

Nuno Ramos

A thousand gifts (an introduction)



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"A thousand gifts (an introduction)" shall be read by two 2 persons facing each other in front of a small table, sideways to the public. In the middle of them, facing the public, a trumpapist, with his/her instrument and a glass of water in front of him/her. After the Introduction is read, he/she will put a sew-thimble on the middle finger and tap it against the table on a one second interval for the rest of the performance. With one exception: he/she will play the Minute-of-silence-tune on Gift 51. After this, he/she will put the thimble on the finger again, resuming the tapping. The two readers will have, in front of them, the Gifts printed on loose-leafs paper and a glass of water. The Introduction will be read by both readers at the same time. The projection of the Gifts, on a screen behind the readers, will follow the reading. The "X" will be read as "FOR", in the sense of "this FOR that". The little red signs, the size of the letters and the intervals between them, are indications of rythm and volume of the voice (four different levels).

A thousand gifts
(an introduction)

A thousand gifts (an introduction)

Nuno Ramos



This is only an introduction.

, for the power of what is suggested seems greater than what has been effectively scrutinized and developed,

Reciprocal indebtedness, at the same time voluntary and compulsory, replacing the war of all against all and the utilitarian notion of profit

Rubin 1975; Weiner 1976; Strathern 1988;

This collaboration between Peter W. Schulze, a scholar in arts, literary and media studies with special emphasis on Brazilian culture at UzK, and Nuno Ramos, a brasilian artist and writer, responds to

Facing a “Great Acceleration” driven by neoliberal economy,

The Rules of the Game:

Summary. Proposal. Published books.

, shrouded in the mystery of its ambivalence and almost infinite suggestiveness,

The key word is

The interdisciplinary activities would be modulated by some general properties of the Gift, such as

- a) Asymmetry
- b) Uselessness
- c)
- d) Voluntariness/obligation—the operation is “obligatorily free”, so you can’t
- e) The relationship is open and, at the limit, endless
- f)
- g)
- h) The “power of loss”.
- i) The “power of loss”

To realize this project in April and May 2023, in Köln, we will launch

Only words are exchanged in this Introduction. Is that:

- a) enough?
- b) stupid?
- c) naive?

Bibliography –

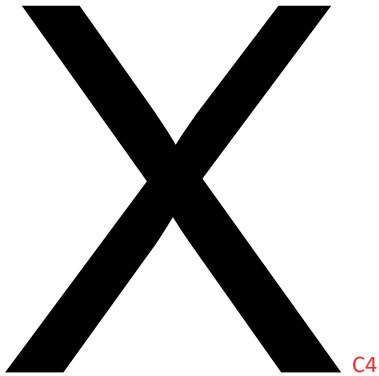
The X in the following Gifts means “FOR”, like in “this FOR that”. So, when we say FOR we mean that the two fragments above and beneath the “X” should be understood as concretely as possible, and put into an exchange-situation: this for that.

As everybody knows, singing would be much better, instead of reading.

This is only an introduction.

Gift 1 ^{B3}

minimal pain or brief discomfort, ^{B5}



A few weeks later, while engaged in a hunting expedition, Staden was captured by a party belonging to the Tupinambá people of Brazil, an enemy group of the Tupiniquim people and their Portuguese allies. As Staden was part of a Portuguese crew, he was perceived of as an enemy of the Tupinambá, and they carried him to their village, where he was to be devoured at the next festivity. ^{A10}

Gift 3 A3

The lecture I must deliver in response to your request will necessarily disappoint you in different ways. B2

X C2

polio, smallpox,
diphtheria, cholera
and measles C8

gift 4 D3

They may be our victims, but they are not our slaves. B7

X D2

complete absence of sound. A6

Gift 7 B2

Whether mammals
feel pain like we do
is unknown, says C3

X A4

Superheated gases such as ammonia, hydrogen sulfide and methane, curl in an atmosphere zapped everywhere and at every moment by lightning. The very oceans hang unfallen, unrained – a sphere of steam eclipsing any semblance of sun. Beneath these vapors, thick with formaldehyde and cyanide, the boiling crust of the surface pullulates with radioactivity and heat. A10

Gift 9 B2

**“Politics as a vocation” (in
German, “Politik als Beruf”), by
German Economist and Sociologist B4**

X C3

You can taxidermy your pet, especially
if you’re having a hard time saying
goodbye. B12

Every science has principles, from which it derives its system. One of the principles of political economy is free labor. Now, in Brazil, the impolitic and abominable fact of slavery dominates. This argument, summarized in a liberal pamphlet of the XIXth century, puts Brazil outside the system of science. We were rather a moral, impolitic and abominable fact. B3

X A1

If the gift received, or exchanged, obligates, it is because the thing received is not inert. Even abandoned by the giver, it retains something of him. Through it, he has a strong power over the beneficiary, and even over an eventual thief. B7

Gift 11 D3

AS YOU BEND WITH THE RIGID BLADE
OF YOUR SCALPEL OVER THE UNKNOWN
CORPSE, REMEMBER THAT THIS BODY WAS
BORN OF THE LOVE OF TWO SOULS. B3

X C1

bad english, as
mine. C6

removes toxins from the body's blood supply, maintains healthy blood sugar levels, regulates blood clotting, and performs hundreds of other vital functions. It is located beneath the rib cage, where B1

X C6

- Adam Smith (1723 – 1790)
- Alfred Marshall (1842 – 1924)
- Millicent Fawcett (1847 – 1929)
- John Maynard Keynes (1883 – 1946)
- Milton Friedman (1912 – 2006)
- Paul Samuelson (1915 – 2009)
- Elinor Ostrom (1933 – 2012)
- Joseph Stiglitz (1943 –)
- Esther Duflo (1972 –) A5

gift 13 A2

Yes, your pet can feel depressed. B5

X C2

The corpse is that of the criminal Aris Kindt (alias of Adriaan Adriaanszoon), who was convicted for armed robbery and sentenced to death by hanging. He was executed earlier on the same day of the scene. The face of the corpse is partially shaded, a suggestion of *umbra mortis* (shadow of death), a technique that Rembrandt was to use frequently. B5

Gift 15 B4

Because the human body is composed mostly of water and its only highly flammable properties are fat tissue and methane gas, spontaneous human combustion is highly improbable. B3

X B5

Acts of Speech,
Austin. D7

Gift 17 B1

Clever Hans (German: der Kluge Hans; c. 1895 – c. 1916) was a horse that was claimed to have performed arithmetic and other intellectual tasks. Hans solved calculations by tapping numbers or letters with his hoof in order to answer questions. B5

X

C2

Antonio

Gramsci C9

Gift 20 C1

8-5-2023 D4

X C1

the wood remains wooden when it is made into a table: it is then “an ordinary, sensuous thing”. It is quite different when it becomes a commodity, when the curtain goes up on the market and the table plays the actor and character at the same time, when commodity-table, says Marx, comes on stage, begins to walk around and to put itself forward as a market value. *Coup de théâtre* – the ordinary, sensuous thing is transfigured, it becomes someone, it assumes a figure. This woody and headstrong denseness is metamorphosed into a supernatural thing. The commodity thus haunts the thing, its specter is at work in use-value. This haunting displaces itself like an anonymous silhouette or the figure of an extra (*figurante*) who might be the principal or capital character. A8

Gift 21 B3

Pythagoras prevented a person from continuing to beat a dog because he had recognized the voice of a friend in his howls of pain. B1

X A2

each of a pair of organs
in the abdominal
cavity of mammals,
excreting urine. C3

Gift 23 B1

Therefore, it is only the amount of socially necessary labor or socially necessary labor time for the production of a use value that determines the magnitude of its value. C1

X A1

Fire is geologically a recent phenomenon – it wasn't until the colonization of the continents by tall-stemmed, tough bodied plants, some 400 million years ago, that the fire assemblage, with all it's possibilities, came together. B5

Gift 24 ^{B1}

Around the year 1.000, Cardinal Pietro Damiani insisted that birds bloom from fruits, and ducks emerge from seashells. English scholar Alexander Neckam specified that fir trees, exposed to sea salt, give rise to geese. The Flemish alchemist physician Jan Baptiste van Helmont (1580 – 1644) shared his recipe for making mice from dirty underwear. ^{B1}

X ^{A5}

(in living organisms and cells) the
process of eliminating waste matter. ^{B6}

Gift 25 A2

I use the words you taught me. If they don't mean anything anymore, teach me others. Or let me be silent. B2

X B3

Dimethoxymethamphetamine.

Dimethyltryptamine.

Ditran (piperidyl benzilate).

Lysergic acid diethylmide-25 (LSD).

Mescaline.

Methylenedioxyamphetamine (MDA).

Peyote.

Phencyclidine (PCP).

Psilocin.

Psilocybin. B5

Gift 26 C3

People who took part in the work of burning the corpses say that this grill pits were like giant volcanoes. The heat seared the worker's faces. Flames erupted eight or ten feet into the air. Pillars of thick greasy smoke reached up into the sky and stood there, heavy and motionless. At night, people from villages thirty or forty kilometers away could see this flames curling above the pine forest that surrounded the camp. B1

X B2

Everything we get, outside of the free gifts of nature, must in some way be paid for. A7

Gift 28 B6

and our fire destroys what it burns; therefore, the more intense it is, the shorter it is; but that fire with which the damned shall forever be tormented shall burn without ever consuming and is, therefore, compared unto salt, for “everything will be salted with fire”. Torturing them with inconceivable heat in nature of fire will also hinder them from being corrupted. A3

X A2

Rhino horns, which are made of keratin, like your fingernails, have long been used in traditional Chinese medicine but in recent years have become even more sought-after as a high-end party “drug”; at clubs in southeast Asia, powdered horn is snorted like cocaine. A10

Gift 29 B2

Cézanne used
to ask his wife to
“pose like an
apple”. C4

X C4

the delicious but diseased liver of an
animal who has suffered enormously. B4

The interval between death and return is usually six to seven days, according to Roshi Ysutani. Plato's Republic speaks of an interval of a millennium.

Bhagavad-Gita of an immensity of years. Madame Blavatsky estimates the interval between incarnations at between one thousand and one thousand five hundred years. Joan Grant, the English psychologist who was an Egyptian princess in her last incarnation, suggests five thousand years as the interval between her two incarnations. B1

X B1

Walt Disney films did not invent the Lemmings Death March Myth – but they did propagate it. Allegedly, the crew of “White Wilderness” (released in 1958) built devices to herd and hurtle the creatures off a cliff. They staged it as they were unable to observe and record the supposed phenomenon in nature. B2

Gift 31^{C1}

For at least 150 years, storm names were fraught with personal preferences and vendettas. Although there was plenty of precedent for naming storms after both women and men, the U.S. decided in the early 1950s to settle on a system that only used female names. It's not entirely clear why, but the maritime tradition of referring to the ocean as a woman may have played a factor. Once these storms took on female names, weathermen began to use clichés to describe their behavior—saying that this one was “temperamental,” or that another was “teasing” or “flirting” with a coastline. ^{A1}

X^{B2}

“I adopted the doctrine of reincarnation when I was twenty-six years old. My religion offered nothing that suited me. Even my work did not give me any more complete satisfaction. Work is futile if it cannot utilize the experience we collect in this life in another life. When I discovered reincarnation... time was no longer limited. I was no longer a slave in the hands of the clock. I would like to show others the calmness that this comprehensive view of life brings.” (Henry Ford). ^{B6}

Gift 32 A3

An essay on Gift, D7

X

B1
polio, smallpox, diphtheria, cholera and measles A7

Gift 33 B2

Ne me
quitte pas D2

X B5

when we no longer feel pain, then we
are at the very limit: this is no longer our
body, but the world outside us. B5

Gift 34 D1

As an engine of infinite expansion and accumulation, capitalism cannot, by definition, move forward in a finite world. B5

X C2

According to studies, Schumann's symptoms during his terminal illness and death appear consistent with those of mercury poisoning; mercury was a common treatment for syphilis and other conditions. Another possibility is that his neurological problems were a result of an intracranial mass. A report by Janisch and Nauhaus on Schumann's autopsy indicates that he had a "gelatinous" tumor at the base of the brain; it may have represented a colloid cyst, a craniopharyngioma, a chordoma, or a chordoid meningioma. In particular, meningiomas are known to produce musical auditory hallucinations such as Schumann reported. It has also been hypothesized that he had schizophrenia, or schizoaffective disorder; bipolar type, or bipolar disorder and bipolar-2 disorder. A4

Gift 35 ^{B1}

an enlarged and rigid state of the
penis, ^{B6}



^{D5}

Examples of White Noise ^{A3}

gift 37 C4

It is closely related to another characteristic of classical logic, in which any truth can be replaced by any other truth as long as it preserves properties of implication (syllogisms). B9

X A3

solar anus, C7

gift 38 A1

The following chapter is about killing in war from an *a priori*, moral perspective (and not a legal, *a posteriori* one). B3

X

D9

“Asa branca” (by Luis Gonzaga) B6

Gift 40

B1

Fontenelle, when he visited Malebranche, would have cried out in compassion as he witnessed the priest-philosopher kick the pregnant bitch in the womb as she sought the comfort of his feet. Malebranche, then, would have replied coldly: “What, don’t you know that this is a machine and therefore it feels nothing?”

B1

X A3

	Number of detainees
China	1,690,000
United States	1,675,400
Brazil	835,643
India	554,034

B6

Gift 41 A2

fire unravels what photosynthesis has brought together A2

X

C12

cold panic A6

One day, on a walk, she saw a cat giving birth in a culvert. Prevented from fleeing by being in the midst of labor, the cat snarled. “A poor creature, having her children in a damp, filthy place, and yet ready to lay down her life to defend them.” She then explains that she felt herself, at that moment, deeply questioned: “I’m also a mother.” So, she decided, at once and without any rationalization, that “in the matter of cats”, she would turn her back on her own tribe, the hunters, and side with the tribe of the hunted. B1

X B3

The old woman was bareheaded, as usual. Her light, gray, sparse hair, abundantly oiled, formed a small braid, held back from the neck by a fragment of comb. As she was short, the blow hit her in the temples. B5

Gift 43 B2

Rotpeter B2

X

D3

– for, as Voltaire used to say, to be born twice is no more surprising than to be born once. A6

Gift 45 B2

, the long and slow Column arrived on a Sunday morning, declaring King Victor Emmanuel deposed. Then, it performed the anarchist ritual of setting fire to the archives containing the property, debt, and tax records of the whole city's population. B4

X

B1
I think it is possible that in the world there is evil and that there are some people who are evil. I think of some of the monsters of history who perpetrated the most evil deeds. But maybe God whispered in the monster's ears and said "Do this for me and do not question, because you cannot see the whole of my plan." Maybe. A6

Gift 46 C1

The temporary donor
of the uterus cannot
be the donor of the
eggs or embryos. C2

X

B1
Bourgeois subjects, national subjects,
postmodern subjects, postcolonial subjects,
African subjects, neocolonial Global South
subjects, cracked subjects of the Modern
State, cartesian selves, calvinist selves,
melanesian subjects, neoliberal selves,
selfish subaltern selves, globalized selves,
hybridized selves, late socialist selves,
orgasmic selves, mourning selves,
post-traumatic selves, judicialized selves,
narcissistic selves, etceterized subjects. B4

Gift 47 A1

The OncoRat Tm is my brother, and better said, male or female, he/she is my sister. Although its promise is decidedly secular, it is a figure in the sense developed within Christian realism; he/she is our scapegoat; he/she carries our suffering; he/she signifies and represents our mortality in a powerful, historically specific way that promises a culturally privileged kin of secular salvation – a “cure for cancer”. Whether or not I agree with its use, it suffers, repeatedly and deeply, so that I and my sisters can live. In the experimental way of life, the Oncorat TM is the experiment. If not in my own body, then certainly in the bodies of my friends, I will one day owe a great debt to Oncorat TM or its subsequently engineered rodent relatives. B1

X A1

Gregory Bateson C4

Gift 48 B2

what is surprising is the tension between the petrification of the bones, their strange coldness, and, on the other hand, their persistent desire to make sense, to signify something, leaving behind, for the ones that are still alive, some clues. B4

X C3

the monarch postponed the execution of his wife from day to day, and ended by renouncing his sanguinary resolution altogether. A7

Gift 49 B2

Vernadsky contrasted gravity, which pulls matter vertically toward the center of Earth, with life – always growing, running, swimming, and flying. Life, challenging gravity, moves matter horizontally across the surface of the planet. B5

X

D2

“Let’s Do It, Let’s Fall in Love”

“Night and Day”

“It’s De-Lovely”

“Begin the Beguine”

“Just One of Those Things”

“I Get a Kick Out of You”

“You’re the Top”

I’ve Got You Under My Skin”

“I Happen to Like New York”

“Love for Sale” A9

Gift 50 B12

X A5

Minute of silence tap, trumpet A10

Gift 52

B2

In “invasion of the body snatchers”, by Don Siegl (1956), plant spores have fallen from space and grown into large seed pods, each one capable of producing a visually identical copy of a human. As each pod reaches full development, it assimilates the physical traits, memories, and personalities of each sleeping person placed near it until only the replacement is left; these replicas, however, are devoid of all human emotion. B1

X B1

Translated with
www.DeepL.com/
Translator (free
version). C5

Gift 59 ^{A6}

Why don't we do it in the road? ^{B2}

X ^{B1}
**, strictly economic or material interests
are secondary to the interests of glory
or fame. ^{B5}**

Gift 60 A1

The other Experiment (which I am unlikely to do again, for it seemed cruel to me) was with a dog, which, by means of a pair of bellows with which I filled its lungs, opening its thorax and cutting out all the ribs, I was able to preserve alive for as long as I wished. My desire was to make some investigations into the nature of breathing, but I confess that I am unlikely to make any further attempts of this kind, because of the creature's torture. Certainly, however, the investigation would be noble if we could find a way to stupefy the creature by sedating it, so that it would not be sensitive. B3

X

C5

I miss you so tremendously. A4

Gift 63 B2

The fact that we were born is a bad omen
for immortality B2

X C4

madam, I'm adam
(a very well known
palyndrome), C6

Gift 64 A1

I have never been a quitter. To leave office before my term is completed is abhorrent to every instinct in my body. But as President, I must put the interest of the Nation first. This Nation needs a full-time President and a full-time Congress in a period when our entire focus should be on the great issues of peace abroad and prosperity without inflation at home. Therefore, I shall resign the Presidency effective at noon tomorrow. Vice President Ford will be sworn in as President at that hour in this office. As I recall the high hopes for America B1

X A1

Rats have a Harderian gland behind their eyes which secretes, during times of stress, a substance called porphyrin. B5

Gift 65_{D4}

naked flesh, naked
boulder, naked tree,
naked you, naked me,
naked something_{C1}

X_{C3}

It will be necessary not to impose the
work, but, on the opposite, to forbid it.
The Rothschild will be allowed to
prove that they have been perfect
vagabonds all their lives._{B4}

Gift 67 C2

The windowless pools where the "Poouli" cells are kept alive – sort of – is called The Frozen Zoo. The name is trademarked, and if other institutions try to use it, they are advised they are breaking the law. The room holds half a dozen tanks and, stored inside them, in frigid clouds of nitrogen, are cell lines representing nearly a thousand species. B2

X A7

he judges not as the judge judges, but as the sun falling round a helpless thing B6

Gift 68 A3

Search for: **Why does Colonel Kurtz say the horror?**

What did Conrad mean with **the horror?** A3

X A9

He cut his hair, shaved, took a shower. Then he looked in the mirror and said 'look how beautiful your son is, mom.' Then he put on the Adidas outfit he loved and told me he was going to a dance party nearby, with some friends. I said 'okay, go with God' – and I never saw my son again. B6

Gift 69 A2

and then we saw the girl; she cried out bitterly, with a sound like the piercing note of a bird when she sees her empty nest robbed of her young; just so did she cry out, weeping, when she saw the corpse of her brother laid bare and called down curses on those who had done the deed. At once she brought in her hands thirsty dust, and from the well-wrought brazen urn that she was carrying she poured over the corpse a threefold libation. A4



D3

me C6

Gift 77 A1

Listen – he repeated slowly, almost in a whisper – I don't know how the *barchina* works, I don't know how the work in the field runs, or what a poor mujik and a rich mujik mean; I don't know what a quarter of oats or rye means, I don't know how much it costs, I don't know what is harvested and sown in which month, or how and when it is sold; I don't know if I'm rich or poor, nor do I know if in a year's time I'll have a full belly or be a beggar. I don't know anything! – concluded Oblómov dejectedly, loosening the lapels of his uniform and walking away from Ivan Matviéievitch. – So, talk to me and advise me like a child. B1

X B1

Ni foi, ni roi, ni loi, C

Countergifts

Gift 1 ⁸³

minimal pain or brief discomfort, ⁸⁵

X ⁸⁴

A few weeks later, while engaged in a hunting expedition, Staden was captured by a party belonging to the Tupinambá people of Brazil, an enemy group of the Tupiniquin people and their Portuguese allies. As Staden was part of a Portuguese crew, he was perceived of as an enemy of the Tupinambá, and they carried him to their village, where he was to be devoured at the next festivity. ⁸¹⁰

Peter W. Schulze
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Gift 3 az

The lecture I must deliver in response to your request will necessarily disappoint you in different ways. az

X az

**polio, smallpox,
diphtheria, cholera
and measles** az

You can only have polio, smallpox, diphtheria or measles if someone has given them to you. Cholera can persist in the environment, but the other four are a personalized gift. These infections cause what they are, conjuring up images of a snake biting its own tail. But this is very much the wrong image. What we are watching, when we count the cases, is the opposite of a loop closing: a feedback loop instead, more leading to more, and then collapsing under this logic.

My passion for the esoteric implications of this mathematical coupling, the looping cycles, their frequencies and how a surge of births, of a transformation of the weather may derail and then rerail them provides a disappointing lecture to students whose interest is in the meatier side of fate: who suffers, who dies, how can we prevent it. Weber was called the anti-magician. I think perhaps I sometimes do the opposite: I am peddling magic when the student's interest is in pain.

gilt 13 A2

Yes, your pet can feel depressed. B5

X C2

The corpse is that of the criminal Aris Kindt (alias of Adriaan Adriaanszoon), who was convicted for armed robbery and sentenced to death by hanging. He was executed earlier on the same day of the scene. The face of the corpse is partially shaded, a suggestion of *umbra mortis* (shadow of death), a technique that Rembrandt was to use frequently. B5

Benjamin Mey

Writer

Anja Lemke

Director of the Erich Auerbach-Institute for Advanced Studies

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Is it possible to be attentive without paying attention? To think of attention as a gift, of attentiveness as “natural prayer of the soul”, as Celan quotes from Benjamin, who claims to have found it in Malebranche – a whole chain of gifts.

The participants in the Anatomy Lesson of Mr. Tulp would probably have missed your pet’s depression, because there is no script. No script will ever lead to an attentive recognition of the dead body of Aris Kindt – looks are sliding over the corps and only the disturbingly false anatomy of the dead hand evokes an echo of the body and the soul, it ones belonged to.

X

Your dog and I share the same diagnosis

Would break my Lexapro in half but

Got lost between floorboards, sorry!!!

Have found joy in a box

I never unpacked

Will you help me carry?

There’s no need to

Look at my shadow in the dark

Hope seems to always be on its way.

Gift 17 ⁸¹

Clever Hans (German: der Kluge Hans; c. 1895 – c. 1916) was a horse that was claimed to have performed arithmetic and other intellectual tasks. Hans solved calculations by tapping numbers or letters with his hoof in order to answer questions. ⁸⁵

X ⁸²

Antonio
Gramsci ⁸³

Antonio Gramsci: a gift of gifts.

Antonio Gramsci is a special gift, with many smaller gifts nested inside it, like Russian dolls in a Russian doll. Directly inside Antonio Gramsci you will find the state, shapeless, ghostly and vast, the stuff of soul material (how it fits into Antonio Gramsci is a mystery, but such is the dark magic of the gift). Inside the state is civil society, made of wantings and words, woven together sticky, like a massive piece of baklava the shape of a Moebius strip. Inside civil society is the state again, a dense echo of the first, also of soul material, but shrill and striving like a spear. Inside this second state is a prison cell. Inside the cell – and this is one of my favorite special surprises in this gift – is Antonio Gramsci, again. This one is just like the first, just as alive, only much smaller, his features blurry to the near-sighted eye, his own close-set eyes blending onto the horizontal 8 of infinity (perhaps because he is unwell?). Inside the second Antonio Gramsci is the intellect, and inside the intellect, pessimism of the intellect, like a sheet of linoleum, a tabula rasa with heel scuffs darting along it this way and that. Inside pessimism of the intellect is the will, as small as the distal phalanx of a little finger, smooth and slippery, wiggly like one-hundredth of a baby just out of the womb. With the will, the opening of the gifts stops. But if you shake it close to your ear (carefully, or it will slip out and vanish in the thickening dust), you will hear a little rattling sound, like a grain of rice inside an almond shell. This is the gift's holy of holies, the axis mundi: optimism of the will. You cannot see it, but I assure you it is there.

Gift 24 ⁸¹

Around the year 1.000, Cardinal Pietro Damiani insisted that birds bloom from fruits, and ducks emerge from seashells. English scholar Alexander Neckam specified that fir trees, exposed to sea salt, give rise to geese. The Flemish alchemist physician Jan Baptiste van Helmont (1580-1644) shared his recipe for making mice from dirty underwear. ⁸¹

x ⁸⁵

(in living organisms and cells) the
process of eliminating waste matter. ⁸⁶

Give me an eel, I'll tell you a story. Like how the sun-warmed Nile gave eels to ancient Egypt. Or how muddied rainwater made eels for Aristotle. An eel rubbed itself on a rock to give more eels to Pliny the Elder. Sigmund Freud longed to receive. He sliced them open to find their reproductive organs, but never found his gift.

Like the eels at The Last Supper, like the eels medieval monks gave to the crown for taxes, like the eels Squanto gave to white men, like the eel skin Samuel Pepys used to whip his son. Like the eels stuffed with the eggs of other fish that seamen brought to Italian biologists, who were so desperate to learn how these gifts came into being that they offered rewards for living clues.

When we consume the stories, nothing is eliminated. "If you are of the opinion that the eel should be allowed to remain an eel," wrote James Prosek, "it follows that you have to allow it to remain a mystery."

Gift 24 ⁸¹

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X ⁸⁵

(in living organisms and cells) the
process of eliminating waste matter. ⁸⁶

A properly materialist view of the world will find no difficulty in seeing excretion and generation as similar if not identical processes. It has been well known since antiquity, since Samson's riddle and the georgics of Vergil, that bees are born from the decaying matter of oxen or lions, and it has been known since Moses that we ourselves are born of the fertile, putrescent slime of the earth. At the moment we start to decay, we are not only reduced to fundamentals, but brought into contact with our own becoming, made motion and unsteadiness, and can it be a surprise that in such a state new forms, even new living forms, are brought into existence? But this occurs not only in death: it occurs daily, inside our bodies, as we eat, digest, cohobate, assimilate, secrete, excrete. Waste is always relative: what we cast out, another absorbs. Nothing is annihilated, only eliminated, thrust out of doors, made someone else's problem, or benefit. This is just chemistry, or as it used to be called, alchemy, a constant rearrangement. No wonder that mediaeval intellectuals believed in geese that grew as 'excrescences on fir-logs', hanging 'by their beaks from what seems like seaweed clinging to the log, while their bodies, to allow for their more unimpeded development, are enclosed in shells'. And no wonder that, as the alchemist Van Helmont informs us, 'lice, bedbugs, fleas and helminths, come into being as the guests and neighbours of our wretchedness, and are born from our inmost parts and our excrement' (**Ortus Medicinae**, Amsterdam 1648, p. 113, col. 1). He only needed a pot full of wheat, a dirty **indusium** and twenty-one days to produce adult mice of distinct sexes. It was just the

same, he said, as when lice are generated in the pores of human skin and cause phthiriasis or pediculosis, the infestation of the pubes or eyelashes. Many readers have circled this passage, excited by the possibility of making mice. Georgius Hornius, in his commentary on the sacred historian Sulpicius Severus (Amsterdam, 1665, p. 148), read Van Helmont's experiment as evidence that mice were generated by an excess of salt, and postulated that they naturally appeared in dry areas of the earth like Palestine, where they seemed to be abundant. There were, of course, sceptics, such as the Italian lawyer Giacinto Gimma, who discounted the whole matter as nonsense in his treatise on fabulous animals (**Dissertationes academicae**, Naples 1714, vol 1, p. 263). But we can ignore them. What has been rarely noted by Van Helmont's readers is that the **indusium** is not just an undergarment, but a **woman's** undergarment. One can only speculate that the venerable scientist would have managed to create something more salubrious from the virile sweat of, say, a pair of boxers, or a jockstrap. But one must not suggest, under any circumstances, that any of the copious pages discussing the question was itself 'waste matter', even if, under the direst conditions of need, really **in a bind**, one might be tempted to use such a page for the purpose of—

Gift 25 ^{a2}

I use the words you taught me. If they don't
mean anything anymore, teach me others.
Or let me be silent. ^{a2}

X ^{a3}

Dimethoxymethamphetamine.
Dimethyltryptamine.
Ditran (piperidyl benzilate).
Lysergic acid diethylamide-25 (LSD).
Mescaline.
Methylenedioxymphetamine (MDA).
Peyote.
Phencyclidine (PCP).
Psilocin.
Psilocybin. ^{a5}

In these Gifts, everything can be exchanged for everything. Dissociated elements come together. There is something of Surrealism here, of automatic writing. But if everything can be exchanged for everything, a strong comprehension of capitalism itself also seems to be at play. And money, which possesses maximum exchangeability, would be the economic counterpart of automatic writing.

But what if money and things get into a situation of loss of exchangeability? Then we would have an economic crisis. Perhaps it is not unreasonable to say that Surrealism, by its excess of propositions and things, and the unusual ways of putting them together, anticipated a critique of the world monetary crisis of 1929, due to the scarcity of money.

In this Gift 25, a fragment of Beckett's **Endgame** is exchanged for a list of psychotropic drugs. The nonsense between the terms makes a common currency difficult, but nothing prevents associating what is similar in such striking dissimilarities, preserving the uniqueness of each term of the exchange.

It is no longer the exchange value that would base the operation, here, but the use value: that which one thing is, in relation to others, without passing through a general equivalent.

It is possible to imagine, then, that Beckett's fragment is given to Wittgensteinians, who will readily find affinities in it, in words and expressions like "use the words", "mean", "be silent".

In possession of Beckett's text, Wittgensteinians would soon make a list of psychotropics. Making a list of words to think about something is a lesson from Wittgenstein for thinking about a concept. If it is psychotropics that are being used in cures for various illnesses, one can generalize this list to the notion of things that cure and, after all, to the cure itself.

Thinking about cure one is led, in a Wittgensteinian context, to the conception of philosophy as therapy, which is at the heart of his thought: to cure philosophy of its excesses, of what cannot be said. For Wittgenstein, only empirical propositions can be said. Even logic and mathematics are pseudo-propositions – tautologies. Beyond empirical propositions, nothing can be said with precision, much less about aesthetic, ethical or religious subjects. In the end, let it be noted that, for these Wittgensteinians, when faced with ethical, aesthetic, or religious themes, a perfect answer would be "let me be silent".

With this, one exchanges Beckett for Wittgenstein, and then Wittgenstein for Beckett again. This is somewhat like the near circularity of some gift-giving practices. The two remained what they are, although one borrowed aspects of the other through a chain of metonyms and metaphors. A mixture, I admit, somewhat chaotic, of Fraser with Mauss, of Malinowski with Benveniste.

Anything goes to find the non-currencies hidden in these Gifts, each very rewarding in this kind of a poetic gnosis of the contemporary age. Or a Critique of Political Economy, which states: don't forget anything Marx said, but make the most nonsensical exchanges to discover, if you are lucky, what things are.

Gift 26 ^{c3}

People who took part in the work of burning the corpses say that this grill pits were like giant volcanoes. The heat seared the worker's faces. Flames erupted eight or ten feet into the air. Pillars of thick greasy smoke reached up into the sky and stood there, heavy and motionless. At night, people from villages thirty or forty kilometers away could see this flames curling above the pine forest that surrounded the camp. ⁸⁵

x ⁸³

Everything we get, outside of the free gifts of nature, must in some way be paid for. ⁸¹⁹

Daniel Schönflug
Professor of History at the Free University of Berlin
Head of Academic Programs at the Wissenschaftskolleg zu Berlin

Our first steps on the newfound, virgin lands are timid and uncertain. What if it turns out to be neither newfound, nor virgin? In fact, it never is. So frippery, rosaries and bold gestures are necessary to make them tolerate the tall wooden cross on the beach. In exchange they give fresh fruit, meat, and feathers, which they hand over with their eyes turned to the ground. Close enough they stand for us to perceive the beguiling scent of the women, that shall be tried in exchange for brandy. Close enough also for the very first germs to jump over and begin their journey through their unprepared bodies. Later, they will receive knives, spoons and pots, and even later rifles, all these as signposts to our superior ways. Our ultimate gift to them is eternal life.

Gift 29 52

Cézanne used
to ask his wife to
“pose like an
apple”. 64

X 64

the delicious but diseased liver of an
animal who has suffered enormously. 64

Sophie Roux
Professor of History and Philosophy of Science
École Normale Supérieure, Paris

My grandfather was a painter. My grandmother being married to a painter, she sometimes served as his model.

Poor grandmother! She wasn't born an apple and it was impossible for her to become an apple. She was a cheerful creature, always in motion, listening to music, cooking and chatting, riding a bike and smoking a cigarette, laughing, reading and knitting.

In my grandfather's paintings you get the impression that an evil genius bewitched her and that she is going to die of boredom. Do all the apples die of boredom?

Gift 31^{C1}

For at least 150 years, storm names were fraught with personal preferences and vendettas. Although there was plenty of precedent for naming storms after both women and men, the U.S. decided in the early 1950s to settle on a system that only used female names. It's not entirely clear why, but the maritime tradition of referring to the ocean as a woman may have played a factor. Once these storms took on female names, weathermen began to use clichés to describe their behavior—saying that this one was “temperamental,” or that another was “teasing” or “flirting” with a coastline.^{A1}

X^{B2}

“I adopted the doctrine of reincarnation when I was twenty-six years old. My religion offered nothing that suited me. Even my work did not give me any more complete satisfaction. Work is futile if it cannot utilize the experience we collect in this life in another life. When I discovered reincarnation... time was no longer limited. I was no longer a slave in the hands of the clock. I would like to show others the calmness that this comprehensive view of life brings.” (Henry Ford).^{B6}

Written on the wind: your name as a gift

Blow, winds, and crack your cheeks!

(Shakespeare, King Lear III/2)

Winds and weather phenomena have borne names for ages, but what is implied in these names has changed significantly. In Ancient times, it is mostly the regular winds that are named after deities, from the four Greek winds [**anemoi**] Boreas, Euros, Notos, and Zephyros. Wind roses in ancient Rome, in medieval, early modern times become more and more differentiated and comprise up to 32 different winds, like in Jan Janssonius' **Tabula anemographica** from the mid-17th century that tries to summarize known wind names in six different languages and where the winds are represented by blowing male faces with different ages and racial characteristics (fig. 1). These blowing faces, which, in the Hippocratic tradition, also stand for the beneficial or pernicious influence of the climate, surround the earth in many medieval and early modern maps so as to constitute the macrocosmic stage for the microcosmos of human lives. From a cosmographical point of view looking onto the earth from outside, the winds appear as an orderly system, in spite of all the disorder they can produce on earth.

Such an orderly view of the cosmos structured through the wind rose and a long-standing naming tradition disappears with the emergence of modern meteorology since 18th century. Instead of being represented on world maps as straight lines intersecting in the center of the wind rose

and hitting the surface of the earth from a non-place taking its origin in the cloudy skies, winds are now explained by differences in atmospheric pressure within the earth system. They come to be represented on our weather maps together with high and low pressure areas as isolines, roughly flowing parallel to isobars (the higher their density the stronger the winds).

Some time after the traditional wind names have disappeared from the margins of the map together with the wind rose and the puffy cheeks of young boys and bearded old men, a new type of wind names appears within the paradigm of meteorology. Apparently, it was a meteorologist called Clement Wragge, coming from England to Australia, who first had the idea of naming cyclones, i.e. zones of low pressure and the storms that went along with them, towards the end of the 19th century. Wragge seems to have chosen storm names rather capriciously, taking them either from Polynesian woman or from politicians he particularly disliked. Only in 1950, and first in the USA, was adopted the convention of gendering storms as female, following the order of the alphabet, thus, opposing female disaster to male scientific control and symbolic order.

In Germany, since 1954, names are chosen by the “Wetter- und Klimastation Berlin-Dahlem” at FU Berlin (also here, until the year of 1998, all cyclones were named with female names, while anticyclones received male ones; since then, male and female names alternate every year). Since 2002, one can apply for giving his own name to a storm; currently, a cyclone costs 240 Euros and an anticyclone 360 Euros. Anticyclones are more costly, it seems, because they tend to stay longer on the map than cyclones, but the latter might be remembered much longer in case of an extreme weather event. Is godparenting a storm just a way of inscribing one’s own name onto the daily weather map, with the wind being the material carrier of someone’s

expansive personal identity and the will to get his or her fifteen seconds of fame on a TV screen during the weather report? Or is there more in naming a storm than just a symbolic operation of self-promotion: can giving your name to a storm be understood as a gift where you abandon yourself, where you can even survive your own death so that Henry Ford or his wife Clara might have found their wish of reincarnation (or rather reinsufflation) ultimately fulfilled in a storm?

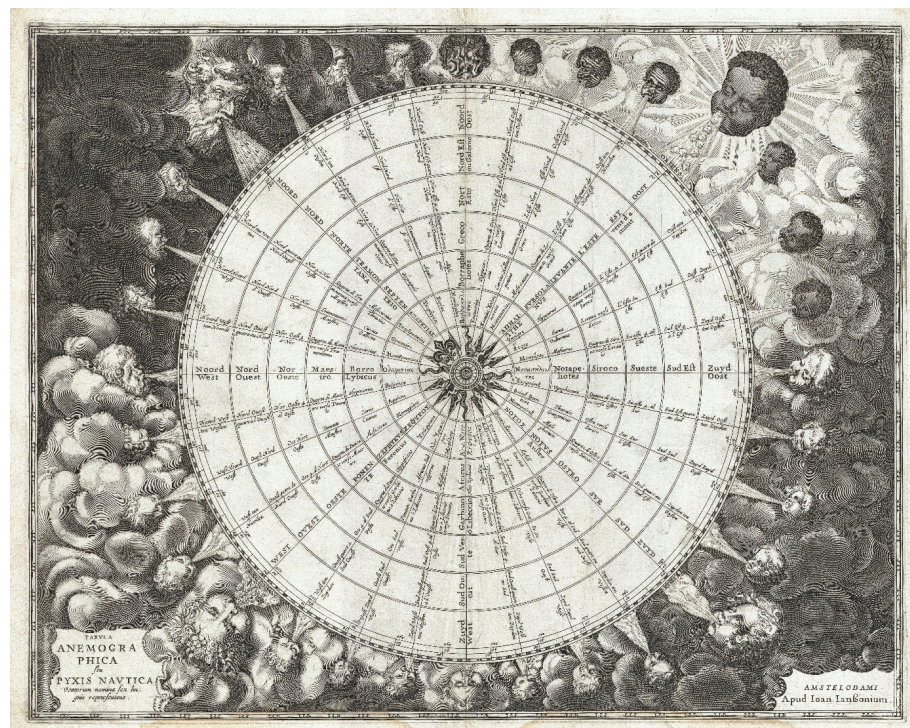


Fig. 1: Jan Janssonius: **Tabula Anemographica seu Pyxis Nautica Ventorum Nomina Sex Linguis Repraesentans** (1650).

Gift 32 ^{A3}

An essay on Gift, ^{D7}

X ^{B1}
polio, smallpox, diphtheria, cholera and measles ^{A7}

For

Thank you very much for you Gift 32. I still wonder what kind of gift it may be that is there for diseases (however gently pronounced). But then it is an “essay” that alludes to Marcel Mauss’ **Essai sur le don**, transforming it into the gift that has just been delivered. – Where? – Here, at **this** very moment. – Where it has already passed by, right? – One reason for the delivery may well be that the capitalized “Gift” is not only to be read as a sizable gift, but has assimilated the German **Gift** (poison) and migrated to me along this linguistic border (without ever clearly leaving it). It would then be a matter of taking the gift as that of the one for the other (which is also that of the language, of the essay, for the body, for the diseases). If we wanted to look for a circle – which Nuno, I shall recall this, warned so forcefully against –, we could see a formalization in the list of diseases: These are all diseases that have (pretty much) lost their terror through the power of vaccination, so that the “essay on Gift” (which, read aloud, looks like a headline in large print) reflects the counter-gift of an immunization: the language (of the essay) as an ineffective **Gift** (poison) that seeks its bodies, the injuries, and slides off at the immunity of the body (that we have formalized): wandering and seeking on the border.

– What would that be then: a gift for all cases (of a body without immunity)?
– It would be a gift of the “for,” because “all cases” just refrains from the individual case, does not mean it also in the plural, but gives preference to “all,” everyone. So, we would move (like in chess) to a field which is a universal field (and which does not exist in chess) and from which all other fields (cases) could be reached. The preference goes ahead and yet remains one step behind. So, in this game (which is not supposed to be

a circle, Nuno says), it needs a gift and a counter-gift. To avoid the possibility of a circle from the outset, I bracket both here, marking them as a quotation and writing something that I will not have said: – Step forward: “Alle Kunst ist der Freude gewidmet.” (“All art is FOR joy.” – Friedrich Schiller) – Step back: “Ich schreibe das Prosastück [...] für die Katz, will sagen, für den Tagesgebrauch. [...] Ich nenne die Mitwelt Katz; für die Nachwelt erlaube ich mir nicht, eine familiäre Bezeichnung zu haben. [...] Alles, was geleistet wird, erhält zuerst sie; sie läßt sich’s schmecken, und nur was trotz ihr fortlebt, weiterwirkt, ist unsterblich. ” (“I write the piece of prose FOR the cat, that is, FOR daily use.” – Robert Walser) – **How can you blend these quotes together? – Perhaps it would be more honest to indent an X of a stately size here. And leave the rest. –**

Both quotations celebrate the “for.” Walser’s sentences, however, remain far from the **celebration** itself, his writing is eaten by the “cat” (**Katz**), so that his words come, as it were, robbed of their body, into an “afterworld” that is no longer familiar: like a quotation that has left the speaker and needs an artificial reference. Schiller’s celebration of joy has long been lost here. Or is the real celebration that of losing, of giving away, in which whoever gives the most (everything) wins (Mauss)? – The “for,” we can well see, in Gift 32 is set very close to “polio, smallpox, diphtheria, cholera and measles”: as if the “heading” were detached from its body (for which it is “meant”), as if the “essay on Gift” were a template that is pushed back and forth on a nameless border until it finds its “for.” – Yet, if I may be permitted a brief interjection: We should read along with the comma, which at the end of “An Essay on Gift,” could be read as a kind of annunciation, but not in the way a headline indicates, but rather as a sentence yet to be completed. – Here it is unfinishable, on the one hand, but perhaps

also, on the other, readable as a **passe-partout**. – Cut out and reinserted: This brings me back to the question of the quotation, especially since the enumeration “polio, smallpox, diphtheria, cholera and measles” is possibly itself a quotation taken over from “Gift 3” (or vice versa), in any case a doubling that can be entered as a further branching into the structure of gift and counter-gift. –

– Thus, we can apply the gift thing also to Madame de Maintenon, mistress of Louis XIV? – Let us read into this new “for” from a letter to Madame Brinon: “Le roi prend tout mon temps; je donne le reste à Saint-Cyr, à qui je voudrais le tout donner.” – How can it be that the king takes all her time (**tout mon temps**) and yet she promises to give the rest to Saint-Cyr, to whom she wanted to give everything (**le tout**)? – We only need to follow Jacques Derrida here, who once underlined the **prend** and the other time the **donne**: the time that the king takes from her cannot devour the time that she gives, although she does not have it. The whole of the time can be neither taken nor given. It can be thought only from a rest that remains here as there, where something becomes a gift. The thought is not mine; it is a gift that remains entirely in desire. I accentuate a few pieces from Derrida’s discourse on giving, and it may be true that I take here – according to the violence of the philological operation of tearing apart and pushing together – the one quotation for the other. Take them, **for**. Derrida talks about Madame de Maintenon’s desire (**désir**) that goes all out, that she and no one else possesses, and that she therefore “ne peut pas faire présent,” that she cannot make present and/or gift. It would also not be her time at all, but her desire, “pour le pouvoir donner.” – So, we have already left? – I have just reached a place: It is the top of the end.

Martin Roussel
Associate Director of the Erich Auerbach Institute for Advanced Studies
University of Cologne

For

Thank you very much for you Gift 32. I still wonder what kind of gift it may be that is there for diseases (however gently pronounced). But then it is an "essay" that alludes to Marcel Mauss' *Essai sur le don*, transforming it into the gift that has just been delivered. – Where? – Here, at **this** very moment. – Where it has already passed by, right? – One reason for the delivery may well be that the capitalized "Gift" is not only to be read as a sizable gift, but has assimilated the German *Gift* (poison) and migrated to me along this linguistic border (without ever clearly leaving it). It would then be a matter of taking the gift as that of the one for the other (which is also that of the language, of the essay, for the body, for the diseases). If we wanted to look for a circle – which Nuno, I shall recall this, warned so forcefully against –, we could see a formalization in the list of diseases: These are all diseases that have (pretty much) lost their terror through the power of vaccination, so that the "essay on Gift" (which, read aloud, looks like a headline in large print) reflects the counter-gift of an immunization: the language (of the essay) as an ineffective *Gift* (poison) that seeks its bodies, the injuries, and slides off at the immunity of the body (that we have formalized): wandering and seeking on the border.

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Gift: “he to whom it comes falls”

A short essay, then, as a countergift to Martin’s deconstructive Gift|gift that he sent to me. An essay, therefore, that is inspired by the wonders of the signifier that are so important to Derrida and to Martin. And by a pun, and by etymology, both of which Derrida and Martin also love. A careful, loving attention to the wor(l)d. And by Nuno’s work, whom I only know through Martin’s stories, and thus in quotation marks.

The essay is about curare, as in the Latin verb, which means “to arrange, see to, attend, to take care of, look after, ensure or tend to”. Like curating an exhibition. Martin Heidegger talked about cura as a “care for the world” [**Sorge um die Welt**], noting that “the double sense of cura” refers to “care for something as concern, absorption in the world, but also care in the sense of devotion”.

Raymond Roussel loved puns. His 1909 novel “Impressions d’Afrique” is a travel novel whose journey goes from one sentence to another, almost identical one. The protagonists, or should one say the, “characters”, as in “letters”, travel from the sentence “Les lettres du blanc sur les bandes du vieux billard” [The white letters on the bands of the old billiard table] to the virtually identical-sounding sentence “Les lettres du blanc sur les bandes du vieux pillard” [the letters of the white guy about the hordes of the old plunderer]. A journey from ›b‹ to ›p‹. Both plosive consonants, but a minimal **différance**.

While curare is the verb to the Latin cura, that’s not how I came to the word. My personal etymology goes back to when I was young. I knew, from

watching TV as a child, that there was a very scary poison that came up in detective and adventure stories. It was instantly lethal, and when native people dunked their arrows in it, bad things were about to happen. Normally used to hunt animals, you could also hunt explorers. Aguirre, perhaps. In his book “Conquest of the Useless: Reflections from the Making of **Fitzcarraldo**” (a project that resonates in many ways with Nuno’s current, equally “useless” plan of drowning a piano in the Rio Negro river and bringing the frozen displaced water – or should one say the repressed water – to Frankfurt. Didn’t Fitzcarraldo make money in the jungle with an ice-making machine?), Werner Herzog mentions that “at the Indians’” request, we bring chain saws, machetes, and shotguns to the Río Cenepa, as well as a large canister of poison for arrow tips. They no longer know how to make it themselves. Vivanco says “they will pay for a spoonful with a gold nugget”. What? They don’t know anymore? That poison, he later notes, was curare (n., /kju:ˈrɑ:ri:/), which is a common name for various arrow poisons originating from South America. The word comes from Portuguese or Spanish **curare**, which in turn was a corruption of the name in the Carib language of the Macusi Indians of Guyana, **wurali** or **wurari**, which had a sort of click sound at the beginning. That click sound got some public relations in pop-culture lately. You try it. Not part of the universe of an English phonetics. That’s for damn sure, Jack Reacher would say. In 1800, Alexander von Humboldt gave the first western account of how the toxin was prepared from plants by Orinoco River natives.

Curare, formerly also **curari**, **curara**, is a resinous plant substance used by South American natives for poisoning their arrows. Should I mention that the German word **kurieren** is also borrowed from the same Latin root as curare, but also sounds like **Kurier**, the courier that gets a message across, as in the person who shoots a poisonous message with an arrow from, lets say, b. to p.? When it is introduced into the blood stream, the effect of curare is almost instantly fatal. The U2 spy-plane pilot Gary Powers, when shot down in 1960 on his flight over the Soviet Union, was wearing a silver-dollar charm that concealed a curare-tipped needle.

But then curare is also a curative poison. 1812 when Charles Waterton realized that if the right dose were used, muscle relaxation, also known as paralysis, without death could be achieved. Curare came to be used in the treatment of lockjaw, infantile paralysis and even epilepsy. In 1844 French physiologist Claude Bernard experimented with frogs and found that curare had the effect of relaxing the muscles to the point of limpness. Curare greatly facilitated abdominal surgery by preventing the muscles from becoming stiff and almost impenetrable. It was introduced into anesthesia in the early 1940s as a muscle relaxant for surgery. Curare is active only by an injection or a direct wound contamination by poisoned dart or arrow. It is harmless if taken orally. Which is a good thing for the Macusi. Because it had to enter the blood stream to kill you, they could still eat the animals they had killed with it. One source notes, with unintended irony, that it plays 'a vital role' in the Conan Doyle's short story "The Adventure of a Sussex Vampire".

Curare then, can be a Gift or a gift. It is both. A digression: In Puritan religion, the elect were people who were gifted, by the grace of God, with salvation. Unlike us, the preterites. In the parameters of our secular world, that means that they were chosen randomly. They got talent. A throw of the dice. Mallarmé. Without rhyme or reason. If you were gifted and successful in this world, that was a sign you were elected, and would enter paradise. Virgins not included, though. Puritans, after all. But it was a question about the afterworld. If there is.

Whether or not, we might take comfort in the fact that death will cure us of all ills. As Vilém Flusser noted, "the organism is an energy that has been contracted into life, which explodes when the cramp, which is the organism, relaxes". And further, "the more rigid the cramp, the stronger the personality". In this spirit, even in life, we might want a healthy dose of muscle relaxant. In the Macusi language, curare means "he to whom it comes falls". As a toxin, curare comes as the gift of death. As a curative, it comes as the gift of life: Unwind. Relax. Take it easy. Loosen up.

Hanjo Berressem
Prof. (em.) of American Literature and Culture
University of Cologne

Gift: "he to whom it comes falls"

A short essay, then, as a countergift to Martin's deconstructive Gift|gift that he sent to me. An essay, therefore, that is inspired by the wonders of the signifier that are so important to Derrida and to Martin. And by a pun, and by etymology, both of which Derrida and Martin also love. A careful, loving attention to the wor(l)d. And by Nuno's work, whom I only know through Martin's stories, and thus in quotation marks.

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Gift 88_{D2}

Agriculture represented a regression. It degraded the diet, which was limited to a few products: of the thousand or so plants known as food sources, agriculture only retained about twenty. _{A2}

X _{A5}

It is unfortunate
for the gods that,
unlike us, they
cannot commit
suicide._D

Post Scriptum: Nuno Ramos's Crisscrossing Art of Gift Exchange

Peter W. Schulze

We have to bend the X.
We have to find the tunnel.
We have to break that scale.ⁱ
Nuno Ramos

In **A thousand gifts (an introduction)**, unlike his other book publications—including prose, poetry, and essays—Nuno Ramos does not (or rather, only marginally) appear as a writer in the conventional sense of the term: as someone who uses letters in order to form words combined according to certain language rules. Instead, he operates rather as a “permutator,” who, in Vilém Flusser’s definition, no longer writes empirically but rearranges existing texts based on conceptual assumptions.ⁱⁱ

The montage of preexisting texts is a structural principle underlying **A thousand gifts (an introduction)**, which immediately reminds one of certain avant-garde aesthetics. Ramos’s juxtaposition of highly diverse, dissimilar text fragments might, for instance, evoke surrealist aesthetics, particularly the procedure of exploiting “the fortuitous encounter upon a non-suitable plane of two mutually distant realities,” as Max Ernst put it referring to Lautreamont’s famous description of a boy as “beautiful as the chance meeting on a dissecting-table of a sewing-machine and an umbrella” in **Les Chants de Maldoror**.ⁱⁱⁱ Nonetheless, Ramos’s approach is fundamentally different. Whereas surrealist montage ultimately results in a fusion—albeit a frictional one—of disparate parts, **A thousand gifts (an introduction)** does not provide any synthesis but instead accentuates textual difference and the persistence of dissimilarity. Even though the excerpts juxtaposed resonate with each other (a point I will come back to), neither a common ground nor equivalence is established between them. This is not to say that the discrete texts are randomly assembled or exchangeable. Quite the opposite, the work is configured not arbitrarily but following a specific concept.

The conceptual configuration of **A thousand gifts (an introduction)** is inspired by Marcel Mauss’s **Essai sur le don**. In this seminal essay, Mauss reflects upon the characteristics and social functions of gift exchange in so-called “archaic societies” and the way in which it affects human relationships in certain non-modern cultures (both contemporary and historical). The essay establishes characteristics of gift exchange which include, inter alia, asymmetry, the uselessness of the objects, constantly switching roles of donor and beneficiary, and the perpetual process of giving and

receiving. It is worth noting that Mauss, particularly in his conclusion, proposes gift exchange as an alternative model to utilitarianism and capitalist market economy, giving the concept a certain utopian touch.^{iv} The simultaneous openness and closure as well as the suggestiveness—not only of the phenomena of gift exchange, but also of its interpretation by Mauss—find a fertile ground in Ramos’s artistic practice.

Mauss’s essay itself was conceived by Ramos as a gift which he transformed into his own **dádivas** (gifts). He had begun artistically exploring the concept of gift exchange back in 2014 at the Iberê Camargo Foundation, the main art museum in Porto Alegre. **Ensaio sobre a dádiva**, the title of his exhibit, literally refers to Mauss’s essay in Portuguese translation. The exhibition consisted of three Gifts, each arranged in a separate white space but visually connected by the ingenious usage of Álvaro Siza’s architectural structure with its interplay of interior and exterior, of closed and open spaces. The installation **Dádiva 1** consisted of a sculpture and a short film on a screen, both depicting in different artistic idioms the exchange of a glass of water for a violoncello. **Dádiva 2** also comprised a sculpture and a video, idiosyncratically representing the exchange of a horse for a Pierrot. **Dádiva 3** represented the exchange of a house for a handful of rice. All three Gifts used elements that were part of the respective films in order to create large sculptural “scales”—for example, **Dádiva 1** (a glass of water for a cello) used a fragment of a boat, which appears in the film, cut up and mounted, in balance, with a glass of water at one end and a cello at the other. In addition, an aluminum or bronze replica was made of each sculpture and placed on the ground, under the suspended “scales.” As every casting is hollow, symbolically opposing liquids (in **Dádiva 1**, for instance, morphine and glucose), connected by two glass tubes, were circulated inside these cast replicas, as if connecting impossible and isolated extremes. Without going into the details of this intriguing, visceral, and highly complex exhibit,^v my short—and admittedly reductive—description might give an idea of how Ramos’s **Ensaio sobre a dádiva** produces exchange beyond equivalence, exploring spatial configurations, symbolic dimensions, material qualities, different media, and more, to reflect upon issues such as value, relation, scale, and conversion in the specific framing of the field of art.

A thousand gifts (an introduction) evolved in a very different setting: within the field of research. More precisely, the annual research focus on “Culture and Economy” at the Erich Auerbach Institute for Advanced Studies, University of Cologne. Ramos was granted a Senior Fellowship at the Auerbach Institute in cooperation with myself as the host. Our goal was to collaborate on a project entitled “Gift, Counter-Gift: An Experimental Dialogue Between the Humanities and the Arts.” In this context, Ramos elaborated a new transversal project that again—but in a very different way—takes up ideas from **Essai sur le don** in order to artistically explore aesthetic, epistemic, and social possibilities of gift exchange. In **A thousand**

gifts (an introduction), the concept of gift exchange is explored in relation to academic discourses and conventions, including the application for the Auerbach Fellowship and the expected output at the institute. The proposal for the project, coauthored by Ramos and myself,^{vi} has been exchanged in this book for a different text type by means of montage, omission, and complement. In Ramos's text—which begins and ends with the sentence **"This is only an introduction."**—elements of the proposal are restructured, thereby transforming its nature: cohesion turns into suggestiveness, precision into "poeticity." A certain scientific utilitarianism manifest in the **form** of the proposal gives way to poetic "uselessness." Poetic in the sense of a genre-specific layout, or **typographic dispositive**,^{vii} i.e., the organization of the text into verse lines and paragraphs as well as blank lines and visual caesuras. In short, the accentuation of rhythmic qualities contrasts with the prosaic ostensible meaning of the original proposal, whose discursive structure is entirely rearranged by means of montage. As a result, a different form of thinking emerges, which implies the **unthinking** of certain academic structures and conventions as manifest in the proposal. A particular economy of knowledge is revealed, for instance, when generic structural elements of applications for research projects such as "summary," "proposal," and "published books" are directly juxtaposed, or when various shorthand references to the intended output implicitly raise questions on the nature and function of publications or papers as currency. If certain forms of scientific discourse are dismembered, they also are transformed aesthetically, thus entering the field of art. Along these lines, the introductory text establishes the "rules of the game" of the following gift exchanges, including a definition of the "X."

The "X" is a fundamental element in **A thousand gifts (an introduction)**. It appears to be **o x da questão**, to use a Portuguese expression which literally means "the x of the question" and translates as "the heart of the matter." On the cover, the "X" materializes as a visual artwork on the threshold of drawing, painting, and graphic art. A paratext on the inside of the front cover, which describes the set-up of a performance based on the book, says "The 'X' will be read as 'FOR,' in the sense of 'this FOR that'." At the outset of the main text, the same affirmation is made, with the difference that instead of "will be read" the text states: "means." In the cross-media configuration of **A thousand gifts (an introduction)**, the "X" thus takes on different qualities: its materiality comes to the fore as well as its visuality, its sound, and its (possible) meaning—after all, the text claims that "X" is a specific signifier, that it must stand **for** something. But despite this alleged semantic restriction, the "X" still is subject to the interference of other meanings suggested by this multiple signifier. Among its various conventional meanings and usages, three in particular seem to resonate with Ramos's concept of gift exchange: "X" is commonly used for a variable or unknown value; it stands for multiplication; on maps and other images it indicates a specific location. Taking into account both the centrality

of the “X” and its multiple dimensions, Ramos’s aesthetic practice in **A thousand gifts (an introduction)** could be referred to as crisscrossing the art of gift exchange. Essential for the project’s perpetual process, crisscrossing implies not only varying reiterations of performative **acts** of giving and receiving, but also a movement back and forth, indicating transversal and cross-media routes of aesthetic production, circulation, and reception as production in the form of counter-gifts.

Visually, the “X” takes on two very different forms, resonating with the fundamental importance of “the way of giving”^{viii} pointed out by Mauss. On the cover, the “X” is bisected by the front and back board, revealing itself only when the reader realigns both parts by opening the exterior of the book—inversing the conventional usage of this media. Even when fully in sight, the “X” still hovers at the verge of recognizability due to the asymmetrical shape of the two diagonal lines—or planes, considering their width—ending in four perpendicular shapes (remotely reminiscent of a serif typeface). In short, the “X” on the cover primarily appears as a visual configuration beyond its **Zeichenhaftigkeit**, i.e., its quality as a sign. What is more, the “X” not only evokes a bifurcation but also seems to branch out beyond the limits of the book, with its outer contours cut off by the frame. In this sense, the very cover evokes the cross-media dimensions characteristic for **A thousand gifts (an introduction)**. In contrast to the cover image with its fragmented irregular shape in close-up, the “X” in the Gifts of the main text appears foremost as a sign bearing the—previously defined—function of exchanging one text for another. Nonetheless, the visual configurations of the Gifts come to the fore due to a particular “typographical dispositive” which evokes concrete poetry and allows for a heightened “perceptibility of the signs”^{ix} of written language. Even though organized by the same structure, each Gift consists of a different typographical arrangement, in which the elements—gift number, first text, “X,” and second text—vary in size and font, including different weight, slope, and width. Not only do the typographical elements vary from the massive to the filigree; the blanks between the four elements also diverge considerably, resulting in a particular visual rhythm of each Gift.

The visual arrangement of the words and blank spaces create pauses, altering the rhythm of reading and thus evoke a different temporality in each Gift. This performative dimension is reinforced by a notation system—codified in four different scales by small red letters and numbers indicating the volume of each textual element and the duration of the pauses between them. In other words, the spatialization of time manifest in the visual configuration, which resembles concrete poetry, is complemented by a temporal regime characteristic of the performing arts. Performances actually are part of **A thousand gifts (an introduction)**. In the first performance, which took place at the Auerbach Institute on May 8, 2023, the Gifts published in this book were projected on a screen and simultaneously

spoken, sung, and musicalized in performative acts of gift exchange. The multimedia arrangement explored media-specific differences and convergences between the text and the particular performance based on it. Both in the joint reading of the introductory text and the alternating recitation of the Gifts by Ramos and myself—accompanied by Emmanuelle de Freitas’s tapping on a table in intervals of a second—the act of mutual verbal gift exchange came to the fore as a form of social interaction determined by various paralinguistic dimensions. In contrast with the precision of the projected text, the performance based on it added more dimensions beyond the indications of volume and duration specified in the notation. The exchange of looks and emotional reactions through tone, facial expressions, and body language introduced ambivalence and variability to the text. These embodied semantics include not only signifying practices such as intonation and accentuation but also a materiality beyond meaning, which manifested itself in “the grain of the voice”^x (which subtly changed throughout the performance due to the vocal strain caused by parts to be recited on the verge of screaming). What is more, imperfections such as mispronunciation or the idiosyncrasies of accented speech—English not being native to either of the performers—appeared as dimensions of the “acoustic signifier, i.e., the materiality of the voice and the whole dimension of sound and affect modulation.”^{xi} Apart from corporeality, the textual gift exchange was modified by mutual relations, exceeding the binary structure of two people switching the roles of donor and beneficiary through the participation of a third person: Emmanuelle de Freitas not only marked the rhythm but also took part in the gift exchange. In “Gift 50,” which does not contain the tapping sound, silence is exchanged for the “Silence Tune” she plays on the trumpet—as a form of bending the X and breaking the frame (to paraphrase Ramos) in regard to the prevailing structure of gift exchange in **A thousand gifts (an introduction)**.

Most of the Gifts are textual ready-mades, combined by features difficult to pinpoint, such as rhythm and resonance as well as stylistic and thematic dissimilarity (this is the initial impression, at least). Based mainly, but not exclusively, on quotations, the text blocks are extremely varied in terms of sources, linguistic registers, and genres. The texts making up the Gifts range from single words like “me” and “Rotpeter” (the protagonist of a story by Kafka); a date (that of the first performance based on this book); titles of songs; statistical information (on imprisonment); mental states (such as “cold panic”); a palindrome; the URL of a translation program; excerpts from publications of various disciplines (by authors such as Henry Hazlitt and Jacques Derrida); excerpts from literary texts including novels, short stories, and plays (such as **Crime and Punishment**, **Oblomov**, **The Old Woman and the Cats**, and **Endgame**); references to scientific/scholarly methods, paradigms, and approaches (such as “syllogism” and “speech act”), and so on. Despite the apparent incompatibility of the texts making up the Gifts, a relational reading of each pair is almost inevitable, thus establishing

a thinking of difference and dissimilarity. If the textual equation does not add up in the sense of an economy of knowledge, if no equivalence is established between the variables, what does result from it is a “surplus poétique”.^{xii}

A thousand gifts (an introduction) contains a dozen Countergifts, authored mainly by researchers from different disciplines. They were asked to comment on the relation of the two texts making up a Gift of their own choice. One Countergift goes one meta-step further, consisting of a comment to a comment, and the final Countergift is a ‘regular’ Gift by Ramos. Thus, established structures of the gift exchange are altered—yet again bending the X and breaking the frame.

PPS: The **post scriptum** above assembles some afterthoughts of mine, a rudimentary result of an extended dialogue with Nuno Ramos and his art of gift exchange. It remains, for my part, to remind the reader that **post scriptum** has both a temporal and a spatial meaning: “written after,” an undertaking I have assumed, and, crucially in this context, “that which comes after writing.” Lying at the heart of **A thousand gifts (an introduction)**, this book and the performances based on it are preludes to other preludes yet to come. Preludes both in terms of preface, or “speaking beforehand,” and musicality, as free-form stand-alone pieces as well as introductions to a larger work.

Ramos’s crisscrossing art of gift exchange connects not only **theoria** (thinking) and **poiesis** (making), but also, fundamentally, **praxis** (doing). That is, a theoretically informed and poetically conceived **praxis** based on and aiming at transformation. As such, it is incessantly deferred, being in a perpetual state-of-becoming. Taking on manifold forms, across different media, and involving the interdisciplinary collaboration of people and institutions, the act of gift exchange may appear in discrete works, sketches or even ephemeral gestures—all of which form part of a multi-faceted work-in-progress: an unbounded chain of Gifts and Countergifts.

Notes

ⁱ A statement by Nuno Ramos during a conversation at the Erich Auerbach Institute, on May 9, 2023.

ⁱⁱ For the concept of the “Permutator,” cf. Flusser, Vilém: “Dichtung.” In **Die Schrift. Hat Schreiben Zukunft?** Göttingen: European Photography, 1990, 72–78.

ⁱⁱⁱ Ernst, Max: “Inspiration to Order.” In **Beyond Painting and Other Writings by the Artist and his Friends**, edited by Robert Motherwell. New York: Wittenborn/Schultz, 1948, 21.

^{iv} Cf. Mauss, Marcel: **The Gift. The form and reason for exchange in archaic societies**. With a foreword by Mary Douglas. London/New York: Routledge, 2002. Mauss draws both “Moral Conclusions” (p. 83) and “Conclusions for Economic Sociology and Political Economy” (p. 91), in which the “economy of the exchange-through-gift” (p. 92) previously analyzed in “archaic societies” serves as a suggestive model for contemporary societal changes, as a way to “direct our ideals” and “perceive better organizational procedures applicable in our societies” (p. 91).

^v For details of Nuno Ramos’s **Ensaio sobre a dádiva**, cf. the excellent analysis in the exhibition catalogue by Alberto Tassinari, art critique and curator of the exhibit: Tassinari, Alberto: “Three Times Seven Times. On Nuno Ramos’s **Ensaio sobre a dádiva**.” In Nuno Ramos: **Ensaio sobre a dádiva**. Porto Alegre: Fundação Iberê Camargo, 2014, 97–107.

^{vi} Jörg Dünne, Professor of Romance Literatures at Humboldt University, also took part in this dialogue, extending the gift exchange to Berlin.

^{vii} “Typographisches Dispositiv” is a conventionalized structure of the typographic layout indicating the affiliation of a text to a certain genre. Cf. Chartier, Roger: **Lesewelten. Buch und Lektüre in der frühen Neuzeit**. Frankfurt am Main/New York: Campus, 1990, 12–14.

^{viii} Mauss, Marcel: **The Gift. The form and reason for exchange in archaic societies**. With a foreword by Mary Douglas. London/New York: Routledge, 2002, 76.

^{ix} Jakobson, Roman: “Linguistik und Poetik.” In **Poetik. Ausgewählte Aufsätze 1921-1971**, edited by Elmar Holenstein and Tarcisius Schelbert. Frankfurt a.M.: Suhrkamp, 1979, 93.

^x Cf. Barthes, Roland: **Le grain de la voix. Entretiens 1962-1980**. Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1999.

^{xi} Weigel, Sigrid: “Die Stimme als Medium des Nachlebens: Pathosformel, Nachhall, Phantom. Kulturwissenschaftliche Perspektiven.” In **Stimme. Annäherung an ein Phänomen**, edited by Doris Kolesch and Sybille Krämer. Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 2006, 17.

^{xii} Ricœur, Paul: **Philosophie de la volonté. Tome I: Le volontaire et l’involontaire**. Paris: Aubier, 1949, 381.

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