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Giving Back to the Gift Paradigm—Another Worldview is Possible

By restoring gift giving to the many areas of life in which it has been unrecognised or concealed, we can begin to bring the gift paradigm to consciousness. Gift giving underlies the synonymy of "meaning in language" and the "meaning of life." (Vaughan 2002: 2)

The current world situation--the rise and deepening of neo-liberal economic fundamentalism--represents the most threatening stage of human development: It may even be interpreted as the apex of the patriarchal and capitalistic exchange economy, with cynical self-interest at its ideological core. This is a moment in his-story when the gifts of the many, of the land, of nature, the caregivers in homes, hospitals and educational institutions are not only being taken for granted but exploited and appropriated to serve the market .

Women are 70 per cent of the world's poor, and they own one per cent of the world's wealth. In every country in the world, women are poorer than men, and their poverty and economic inequality affects every aspect of their lives--their basic survival and the survival of their children, their access to food and housing, their physical security, their sexual autonomy, their health, their access to education and literacy, their access to justice, their ability to participate in public life, their ability to influence and participate in decisions that affect them. Women's economic inequality is integrally connected to their sexual exploitation, and to their lack of political power. As long as women as a group do not have an equal share of the world's economic resources, they will not have an equal say in shaping the world's future. (Day 2000: 12)

It is also worth considering that in 1994 the richest 20 percent of humanity garnered 83 percent of global income, while the poorest 20 percent of the world's people struggled to survive on just 1 percent of the global income (World Bank 1994). The situation appears to have only worsened. As the above references to the widening income gap suggests, women's lack of political and economic power translates into the devaluation and incorporation of their gift labour in all of its public and private forms--emotional, domestic, public service.^{1[1]} Neo-liberal globalisation has extended its tentacles to the most remote regions from the overexploited South to the overdeveloped West and the marginalized Arctic, wreaking havoc on indigenous and mainstream communities, on men and women, but most particularly, on those women who, due to lack of resources and power are most vulnerable to economic exploitation. Masculated^{2[2]} economic policies and the psycho-spiritual control of women by patriarchal religions have represented a major threat to women's self-determination and status throughout history. The new marriage of right-wing religious and economic fundamentalisms risk taking women back to the dark ages in terms of their economic, sexual and psychological self-determination and choices. As our basic rights to work, resources, water, security, peace and clean air are being traded for corporate entitlements and privatisation, global ethics, too, are being "outsourced" and "downsized." It is important, then, to take collective action against the new fundamentalisms threatening the historical achievements in the realm of woman/human rights and the politics of positive difference. It is equally urgent to theorize and research the underlying roots of the expanding dysfunction and loss of values.

^{1[1]}On feminist perspectives on globalization, see for example Batra 1994; Ås 1999; Hale 1995; Kailo 2004e; Wichterich 2002; Pyle 2003; Sassen 2000; Goldsmith 2002; Day 2002. I also recommend a special issue of the *International Sociology Journal*, *Gender Matters: Studying Globalization and Social Change in the 21st Century* (2003) and *Canadian Woman Studies/Cahiers de la femme* issue, *Women, Globalization and International Trade* (2002).

^{2[2]}A term used by Vaughan (1997) to refer to the outcome of boys' upbringing to the less giving sex; to identify with the masculated agenda.

Genevieve Vaughan's writings on the gift economy in (1997) and the paradigm on which it is built, represent one much-needed and timely theoretical response to this crises. It represents a powerful naming and valorisation of women's traditions of circulating gifts. After all, it is thanks to the philosophy and world view based on gift giving and circulation that communities hit hard by the market and the Bretton Woods institutions (the unholy trinity of WTO, World Bank and IMF) have and may well continue to survive. Where the current neo-liberal politics is based on an unrecognised unilaterality of taking, the Gift Economy stresses the value of unilateral giving, when the gift recipients are not in a position to give back. In the former, profits motivate the unilaterality, in the latter, giving is a response to the satisfaction of needs--basic needs to which all are entitled.

I have chosen to focus on Vaughan's theories of the Gift, because they promise renewal and "re-sourcement" to counter the scarcity of solidarity, the freezing over of social responsibility. They help analyse how "progress" could have led to this, and how we might best get out of the mess. The purpose of this article is twofold: first, to briefly situate Vaughan's work in the academic lineage addressing gift giving from the influential theories of Marcel Mauss to contemporary theorists of the gift. I also include feminist materialist theories as a lineage of theories on women's surplus labour, with which Vaughan has significant affinities. Second, I will assess the usefulness of the Gift economy and paradigm for transformational politics, to which many members of the international group, Feminists for a Gift economy, started by Vaughan in 2002, are committed.^{3[3]}

1. Giving Back to the Gift Economy—Vaughan's Contribution to Theoretical Gift Circulation

Genevieve Vaughan's theories (and the activism to which they are inextricably linked) could be analysed in the light of a number of theoretical schools and feminist theories from Feminist economics (eg. Folbre 2002; Mellor 2002) to cognitive psychology, semiotics, psychoanalytic feminist theories (object relations)^{4[4]} and Marxist or materialist Feminist Theory. However, it seems most appropriate to situate her writings in the genealogy of the writings in anthropology on the gift while at the same time recognizing the broad applicability and the holistic, interdisciplinary gist of her theories.

1.2. The Lineage of the Theories of the Gift

Since Marcel Mauss' influential *Essai sur le don or the Gift* in 1924, gifts and gift exchange have been frequent topics of inquiry within the field of anthropology. The theme of gift giving has emerged as a central issue also within a range of fields from the social sciences to the humanities, from literature to Native and Women's studies. It has also been addressed in economic philosophy, and to some extent also in feminist approaches to anthropology (Strathern 1988), or studies giving some attention to gender (Berking 1999; Cheal 1988). For Alan D. Schrift, the theme of the gift can be located at the centre of current discussions of deconstruction, gender, ethics, philosophy, anthropology, and economics:

Where commodity exchange is focused on a transfer in which objects of equivalent exchange value are reciprocally transacted, gift exchange seeks to establish a relationship between subjects in which the actual objects transferred are incidental to the value of the relationship established. Commodity exchange thus exhibits the values that, for example, Carol Gilligan associates with an ethic of rights based on abstract principles of reciprocity, while gift exchange exhibits the forming of and focus on

^{3[3]} Where the activists participating at the world social forum have adopted the motto "Another world is possible", members of the Gift Economy Group, meeting recently in Mumbai, India, ask: "is another world view possible"?

^{4[4]} The psychofeminist and moral philosophical theories which Vaughan could also be related to include Belenky et al. (1986), Carol Gilligan (1982), Nel Noddings (1984); Nancy Chodorow (1978), Jean Baker Miller (1973) and Dorothy Dinnerstein (1976). At a first glance, Vaughan addresses similar key questions about the impact of parenting arrangements on the psychosocial and ethical values of boys and girls; yet she has consciously extended her theorizing a step deeper into concrete action and transformational politics. She also lays more emphasis on cognitive psychology, the impact of language, communication and semiotics. Her focus is less on parenting arrangements as such than on the role of the boy occupying the subject position of the "protohuman", the one who is in a category the opposite of the giving mother.

relationships that she associates with an ethic of care, an ethic based on interpersonal needs and responsibilities, an ethic that speaks in a voice different from the one that has heretofore dominated the moral tradition (Schrift 1997: 2-3).

Lewis Hydes' *The Gift. Imagination and the Erotic Life of Property* (1979) and Jacques Godbout's *The World of the Gift* (1998) likewise trace the writings on the Gift by focusing on literary and philosophical works. However, both Hyde and Godbout are examples of the ease with which male scholars neglect or trivialize women's historic role as nurturers and gift givers. In fact, Godbout's analysis of the writings as well as his own approach towards women's gift processes reproduce the values and biases of the exchange economy. This refers to a worldview which according to Vaughan is more characteristic of men than of women, and which due to upbringing predisposes men to taking gift giving for granted while rendering them all the more attentive to the worldview based on exchanging—giving in order to receive the equivalent or more of what one has given. In contrast with Vaughan, as the above quotation reveals, Schrift labels even gift giving as a form of exchange.

According to Schrift (1997), the contemporary focus on gifts and exchange can be traced to “two important developments”. He identifies them as the writings of Jacques Derrida and second, as the emergence of gender issues within critical theory.⁵[5] Among the critical theories Schrift notes the writings of Helene Cixous. Without going into a detailed comparison of the research on the Gift, it is obvious that few of the studies go into any length or depth regarding the contributions of women or of mothers as primary gift givers and providers of non-monetized care, or as transmitters of a social contract not based on self-interest. It is significant and quite radical in the patriarchal context of academic theory that Schrift should give recognition to gender issues as belonging to the “important developments.” However, the particular and concrete ways in which women contribute to the upkeep and reproduction of patriarchy and the labour force as the unrecognised pillars of capitalism, remains surprisingly absent or unfocussed. Unlike the purely theoretical, abstract and even elitist writings of Cixous, Vaughan's theoretical and real life activism is informed by concrete, pragmatic caring for social justice and transformation. She practices the philosophy of the gift, having also created many projects, founded societies and an international network for women to share visions and strategies on gift circulation despite the obstacles to it created by the neo-liberal politics. Vaughan's formulations of the tension between the gift and the exchange economy as gendered categories provide the theoretical lens through which the oversights and selective biases of the male writings can be exposed and situated. In light of the current world crises, it is most important to give weight to the lived, pragmatic dimensions of the gift paradigm. The world has never been transformed by theory and academic action alone. As a feminist writer and activist, Vaughan is both inside and outside of the academe, using her resources to help women devise ways of re-owning their gift ways, while also dismantling the Master's House (Lorde), undermining the market and its parasitical ways. Thanks to the act of naming women's gifts, Vaughan also helps us women come out of the closet as self-belittling gift givers or as the unconscious closet supporters of the patriarchal exchange economy.

The fact that Vaughan's writings are ignored by Schrift and Godbout,⁶[6] among others, might well attest precisely to what is wrong with patriarchal attitudes towards the gift; their tendency to privilege even those gift-*analyzing* women, who have concretely done less for the transformative politics than those, whose concrete, grassroots labour of caring might help undo the world's asymmetries of power. But this is the essence of patriarchal academic circulation of knowledge-as-a-gift; those gifts are recognized and circulated which best reinforce and uphold the status quo of the non gift-giving manhood agenda; gifts that do not upset the balance of power favouring the masculated world view and order. Helene Cixous, for all her feminism and experimental feminine writing, is still part of the more hegemonic system of gendered power. Paradoxically, as a discursive rebel and feminist theorist of *the other bisexuality*, she is still an accepted, near-canonical figure of the academic institution. In Europe as in North America, she is privileged over the sweaty, exhausted activist feminists, whose labour of love may be seen to rock the unsustainable patriarchal economics more concretely and tangibly in the here-and-now. However, it is important to stress that these considerations do not mean

6 [6] Although it is of course possible that they had not come across Vaughan's book when doing their research, it is nevertheless symptomatic of the masculated lens to ignore the specific theories on women's surplus labour, on which feminists have written extensively since the 1970s. Also, Vaughan has since contacted Godbout and others, whose attitudes to her notion of the gift have not been gender-sensitive (personal communication with Vaughan in 2002).

having to adopt the either/or politics of hierarchical patriarchy; of pitting the grassroots vs. the academic activists. In my holistic interpretation of Vaughan's theories, which I call the Gift imaginary,^{7[7]} all levels of rebellion and theorizing are needed to bring about the long and short-term transformation of the patriarchal exchange economy. I do not question the gift of Cixous' *other bisexuality*, her creative and transgressive feminine writing. I only question the elitist one-sidedness that has colluded with the appropriation and silencing of the concrete and pragmatic gift impulse. Academics tend to privilege the academic, at the expense of the "other" gift givers. In fact, one wonders whether the Academic context lends itself to gift circulation at this neo-liberal stage of the knowledge society; In Europe as in North America, academic freedom is being watered down as corporate interests and the (market-oriented) "social mission" of universities is being strengthened. Knowledge is in the process of being turned into a marketable, profitable commodity. Academic freedom, too, is being sacrificed to the "rights" of companies to benefit from education by commercializing any and all types of knowledge from technological innovations to national epics.

1.2. The Exchange and the Gift Economies

Unlike most of the theorists on the gift, Vaughan heeds the impact of gender on the very worldview and theoretical lens through which such theories have and should be approached. One of Vaughan's contributions is to bring home tangibly and convincingly that the scientific, academic approaches of Mauss and his followers bear the unavoidable imprint of the theorists' own sex—and I would add, even their culture and history. One's own understanding of the nature of humans as either *homo economicus* or as *homo donans* (Vaughan 1997) cannot but impact on how gift circulating societies are perceived and evaluated. A scholar who has himself naturalized human self-interest rather than the nurturing motivation thus ends up projecting such a negative assumption on the cultures he is studying. This bias is present in many theories on the Gift. Throughout history, male scholars have sought to naturalize women's difference from men, writing theories about women's alleged closeness to nature, nurture, intuition, and emotional leanings. Women have been kept out of politics with the pretext that politics is too cruel, hard and immoral for women—whose role is in stark contrast to cherish and guard a nation's morals and more communal values. Curiously, many of the very same scholars have extended and projected the self-interest and less "moral" ways of the male sex to all of humanity, forgetting that they had considered the other half (of mankind) as more self-sacrificing and caring. Implicitly, Vaughan addresses this major contradiction within male philosophy, psychology and other academic theories.

Vaughan argues that two basic economic paradigms coexist in the world today, the *exchange paradigm* based on power over, a selfish mode of trading, competition, short-sighted and divisive self-interest and the unconditional *Gift Economy* which seeks to satisfy needs and consolidate communal life (Vaughan 1977; 2002). The two basic orientations in life, with their gendered roots, co-exist and compete: "These paradigms are logically contradictory, but also complementary. One is visible, the other invisible; one highly valued, the other undervalued" (Vaughan 1991, 84). For Vaughan, the former, based on unilateral needs satisfaction and the creation of bonds between giver and receiver, is essentially connected with elite white men; the latter with women. Echoing the theories of Belenky et al. (1986), Gilligan (1982), Chodorow (1978), Noddings (1984) and others, For Vaughan, women have been assigned the role of caring unilaterally for children, which is why they are more likely to develop the logic of the gift (2002: 3, 7). Without dwelling on culture-specific sex/gender systems, Vaughan believes that

There is something else that all the societies have in common: the caregiving done by mothers. This social constant does not depend so much upon the biological nature of mothers as upon that of children, who are born completely dependent. If someone does not take care of their needs, they will suffer and die. The satisfaction of their needs must also take place without exchange, because infants cannot give back an equivalent of what they receive. (Vaughan 1997: 35)

^{7[7]} The "imaginary" is a Lacanian term borrowed by many theorists from social science to literature and educational science. Among the many uses of the term, Louis Althusser defines ideology as "the imaginary relationship of individuals to their real conditions of existence" (1971: 52), Althusser argues that the imaginary is that image or representation of reality which masks the historical and material conditions of life.

Vaughan's insight is to consider the way in which the very notion of exchange comes to dominate a boy's and the adult man's cognitive maps:

If we look at co-muni-cation as the material nurturing or free giftgiving that forms the community, we can see the nurturing that women do as the basis of the co-muni-ty of the family unit. The nuclear family, especially the relation between mother and children, is just a vestige of what a community based on widespread giftgiving may have been at some time in the past, or could be in the future. The isolation of pockets of community from each other keeps the gift model weak, while the scarcity in which most of us are forced to live makes giftgiving difficult, even self-sacrificial and, therefore, "unrealistic." (Vaughan 1997: 35)8[8]

Vaughan explains that transforming the gift process into an equal exchange erases the other-orientation of both exchangers—making their equality only the equality of their self-interests. Exchange becomes a kind of magnetic template around which societies organize themselves. The thinking of both men and women gravitates towards the masculated "template," giving it a great deal of credit, perhaps because of its similarity with naming and definition (the linguistic processes from which it derives and which we continue to use at least in English). Giftgiving continues unabated, but remains invisible and does not become generalized as a model, which is validated by having conscious followers. In fact, the gift paradigm gives way: it does not complete with the exchange paradigm. It is thus in the situation of giving value and giving many gifts to exchange (Vaughan 1997: 49).9[9]

Because in most modern societies men have more power than women, they have the opportunity to project their own cognitive patterns and images into their work, politics, policies, beliefs and institutions. Vaughan looks at such similarities between patriarchal structures at different levels not as analogies, historical isomorphisms or homologies. Rather they are self-similar social patterns created by the reciprocal feedback of the form of the definition into the definition of gender (and vice versa, the definition of gender into form of the definition) at many different levels (Vaughan 1997: 51-52). In Vaughan's view, language and communication themselves need to be re-approached by divesting them of the cognitive and evaluative projections of the male theorists.10[10] Hence, we need to realize the extent to which they have governed and directed our understanding of any number of social phenomena—not just theories of the gift. One might look upon the exchange economy as also a form of mind colonization—ideological imposition. Vaughan believes that language, for example, needs to be seen as a sort of free gift economy:

We do not recognize it as such, because we do not validate gift giving in our economic lives and, in fact, we usually recognize the existence of nurturing specifically only in the mother-child relation. It, therefore, does not occur to us to use gift giving as a term of comparison for language. With language, we create the human bonds that we have stopped creating through

8[8] For an analysis of the etymology of "gift", "exchange" and "munus", see Emile Benveniste (1973). The etymologies can be interpreted in many ways, and have not stressed Vaughan's interpretation. I agree with Vaughan, however, that etymological speculation is as fraught with subjective elements as any other scholarly undertaking. We cannot avoid projecting cultural and gendered biases. Vaughan's contribution is to "project" another interpretation, one foregrounding the possibilities of the gift circulating rather than self-interested assumptions. On Vaughan's view of "munus" see 1997: 30-31. Vaughan notes: "Exchange, with its requirement for measurement, is much more visible [than the gift economy] ... Even our greetings 'How are you?' is a way of asking, 'What are your needs?' 'Co-muni-cation' is giving gifts (from the Latin *munus*-gift) together. It is how we form the 'co-muni-ty' (Vaughan 1997: 31).

9[9] Many empirical studies confirm this insight; indeed, women's sense of space and bodily boundaries are marked by their education, upbringing and conditioning towards sacrifice and yielding. This gendered dimension of occupying space is even reflected in sports. In Finland, for example, boys and men occupy public spaces and the commons with their motorized vehicles from snowmobiles to water scooters. Where the typically male sports take space not only spatially, also in terms of noise and sound, women and the typical female hobbies and sports are marginalized. Horseback riding is a good example of a form of sports cherished by girls. Yet, girls on horseback are not allowed on public roads and must be restricted to enclosures away from the public. Horses and girls must not take space from motorized sports. Additionally, the restricted space has its corollary in the restriction of public funding mostly to male sports. The girls' culture of tending to horses beyond the hierarchical and rougher male sports is not given public funding (eg. Kallioinen 2004).

10[10] Her focus is most likely the Western context and the English language although this point is not fully clear.

material co-muni-cation. Language gives us an experience of nurturing each other in abundance, which we no longer have—or do not yet have—on the material plane (Vaughan 1997: 36).

The social significance of the above theories in the neo-liberal modern context is obvious. The cutthroat individualism and one-upmanship of the neo-liberal politics can be exposed as anything but “natural” and unavoidable, to defy the persistence with which its tenets are disseminated and imposed. As David Korten (1996) among others has discussed, neo-liberalism is projecting crude and divisive self-interest as the essence of human nature, arguing also that this is what, together with competitiveness and greed, best motivates humans and thus best guarantees economic growth and increasing prosperity. Vaughan’s analysis adds a gender-sensitive dimension to the male discussions of economic fundamentalism, reminding us that macho-capitalism also has very obvious gendered roots.

In contrast with the worldview based on abundance and gift circulation, the ideologies of lack, of artificial scarcity, deficits, "inevitable" cutbacks coalesce in the masculated mind-set.¹¹[11] In this regard Vaughan’s writings echo also the views by Vandana Shiva and Maria Mies (1993) who find that deficit thinking is inherent even in Western science:

There seems to be a deception inherent in divided and fragmented knowledge, which treats non-specialist knowledge as ignorance and through the artificial divide, is able to conceal its own ignorance. I characterize modern, Western patriarchy's special epistemological tradition of the 'scientific revolution' as 'reductionist' because: 1) it reduced the capacity of humans to know nature both by excluding other knowers and other ways of knowing; and 2) by manipulating it as inert and fragmented matter, nature's capacity for creative regeneration and renewal was reduced. Reductionism has a set of distinctive characteristics which demarcates it from all other non-reductionist knowledge systems which it has subjugated and replaced. Primarily, the ontological and epistemological assumptions of reductionism are based on uniformity, perceiving all systems as comprising the same basic constituents, discrete, and atomistic, and assuming all basic processes to be mechanical. The mechanistic metaphors of reductionism have socially reconstituted nature and society. In contrast to the organic metaphors, in which concepts of order and power were based on interdependence and reciprocity, the metaphor of nature as a machine was based on the assumption of divisibility and manipulability. (1993: 23)

Vaughan believes that despite the parasitism of the exchange economy, the gift paradigm is present everywhere in our lives, though we have become used to not seeing it.¹²[12] Vaughan elaborates on the gendered aspects even of creativity by arguing that patriarchy has assigned "activity and creativity" to men and "passivity and receptivity" to women, because it has been blind to the creativity of gift giving and of receiving. However, Vaughan sees both gift giving and receiving as creative: "The use of what has been given to us is necessary to make what has been given into a gift. If we do not use it, it is wasted, lifeless. The fact that the capacity to receive is as important as the capacity to give is manifested in our ability to transform sentences from active to passive and from passive to active" (Vaughan 1997: 47). In Vaughan's view, reinstating the gift paradigm to its

11[11]Vaughan calls the values attached to the exchange economy as part of and as resulting from the "manhood agenda". I use the term "masculated" as referring to Vaughan's analysis of masculinity as a process of masculinization. Not all men need to identify with this agenda; nor is it essentialist but open for transformation through consciousness-raising.

12[12]Shiva argues that the Green Revolution held technology as a superior substitute for nature, viewing nature as a source of scarcity, and technology as a source of abundance. Instead, this leads to technologies that create new scarcities through ecological destruction by reducing availability of fertile land and through the genetic diversity of crops (1997: 108). The expansion of cyberculture and new technology into the most remote reaches of the North can, of course, bring unprecedented opportunities for Northern people. It can open new vistas for information sharing and networking. However, Eisenstein has shown that technology and the virtual democracy have been nothing but empty rhetoric for the vast majority of marginalized populations, and will continue to be so, unless we address the asymmetrical power relations that go along with the technological revolution. The current neoliberal agenda is based on creating false consumerist dependencies and addictions, and it has led to sharp increases in gendered violence, by making women even more vulnerable to economic, and hence, other forms of power. For Vaughan, masculated hierarchies are used to continually re-create scarcity around the world, by siphoning off surplus wealth. They thereby maintain exchange as the mode of distribution for all, imposing a multilevel monoculture globally. In contrast, gift-based societies do not separate economics and politics, economics and socio-cosmic relations, economics and spirituality. Their goal has been (and in part, continues to be) to create and sustain the conditions for fertility, abundance, self-sufficiency, and to circulate goods as a precondition for social justice, peace, prosperity, the good life for all.

central place in the group of interpretive registers, through which we address the world, lets us see that most human "activity" is not oriented towards the satisfaction of a need at some level. 13[13]

As the above brief summary of Vaughan's theories suggests, the gift giving by women is not just a concrete activity that we need to revalorise, to prevent it from being appropriated by patriarchy and capitalism as women's unpaid free labour. This appropriation of the gifts not just of women but also of the land and its free "resources" is a reflection of a scarcity-based and un-giving worldview with a particular gendered, masculated agenda. Vaughan has thus broadened the scope of the classical analyses of the gift by not limiting it to the gift, but showing how a non-giving worldview and cognitive bias affects all areas of human and non-human life. This is the perspective that also sets Vaughan's theories of "surplus labour" apart from the feminist analyses going back to the 1970s.

1.4. On Materialist Feminism

Since the 1990s, by which time capitalism has secured its near-global reach, the Left has had to reorganize in new ways, to address the failure or weakening of the power of socialism. The women's movement, too, following the political apathy of postmodernism and deconstruction, has gradually woken up to the new, radical challenges of neo-liberalism and the deepening backlash against women's rights. Commitment to social transformation, attention to the political economy of capitalism have had to be debated rather than taken for granted. Although many forms of feminist cultural politics dealing with gender, race, class, sexuality or their intersections have heeded issues of privilege and power politics, they have together tended to displace a systemic analysis that might engage feminism directly with the struggle against capitalism. Feminist engagement with Marxism has adopted a perspective on social life and the sex/gender systems that considers together the materiality of meaning, identity, the body, the state, the nation all of which are intimately linked with the division of labour benefiting patriarchal capitalism. Hennessy & Ingraham (1997) note in their anthology, *Materialist Feminism: A Reader in Class, Difference, and Women's Lives* that

Women's labor continues to be a primary source of capital accumulation. Feeding and caring for children, attending to the sick and the elderly, and providing one of the main sources of cheap labor in waged work have been women's long-standing contributions to capital accumulation across the globe. Women perform most of the world's socially necessary labor, and yet they are far more vulnerable to poverty than men. (1997: 2).

The authors remind us that white women earn 70 percent of white men's earnings, while black women earn only 64 percent of what white men earn (US Bureau of Census 1995). They stress that

It is important to remember that poverty is not mainly a function of gender or race but a permanent feature of capitalism that affects children and men too. The socially produced differences of race, gender, and nationality are not distinct from class, but they play a crucial role—both directly and indirectly—in dividing the work force, ensuring and justifying the continued availability of cheap labor, and determining that certain social groups will be profoundly exploited while others will be somewhat cushioned. (1997: 2).

I agree with the authors that the theory underlying feminist practice cannot afford to eclipse the material realities that bind race, gender, sexuality, and nationality to labour. For Hennessy & Ingraham, these, however, are the very connections that have been abandoned by western feminists in the past twenty years. They feel the oppressive construction of difference and identity connected to capitalism's drive to accumulate have no longer been sufficiently addressed by feminisms. When feminists have questioned visible differences as the basis for political movement, the alternatives proposed often appeal to abstract, ahistorical, or merely cultural categories like desire, matter, or performativity. In bracketing the relationship of visibility and bodies to capitalism as a class-based system, feminism has implicitly and at times even explicitly embraced capitalism—or, more commonly, ignored it (1997: 2). Hennessy & Ingraham thus call for a return to considerations of class and anticapitalist theorizing and practice.

13[13]Language consequently appears, not as a mechanical concatenation of (verbal) activities, but as a collection of gifts and of ways of giving and receiving, in alignment with communicative needs, which arise from experience and proliferate at many levels, given that there are abundant means available for their satisfaction (Vaughan 1997: 48).

What is Vaughan's contribution in light of these feminist needs? While Vaughan does not brand her theories as "materialist" or "feminist Marxist" or the like, together with her network and activist writings (eg. *The 36 Steps towards a Gift Economy*, 2000), her political, transformative engagement is both implicit and explicit. "Feminists for a Gift Economy" produced a joint statement, which was circulated first at the World Social Forum in Porto Alegre (Jan. 2001), then at other feminist events from Uganda to Mumbai (2004). In this declaration of our goals and visions, as well as the critique of patriarchal capitalism, we refer to the class dimension of neo-liberal economic fundamentalism, and also point out the surplus value that women's labour represents to the capitalists.

As early as 1981, Heidi Hartman asked, in one of the early classical Marxist feminist articles, whether Marxism and feminism might be reconcilable as potential "marriage partners." She was of the opinion that such a union would have been as unequal and asymmetrical as that of men and women in matrimony: it is the women or the feminism that gets incorporated instead of the union being one of two partners with equal weight and power. In this regard, her theory echoes Vaughan's view of the gift as the "invisible" economy. As is normal, Vaughan's theories address the burning issues that face the women's movement in the 21st century, and it is thus normal that the focus should be different from those worrying Hartman. While the collective feminist awareness of the roots of patriarchal and capitalistic abuses has deepened, the approaches—and particularly their intersectionality and interdisciplinary nature have also broadened. Feminist theorizing has expanded to include issues and perspectives that were unheard of at the time of early Marxist feminism. For all that, Hartman's article remains a classic in its own right, and was one of the early efforts to heed the role of class and capitalism rather than an ahistoric patriarchy as key foci of feminist theorizing.

According to Hennessy & Ingraham (1997) Annette Kuhn, Anne Marie Wolpe, Michele Barrett, Mary MacIntosh in Britain, and Christine Delphy in France were the initial promoters of materialist feminism. They favoured this term over "Marxist feminism" in order to emphasize the point that although Marxism had not adequately addressed women's exploitation and oppression, a historical materialist analysis might be developed that would account for the sexual division of labour and gendered formation of subjectivities. More than socialist feminism, materialist feminism was the conjuncture of several discourses--historical materialism, Marxist and radical feminism, as well as postmodern and psychoanalytic theories of meaning and subjectivity. In drawing on postmodern critiques of the humanist subject and neo-Marxist theories of ideology, materialist feminism constituted a significant shift from the feminist debates of the early 70's, both radical and socialist alike (Hennessy & Ingraham 1997: 6-7).¹⁴[14] For all their differences, most materialist feminists share the view that an essential feature of capitalism's gendered division of labour is gender ideology--those knowledges, beliefs, and values that present women's oppression as natural.

Surplus Labor and Marxist Feminist Theories

As regards the notion of domestic and emotional labour, Vaughan has affinities with the tradition of Marxist feminism that has theorized the implications of these forms of gendered "surplus labour" to capitalist profiteering. Vaughan also refers to the masculinized biases of economics, with the gross national product being limited to "productive" work:

Though communism may be seen as an attempt to satisfy needs, it has been undermined, like capitalism, by patriarchal structures. MarVaughan 1997, and other male economists up to the present day, did not understand women's free labor as value-producing work. If women's work were counted (See Marilyn Waring, *If Women Counted, A New Feminist Economics*, Harper and Row, San Francisco, 1988), we would have to add on at least 40% to the GNP of most Western countries, more to Third World countries. Economists who leave aside such macroscopic elements must be skewing their analyses, as if a student of the solar system were to leave aside 40% of the planets. S/he would have to find other

¹⁴[14] Many cultural materialists who have critiqued or distanced themselves from deconstruction's textual analysis, however, also make use of theoretical frameworks that tend to reduce social life to representation, albeit a much more socially grounded understanding of language as discourse. In contrast, historical materialist (Marxist) feminists see it as their aim to make visible *the reasons why* representations of identity are changing (see Hennessy & Ingraham 1997).

explanations for their effects – irregularities in orbits, for example, and would not be able to map an itinerary for successful space travel. Feminism is a more complete analysis, deeper and farther reaching, and a better basis for social planning than communism or capitalism, because unlike them it gives value to free labour. (Vaughan 1997: 101)

Vaughan sums up that women's un-monetized gift labour has been invisible to economists until recently because those who were practicing the values of exchange were the only ones studying it (Vaughan 1997: 53).

Against classical marxism, Dalla Costa and James (1972) also argued that women's domestic labour is integral to the production of surplus values. They saw the entire domain outside the wage market as a "social factory" that is not strictly speaking outside capitalist production at all, but is the very source of surplus labour. Women's housework--feeding, laundering, cleaning, educating--is indispensable to wage work because in doing this unpaid labour women produce the living human beings who enter the wage sector. This position was shared by Benston (1969) and Gimenez (1978), who contended that the material base for women's oppression is their exploitation as domestic workers. As Benston explained it, women's reproductive labour in the home is necessary "if the entire system is to function," and it is therefore a crucial component in the class system. In this respect, women are potentially the central figures of subversion in the community. This view echoes the vision of the Feminists for a Gift Economy that reviving or making visible the already existing gift impulse and making women recognize their concealed economic value can have radical consequences for social transformation and the undermining of cutthroat capitalism. Swasti Mitter has elaborated this point by detailing as early as 1986 the role of women's labour in the global factories of late capitalism and outlining strategies for organizing women workers internationally (1998: 12). Vaughan's contribution, other than the added dimensions described above, is, however, to situate women's labour as a particular form of multidimensional Gift labour, which cannot be reduced to the Western understanding of economics as separate from spirituality, worldview and broader socio-psychological issues (Vaughan 2002). The early materialist or Marxist feminists have tended to operate from within an uncritically embraced Western paradigm that did not at the time realize the impact and importance of epistemic and ontological cultural differences of perspective and worldview. While Vaughan does not explicitly build the understanding of cultural variation in perception and interpretation into her own culturally -situated theory, she recognizes its relevance and has created a space for cross-cultural explorations of the gift and its many manifestations through the gift network. Furthermore, Vaughan feels that whereas materialist feminists look upon women as predominantly exploited victims¹⁵[15], she prefers to foreground women's labour as a logic and worldview in its own right, something so basic to human survival that it should not be seen as the other of the male economy. In fact, she feels, together with many members of the Feminists for a Gift Economy network, that this logic of gift circulation should most importantly be extended also to boys and men. To raise boys as virtual soldiers or upholders of the national competitive economy also prepares them for power over- forms of object relations, predisposing them to replace giving with hitting (Vaughan 1997). Considering the fact that violence against women is the single most serious human rights issues today (Amnesty 2004), one cannot overestimate the transformative power mothers and fathers can exert through their educational values and methods.

III. The Gift Imaginary—Reuniting Politics and the Spirituality of Everyday Life

Ecofeminism challenges all relations of domination. Its goal is not just to change who wields power, but to transform the structure of power itself." (Starhawk 1982: 77)

The Gift is an agent of social cohesion, and this again leads to the feeling that its passage increases its worth, for in social life, at least, the whole really is greater than the sum of its parts. It brings the group together; the gift increases in worth immediately upon its first circulation, and then, like a faithful lover, continues to grow through constancy. (Hyde 1983: 35)

In this last section, I wish to create a third space between Vaughan's theories of the Gift and that of the classic materialist/Marxist feminisms that overlap but also part on points that I consider to be critical for the

¹⁵[15]My communication with Vaughan at the World Social Forum, during the Gift economy workshop, Jan. 18th, 2004, in Mumbai, India.

transformation of the neo-liberal agenda. A recent comment I received from an organizer of a conference on Spirituality and Globalisation alerted me to the importance of highlighting certain aspects of the gift paradigm—what I call myself the Gift Imaginary. A selection committee member had expressed reservations about my participation at this event, since grassroots feminism is to his mind mostly, or even essentially secular rather than spiritual. I did get invited, but only after protests by some other members of committee that had precisely interpreted my articles as spiritual in nature. Are the Gift Economy and the network around it “spiritual” in nature? What is the very meaning of the term “material”? I suspect that the persistent stereotypes about feminism as “reverse sexism”, as an agenda seeking to revert rather than transform the gendered power relations lurk behind such comments. The dualisms of Western philosophy and enlightenment thought (spirituality vs. materiality, mind vs. matter, spirit vs. body, man vs. woman, nature vs. culture...) also give rise to the false dichotomies that pit spirituality against political or material dimensions of life and being.

I call the dominant Western paradigm and worldview to do with human identity and consciousness the master imaginary. Not unlike the exchange economy, the concept condenses the artificial and arbitrary dichotomies that have allowed white heterosexual elite men to dominate nature, women, native populations and people of colour, as well as men defying the hegemonic “gender contracts.” Among the central elements of the master imaginary are assumptions and projections of non-egalitarian difference (eg. humans vs. animals, primitives vs. the civilized) which, upon closer scrutiny are merely the ideological tools through which the hegemonic class has sought to control, subjugate and label those it has placed in the periphery of its hierarchical order. Reason and emotion are among the gendered dimensions of being that have led to a most harmful gendered division of ethical and moral labour in the Western world. Rationality, as Max Weber among others has argued, is a highly valued feature of human (male) society, whereas the nurturing, emotional, empathetic qualities projected as the domain of women have not been even considered as “rational.” Today, thanks to Hildur Ve and other feminists, the male interpretation of rationality has been exposed as limited and reductive and a more multilayered, complex understanding has emerged regarding the different varieties of rationality based on care, responsibility and productivity. It is crucial for us to grasp the gendered, historic and cultural interpretations of rationality, for many feminists, particularly of the socialist and Marxist orientation have embraced it uncritically.

The Gift Imaginary is a world view, a projected fantasy of how I would like the world to be ordered, which has at its core the undoing, the dismantling, the blurring of the reductive dualisms within the master imaginary. The dualisms coalesce and overlap, reformat and fade as the assumption of spirit and matter, rationality and irrationality get approached via the lens of the Gift—the impulse to circulate care, solidarity, well-being. From the point of the view of the Gift, it is not rational to exhaust the world’s dwindling resources—all in the name of short-term profit and the increasing destruction of cultural and biological diversity. Neo-liberalism, from the point of view of the Gift imaginary is irrational—even suicidal. We cannot have the abundance needed for gift giving in a situation of artificial scarcity, created through wars and economic arrangements to benefit the few at the expense of the many. Likewise, it is not irrational to care about people rather than accumulate capital; to create utopias of gift circulating societies rather than spreading myths of the inevitability of neo-liberalism. Yet, even among feminists, the assumption of virile rationality reigns as a strong principle and ideal (Kailo 2004c). I therefore suggest a revisiting of Hartman’s “impossible marriage of Marxism and feminism” which reflects a pessimistic submission to irreconcilable fields and systems. I call for the necessary, if not shot-gun union, of the spiritual and the political, claiming that the very opposition is artificial. I also call for sustained attempts to seduce men into the open marriage of spirituality, politics, economics, feminism.

“Opium for the Oppressed?”—on the Union of Ecospirituality and Material Feminism

Historically, feminists of the Marxist or socialist orientation have been the most resistant to the spiritually or ecologically oriented feminisms with ecofeminism a case in point. Although this risks being itself a stereotype, or Marxist feminists anything smacking of religion or spirituality would be opium for the oppressed.¹⁶[16]

¹⁶[16] Janet Biehl is a Green Party activist who is dismayed at the prevalence of Goddess-based rituals among the Greens. She rejects the use of mythic history in achieving socio-political change, and challenges Marija Gimbuta’s findings (and their “incautious adoption by spiritual feminists”) regarding matriarchal Old Europe and the assumption that worship of “the Goddess” always goes hand in hand with peace and democracy. In sum, she warns that paying homage to the Goddess infantilizes us (1989). Biehl (1990) is not opposed to eco-feminism per se, but she seeks to make eco-feminist though more analytical, politically astute, and less dependent on what seems to be

This is not true of them all, and indeed, the labelling of feminists as belonging to strict schools of their own is problematic and artificial. It might well be a symptom of what Mary Daly has called patriarchal methodolatry, an obsession with categorization as a means of controlling reality. Yet, Marxist feminists have tended to see spiritually oriented feminists as “irrational” or misguided—the energy spent on pining after lost matriarchies or the Golden Past where women were venerated is perceived as so much precious time wasted from from the politics of here-and-now. Vandana Shiva's and Maria Mies' writings on ecofeminism and globalization (eg. 1993) have likewise drawn critical outpours from feminists who have no patience for myths of the “female angel in the ecosystem,” or who prefer to put their energies into the strengthening of women’s paid wage-labour rather than the utopian discourses about a subsistence perspective. In light of the rise of cyberfeminism to embrace the marriage of humans and machines (Kailo 2003b), and considering the deepening digital and prosperity wedge between the privileged and less privileged women of the North and the South (eisenstein 1998), I look upon feminist ecospirituality as all the more important, to help us restore the Gift Imaginary and to ensure an eco-social future for all, including the future generations. While it is easy to find something commendable and important in all feminist approaches, including the critiques of the most utopian ecofeminisms, I prioritise today materialist/economic perspectives as the politics of social transformation. If the gifts of so many, and of nature and the natural "resources" are being destroyed under neo-liberal globalisation, we simply cannot afford to promote a fully uncritical global relativism. Unfortunately, many women and feminists also embrace the values of the master imaginary, not hesitating to treat less privileged women and nature as the “other.” What I appreciate about ecofeminism, when it is not rooted in or does not embrace the dualisms of the master imaginary, is the broadness and inclusivity of its tenets and values: the promotion and maintenance of diversity in all of its forms, not just in nature but among cultures, and among men and women. This is not just any open-ended and tolerant form of diversity, but one based on the respect of human-woman rights, nature’s inalienable rights and the rights of future generations to share in the riches of the planet.

Whereas many materialist feminists ignore or wilfully neglect the issues of ecology and sustainability, many ecofeminists do also ignore the concrete material differences of women around the world. Resurrecting the goddess religions and going back to nature may work for the chosen few; the majority of the poor in the world, however, are women in need of direct political and economic action, food, clean water, unpolluted surroundings, and medicine. Yet, we also need the long-term transformation of values, away from profit-based greed towards the circulation of gifts and the reinforcement of all peoples' economic, basic self-sufficiency: the subsistence perspective (Mies & Shiva 1993). It is in this regard that I find it necessary to seek out and adopt alternative visionings of society—such as the gift circulating communal values of past ages. Subsistence has to do with being locally self-sufficient, not dependent on consumer goods imported from overexploited countries. Ecospirituality as part of the new Gift Imaginary is then not the luxury for the privileged; it is only by replacing the psycho-spiritual motors of consumer-based market ideologies that we can bring about lasting changes. Economic greed and consumerist behaviour rests on ideological-political rather than human premises; people are led to support the multinational corporations and an addictive patriarchy ruling the world by their consumerist choices because they are filling a deficiency at the heart of being. Capitalism thrives on all kinds of gaps, lacks and forms of inner emptiness. Goods are poured into the void produced by a worldview that has no space or appreciation for the free gifts of the soul, the spirit, nature, human bonding, and interspecies communication. According to Vaughan, the non-gift giving boys are brought up to compensate for the emptiness of not living according to the logic of nurturing and giving. Communion and communication--with gifts in the centre--are replaced by ammunition, violence, hitting, robbing.¹⁷[17] With global warming (and

the fundamental irrationality (and anti-rationality) of Goddess theology and cultural feminism. To Biehl, woman does not equal nature and statement "The Earth is alive" is neither profound or true. She is particularly skeptical that any myth (e.g., of the Goddess or Gaia) can be a useful political image. Many Marxist scholars contends that women’s spirituality does not challenge class society, and that forming an alternative women’s culture merely allows women to drop out of the struggle for liberation for all. They reject theories of ancient matriarchy and the popular identification of woman with nature, but admit that the Left has failed to reach people’s souls as effectively as spirituality has. The case of Biehl is illustrative of the internal contradictions within ecofeminist theorizing, for she embodies, in my view, the repressive and intolerant monocultural bias that ecofeminism seeks to deconstruct as the bedrock of patriarchal relations concerning nature and the feminine. See my article critiquing her “rationalist” mode (Kailo 2004c).

¹⁷[17] As Mies pointed out at the WSF in Mumbai, Indian, 2004, the etymology of privatization goes back to the Latin "privare", to rob. Do men around the globe now seek to rob the earth of its gifts--to private the commons--only because there is a primary lack in

freezing of values), we are in dire need of new social contracts--the marriage of ecospirituality and a form of material interconnectedness that does not misname the gifts of women, nature and many others. In archaic cultures, gifts of material and spiritual nature were circulated in the context of "world renewal ceremonies". The purpose was to ensure the collective survival base of communities that were interdependent (including humans and animals). The Native Indian potlatches are one expression of the early forms of economics that integrated spirituality and the distribution of the vital resources from water to food and healing (Kailo 2003, 2004a, b; Kuokkanen 2003, 2004).

The Gift Imaginary I advocate condenses and combines—ideally--the most *munificent* of ecospiritual writings, and of the concrete theories and activisms that aim at the radical transformation of the global village. When humans rediscover their interconnectedness and spiritual continuum with nature (of which indeed we are part), they may well find ways of filling the inner void beyond the materialist trappings of consumer hysteria. Simultaneously, reowning the inner space--colonized by consumerism and patriarchal capitalistic addictions--means undermining the psycho-spiritual roots of neo-liberal commercial power. Ecospirituality is a radical means of starving the market of its gift-robbing power for women and men finding their inner power and authority are less vulnerable to the market seductions. However, not any spiritual doctrine would bring about the balance and interconnectedness, based on equality. History has proven that male-directed and "male-owned" religions have quickly appropriated the teachings to consolidate the manhood agenda, subjugating women and nature. The Gift Imaginary is gender-sensitive and recognizes that due to their different upbringing and socialization, women's "visionwork" differs in degree and contents from that of male spiritual practices.

Visionwork

Vaughan feels that we need a peace and justice movement led by women; this is because of women's long tradition and experience in giving and circulating gifts as a response to the needs of the needy, unable to reciprocate. Women have also had a different attitude toward power; as Starhawk's definition of power (see above) describes. Indeed, feminism is not about seizing male power, but about transforming the very notion of power as power over.¹⁸[18] Woman-identified women's leadership is also needed to guarantee that sustainable "development" does not increasingly mean ways of sustaining the consumer-dependent market, of adapting even sustainability to the logic of the exchange economy. In fact, I replace the very notion of development for an ecosocial sustainable future. We do not need more development, we need more livelihoods, justice, rights, security, peace and balance.

While I cannot take up space here to elaborate on the cultural varieties of the Gift Imaginary, I would like to cite a few examples from cultures that cannot be labelled irrational just because they do not embrace the "rationality" of harnessing everything for profit. A Mohawk two-spirited writer, Beth Brant is a good example of an author giving expression to a worldview rooted in the recognition of humans' interconnectedness with other species—not the individualistic cult of independence that marks Western ways. In her story, *This is History* (1991) she not only role models an attitude towards gender, nature and difference that is rooted in a recognition of mutuality, equality and the cyclical processes of death, renewal, rebirth, but her character—the primal ancestress of the Mohawks, also literally gives thanks to creation for its abundance: "Sky Woman prayed, thanking the creatures for teaching her how to give birth. She touched the earth, thanking Mother for giving her this gift of a companion (1991: 23). Many Native writers and theorists evoke their cultural tradition of "giving back" (Keffey 1993) and we also owe "Thanksgiving" to North American Indian traditions. However, such an apparently banal gesture as thanking is radically absent in the dominant Western ethos of development: nature is there for the taking, as are women and their taken-for-granted labours of love. Brant's story is a reminded of values and a way of relating that is being outsourced and downsized fast, in the neo-liberal context of fierce competition and musical chairs. It represents an eco-social cosmos not based on the

their heart of being, the masculated heart of darkness? Perhaps the reasons are more complex, more cultural, more materialist and to do with human psychology and biology.

¹⁸[18]See the many alternative non-hierarchical definitions of power in Spretnak, ed. *the Politics of Women's Spirituality* (1982).

Western dualisms, including that of a clearly demarcated good and evil. To become familiar with such an alternative worldview means being able to imagine the other imaginary, and this is a precondition for creating or resurrecting an imaginary order based on one's own culture. The idea is not, of course, for white women to appropriate Native spirituality but recover from their own cultural, colonial amnesia, the patriarchal overwriting of their stories and myths. The Gift Imaginary means being rooted in one's own deepest roots—experiencing the healing impact of cultural, gendered continuity of being. Yet the local and global intersect and overlap, and it is also necessary to consider that not all humans have knowable roots (orphans, for example). The Gift Imaginary is therefore an adaptable, broad concept, an umbrella that shelters people of all backgrounds and seeks to provide us a globally valid, if locally colored container for images and values, rituals and practices beyond the master imaginary, the imperialist white mythology.

For Vaughan, women should be the leaders of the new gift-based order. According to the same logic, Native women might be earmarked as the most appropriate leaders of a new consciousness. After all, more than white privileged women, they have centuries of experience of multilevel oppression, and simultaneously, of keeping sane and whole under inhuman pressures. Most importantly, however, they have retained more of the ecosocially sustainable worldview, the Gift Imaginary, than most white folks.

In the life celebrating worldview gift relations determined socio-cosmic covenants and the strict, hierarchical dualisms of the West did not exist as such. Indigenous attitudes towards the land, for example, are very different from those characterizing Western businessmen. For G.M. de Frane (Coast Salish):

All things of the land are sacred; this includes human people, non-human people and inanimate people as well ... All teachings are sacred; all teachings are stories; all stories are sacred. Sacred Teachings explain everyday life to Salish young and old. Salish people are taught from birth how to be with everything in the land ... The philosophy of Take No Photos, Leave No Footprints addresses the practice of being prepared before we enter the land. It is a way of being that presupposes that any human people would know how to be spiritually, physically and mentally, and employ reason to ensure that the intrusions are limited in duration and leave no evidence of having been there. ... The Land is our host when we are on the Land. Being guests on the Land means working with the Land in a mutually respectful way. (de Frane 2001, 135).19[19]

For Indigenous people of the North, including the Finns and the Sami as Finno-Ugric peoples, giving back to nature has been based on a non-hierarchical and non-dualistic world view where goods are circulated as gifts in the name of collective peace and balance, not hoarded for private consumption. Treating animals with respect as subjects with inherent, inalienable rights contrasts sharply with the commodification and subjugation of animals within agribusiness (Kailo 1998, 2003, 2004c). Also, in the distant times the notion of power—at least when attached to women—was not one of power over, but one of power within. There is always the risk of resurrecting the myth of the noble savage or of lending weight to the myths of women's nurture gene. Therefore it is important to stress that women, as well as Native people, only risk being stereotyped in dualistic, idealising and denigrating ways, through the Exchange Gaze. The concept of women being closer to nature than culture is only possible from the perspective of the master imaginary that values culture over nature, and thus cannot imagine men wanting to be part of it. However, in the prehistoric worldview no such dualisms dominated. All were on the side of nature, with nature being part of culture. From the point of view of the Gift gaze, there is no dualism of noble vs. shameful savage; individuals are what they are with their foibles, but a worldview based on Indigenous notions does not have either nobility or savages; its order consists of interdependent members of an extended family of humans and animals. Also, for the East Indian ecologist, Shiva, who has written much about East Indian Native traditions and attitudes towards nature, diversity is the basis of mutuality and reciprocity—the "law of return" must replace the logic of return on investments, if the planet is to survive (1997: 87). For Vaughan, reciprocity is itself a term that aligns itself with the exchange economy; therefore she privileges the term GIFT, which Shiva, too, seems to have increasingly embraced.

The Gift Imaginary then as a concept is not in itself new, as is true of most ideas. It is a background notion in the feminist herstory and feminist or Native ways of ordering reality. I am merely selecting and combining

19[19]I have elaborated on these points in several other articles (see Kailo 2003a, 2003b, 2004a).

feminist and other writings and my own perspective to create a narrative concept with a new focus. Dorothy Riddle for example has addressed the need to unite spirituality and politics in a collection of ecofeminist writings published in 1982 as *The Politics of Women's Spirituality. Essays on the Rise of Spiritual Power Within the Feminist Movement*. Riddle addresses similar issues of feminist theory as I have evoked above:

Traditionally, we have tended to focus either on spirituality or on politics, either on process or on product; but they are interrelated. Spirituality focuses from society to the individual, emphasizing uniqueness and individuality. Politics focuses from the individual to society, emphasizing our membership in a group. At the same time, spirituality focuses on our interconnectedness and sense of oneness, while politics focuses on our differences, which result in our experience of separateness. (Riddle 1982: 374)

For Riddle, the ingredients of any process of change include an awareness of the need for change, a belief or vision that change is possible, and a commitment to action. She views the first ingredient as primarily a political process—one of analysis and the second as primarily a spiritual process—of imaging a potential new synthesis. Riddle also echoes Starhawk's writings on the need to invent alternative forms of power as empowerment to benefit all:

Power-over relating, or the conquest model, is maintained by several myths. The first of these is the myth of the half-person. This myth states that we are each half-persons and that we need another person in order to make us whole. The second myth is that of scarcity, i.e., that there is not enough to go around. If we believe that we must compete for scarce resources, then we will also believe that we must hoard whatever we have rather than sharing it. ... (Riddle 1982: 377)

Echoing the Gift Imaginary, both spirituality and politics are combined since action contains both process (means) and product (end) components (Riddle 1982, 374-75). What I add—inspired by Vaughan—is a more thorough, deep-delving, locally and globally relevant perspective on economics and spiritual process. Instead of masculated existentialism, based on being and nothingness (Sartre), the lack and deficit cutting, the freefloating signifier (Lacan), ego-building as the drive toward aggressive individuality (Freud), I opt for abundance and the gifted state of beeing.²⁰ Instead of the psychopathology of everyday life (Freud), I stress the need for an imaginary recognizing the everyday eros of gift-based living.

The Gift Imaginary, then, is not first and foremost an academic concept but a creative process towards a radically other worldview, based on concrete action and on theory. Chrys Ingraham has coined the term "heterosexual imaginary" to reveal the extent to which the dominant imaginary is rooted in compulsory, if unavowed heterosexuality. For her, it is that way of thinking which conceals the operation of heterosexuality in structuring gender and closes off any critical analysis of heterosexuality as an organizing institution. The effect of this depiction of reality is that heterosexuality circulates as taken for granted, naturally occurring, and unquestioned, while gender is understood as socially constructed and central to the organization of everyday life (Ingraham 1997: 275). I agree that the exchange economy does contain this dimension of a particular heterosexist imaginary as well, which further exposes the particular and subtler operations within patriarchy. I also embrace a critique of heterosexism as yet another important dimension to be exposed and transformed. Seen through the lens of the Gift, heterosexism, however, is not just about male-female sexuality and power, it is about a whole worldview based on a dualistic rather than multifocal, multilevel lens—a kaleidoscopic mode of Seeing. Compulsory heterosexuality also reflects the obsession to see dualistically—through the filter of a naturalize male-female mode of organizing reality. It ignores the rainbow of colours and ways of being that better reflect life's infinite variety. Indeed, it is necessary also to interrupt the ways in which the heterosexual imaginary naturalizes heterosexuality and conceals its constructedness in the illusion of universality. The

²⁰[20]I spell beeing consciously with two "ees" for I want to root it in the ontological hints contained in the Finnish pre-Christian worldview with its world renewal ceremonies; in the sacred, spiritual sweats where the world order was being recreated, the shaman-as-a-bear may well have called upon divine bees to help with the process of rebirth and cyclical renewal. Beeing was created on the basis of the magic substance of renewal, of which the bees knew the secret, with their divine honey (Kailo 2004f). "Beeing" has to do with the plenitude, not existential emptiness of being, it refers to meady, cosmic longings and oneness with the sense of self-expansion more central than the recognition of the lack at the heart of being. It refers to an "oceanic state" beyond the existential Angst of questions such as to be or not to be.

realization of a Gift imaginary also necessitates a systemic analysis of the ways in which compulsory heterosexuality (mostly a Western, historical manifestation of the cultural sex/gender systems) is historically implicated in the patriarchal distribution of economic resources, cultural power, and social control. Vaughan's theory of the gift economy can be complemented most fruitfully by a materialist feminist concept, Ingraham's "heterogender" which de-naturalizes the "sexual" as the starting point for understanding heterosexuality. In contrast, it connects institutionalised heterosexuality with the gender division of labour and the patriarchal relations of production (Ingraham 1997: 276). What holistic practices like the Gift Imaginary offer at best is the opportunity for women and men willing to espouse the other "conditioning", to recover and re-source their own sources of wisdom. It enables them to align themselves with new or newly re-discovered expanses of being and living. The political implication of self-healing includes not only the empowerment of the self, but also the creation of new definitions of our potential as members of human society. To heal is to become whole. To become whole means being able also to assess and act on collective, societal addictions (consumerism) through increased self-knowledge, critical consciousness, embodied spiritedness.

However, I have not answered whether gift circulation, care and emotional labour are really "spiritual". Who has the power and authority to define the "spiritual"? Since the dominant class—elite men—have had the privilege and power to define reality, they have also seized it to shroud spirituality in associations and definitions reinforcing their own reflections. Are the grass-roots feminists and academics within the Gift Economy group "spiritual"? While I do not wish to speak for and define spirituality on behalf of other women, I do seize the power to define it for myself. For me, based on my understanding, both intuitive and academic, of the worldview of archaic Finno-Ugric peoples (to which I belong), spirituality and materiality, the spiritual and the earthly, the mind of matter and the matter of which the spirit consists are not manifestations of duality. They are not essences, and what matters is not their inner core or unknowable reality. What matters—very concretely—is the attitude we bring to them. All created beings are by definition animate, they are alive, they grow, die, get recycled. To relate to them and the inherent nature that we are through the Gift perspective, is to respect their immanent sanctity. By aligning ourselves with the sanctity of all forms of life, we are also more likely to align ourselves with respectful attitudes that see value in giving back, or of passing on the gifts we have received for the benefit of the entire ecosystem, and all of its members.

Conclusion

As I have suggested, politically engaged materialist feminism and ecospirituality need not be strange bedfellows. "Virile" feminisms based on the master imaginary, a dualistic world view and the espousal of the cognicentric rationality, can be seen to reflect the master/slave identity, an imaginary based on the very notion of deficit which characterizes masculated thought and values; it is characterized by an either/or way of seeing life, an inability to flow the rapids of spirituality and Marxism, expressing a fragmented, compartmentalized relatedness to the world, to mind and matter, the soul and the earth. At worst, it is intolerant of other ways of perceiving and evaluating life, denigrating other forms of rationality.

Vaughan exhorts us to restore the mother image as the human image, and gift giving as the human way. Many Western feminists, particularly of the "secular" Marxist trend, have more in common with the instrumental view of life than they may be willing to admit. It stresses material conditions and prioritizes economic issues at the expense of earth-centred spirituality and the interconnectedness of humans and nature in its diverse forms and manifestations. Seen from the give back and gift perspectives, however, economics and spirituality need to be mutually exclusive. Many women's and Indigenous peoples' traditional paradigms have, as proof, united the spirituality of care and giving and the "economics of giving back" which are part and parcel of the holistic worldview. In such a perspective, politics and spirituality, spirituality and economic are not separate, compartmentalized realms: they form one. Spirituality is not reserved for particular sites or days but permeates one's approach and attitude toward self and another. While some places are considered particularly powerful and sacred, this does not translate into their "opposites" being secular. Rather, everything is spiritual, some sites merely more so. The secular as a category does not exist.

I will conclude with Vaughan's comments on the logic of motherhood as a nonessentialist process, for I agree with de Beauvoir that women are not born but become women. Boys, too, can be brought up on those care

rational values that have made girls as a group more sensitive to the environment, also less racist and more collaborative in their working life.

Mother earth is not just a metaphor. Nature actually functions according to the gift way, not the exchange way. ...If we project the non-nurturing perspective of exchange we will see nature as objectified. Our understanding of nature as alive or dead really depends on whether we project the giftgiving way onto "her" or not. And very much the same for ourselves. The point of view of the ego created by exchange is very limited. Taking the point of view of the other, or of many others as having a need which we might satisfy, expands our perspective. ... Create and believe in a women's culture with the economic base of gift giving now still burdened by the exchange economy, patriarchy and its values, but liberateable. ...Practice gift gaze to see needs instead of exchange gaze to reap profit. Act in accord with gift values while not self-destructing (2002: 5-6).

Vaughan stresses, and here lies another contribution to feminist gift theory, that mothering (giftgiving) is not a state but a creative process (2002, 7). One need not be a biological mother to adopt the values of the mothering and the logic of caring, catering to needs:

Abstracting from a state ...is different from abstracting from a process or different instances or levels of a process. Abstracting from states we may find an essence, attempting to abstract from a process at different levels and instances of a process gives us a common logic or series of interconnected behaviors. If mothering is a process which takes place at different levels, abstracting its commonalities does not give us an essence. It gives us the logic of the gift. (Vaughan 2002: 7).

Vaughan's logic of motherhood as the new norm does not reside in the dualistic division of labour established by patriarchy to the benefit of elite nations and men, but in extending the role of nurturing and the ethics of care and responsibility to all. This logic of mothering as a way to meet the needs of all in society, and to extend thanks and respect to the entire ecosystem, also means becoming active rather than passive and unconscious recipients of care, of seeing concrete and political value in care taking, something that in patriarchy is only idolized and delegated to the poor, not appreciated in terms of salaries, pensions or social values. We need to consider how we can pool our resources around the gift paradigm and economies, in order to formulate a strong practice of resistance to the colonial forces. This means that the global women's movement needs to also address its own robbery or "privatisation" of the gifts of the less privileged groups--foremost women of colour in the overexploited rather than the overdeveloped countries. It is undeniable that the appropriation of gifts has taken place not just between men and women, but between men and less privileged men, between privileged women in North and South and between the less privileged women in all parts of the globe. As Vaughan sums it up, patriarchy is a societal disease, while gift giving creates alignment with nature (Vaughan 2002). The combined strategies may well undermine the patriarchal exchange economy within the academic world and its exchange-based disciplines, and also create positive resistance outside of the institutions, on grassroots levels. The strategies are not either/or ways of organizing and taking action, but philosophies and a worldview based on both/and visionings, rooted in embodied politics, politics with spirit bodies.

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