (v) no one is to be voiceless in the community

These principles are not transcendental claims that exceed our everyday practice. They are neither archaic nor modern, and no more sentimental than rational. They represent a hard-won cultural legacy without which we aggravate the following contradictions in our own civic life:

- (a) Society involves exchange/reciprocity, yet the overall outcome of exchange is inequality;
- (b) Society rationalizes inequality, yet we institutionalize redistributive practices to reduce inequality.

The challenge to contemporary society, therefore, is to sustain its secular gifting which includes all forms of conventional charity and public transfer of income, education, health and civic infrastructures. The secular rationale for these gift practices need not pit independence against dependence or locate rationality in the market instead of the state. Our civic gifts are no less productive than our material goods. No society has separated its political economy into the warring elements of possession and dispossession. No society has tolerated for very long the civil war that would consume it by trying to treat its own members as moral strangers. No modern society is viable that institutionalizes moral exclusions it would not tolerate in its external political alliances. Societies do, of course, violate their own poetical wisdom, pursuing an independent course where

alliance should prevail or refusing recognition to groups whose denial does not remove their moral presence. But historically our cultural achievement has been to frame the fragility of social order with enduring obligations to reciprocity, subverting conflict with cooperation.

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Appendix

Comme nous nous éloignons du bureau de tabac, mon ami fit un soigneux triage de sa monnaie; dans la poche gauche de son gilet il glissa de petites pièces d'or; dans la droite, de petites pièces d'argent; dans la poche gauche de sa culotte, une masse de gros sols, et enfin, dans la droite, une pièce d'argent de deux francs qu'il avait particulièrement examinée.

"Singulière et minutieuse répartition!" me dis-je en moi-meme.

Nous fîmes la rencontre d'un pauvre qui nous tendit sa casquette en tremblant. — Je ne connais rien de plus inquiétant que l'éloquence muette de ces yeux suppliants, qui contiennent à la fois, pour l'homme sensible qui sait y lire, tant d'humilité, tant de reproches. Il y trouve quelque chose approchant cette profondeur de sentiment compliqué, dans les yeux larmoyants des chiens qu'on fouette.

L'offrande de mon ami fut beaucoup plus considérable que la mienne, et je lui dis: "Vous avez raison; après le plaisir d'être étonné, il n'en est pas de plus grand que celui de causer une surprise. — C'était la pièce fausse," me répondit-il tranquillement, comme pour se justifier de sa prodigalité.

Mais dans mon misérable cervenu, toujours occupé à chercher midi à quatorze heures (de quelle fatigante faculté la nature m'a fait cadeau!), entra soudainement cette idée qu'une pareille conduite, de la part de mon ami, n'était excusable que par le désir de créer un événement dans la vie de ce pauvre diable, peut-être même de connaître les conséquences diverses, funestes ou autres, que peut engendrer une pièce fausse dans la main d'un mendiant. Ne pouvait-elle pas se multiplier en pièces vraies? ne pouvait-elle pas aussi le conduire en prison? Un cabaretier, un boulanger, par exemple, allait peut-être le faire arrêter comme faux-monnayeur ou comme propagateur de fausse monnaie. Tout aussi bien la pièce fausse serait peut-être, pour un pauvre petit spéculateur, le germe d'une richesse de quelques jours. Et ainsi ma fantaisie allait son train, prêtant des ailes à l'esprit de mon ami et tirant toutes les déductions possibles de toutes les hypothèses possibles.

Mais celui-ci rompit brusquement ma rêverie en reprenant mes propres paroles: "Oui, vous avez raison; il n'est pas de plaisir plus doux que de surprendre un homme en lui donnant plus qu'il n'espère."

Je le regardai dans le blanc des yeux, et je fus épouvanté de voir que ses yeux brillaient d'une incontestable candeur. Je vis alors clairement qu'il avait voulu faire à la fois la charité et une bonne affaire; gagner quarante sols et le coeur de Dieu; emporter le paradis économiquement; enfin attraper gratis un brevet d'homme charitable. Je lui aurais presque pardonné le désir de la criminelle jouissance dont je le supposais tout à l'heure capable; j'aurais trouvé curieux, singulier, qu'il s'amusât à compromettre les pauvres; mais je ne lui pardonnerai jamais l'ineptie de son calcul. On n'est jamais excusable d'être méchant, mais il y a quelque mérite à savoir qu'on l'est; et le plus irréparable des vices est de faire le mal par bêtise.