

# Tipiti: Journal of the Society for the Anthropology of Lowland South America

ISSN: 2572-3626 (online)

---

Volume 14

Issue 2 *Special Issue in Honor of Terence Turner*

Article 5

---

12-26-2016

## Illusion and Value, or Marcel Mauss on Alienability and Inalienability

Marcos Lanna

*Universidade Federal de São Carlos*, barolo96@gmail.com

Follow this and additional works at: <http://digitalcommons.trinity.edu/tipiti>



Part of the [Social and Cultural Anthropology Commons](#)

---

### Recommended Citation

Lanna, Marcos (2016). "Illusion and Value, or Marcel Mauss on Alienability and Inalienability," *Tipiti: Journal of the Society for the Anthropology of Lowland South America*: Vol. 14: Iss. 2, Article 5, 210-225.

Available at: <http://digitalcommons.trinity.edu/tipiti/vol14/iss2/5>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by Digital Commons @ Trinity. It has been accepted for inclusion in Tipiti: Journal of the Society for the Anthropology of Lowland South America by an authorized editor of Digital Commons @ Trinity. For more information, please contact [jcostanz@trinity.edu](mailto:jcostanz@trinity.edu).

---

# Illusion and Value, or Marcel Mauss on Alienability and Inalienability

**Marcos Lanna**

Departamento de Ciências Sociais  
Universidade Federal de São Carlos

BRAZIL

This paper is at variance from much of the thinking of Terence Turner, but it is also inspired by him. Dedicating a paper to Terry that contains so many ideas with which he would probably have disagreed deserves some explanation.<sup>1</sup> Terry was an exceptional teacher and dissertation advisor on many counts, but also an outstanding debater. He taught me how intellectual dialogue implies respect and understanding of the other discussant's perspectives. Furthermore, beyond any divergence, it will also be clear that this paper shares many of Terry's theoretical concerns, especially with Marx and French structuralism and topics such as the relation between infra- and superstructures. It owes a lot to Terry in many other ways. In a sense, I feel I owe him the freedom to be myself, while reading many of the same authors that he cherished from a perspective that differs from his. But that does not mean I do not use some of his insights. His encouragement of intellectual autonomy was clear to me since the first interview I had with him before I became a Chicago graduate student in 1982, and this impression was renewed whenever we discussed ideas again, as when he wrote me a long letter detailing his reading of a paper (Graeber and Lanna 2005) that David Graeber and I had dedicated to him.

Terry was also a person without futile vanities. He gave me the impression he was worried whether people understood what he wrote, not whether they quoted him. Even when he is not explicitly quoted here, Terry is implicitly present in every single line. Many of the questions presented here were discussed with him, and, although the interest he manifested in them may not have been a function of our agreement, it was certainly a reflection of our mutual understanding.

My objective here will be to highlight Marcel Mauss's emphasis on the inalienability of the gift, using Marx's notion of alienation as a backdrop. Both Marx and Mauss, each in his own way, reveal specific complementary aspects of exchange. Since I am not the first, nor will I be the last, to draw on Mauss and Marx for inspiration and debate, I would be remiss if I did not weave some insights and commentary by other anthropologists (such as Clastres, Dumont, Graeber, Lévi-Strauss, and Parry) into my discussion. Like myself, they have all used theories of exchange to interpret their ethnographic data. To extend my exploration of the rich and varied views on Mauss, Marx, capitalism, and exchange, I step outside our discipline and end by considering Lacan's psychoanalytic perspective on alienation in the context of capitalism and exchange.

Let us recall that Marx examines the ideological masking of inequality in capitalist exchanges, which had been taken by classical English economists such as Adam Smith and David Ricardo to be exchanges of equivalent values. Marx achieves his objective through a critical review of political economy, which Lévi-Strauss (2013:347) considered to be an "ethnography of capitalism." In contrast to Marx, Mauss constructs a general, comparative ethnography of noncapitalist realities. Mauss concludes *The Gift* by arguing for the implementation of welfare systems, both private and state, in capitalist societies. For him, these systems are forms of noncapitalist redistribution as well as repayments for labor. The latter is considered to be a gift made by the worker from part of his own person, thus bearing a sacrificial dimension. This gift made of the worker's self occurs even when labor is bought and sold. However, the sacrificial aspect of the gift, specifically of labor as a gift, was never made explicit by Mauss.

For Marx, the exchange that is fundamentally unequal occurs between labor power and capital. Showing how the exchange of labor power for wages entails the extraction of surplus value, Marx unveils the "essence" (or perhaps structure) of capitalist unequal exchange. In

the market, the value produced through labor is transformed into price. For us to understand what makes it possible to exchange commodities with distinct “use values” in the market, it is necessary to look beyond what makes them distinct and to focus on what is equivalent in them. Abstract labor is contained within all commodities, being the substance they hold in common. On the other hand, concrete labor differentiates the objects to be exchanged. Marx concludes that labor is the “substance of value,” in the sense of being the font of value, which, in turn, is the foundation of commodities. In short, there is no extraction, only the conversion of value in the market. We can therefore say that, for Marx, exchange in the market is a moment of equality (commodities are exchanged for equal values), while exchange in production is unequal.

Mauss and Marx complement each other in various ways.<sup>2</sup> If the latter shows that labor is a commodity that is bought and sold, Mauss sees it as a gift.<sup>3</sup> Unfortunately, Mauss writes little about labor as a particular type of gift. Even if the question of the sacrificial gift remains open in his works (Parry 1986:470), I believe I am following his perspective when I understand the gift as inherently sacrificial and metonymical (Lanna 2007).

Let us turn to Mauss’s definition of the gift. Every gift presents a relationship between alienability and inalienability, as well as a mixture of facts and ideas. Giving is also receiving and reciprocating, as the epigraph from *The Gift* indicates. For Lévi-Strauss (1949), this “synthetic character” of the gift permits the logical possibility of overcoming the opposition between self and other. The gift is thus synthetic in more than one sense. It fuses giving, receiving, and reciprocating, and also binds self and other and unites concept and action. It was precisely “the intimate union between action and thought,” that had previously motivated Mauss to study prayer and make it the topic of his doctoral thesis (Fournier 1994:337).

We are far from the liberal notion of barter (in French, *trac*) or even exchange (*échange*), even though the latter term has been adopted in the lexicon of Maussian commentators—unfortunately, in my opinion. Besides the term “gift,” Mauss also uses “circulation” and, more rarely, “trade.” The latter is related to the concept of tradition, signifying not immobility, but its opposite, *that which moves*. The entity in motion may be either a thing or person. We can consider Mauss’s work, specifically his demonstration that society is defined by the circulation of persons and things, as a way of praising tradition.<sup>4</sup> On the other hand, things and people should not alienate themselves too much or too fast, a point with which Lévi-Strauss agrees, as Marx probably would as well.

For Mauss, circulation is communicative, and communication presupposes the alienability of things and persons. Those aspects of self that are transacted, however, such as clan affiliation, name or surname, are not necessarily implicated in the psychological dimension of self.<sup>5</sup> Nevertheless, circulation presupposes inalienability, since something of the giver goes along with what is given, being inexorably connected to the given object (or person). Mauss (2003:200) writes, “*Présenter quelque chose à quelqu’un, c’est présenter quelque chose de soi*” (“To give something to someone is to give something of the self”).<sup>6</sup> Alienability refers to that part which is actually given or transferred to the receiver, while inalienability concerns the part of the giver that, although passed along and incorporated by the receiver, is not exactly relinquished, being that which is not given up. Inalienability involves the part of the giver’s person that goes with the thing or person given and which can encompass or be encompassed by the receiver.

In Oceania, as Malinowski found in the Trobriands, the inalienable part of the giver, which goes with the object, is described as something that can “bite” (Mauss 2003:222–23). As for the alienable aspect, the greater the circulation, the greater is the degree of alienability in the Maussian sense. In the Marxist sense, we do not have alienability, but alienation, defined as the labor that is present in the thing being transferred, without any recognition of the relationship between labor and value in the process of circulation. (This nonrecognition leads to what Marx calls “commodity fetishism,” which I deal with below). For Marx, greater circulation would give the appearance of the creation of more value, but for Mauss, the value of the gift is defined by the degree of the inalienability of what is passed along. Inalienability refers metonymically to the whole, the more significant part of the gift that does not go (but which can “bite”), when another, less significant part is alienated.

In this apparent paradox lies Mauss’s notion of value, which arises when the person of the giver follows the object or person given. This proposition obviously depends on the

value of the person, *that for good reason is* the topic of Mauss's final important text (1938). Some persons, such as the Brahmans in India, have the capacity to circulate themselves with religious services. In this exemplary case, their inalienability is greater than others, since the Brahmanic gift is the supreme gift in many regions of India; there is circulation, giving, and exchange of services conveyed by and with the Brahman priest. On the other hand, labor in a general sense is more alienable than religious services, without necessarily generating high or maximal values. In capitalist cosmologies, it can also be conceived by workers or capitalists themselves as the only possible way to create value. For instance, one of Brazil's largest banks, Bradesco, uses the slogan, *só o trabalho produz riquezas* ("only labor generates riches"). Nevertheless, taken as a gift, labor still bears a certain inalienability that includes the physical aspect, since the body of the worker (in Mauss's terms, the "producer") is conveyed to (and/or destroyed by) someone else. In the conclusion of *The Gift*, Mauss argues for the social recognition of a certain inalienability of labor. This suggests a kind of socialist perspective or even an endorsement of Marx's theory of alienation: workers do not recognize themselves in their work (Marx), which, according to the universal ethics of the gift, they can and should be able to do (Mauss).

As is well known, the Marxist concept of alienation is linked to that of the fetish, described in the first chapter of Book I of *Capital*. The English word *fetish* is related to the Portuguese *feitiço* (sorcery), the effect that commodities have on human beings. People forget themselves, failing to recognize themselves as the producers of commodities, which appear to them as magical entities devoid of labor. Commodities move in a magical dance before people's eyes. This is what Marx (1990:163–164) wants to suggest in a passage about a dancing table and dishes:

A commodity appears, at first sight, a very trivial thing. But its analysis brings out that it is a very strange thing, abounding in metaphysical subtleties and theological niceties. So far as it is a use-value, there is nothing mysterious about it, whether we consider it from the point of view that by its properties it satisfies human needs, or that it first takes on these properties are the product of human labour. It is absolutely clear that, by his activity, man changes the forms of the materials of nature in such a way as to make them useful to him. The form of wood, for instance, is altered if a table out of it. Nevertheless the table continues to be wood, an ordinary, sensuous thing. But as soon as it emerges as a commodity, it changes into a thing which transcends sensuousness . . . it stands on its head, and evolves out of its wooden brain grotesque ideas, far more wonderful than if it were to begin dancing of its own free will.

This dance, or table-turning, is the alienation of labor. It occurs not simply because workers spend the whole day in a dark, stinking, factory that is too cold or too hot, earning less than they ought to, but because they do not manage to see the commodities as the fruit of their own labor. Commodities dance because they appear to be complete, simply *given*.

As for Mauss, we have seen that he excludes the notions of barter and trade, which are so dear to liberal thought; he does the same with a related notion, that of equivalency in exchange. Circulation is always unbalanced, so much so that I would argue we should speak not of gifts, but of debts or deferred reciprocity. An example of the gift as debt implying deferred reciprocity is the relationship between parents and children. Parry (1986) describes instances in India in which children have the obligation of burying their parents but do not perceive its fulfillment as implying balanced reciprocity over generations. Such a state of affairs would produce statements such as "I owe my burial to my son, just as my father owes his to me." However, in contrast to such an expression, Indian children believe, "I actually owe much more to my father than I can repay, just as my son owes me much more than he can ever repay." In the end, filial debt is never cancelled. Elsewhere (Lanna 1996), I have attempted to show that every gift inaugurates a circuit of debt.

Furthermore, following the basic logic of the Maussian gift, tribute is also a gift.<sup>7</sup> Like Polanyi and Malinowski, Mauss considers the yams given to Trobriand chiefs to be "tribute."<sup>8</sup> We can conclude that tribute is a form of the gift and therefore understand the kind of Polynesian society recognized as a state by Clastres as being formed by tributes (without

defining the Trobriands as a proto-state). These involve one or multiple centralized circuits of gifts, something documented in many ethnographies, such as Geertz's *Negara* (1980) or Leach's *Political Systems of Highland Burma* (1954). In Leach's survey of the neighboring Kachin, Shan, and Chin, all manifested centralizing and hierarchical tendencies that mimicked one another in certain respects.

In a Maussian vision, not only the state but also the market can be seen as the logical and historical transformation of the gift itself. Consider the topics of ethnographies of the gift in contemporary societies, listed on the website of the *Mouvement Anti-Utilitariste dans les Sciences Sociales* (M.A.U.S.S.) inspired by Allan Caillé ([www.revuedumauss.com.fr](http://www.revuedumauss.com.fr)). These include trust (1994), sacrifice (1995), religion (2003), prison, abandonment, and pardons (2012), and health and treatment (2013), among others. While these are important ethnographies, they adhere to the orthodox view that gifts and commodities are in parallel circuits, rather than focusing on *relationships between gifts and commodities*, whether these relationships are hierarchical or transformations (or even transformations among relations of production, as Graeber [2007] suggests). Despite the efforts of M.A.U.S.S., we still need to understand that circuits of commodities are constituted by and modeled after circuits of gifts, if not themselves constituting circuits of gifts. The members of M.A.U.S.S. seem closer to Mauss when the latter "emphasized that the phenomenon of trade and 'markets'... were universal phenomena and existed side by side with gift prestation," but "nevertheless stressed the differences between the two forms of exchange" (Turner 1968:124). My argument here, which I also consider to be Maussian with a Dumontian twist, is that those differences also imply historical continuities and structural transformation, so much so that the gift can encompass the commodity form.

The commodity form can also appear in the form of the gift (such as the presents bought for Christmas, Father's, or Mother's Day) and vice versa (such as the selling of bodies for labor). And like a gift, a commodity can take on a material or immaterial form. As Mauss said of gifts, commodities can be objects or reputations, titles, names, images, songs, visits, services, dances, etc. In all the cases considered in *The Gift*, from the Northwest Coast in North America to ancient Rome, not only does that which circulates bear traces of the persons who possessed them, but also "the person is possessed by the thing." If there is a person in things, and if the giver goes with them, the question of which is the subject and which is the object of the gift in each case is obscured. The radical distinction between persons and things drawn by modern humanism becomes specified. The contrast with Marx reemerges: Mauss considers persons in things and things as persons in all societies (rather than, as Gregory [1982] suggests, things as persons in gift economies and persons as things in market economies), while Marx considers how things become mystified and persons become things in capitalism (Lukács 1974). We can conclude that Marx implicitly assumes a mode of separation between persons and things to be universal or desirable. Mauss, however, argues that this mode is specifically modern, a form that is "ours," as he puts it in the conclusion of *The Gift*. By contrast, as Dumont (1977) shows, Marx universalizes a particular conception of liberty and autonomy of the person.

Mauss, in turn, famously demonstrates that behind each gift are "mechanisms of obligatory repayment," which the Maori call "*hau*" and Lévi-Strauss (1949) calls the "principle of reciprocity." This major insight by Mauss in *The Gift* is, however, often poorly understood. Mauss was already fascinated by the history of each object (as were the Trobrianders, as Malinowski demonstrated so well in his study *Argonauts of the Western Pacific* and as was confirmed by Munn [1986] who revisited the theme). Emphasizing this diachronic dimension, Appadurai (1986) and Venkatesan (2011), among others, abandon Lévi-Strauss's synthetic nature of the gift. But the circulation of objects through time does not mean that we must abandon the notion of the gift as involving reciprocity between person-objects. Besides, Mauss also has a theory of history, aspiring to construct a "total narrative." In this respect, Mauss again reveals similar influences of nineteenth-century evolutionism on his thinking to those of Marx. Parry (1986:458–459) touches on this point, even comparing Mauss to Maine. Mauss seeks to discover the Indo-European origins of the modern French era and organizes *The Gift* by splitting human history into three main stages of gift circulation. The relatively egalitarian "total prestations" of Melanesia and Australia comprise the first. The agonistic ones typical of aristocratic societies appear later, and precede those of the modern stage. In the case of Marx's analyses, we should not confuse his dialectical

model, which assumes syntheses, with evolutionism (although Engels's simplification of Marx's model in *The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State* has been often and correctly criticized).

More important for our purposes here is the fact that, for Mauss, behind particular historical forms lie universal social logics, such as the "mechanisms of repayment." He does not make any conjectures about them to justify a supposed moral superiority of the industrialized West. However, in his 1938 essay on the person, he suggests that a development or expansion of the *category* or *notion* of the individual person has taken place, and his essay describes a linear, historical evolution of that notion. In this respect, Lévi-Strauss's (1950) famous criticism of how Mauss generalized the Maori notion of hau in *The Gift* makes sense with respect to Mauss's evolutionism. It is not that Lévi-Strauss censors Mauss's immersion in ethnographic data (an accusation often leveled against the former in contrast to the latter). Rather, Lévi-Strauss criticizes Mauss for taking the category of hau as an evolutionary survival, as if it were a *passpartout* key that could open any door. Lévi-Strauss's criticism does not refer to what we today call Mauss's "ethnographic theory," but rather to any attempt to produce a general theory of history based on a particular native notion. This was also one of Durkheim's errors in generalizing from notions such as the "sacred" or "totems," an approach replicated by Mauss in the first phase of his intellectual activity. Furthermore, the category of the "person" is similar to the "general mechanisms of obligatory repayment" that Mauss sees behind the notion of hau. Using the principle of reciprocity in place of the native category of hau, Lévi-Strauss (1950) seeks a symbolic theory of the social as a replacement for Durkheim's social theory of symbols.

In contrast to Parry (1986:465), who claims that Mauss saw a nonexistent dichotomy between person and thing in the notion of hau, I hold that Mauss makes it possible to criticize this dichotomy, which for him characterizes not Maori, but rather, modern thought. He thus flirts with a new, broader humanism, which Lévi-Strauss would later develop (Maniglier 2000). *The Gift* also contains a critique of Christian ideology, implicitly viewed as an apology for charity and as a logical absurdity, since nowhere do there exist what Malinowski calls "free gifts." In the latter's typology, which rearranges Trobriand exchanges from the most egalitarian to the most hierarchical, "free gifts" refer mainly to the exchanges between Trobriand husbands and wives and between parents and children (Malinowski 1953:177, 191). But Mauss argues that there are no nonreciprocal, disinterested relationships. Even Malinowski (1953:178) recognized, as early as 1922 in *Argonauts of the Western Pacific* that "there is no comprehensive name for this class of free gifts in native terminology" Four years later, he admitted that Mauss was correct to question the description of free gifts (Malinowski 1926:40–41). The free gift is an impossibility, Mauss demonstrated, because reciprocity lies behind every gift. On the other hand, many anthropologists (predominantly those trained in Great Britain or who, like Malinowski, were active there) argue in favor of the free gift, as if there had been some sort of original equality, a view perhaps based on a deep-rooted sense of unconscious religiosity.

Parry (1986:458) demonstrates that "the ideology of a disinterested gift emerges in parallel with an ideology of a purely interested exchange." For Laidlaw (2008), the supposed free gift is important precisely for not giving rise to social ties and thus allowing the existence of the renouncer who receives it; the same argument could be made of the Hindu priest or Brahman who gives it. Venkatesan (2011) suggests that the "free gift magnifies people's sense of themselves, their relations with one another and to 'gigantic' entities that confront human life yet exceed it." He also proposes the practical reasoning that, in the region of southern India that he studied, the mythical "free gift" of mats for the English queen increased the circulation of these mats as commodities.

Laidlaw (2008:617) takes up Parry's idea that the free gift is not a specifically Christian idea. In his view all the great religions have their modes of institutionalizing it, such as the alms of the Śvētāmbara, one of the great Jainist sects in India that he analyzed. Venkatesan (2011), in turn, asks why the idea of the free gift has endured? It strikes me as necessary to further specify: why should it endure as an ideological formula of the "great religions" (and, I might add, of certain anthropologists)? What kind of gift is this "free" gift? Is it truly a gift or just a rhetorical formula? It should not be necessary to point out that Christian *practice* presents its own form of reciprocity, differing from Christian *rhetoric*, according to which true charity excludes the establishment of relationships between inferiors and superiors, as well as

the desire for superiority and selfishness. In this way Christian rhetoric asserts exactly the opposite of what Mauss argues to be the case for all forms of the gift, which, in his view, operates as a mediator between selfishness and altruism and superiority and inferiority, as well as between other oppositions. But if we associate this rhetoric of free gifts as a formula that enables the establishment of hierarchical differences in form while explicitly negating them in ideology, then we have the gift in the classic Maussian sense.

Let us return to the contrasts between Mauss and Marx. We have seen how the latter considers the capitalist form of alienation and the former discusses forms of noncapitalist inalienability. We have also seen that Marx's criticism of alienation and the fetishism of commodities takes him beyond the distinction between persons and things implicit in modern humanism. He envisions a society in which persons attain a potential he imagines to be possible, becoming truly human, perhaps for the first time. He imagines an unalienated human condition, *beyond things*, in which persons are the only legitimate *subjects* of exchange. From this perspective, the idea of a circulation of persons, or of persons as *objects* of exchange, is scandalous. This is understandable in the case of chattel slavery and other forms of submission, but, for Mauss, the person-thing amalgam is related to a universal condition that we have to research, even if it assumes different forms. Marx's critique of alienation constructs a notion of humanity as distinct *from things* and, furthermore, as being in control *of things*. Indeed, he imagines that, as a consequence of social evolution, people will eventually be in control of a nonobjectified, almost Platonic, world. Marx characterizes his critique of alienation as scientific, in contrast to the nineteenth-century socialist theories that he considers idealistic dreams. But it is not only Marx, but modernity as well, that rebels against the notion of person-things or thing-ified persons, which are produced by modernity itself. It is as if persons could be *liberated* from this condition. For Mauss, the thing-ification of persons is not, however, merely an artifact of modernity, but a condition that humans always live. Marx beautifully complements Mauss by showing us that this condition implies particular mystifications. Mauss seeks to go beyond a narrow liberal definition of the person based on desires and psychological motivations. Along these lines, Dumont (1977) discusses similarities between Marx and modern liberal thinkers. Although Dumont is critical of Marx, he also accepts the description of modernity as generating the thing-ifying of persons, as Marx had asserted and as Gregory (1982) has also argued more recently.

As Dumont (1977) and Gregory (1982) note when exploring the complementarity between the two, Mauss analyzes the society of persons (and things that have become persons), while Marx analyzes the society of things (and persons who have become things). But for Mauss, as we have seen, it is not only in capitalism that persons are conceived as things. *The Gift* shows that persons and things are mutually implicated in each other everywhere, perhaps somewhat less in "our societies." It demonstrates further that, even if these interconnections and imbrications are universal, they nevertheless take on particular forms and are not due to some confusion or lack of comprehension or incapacity of nonmodern minds. Mauss does not criticize how persons are possessed by things, but, to the contrary, accepts this as a given social condition. Marx, however, holds an ideal of the acquisitive person with complete power over things, a view not much different from liberal thinkers, as Dumont (1977) argued. Of course, this is open to debate, since one could develop the Marxist idea of humans transforming themselves by means of engagement with nature.<sup>9</sup>

But, in his day, Mauss criticizes another type of fetishism, the "fetishism of politics" and of the functions of the state, which he encountered in both Bolshevism and social democracy. Mauss thus criticizes the utilitarianism of liberal thinkers as well as the Bolsheviks' idea that the ends justify the means and the latter's opposition to democratic laws and institutions. Elsewhere, Mauss condemned the Bolsheviks and those who made "pilgrimages" to Moscow (Fournier 1994:417) whom in a letter to A. Varagnac he charged with bringing back "disorder" to France (Fournier 1994:393). After he stopped writing for *L'Humanité*, which he associated with Bolshevism, and began writing for *La Vie Socialiste* (Fournier 1994:416), he planned to write a book on socialism that contrasted it with Bolshevism. He berated Russian communists for "the poverty of their ideas and their legal and administrative accomplishments." He criticized the establishment of "laws and rights through coups of decrees and violence," and the belief "that interests can be created without the consent and trust of those interested." He went further to condemn Bolshevik policies

for having “totally destroyed” the economy through the “abolition of private commerce, suppression of all markets, all stock exchanges, all speculation” and for “having dried up the very fountain of social life, trust and good faith.” And, in Mauss’s withering judgment, Bolshevik actions stood “not only outside moral law but also of the most elementary laws of political wisdom” (Fournier 1994:427). However, Mauss never made any association between Bolshevism (or “the dictatorship of the Communist Party over the proletariat” [Fournier 1994:427.]) and the theories of Marx.

Although Mauss said in 1920 that he was not charmed “by the theoretical value of Lenin’s writings and even less by the value of those of Trotsky” (cited in Fournier 1994:421), he was interested in Lenin’s NEP (New Economic Policy), which had been adopted just at the time Mauss was writing *The Gift* (Graeber 2001:157). The NEP allowed some commerce in the communist U.S.S.R., along with some foreign investment, and abandoned some of the strategies of collectivism. The return of some form of the market to the U.S.S.R. led Mauss to evaluate the logical and historical significance of this institution, since experience was proving it was impossible to abolish the buying and selling of commodities. This was probably also due to the fact that he saw the “spirit of the gift” as present in commodities, making it difficult or impossible to supersede the market.

Nevertheless, as Graeber (2000:157) notes, Mauss felt that the market violated people’s sense of justice. *The Gift* tries to understand the appeal of social security programs and socialist parties and what ethnography from around the world could reveal about universal standards of justice that would also be capable of encompassing the market. In various societies analyzed in *The Gift*, such as India and ancient Rome, Mauss finds the market to be present, although not as a basic or preeminent social principle. Mauss’s position is similar to Polanyi’s (2000). The latter held that modern capitalist societies are distinctive because their market constitutes an autonomous sphere, even though there has never been a “market society.” Mauss and Polanyi both position themselves as noncommunist socialists, but, unfortunately, these two great readers of Malinowski never read each other.

Mauss also criticized modern revolutionaries for seeking to abolish private property (Mauss 1920:264). At the same time, he did not romanticize gift societies as ideal or as a more perfect model for managing persons and things. He was aware of the fundamental role of the gift in aristocratic societies; indeed, societies such as the Maori in Polynesia, the Kwakiutl of the Northwest Coast, and the Vedics of India are the focus of *The Gift*. It is not only or even principally in egalitarian settings that the gift is relevant.

Many anthropologists have understood the Northwest Coast potlatch as a mechanism of redistribution that contrast with capitalism since peoples from the region valued giving and even the destruction of wealth, rather than its accumulation. Since Boas wrote in the early twentieth century, many excellent and detailed ethnographies of these peoples have been written. Nevertheless, nonspecialists continue to make hasty generalizations about the potlatch, offering vague assertions about Kwakiutl life, such as “everything was a pretext for extensive, repeated celebrations” (Godbout and Caillé 2000:104). Benedict (1934) in *Patterns of Culture* seems to come close to this position when she “castigated the Kwakiutl for their obsession with riches, desire for superiority, and what she saw as their shameless, paranoid megalomania” (Godbout and Caillé 2000:105).

Imprecise interpretations fail to recognize that any gift that is given must also be received. Kwakiutl chiefs were not only redistributors but also receivers of tribute gifts. Anthropologist of indigenous America have not yet addressed this adequately, having instead privileged chiefly giving. Mauss points out the capacity of chiefs—whether Amerindian, Melanesian, or any other, despite their enormous differences and the specificity of each case—to centralize acts of reciprocity. Malinowski also described Trobriand chiefs as exercising such centralization. Lévi-Strauss’s analyses of the Bororo and Nambiquara chiefs follow Mauss’s perspective as well. Thus, the gift does not preclude the establishment of hierarchies: to the contrary, it promotes them.

As I noted earlier, Christian rhetoric goes to exceptional lengths to imagine disinterested gifts in the form of charity. Mauss provides further evidence of material prestations (portions of the harvest, animals, land, money, etc.) from lower segments of various societies being conceived as tribute for which religious services were received in return, such as those from Brahmins. When and how is it appropriate to give an “immaterial” prestation in exchange for one that is “material”?

It is difficult to read Mauss's reflections on Brahmans without recalling Christian priests. Christian ideology denies the rule of reciprocity as a universal, imagining a pure gift, charity, "offering the other cheek," and so on. Christianity leads to the same paradox as relativism (Aron 1970; Valeri 1992). The party that rhetorically negates any superiority actually assumes a superior position. It is only in an ideological and rhetorical form that the free gift or pure gift exists. Ethnographic descriptions of the prestations surrounding any Christian priest should analyze the ideological construction of an "exchange" as the circulation of religious services (words, prayers, rituals, etc.) moving in one direction, and material values moving in the opposite one. For instance, in São Bento do Norte in the Brazilian state of Rio Grande do Norte, where I conducted research, various types of food (but never money) were given by the community to the local priest in exchange for his services (Lanna 1995). Rather than using the concept of exchange to refer to any kind of circulation, I prefer to apply it to the ideological construction of the encounter of two circuits of prestations, or debts, moving in opposite directions. This applies to the "exchange" of religious services for material prestations. It is precisely for this reason that a theory of ideology, or superstructures, is necessary.

I believe that the Christian idea of exchange reappears in the works of important anthropologists such as Pierre Clastres (Lanna 2005, 2013). By imagining what he calls "nonexchange" between the chief (or the "region of power," as he puts it) and an Amerindian "society" through a process in which women go to the chief while goods and words come from him, Clastres gives new life to the idea of the pure or free gift, even though he does not use the term. Instead, he uses the term "nonexchange" to refer to three unilateral movements: those of women, words, and goods. But words are somehow also spoken to the chief, just as gifts are also given to him; similarly, he is not only a wife-receiver, but a wife-giver as well, since his sisters and daughters also marry. I would argue that we should better understand prestations in terms of a unilateral gift circuit that is compensated by another debt circuit moving against it in the other direction.

I indicated earlier that members of M.A.U.S.S. have written important ethnographies about gift circuits in capitalist societies, analyzing, among other themes, basic ideas upon which such societies are established, such as the notion of trust. By contrast, Mauss himself did not seem to be interested in this type of ethnography of the modern gift. For example, he did not consider Christmas holidays or bourgeois expenses and conspicuous consumption as points of possible comparison with noncapitalist realities. The reason for this, I believe, was that his interests were focused on commodities as transformations of gift forms. As a contemporary example of the gift, social security emerges as a fundamental theme in the conclusion of *The Gift*, precisely because it relates to market exchanges. The market is a pillar of capitalist society, as Marx and Polanyi viewed it, but it is also a logical and historical transformation of gift forms. The same can be said of the formation of the state. As I noted, Mauss, Polanyi, and Malinowski understood Trobriand gifts to the chief as tribute, suggesting some continuity between chiefdoms and the state. If tribute is one possible gift form, so, too, is violence. Thus considerations of the gift uphold the conventional view of the origin of the state as arising from religious centralization and tribute, and the perspective that state ideology takes form as a relationship of reciprocity between rulers and the ruled. However, since Lévi-Strauss, this reciprocity should be understood as structural, not just ideological. If M.A.U.S.S. demonstrates the presence of the gift in capitalism, it is important to consider the market and the state as not being alien to the gift. For M.A.U.S.S., but not for Mauss, there is a certain type of distance between the gift, on the one hand, and, on the other, the market and state, despite the parallels between them.

It is interesting to compare the efforts of M.A.U.S.S. with those of British anthropologists (especially contributors to Bloch and Parry's [1989] volume, *Money and the Morality of Exchange*), who moved in the inverse direction. While the French sociologists revealed the gift operating in capitalist reality, the British anthropologists wrote ethnographies about the introduction of money in societies that previously had been analyzed without paying attention to it. Both groups explored the overlaps between gifts and commodities, but neither of them recognized the hierarchy between them in the terms I am proposing here.

Returning to the contrast between Mauss and Marx, the latter asks why capitalism is not condemned more widely. We have seen that his answer lies in the notion of ideology. Mauss asks precisely the opposite question: from the perspective of workers (or, as he called them,

“producers”), why would there be a condemnation of the capitalist, mercantile ethic? He finds the answer in the existence of a general ethic, based not on profit, but on the gift. The conclusion of *The Gift* suggests that producers would like to follow the things they have produced. By way of contrast with Marx, the issue is not that workers should become conscious of the mystification of capitalist production, but, to the contrary, that we in modern times ought to be conscious that labor, besides being a commodity, is a gift. In what Mauss calls “our societies,” the gift of labor is given both to the individual employer and to society as a whole. In my opinion, the gift aspect of labor complements Marx’s point that labor power is bought and sold.

For Marx, political economic exploitation in capitalism is effectively hidden through ideological means. It can only be overcome through new forms of consciousness, which are a precondition for social revolution that enables the producers to control the means of production, as well as through science. In *The German Ideology*, Marx (1984, orig. 1845–1846) presents the concept of ideology and his theory of the materialist dialectic, transforming the Hegelian dialectic into a materialist one. For Marx, that which is not a dialectic, that is, which does not expose the contradictions of things is ideological. Bourgeois political economy, for instance, is ideological because it explains capitalism without exposing its contradictory character. A new form of science is necessary, one that shows things as they are “in fact.” It is necessary to go beyond the description of their appearance to reveal their contradictory nature. The dialectic, for Marx, is a method that reveals the essence of capital.

This takes us to John Steinbeck’s (1960) famous phrase about “the so-called Communists” he met: “I guess the trouble was that we didn’t have any self-admitted proletarians. Everyone was a temporally embarrassed capitalist.” In accordance or not to Steinbeck’s intention, it has received the understanding that not only Communists, but poor people and middle class people in America, rather than consider themselves to be exploited, feel themselves to be the equals of rich people, or as “temporarily embarrassed millionaires.” This interpretation is found outside the United States and can be considered a Marxist understanding of American people. It could explain why capitalists like Donald Trump have political appeal, something that happens in other countries as well. But Mauss would differ: in the conclusion of *The Gift*, he asserts that capitalist exploitation is immediately perceived by producers through their sense of justice and that it could be overcome through the return of “customs of noblesse oblige” in new forms of the gift (Mauss 2003:298). Because he takes a universal anticapitalist sense of justice for granted, Mauss does not consider his call for new institutionalized forms of the gift to be naïve. He further proposes the substitution of some forms of commodities with gifts (such as state redistribution) and the substitution of some forms of gifts with commodities (endorsing the demand by unions and artists that their labor and art be valued more highly).

A certain contradiction exists between Marx and Mauss, since, for the latter, producers want to follow the things they produce, while, for the former, workers are not conscious of their person or their labor being in things (and, in Steinbeck’s opinion concerning the situation in the United States, they do not have class consciousness). Mauss seems more naïve by viewing the capital-labor contract in terms of gift relations. For both Marx and Mauss, producers or workers deserve more than their wages, but the latter relies on the logic of reciprocity to ground his argument that producers deserve security against unemployment, illness, old age, and death. Social welfare is necessary because it derives from the principle that producers give their lives to both their employer and the collectivity (Mauss 2003:296). They thus give something even more valuable than their labor by sacrificing part of their persons. According to Mauss, the employer has a moral debt, which ought to mean collaborating in building up the worker’s savings. The same holds for the state, since producers have given something not only to their employers, but also to society at large. Social security is thus a responsibility, a repayment to producers. It thus constitutes “state socialism” (Mauss 2003:296).

For Marx, in turn, wages are a form of unequal exchange that *appears* to be fair only as long as workers are not able to adopt a global perspective. In this respect, capitalism is ideologically effective. For Mauss, however, producers tend not to accept wages as fair, because they compare it with the universal moral logic of the gift. Marx considers wage contracts to be derived from bourgeois logic, while Mauss looks to various forms of contracts beyond bourgeois society for a more general meaning of contracts.

We know that workers give of themselves in exchange for wages. I would highlight, as does Marx, the illusory aspect of this “exchange,” but my reason for doing so draws on Mauss’s teachings. The wage-for-labor exchange is not a matter of a single transaction, but rather of circuits involving labor moving in one direction and, in the other, circuits of money-taking-the-form-of-wages. When these two cross, there is the illusion of an exchange. As with the Melanesian *kula* ring, there is not merely an exchange of necklaces for bracelets, but circuits of bracelets that are counterbalanced by circuits of necklaces. Each circuit is structured by a deferred reciprocity that Lévi-Strauss called “generalized exchange” (like that involved in matrilineal marriages of men with their mother’s brother’s daughter). This is precisely the type of reciprocity that Parry failed to note in the Indian case when, for example, he mentions the circulation of water cups among castes, involving prescriptions on the direction of movement in the circuits (Parry 1986:461–462). However, this type of giving does not manifest the “negation of the obligation of a return”; rather, the gift is for someone else, a third party. Parry is right to claim that there is no *quid pro quo*. But he is not describing a dyadic relationship (or what Lévi-Strauss [1949] termed “restricted exchange”).

While some may consider the conclusions Mauss presents to be naïve, Graeber, by contrast, attempts to show their enduring relevance. He points out that “it is commonplace to dismiss Mauss’ political conclusions at the end of *The Gift* as weak, inconsistent, not of the same power or brilliance of the rest of the essay” (Graeber 2001:163). He recognizes that it is “idiosyncratic” to think of the “rich” as becoming “aristocratic treasurers,” and that such an assertion could be criticized as a “stumblingly inadequate attempt to imitate Marx” (Graeber 2001:163). But he praises “Mauss’s approach to alienation as providing a useful corrective to some of the most common blind spots of Marxian anthropology” (Graeber 2001:163).

I would argue that the idea of “the rich capitalists as treasurers” does imply a naïve criticism or even a lack of knowledge regarding the concept of ideology and alienation as false consciousness, as developed in *The German Ideology*. On the other hand, the inalienability universally present in the gift to a greater or lesser extent coexists with alienation in the Marxist sense. Alienation in this sense involves fetishism, taking a thing as being more than a thing, as something that has life. Mauss takes us further by arguing that it is precisely in this way that, according to native thinking, a thing may *represent* its giver since part of the giver is in the thing and can follow it. This occurs not only in capitalism but also in any context when objects move from one person to another. As Graeber (2001:163) points out,

More daringly, Mauss appears to be suggesting that a certain degree of subject/object reversal—in certain contexts, at certain levels—might act not as mystification or an instrument of exploitation, but as a normal aspect of creative processes that may not be nearly so dangerous as its opposite, the reduction of all social relations to any sort of objective calculus.

This “reversal” is precisely what Lévi-Strauss (1950) shows is implicit in Mauss. My conclusion is that ethnography shows that mystification and exploitation are “normal aspects” of social life. The conclusion of *The Gift* implies that some degree of mystification and subject/object reversal lies in the very constitution of any communicative processes. Graeber accepts this as part of “creative processes,” but I argue that this reversal is the essence of any social process defined as communication. While Graeber states that the subject/object reversal “might act not as mystification or an instrument of exploitation,” I believe it acts simultaneously as part of the processes of mystification *and* exploitation in the gift as commodity *and* the commodity as gift.

According to Mauss, there is something transcendental in the gift, a “communication of souls,” as he expressed it. At the same time, there is something mystifying in the gift, although not in the same way as Marx’s concept of alienation would have it. As we saw, “Mauss’s work complements Marx,” but not only, or even mainly, “because it represents the other side of socialism” as Graeber (2001:163) proposes. Nor is it because “as Mauss himself observed, he [Marx] carefully avoided speculating about what a more just society would be like...[while] Mauss’s instincts were quite the opposite: he was much less interested in understanding the dynamics of capitalism than in trying to understand—and create—something that might stand outside it” (Graeber 2001:163). The major difference between

Mauss and Marx, I believe, is that the former sees mystification as inherent in the social rather than as harmful.

Here we return to Lévi-Strauss, for whom, if communication has to follow rules in order to signify, what it signifies are illusions of perception. These do not come from “excessive sensory or mental activity,” as traditional psychology would have it, but are an “elementary manifestation of an intrinsic power where all activities of the mind originate.” (Lévi-Strauss 1985:174). Here, Lévi-Strauss’s theory of superstructures meets up with Marx’s theory of infrastructure. Superstructures are not exactly “false consciousness,” in Marx’s terms, but “slips” (not in the sense of Freudian-Lacanian parapraxis) that are “socially successful.”<sup>10</sup> Marx, Freud, Mauss, Lévi-Strauss, each had his theory of illusions. Marx understood better than Mauss how profound the structuring of alienation in capitalism is. On the other hand, Marx sought to overcome it, whereas Mauss did not think this was possible.

Given the growing anthropological interest in the relations between persons and things, persons as things, and things as persons, the Maussian perspective is fruitful in the context of a general, comparative ethnography of human thought and practices. It is also less likely to lead to a reduction of social relations to “some type of objective calculus,” to recall Graeber’s (2001:163) expression, that both Marx and Mauss showed was characteristic of liberal thinking. However, as Dumont (1977) argues, Marx himself fell victim to some of the same liberal assumptions. Along lines similar to Dumont’s critique of Marx, Mauss criticized Bolshevik thinking in the 1920s, characterizing the Soviet regime as a particular combination of a centralizing redistribution and market logic. Like Mauss, Polanyi (2000) and Dumont (1983) sought to construct theoretical alternatives to Marxism, as well as to liberal thought.

Mauss drew on ethnographic information from noncapitalist societies, a subject that had also been of interest to Marx. The task of collecting and analyzing ethnographic data is, of course, the foundation of contemporary anthropology. We should not overlook the fact that, in *The German Ideology* and elsewhere, Marx argued that we must cast our gaze on noncapitalist dynamics in order to understand the market, the state, and wages.<sup>11</sup> By thinking of capitalism in relation to noncapitalist reality, and vice versa, we can better understand the logical and historical transformations of the gift. It is often forgotten that Marx and Morgan considered the regimes of bourgeois property in relation to the Iroquois. Similarly, Parry (1986:459) drew on ancient history to shed light on the contemporary notion of “the legal separation of persons from things” that he traced back to an “ideological revolution...located in the late Roman Empire [that is] central to our concepts of property and market exchange.”

For Graeber (2001:158), Mauss’s socialism is closer to that of Proudhon or the anarchists, for whom capitalist ideas and institutions were a source of moral critique for capitalism itself. Graeber sees in Marx the ambition and ability to understand totalities (citing the difference between concrete and abstract labor, the relationship between the costs of reproduction and global surpluses as an indication of exploitation, and so on). He notes that, by contrast, “Mauss does not even talk about production in preindustrial societies, he has no sense of the reproduction of social systems as wholes, he lacks a theory of value” (Graeber 2001:163). It is widely accepted that Mauss based his theories on the local, never straying far from the native point of view, and this represents a limitation of this thought, as Lévi-Strauss (1950) has noted. But I would contend, in contrast to Graeber (2001:162), that Mauss does have a theory of value as well as of alienation. In fact, his theory of inalienability is an inherent part of his theory of value. I would also argue that there is an exteriority in Mauss’s perspective, even if it is different from Marx’s. After all, Mauss is a precursor of comparison through the “view from afar.” He did not define ideas and institutions simply in terms of their functions, but through their principles and how they structure ways of being.

Marx, on the other hand, sees the proletariat as a truly revolutionary class precisely because it is dialectally contradicted in and by capitalism, a fundamental point recalled by Graeber (2001). Marx takes a perspective that implies that only “from below” could one see the totality. Only the proletarian class could *liberate* itself, dialectically opposing itself to the totality of the “system” and creating something radically new that could not be imagined or described on the basis of current reality.<sup>12</sup> In this regard, I believe, Marx, even more than Mauss, clings to a native perspective that arises from within the structure of capitalist production. He may have done so because, among other reasons, he did not have access to the volume of ethnographic and historical facts of noncapitalist realities that Mauss did later

on. If Graeber is right that Mauss did not think of capitalism as a totality, we can nevertheless assert that Mauss revealed the “mechanisms of the gift,” which we could call, in an institutional sense, the “elementary form” of all social life. Just as Lévi-Strauss later deconstructed totemism as an institutional form, but retained it as a fundamental logical, metaphorical operation, Mauss abstracted the principle of reciprocity from the institutional form of gifts.<sup>13</sup> The presence of this “elementary form” in capitalism has been emphasized in the last few decades by some sociologists and ethnographers, such as those linked to M.A.U.S.S. But this also lends a new perspective regarding Marx’s contribution to the understanding of commodities and the process of capital accumulation. We now see these as elementary institutional forms of life under capitalism.

### Postscript

As a postscript to this comparison between Marx and Mauss, let me briefly consider Jacques Lacan’s concept of alienation, which, like them, he situated in a framework of capitalism and exchange. For Lacan, a certain false consciousness resides in any signified; paradoxically, however, he sees significance and certain truths as arising from signifying chains, such as displacements, omissions, slips, lapses, forgetting, and resistance. According to Lacan (1997), desires are only revealed through dislocations, ruptures, and fissures in consciousness, and, being pure “desiring,” are defined by the impossibility of satisfaction (Antonio 2015:156). He argues that the needs of particular individual subjects are replete with truths that are unique and related to his or her history and “island” (Lacan 2008), similar to what Lévi-Strauss (1958:219–20, 253) calls the “individual myth.”

For Lacan, the “I” is constituted in relation to the Other, who confers imaginary, alienated identity on the “I,” and who by means of this conferral contributes to the development of the psyche. The Other is of a symbolic, cultural order. The structure of language constitutes the subject from a set of demands, desires, and designs directed toward him or her since birth, and even before. From a position of helplessness and dependence, the subject develops at the mercy of the Other’s desires, a process that Lacan calls “alienation.” The Lacanian person is alienated through language (Antonio 2015), but Lacan uses the notions of language, symbolic order, and structure in a weak sense, much differently than does Lévi-Strauss. The Lacanian clinic is a venue for critiquing the alienation of the “I” that occurred through the ideas of satisfaction offered by the capitalist system. To assist the subject to resist giving in to desire, therapy paradoxically consists of defending his or her desiring condition. Therapy proposes to go beyond consciousness, to de-alienate the subject from the determinations of language—something that Lévi-Strauss would not consider possible. We should also acknowledge the monetary prestations that the subject in analysis makes to the therapist. Independently of its specific form, these prestations are *structurally* similar to those given to priests, whether Brahmins or Christians, which we discussed earlier.

For Lacan, alienation is thus the “desiring condition,” the Other’s construction of the self’s desire. Alienation is structural, although not in a Lévi-Straussian sense of structure, because the subject is alienated through language. After years of analysis, if it is successful, the subject should be able to maintain relationships without worrying about serving the desires of, or being desired by, the Other. This is achieved in part when the “symptom” is revealed. At this point, the subject in analysis stops being worried about satisfying the Other, filling in the lack of the Other, or serving as the speech of the Other, since he or she has learned that such satisfaction is impossible and begins to seek his or her own desires (Antonio 2015). As does Marxism, Lacan suggests a “liberating consciousness of alienation,” a new reality constructed scientifically but as yet only presupposed. Lacanian psychoanalysis rests on an unsurmountable contradiction, since therapy seeks a “liberating consciousness of alienation,” even though the apprehension of something by consciousness is no more than a fiction. Our inescapable destiny is to desire without ever being sated, and to seek happiness without ever reaching it (Antonio 2015:157).

The desiring condition of the subject is related to consumerism, from which he or she must detach, even though it is impossible for any subject to be truly liberated from capitalist alienation. For Lacan, capitalism is a “superstructure” in the Marxist (not Lévi-Straussian) sense: it is ideological and related to false consciousness. Capitalism in this sense promotes the *illusion* of satisfaction through consumption, leading subjects to believe that completeness

is possible if they buy, for instance, a slew of Ferraris. Capitalist alienation thus occurs through goading. The therapist's aim is to help subjects realize that the satisfaction proposed by capitalist reality will never be achieved. If subjects in analysis want to buy Ferraris, the Lacanian analyst must help them deconstruct this desire, which is a "symptom." This is accomplished by linking the "truth" of the desire to primeval moments expressed in each subject's individual myth. Subjects will always be unhappy, always lack something, but they must also always pay the therapist's bill. Lacan criticizes the medicalization of neurosis in the same way as he criticizes capitalist reality, since both alienate the subject by taking away any capacity for *autonomy*.<sup>14</sup> Nonetheless, Lacanian psychoanalysis proposes an even more radical form of alienation: the alienation of the subject from him- or herself. The impossibility of subversion is considered to be liberating by both the subject and the therapist (Antonio 2015:269).

At this point, however, we need to ask, does Lacanianism fall into the trap of what Freud called the "narcissism of small differences"? After all, Lacan's liberation occurs not between individuals but within each, exemplifying the movement from large to small intervals, and from small intervals to even more minute ones. This is reminiscent of the Lévi-Strauss's theory of history (from myth to legend to romance, for instance). As Antonio (2015:123) remarks,

Freud conceived of *narcissism* as love of oneself, while Lacan, as *alienation* of an *imaginary I*; Freud spoke of the satisfaction of *desires*, Lacan, of how *desire* cannot be satisfied, *the lack being structural to the subject*; Freud spoke of the object of drives, while Lacan dealt only with the *lost object*. Furthermore, the latter constructed concepts such as *master signifier*, *objet petit a*, *foreclosure*, *lack of being*, *imaginary-symbolic-real*, and *sinthome*, among others, based more on authors such as Plato, Hegel, Kojève, Politzer, Saussure, Lévi-Strauss, and Jakobson. [my translation]

Given that Lacanian psychoanalysts aim to promote "an interior asceticism, a liberation, and a subversion of the subject" (Antonio 2015:156), I conclude that Lacanian alienation is narcissistic and individualistic in the Dumontian sense of the individual seeking liberation.

In reality, we see that "people are running toward a future and behind the losses of a past. But to be in movement all the time is alienating. In order to have power back in your hands, you have to stop, breathe. What has led us to unsustainability was trying to put inside everything that is outside us. This does not sate" (Nogueira 2016:B3).

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> I want to thank Michael Scott for the opportunity to present a version of this article in a seminar held by the Department of Anthropology at the London School of Economics on July 26, 2012. Another version, entitled "Maussian Inalienability and Marxist Alienation: A Contrast," was presented in November 2013 in the symposium, "Beyond Engagement: Papers Inspired by the Work of Terence Turner," at the 112th Annual Meeting of the American Anthropological Association. I presented another version to the Working Group, "A New Anthropological View on the Economy," at the II Meeting of Mexican and Brazilian Anthropologists, held in November 2013 at the University of Brasilia. I thank the participants of these symposia for their comments. I also want to thank the fruitful comments and suggestions made by the translator of this article from the Portuguese, Catherine V. Howard, a colleague from the University of Chicago, who was also an advisee of Terry Turner.

<sup>2</sup> My proposal here differs from Turner's, for whom "against both Mauss and Simmel, but with Marx, exchange as it exists in any society must be understood in relation to the total process of social production, circulation, and reproduction of which it forms but one moment or aspect" (Turner 1989:260). On the other hand, Turner understood that, in noncapitalist societies, "a form of circulation" can become "the form of social production and reproduction in the most inclusive sense" (Turner 1989:262) and that "interests, values of actors and properties of objects" can be "mediated by gift prestations" (Turner 1968:125).

<sup>3</sup> For example, in his reflections on the notion of “wages” Mauss (1950:253–254) recalls that the French term *gage* comes from the Latin *wadium*, which he contrasts with the English wage.

<sup>4</sup> On the Latin *traditio*, see Mauss (2003:271–275).

<sup>5</sup> My use of the concept of circulation owes a great deal to Turner’s ideas on “the relation between the notion of exchange and that of circulation (two notions which are often identified which should be kept analytically distinct)” (Turner 1989:263). Names, for instance, “or reputations, circulate but are not ‘exchanged.’” The ability of one’s reputation to circulate separately from oneself and independently of physical existence is established in large part through successful exchanges, but is not itself an exchange. As Turner (1989:263) further argued, “exchange is a concretized form of circulation, but circulation is a more general relation of communication.” I show that this circulation is one of debts, and that reciprocity does not necessarily involve the bilateral movements of objects, which Lévi-Strauss (1949) characterized simply as “restricted exchange.”

<sup>6</sup> When Weiner (1992) attempts to present an alternative to Mauss in her analysis of inalienability in Oceania, she considers reciprocity to be “superficial” in comparison to “strategies of exchange.” This aspect of Weiner’s theory is criticized in Valeri (1994).

<sup>7</sup> For discussion of tribute, consult Mauss (2003:146–7) on Madagascar; *ibid.*: 200 on Melanesia and Polynesia; *ibid.*: 201 on Borneo; *ibid.*: 279 on India.

<sup>8</sup> The Trobrianders call this prestation “pokala” (Malinowski 1953:181). For more on Trobriand tribute, see Malinowski 1953:186, 193; see also: *ibid.*:153 on Trobrianders in general; *ibid.*:61 on gifts from wife’s brother to sister’s husband; *ibid.*:63 on villages sending tributes; *ibid.*:64 on a system of vassalage in which a woman from each village is given to the chief (*ibid.*:153, 180). Along these lines, Polanyi cites the ethnography of Thurnwald on the Banaro (along with that of Malinowski on the Trobrianders and Firth on the Tikopians): “Among Micronesian and Polynesian peoples, for instance, ‘the kings as the representatives of the first clan, receive the revenue, redistributing it later in the form of largesse among the population’” (Polanyi 2000:312 quoting Thurnwald 1932).

<sup>9</sup> A point made by a Tipiti reviewer.

<sup>10</sup> “In this respect Sartre seems to have remembered only half of Marx’s and Freud’s combined lesson. They have taught us that man has meaning only on the condition that he view himself as meaningful. So far I agree with Sartre. But it must be added that *this meaning is never the right one*: superstructures are faulty acts which have ‘made it’ socially” (Lévi-Strauss 1966:253–254, italics in the original).

<sup>11</sup> This type of cross-cultural perspective is what Dumont (1967), following De Tocqueville, called “apperception,” and which Merleau-Ponty (1962) also saw as anthropology’s great contribution.

<sup>12</sup> I emphasize the word “liberate” to move closer to Dumont’s (1977) understanding of freedom (and of emancipation) as fundamental categories in both liberal and Marxist thought.

<sup>13</sup> Scubla (2011) argues that Lévi-Strauss, after deconstructing totemism and religion, ended up reintroducing the second through the canonical formula, in a sort of “return of the repressed.”

<sup>14</sup> I again recall Dumont’s (1977) approximation between Marx and liberal thinking through individualistic concepts such as “autonomy.” Is Lacan an individualist?

## References

- Antonio, Maria Carolina de Araujo  
2015 “A Ética do Desejo: Estudo Etnográfico da Formação de Psicanalistas em Escolas Lacanianas de Psicanálise.” Ph.D. dissertation, Department of Social Anthropology, Universidade Federal de São Carlos.
- Aron, Raymond  
1970 “Le Paradoxe du Meme et de l’Autre.” In J. Pouillon and P. Maranda (eds), *Échanges et Communications*, Vol. II. The Hague: Mouton, pp. 943–952.
- Bloch, Maurice and Jonathan Parry (eds)  
1989 *Money and the Morality of Exchange*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

- Clastres, Pierre  
 1974 *La Société Contre l'État. Recherches d'Anthropologie Politique*. Paris: Minuit.
- Dumont, Louis  
 1967 *Homo Hierarchicus: Essai Sur le Système des Castes*. Paris: Gallimard.  
 1977 *Homo Aequalis: Genèse et Épanouissement de l'Idéologie Économique*. Paris: Gallimard.  
 1983 Preface to *La Grande Transformation. Aux Origins Politiques et Économiques de Notre Temps*, by Karl Polanyi. Paris: Gallimard.
- Engels, Friedrich and Karl Marx  
 1984 [1932] *A Ideologia Alemã (I-Feuerbach)*, trans. José Carlos Bruni and Marco Aurélio Nogueira. São Paulo: Hucitec.
- Fournier, Marcel  
 1994 *Marcel Mauss*. Paris: Fayard.
- Geertz, Clifford  
 1980 *Negara: The Theatre State in Nineteenth-Century Bali*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Godbout, Jacques T. and Alain C. Caillé  
 2000 *The World of Gifts*. Montreal: McGill-Queens.
- Graeber, David  
 2001 *Toward an Anthropological Theory of Value: The False Coin of Our Own Dreams*. New York: Palgrave-Macmillan.  
 2007 "Turning Modes of Production Inside Out: Or, Why Capitalism is a Transformation of Slavery." In *Possibilities: Essays in Hierarchy, Rebellion and Desire*. Oakland: AK Press, pp. 85–112.
- Graeber, David and Marcos Lanna  
 2005 "Comunismo ou Comunalismo? A Política e o *Ensaio sobre o Dom*." *Revista de Antropologia* 48(2): 501–523.
- Gregory, Chris  
 1982 *Gifts and Commodities*. London: Academic Press.
- Lacan, Jacques  
 1997 *O Seminário, Livro 7: A Ética na Psicanálise*, trans. Antonio Quinet. Rio de Janeiro: Zahar.  
 2008 *O Mito Individual do Neurótico*, trans. Claudia Berliner. Rio de Janeiro: Zahar.
- Laidlaw, James  
 2008 "A Free Gift Makes No Friends." *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* 4: 617–634.
- Lanna, Marcos  
 1995 *A Dívida Divina, Troca e Patronagem no Nordeste Brasileiro*. Campinas: Ed. Unicamp.  
 1996 "Reciprocidade e Hierarquia." *Revista de Antropologia* 39(1): 111–144.  
 2005 "As Sociedades Contra o Estado Existem? Reciprocidade e Poder em Pierre Clastres." *Mana* 11(2): 419–448.  
 2007 "God-Parenthood and Sacrifice in Northeast Brazil." *Vibrant* 2(2).  
 2013 "De Claude Lévi-Strauss a Pierre Clastres e Retorno. Da Troca à 'Filosofia da Chefia' e Desta à Política como Código Estrutural." *Perspectivas* 43: 17–33.
- Leach, Edmund  
 1954 *Political Systems of Highland Burma: A Study of Kachin Social Structure*. London: London School of Economics and Political Science; G. Bell & Sons.
- Lévi-Strauss, Claude  
 1949 *Les Structures Élémentaires de la Parenté*. Paris: PUF.  
 1950 "Introduction à l'Oeuvre de Marcel Mauss." In *Sociologie et Anthropologie* by Marcel Mauss. Paris: PUF, pp. ix–lii.  
 1958 *Anthropologie Structurale*. Paris: Plon.  
 1966 *The Savage Mind*. London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson.  
 1985 "From Mythical Possibility to Social Existence." In *The View from Afar*, trans. Joachim Neugroschel and Phoebe Hoss. New York: Basic Books, pp. 157–174.  
 2013 [1963] "As Descontinuidades Culturais e o Desenvolvimento Econômico." In *Antropologia Estrutural Dois*, trans. Beatriz Perrone-Moisés. São Paulo: Cosac & Naify, pp. 345–356.

- Lukács, Georg  
1974 "A Reificação e a Consciência do Proletariado." In *História e Consciência de Classe: Estudos de Dialética Marxista*, trans. by Telma Costa. Porto: Publicações Escorpião, pp. 97–231.
- Malinowski, Bronislaw  
1951 [1926] *Crime and Custom in Savage Society*. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul.  
1953 [1922] *Argonauts of the Western Pacific*. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul.
- Maniglier, Patrice  
2000 "L'humanisme Interminable de Lévi-Strauss." *Les Temps Modernes* 609: 216–241.
- Marx, Karl  
1990 [1867] *Capital*, Vol. I, trans. Ben Fowkes. New York: Penguin Books.
- Mauss, Marcel  
1920 "Les Idées Socialistes: Le Principe de la Nationalisation." In Marcel Fournier (ed), *Marcel Mauss: Écrits Politiques*. Paris: Fayard, pp. 249–266.  
2003 *Sociologia e Antropologia*, trans. Paulo Neves. São Paulo: Cosac & Naify.
- Merleau-Ponty, Maurice  
1962 [1959] "De Mauss a Claude Lévi-Strauss." In *Sinais*, trans. Fernando Gil. Lisbon: Minotauro, pp. 171–188.
- Munn, Nancy  
1986 *The Fame of Gawa: A Symbolic Study of Value Transformation in a Massim Society*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Nogueira, Wellington  
2016 "Para Celebrar a Alegria, é Preciso Conhecer a Tristeza." Interview to Angela Pinho. *Folha de S.Paulo*, 20 de setembro, Cotidiano, B3.
- Parry, Jonathan  
1986 "The Gift, the Indian Gift and the 'Indian Gift.'" *Man* 21(3): 453–473.
- Polanyi, Karl  
2000 [1944] *A Grande Transformação. As Origens de Nossa Época*, 3rd edition, trans. Fanny Wrobel. Rio de Janeiro: Ed. Campus, p. 312, quoting Richard Thurnwald. 1932. *Economics in Primitive Communities*. London : Oxford University Press, p.xii.
- Scubla, Lucien  
2011 "Le Symbolique Chez Lévi-Strauss et Chez Lacan." *La Revue du M.A.U.S.S.* 37(1): 223–239.
- Steinbeck, John  
1960 "A Primer on the '30s." *Esquire* June : 85–93.
- Turner, Terence  
1968 "Parsons' Concept of 'Generalized Media of Social Interaction' and its Relevance for Social Anthropology." *Sociological Inquiry* 38(Spring): 121–134.  
1989 "A Commentary on T. Beidelman's Agnostic Exchange: Homeric Reciprocity and the Heritage of Simmel and Mauss." *Cultural Anthropology* 4(3): 260–264.
- Valeri, Valerio  
1992 "Relativisme Culturel." In Pierre Bonte and Michel Izard (eds), *Dictionnaire d'Ethnologie et Anthropologie*. Paris: PUF, pp. 618–619.  
1994 Review of *Inalienable Possessions: The Paradox of Keeping-While-Giving*, by Annette Weiner. *American Anthropologist* 96(2): 446–448.
- Venkatesan, Soumhya  
2011 "The Social Life of a 'Free' Gift." *American Ethnologist* 38(1): 47–57.
- Weiner, Annette  
1992 *Inalienable Possessions: The Paradox of Keeping-While-Giving*. Berkeley: University of California Press.