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What is the Community Exchange System?

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The **Community Exchange System** (CES) is a community-based exchange system that provides the means for its users to exchange their goods and services, both locally and remotely. It could also be described as a global complementary trading network that operates without money as it is commonly understood.

Unlike the conventional money-based exchange system, the CES has no physical currency. The idea that such a currency is required before any trading can take place is an ancient one and increasingly irrelevant in this day and age of computers and the Internet. Information can replace currencies and at the same time eliminate most of the problems associated with regular money.

There are many similar trading systems around the world, commonly know as **Community Exchange Systems**, **Local Exchange Trading Systems** (LETS), **Mutual Credit** trading systems, **Trade Exchanges** or **Time Banks**.

Apart from using information instead of currencies to facilitate exchange, these exchange systems are community-focussed in order to build community and keep wealth where it is created. The CES takes this a step further by providing the means for inter-community trading, right up to the global level.

As the 'currency' in the above types of exchange systems is information it does not have to be ‘created’ like conventional money so there is no need for an issuing authority or for a supply of it, and none is required to start trading. ‘Money’ in these systems is a retrospective score-keeping that keeps a record of who did what for whom and who provided what to whom. There can never be a shortage of information as there can be of money, as information does not have to be created and limited by a third party (banks or government) in order to give it value and meaning. For this reason the concepts of borrowing, lending and interest are meaningless in the CES.

There are many different types of complementary exchange systems (CESs) and they are growing in popularity throughout the world. Some use ‘hard’ currencies, where notes and coins are issued by the group for their own use; others use time as a 'currency' rather than notes; and yet others use a ‘virtual currency' which is the recording of the values of goods and services exchanged.

Complementary exchange systems foster the real wealth of communities and rebuild a sense of worth and self-esteem among their users. Around the world they report an increased sense of vitality in all sectors of the communities using them. While these exchange systems might have a slightly different function for each of these sectors, they certainly have relevance to all.

These systems provide infinite opportunities for exchanging one's narrow specialisations for the goods and services offered by others. In this way a complementary exchange system acts like a supplementary currency, creating an additional stream of value in a community. By supplementing conventional cash flow with a local exchange system a community can provide an additional source of essential goods and services that become scarce in economic downturns and protect itself from changes and fluctuations in the national money supply.

I help you, and you help another—and someone else helps me. The recipients of help become, in turn, the providers of help. What goes around comes around. By helping others you become entitled to receive goods, services or help from someone else. When you receive something, someone else is entitled to claim from the community the equivalent of what they provided.

How does it work?

CES exchanges compile and distribute a directory of goods and services offered by the users registered with them, as well as a list of their ‘wants’ or requirements. When a user requires something advertised in the directory the seller is contacted and the trade takes place. The buyer 'pays' the seller by signing a trading sheet provided by the seller or by handing over a cheque-like trading slip that records how much the buyer is agreeing to be debited by the seller for the goods/service delivered. The slip is either handed by the seller to a group administrator who will enter the amount into the computerised system, or the information is entered directly by the seller. Sales are recorded as credits for sellers and as debits for buyers. The central book-keeping system records the relative trading positions of the traders. Those in credit can claim from the community goods and services to the value of their credit and those in debit owe the community goods and services to the value of their debit. Traders receive a regular statement of account that lists their trades and gives their balance at the end of the period. Information about the trading position of others prevents unscrupulous buyers from exploiting the system. Newsletters assist in building links and enhancing the sense of community.

Is this a form of Barter?

No! Barter almost always involves bargaining between two individuals to establish the relative worth of the goods or services they wish to exchange. There is no bargaining in the CES as the receipient is in no way obligated to the provider; you 'pay' for what you have received by delivering/selling something to another trader in the community at a later time. Complementary exchange systems are as versatile as conventional ones.

Is this just a tax dodge?

Definitely not! Our motives are noble. Our aim is to create a more equal society where wealth is distributed according to contribution, not according to the ability to ‘make money’. In other countries where these systems have become big, the state has either ignored the tax angle because it saves state expenditure on welfare payments, or there is an agreement to provide services to the state. Our approach is that when the CES becomes big, the state should become a user of the CES and participate in the normal way. In this way the state could credit itself through the services it provides to all user and debit itself by purchasing the services of CES users.

Can I only trade with members of my own exchange group?

The CES is an international trading network with exchanges in many countries. Credits earned in one exchange can be spent in another, or if you are visiting another area you can trade with local CES traders. New exchanges are starting in new areas all the time, and existing ones are growing steadily.

What other benefits are there in using a community exchange system?

One of the reasons why we took the initiative to launch this project is that it is in line with our New Economics thinking. New Economics is about rebuilding society using alternative/sustainable economic policies and practices. Complementary exchange systems fall into this category because they are instrumental in:

- **Mobilizing the Real Wealth of a Community**: The knowledge and skills of its people is the real wealth of a community. Conventional money drains away while a local exchange system keeps this wealth moving about the community, generating economic activity and providing access to the common wealth for all involved. People who have accumulated a wide range of skills and abilities suddenly become once again highly valued members of the community.
- **Fostering Self-Reliance & Self Esteem**: In our communities unemployment is growing and increasing numbers of people are unable to get their needs met. Single-parents may need respite care or other services for their children. Elderly pensioners also need a range of specialised services or may simply require company to combat loneliness. At present a person's ability to access these and other services is proportional to their purchasing power. The community exchange system breaks this bottleneck by making it easier to match someone's need with another's offerings. People are no longer dependent upon welfare or charity, and everyone's self esteem is elevated.
- **Increased Personal Savings & Disposable Income**: Because CES users can acquire local goods and services through their local exchange system, this reduces their need for national currency. Disposable income in conventional money, available after basic needs are met, thus increases. Those who trade regularly with complementary exchange systems will find they have more money left in their pockets at the end of each week. The rate of community savings, and therefore of community investment and capital generation, will improve. This will result in an improvement in the quality of life for everyone.
- **Creating Local Economic Control**: Complementary exchange systems help to plug the leaky bucket of the local economy. By creating an exchange system that reduces the leakage of wealth from a community, uncontrolled and activity-limiting capital outflows are reduced. As wealth generated by users of a local exchange system only has value in the community in which it is generated, it continues circulating to create more wealth for everyone. They give community members a powerful new tool with which to "steer" the local economy in directions which benefit everyone.
- **Building Community Support Networks**: Because the CES plugs its users into a local information network, it provides new or isolated residents with an instantaneous social support network. This avoids the embarrassment of introductions for strangers. Through a CES network all users have a ready reason for calling for support or help. Elderly pensioners, people with disabilities, unemployed youth, supporting parents, new arrivals, and single-income families with partners trapped in a dormitory suburb can all build firm friendships on relationships established through a functioning network.
- **Fostering Social Justice & Equality**: Because the value attached to one's time and commitment is set individually by participants, a complementary exchange system equalises the differentials that exist in the conventional economy between the work of women and the work of men. This greater equality helps prevent the polarisation of the community "haves" and "have-nots". There is no point in accumulating community credits as they do not earn interest. It is only by spending them back into the community that the individual or community benefits. Local exchange systems foster participation at all levels in the community.
- **Building a Sense of Community**: The increasingly transient, temporary and mobile lifestyle in the world today has seriously damaged our sense of belonging to a meaningful community. Because a local exchange system builds relationships it is a powerful means of regenerating a sense of trust among community members, a necessary component to the health of any community. As communities become more self-aware and self-reliant through the use of a local exchange system, isolation, fear and loneliness diminishes and everyone benefits.
- **Keeping Wealth Where it is Created**: National currencies always leak away to the 'money centres' creating money deserts and the dwindling of local economic activity. Local exchange systems, on the other hand, are community based and so keep wealth where it is created. Where previously economic activity was stagnant, the local exchange system can stimulate trade and permit things to happen where formerly there was no economic activity due to a lack of money. By being community focussed the entire community becomes self-sufficient and does not have to rely on 'imports' and external businesses to provide what is required.
- **Bringing the 'Money Power' Back to the Commons**: The money we use in our daily lives is provided by the corporate financial system as a profit-making enterprise, not by the government as a public service to the community. As such, the money we use does not belong to the commons and so we have little control over how it is spent and who it benefits. A local exchange system is democratic because it brings the 'money power' back to the people. Its users can decide how that power is exerted.

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Alternative currencies: A challenge to globalisation?

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Alternative Currencies: A Challenge to Globalisation?

RACHAEL TIBBETT

Introduction

The monopoly of a single currency was unknown before the 19th century.[1] In other words, 'alternative' currencies have been the norm until recent times. An immense variety of substances have had monetary uses, including such diverse items as bricks, beeswax, dog's teeth, calves, fur, slaves and almonds.[2] This is not surprising, given that, as Hayek observes, there is no such thing as 'money' *per se*; rather 'moneyness' is a set of properties possessed to varying degrees across time and cultures by many different objects.[3]

However, since the beginning of modern times, there has been a trend towards monetary integration, at first nationally, and now internationally, for example with proposals for a European single currency. The creation of a single, universally accepted currency is encouraged by orthodox economic theory. This favours all actions which bring the economy closer to profit-maximising perfect competition through the elimination of market inefficiencies and barriers to trade. National currencies, local currencies, competing currencies, exchange controls are seen as anachronisms, imposing social and economic costs and impeding economic growth. It is estimated that the introduction of a European single currency would reduce transaction costs equivalent to 1 per cent of Gross Domestic Product for smaller member states and 0.5 per cent for larger states.[4]

Yet financial globalisation is itself accused of imposing economic and social costs.[5] It is criticised for exacerbating income disparities between regions and reducing economic sovereignty and local self-reliance. Jensen and Fagan argue that economic pressures on wages and unemployment caused by such globalisation will cause political stresses that could endanger the continued existence of Western democracies and the post-1945 social contract.[6]

While financial globalisation has gathered pace, there has also been a major increase in barter and alternative currency schemes of various types, from commercial barter systems to community-based Local Exchange Trading Systems (LETS) and alternative paper currencies. It has also been argued that financial deregulation and developments with electronic money, credit, debit and

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smart cards have resulted in the *de-facto* creation of currencies competing with national money, even though they are denominated in official currency.[7]

Barter has been growing within and between countries since the 1970s. An estimated 25 per cent of East–West trade involved barter in the 1970s, rising in the 1980s and 1990s.[8] The collapse of communism has led to a surge in barter, the use of gold and the creation of 'factory currencies'. Used for wages, they are exchangeable for (bartered) goods in the factory shop.[9] Barter trade also comprises a significant part of the internal and external trading of some Middle Eastern and Latin American countries. The Atwood—Richards Corporate Exchange Firm dealt with £65 million worth of Mexican barter trade in 1994, 70 per cent of which was domestic trade, and expected to top £100 million worth in 1995.[10] In 1991, US commercial barter networks reported US$5.9 billion trading among 240 000 clients, in 450 systems, with an estimated growth rate of 10 per cent p.a.[11]

LETS schemes 'in the UK have grown from five in 1992' to over 270 in early 1995.[12] There are LETS schemes in many other countries across the world, in addition to paper-based alternative currency systems such as Ithaca Hours. More and more retailers, including Esso and the Takashimaya department store of Japan, are introducing smart cards with rebates on purchases in an attempt to capture trade.[13]

Alternative currencies

There is much diversity in examples of and proposals for alternative currencies recorded since the beginning of the modern era. There are four main categories: non-monetary substitutes such as tobacco, playing cards or postage stamps; note issues, of which there are many different types; barter schemes such as the New Zealand Commercial Exchange Company (1898–1904) or present-day LETS; and banking schemes such as the Wirtschaftring (WIR) in Switzerland or Jord–Arbete–Kapital (JAK) in Scandinavia.

Some are purely nominal or fiduciary, others are based around precious metals, backed by an official reserve, or backed by a commodity standard. They may be tied to the value of official currency or free-floating. They have been issued by many different associations, including local governments, a group of citizens, employers, shopkeepers, business people, welfare services and charities. They may be targetted at a particular group of people or region, or be in general circulation. A few are interest bearing, others are not, and some bear negative interest so that currency-holders are penalised and currency-circulation encouraged. Some examples of contemporary alternative currency schemes are provided below.

The common element of these schemes is that they all seek to overcome perceived inadequacies of official currencies by supplementing or bypassing them. There are two main ways in which they consciously or otherwise seek to do this: *parallel* or *complementary* currencies supplement what is seen as a scarce, expensive, or unstable means of official exchange. *Local* currencies trap money within a closed currency system (shop, business club, region), stimulating local trade.

Although some currencies are introduced by people driven by necessity in times of crisis, rather than by ideology, many are introduced by those who would like to see reform of the existing monetary system. As such, they are part of a long tradition of dissent from the orthodox viewpoint about the nature and purposes of money.

Securing an efficient means of exchange

Dissenters argue that the paradox of 'poverty in the midst of plenty', or of the coexistence of unsatisfied need, unemployment and spare production capacity, can only be explained by a shortage of money to facilitate exchange. This scarcity is attributed to an in-built tension between two of the main functions of money, as well as to certain other characteristics of the conventional money system. Karl Polanyi has shown that the commonly accepted functions of money evolved independently over time and are separable from each other.[14] Dissenters argue that such separation is highly desirable, as the *store of wealth* function of conventional money prevents it from acting effectively as a *means of exchange*.

The store of wealth function is regarded as an impediment to the circulation of money because money cannot circulate at the same time as it is stored. A requirement for the free and efficient circulation of a means of exchange is that it is regarded as nothing more than a token with no intrinsic value, a measure for the exchange of 'real' wealth. However, money is not regarded as a token but as a desirable commodity in its own right, a commodity which is preferable to others because of its unique ability to preserve its value. Unlike other goods, money (in the absence of inflation) does not decay over time, and may actually appreciate through the accumulation of interest.

Silvio Gesell[15] argued that, because money does not decay, its holders have an advantage over the holders of other goods. Whereas the farmer must sell his produce before it deteriorates, the holder of money can bide his time. If the price of a commodity is dropping, it will be in the interest of the holder of money to wait a little longer until the price drops yet further, and so on. Gesell argued that this contributes towards the creation of booms and depressions by encouraging speculation, thus acting against the efficient exchange of goods in the market place.

In order to enable money to function efficiently as a means of exchange, Gesell said that money must 'rust' like other commodities, in order to discourage hoarding and encourage its circulation. He advocated the use of a currency known as 'stamp scrip' which must be stamped for a small fee after a certain period of time in order to retain its face value. Knowledge that the money must be spent before this deadline in order to avoid the need to purchase a stamp would encourage people to spend it rather than hoard it. Based upon Gesell's ideas, stamp scrip schemes were introduced in significant numbers in a number of countries during the Great Depression, and their cause in the USA was taken up by the economist Irving Fisher.[16]

The diversion of money from its role in facilitating trade to more profitable speculation on the money markets is accused of creating a situation in which a surplus of liquidity exists at the same time as a real shortage of capital.[17] The daily turnover of the currency markets is equivalent to 40 times the average daily turnover of the world trade and service markets. As currency speculation is so profitable, companies such as Siemens now make more money through financial operations than production.[18]

It is argued by Dieter Suhr, following Gesell and Proudhon, that the existence of interest also restricts the level of trade and transactions below the market clearing level.[19] Interest may make a transaction unprofitable which, in its absence, would be profitable; therefore it depresses trade. Moreover, as interest charges grow exponentially, the interest burden grows massively over time. According to Margrit Kennedy, hidden interest payments in service charges and the prices of goods amount to an estimated 50 per cent of average total costs of goods and services in western Europe. In the case of Germany, she estimates that 80 per cent of the population loses through the existence of hidden interest, 10 per cent break even, and 10 per cent gain massively.[20]

The fractional reserve banking system, in which an estimated 95 per cent of currency is debt, is also accused of being a major exacerbator of recessions, through the contraction of the money supply occurring when banks or individuals call in their loans. Irving Fisher observed that, during the Great Depression, the withdrawal of US$1 billion in cash from the banks led to a shrinking of the total money supply (cash plus credit) by a third.[21]

Finally, monetary dissenters are often critical of monetary integration measures which enable money to flow in search of the highest profits, leaving poorer regions suffering again from scarce means of exchange. Since 1980 there has been a net flow of capital into the USA of about US$1 trillion.[22] In addition, moves towards monetary integration reduce the economic sovereignty of local and regional governments, so that at the same time as they are faced with a worsening economic situation, their powers to ameliorate it are removed.

Dissenters argue generally that the current money system leads to a progressive impoverishment of a large part of the population. This may be because of debt, because of restricted access to credit or because their interest payments are greater than their receipts. Perhaps their incomes have declined because of public expenditure cuts deemed necessary to reduce and service the burgeoning public sector deficit, or when their employer decided to shift operations to another country in pursuit of greater profits. They seek to reinvigorate depressed communities by injecting money into the local economy.

Practical alternative currencies today

It was shown in the introduction that there has been a resurgence in the use of alternatives to official money since the 1970s. There has been a major increase in commercial barter for both internal and external trade, particularly in the Third World and eastern Europe, where 80 per cent of estimated domestic trade takes place by barter, but also in the West.

A revival has also taken place in the fortunes of many alternative currency schemes first introduced during the Great Depression, such as the JAK interest-free currency and banking system in Scandinavia, which was founded during the 1930s and was restarted in the 1970s. By 1991 Swedish JAK had 3900 members and a turnover of 34 million Swedish crowns, about US$15 million. Just two years later, there were 38 000 members and a turnover of 600 million Swedish crowns.[23] The Swiss WIR currency and banking system has also experienced a revival in recent years, with a turnover of £1200 million and 60 000 accounts in 1993.[24]

The past few decades have also witnessed the growth of a range of entirely new note issues and community-based banking and barter schemes. There was an attempt to introduce two new currency and banking schemes in Switzerland (the SYS network), and Holland (Liquid Capital Circuit), but these failed in the face of heavy pressure from the authorities.[25] The rise of LETS schemes since the early 1980s has been well documented, but their 1970s British forerunner, Link Opportunity, introduced to encourage trading between retired people, is less well known.[26] Note-issues include the experimental Constant (1972), which was based upon a commodity basket of 30 goods,[27] Time Dollars or service credits, created in the mid-1980s by a US welfare lawyer with the aim of reinvigorating the 'community economy'[28] and Ithaca Hours, circulating in the home town of their inventor since 1991.[29] Since the collapse of communism in the USSR, 'factory currencies' exchangeable for goods available in the factory shop have been recorded as widespread.[30] Community-created currencies are spreading in Mexico and elsewhere in Latin America[31] and have also been recorded in the Middle East.

Finally, there has been a rise in the use of credit, debit and smart cards which arguably act in some respects as alternative currencies, being issued by different institutions including shops, and frequently seeking to capture trade within a particular system, even though, denominated as they are in official money, they are not true alternatives.

Reasons for the resurgence

It is noteworthy that most alternative currencies throughout history have in fact been established where there is a perceived shortage of stable currency, frequently because of war or trade depression. Examples from wartime include the special government issues of Greenbacks during the American Civil War, the Bradbury 'Treasury Notes' and Kriegsgeld issued by Britain and Germany, respectively, during the First World War,[32] and the postage stamp currencies recorded during many conflicts across the world.[33] Examples from trade depressions include Robert Owen's Labour Notes, which circulated during the panic of 1832–34[34] and the numerous stamp scrip schemes of the 1930s.[35]

Similarly, it can be argued that the current revival in alternative currencies is in large part stimulated by a perceived shortage of means of exchange among certain regions and groups. The Third World debt crisis has undoubtedly contributed to the growth in barter and the use of community-created 'new money' in countries such as Mexico, and to the introduction of private note issues by the regional government of Salta in Argentina.[36] The virtual collapse of the economic and monetary systems in eastern Europe has provided a similar powerful incentive to the growth of barter. In the UK LETS schemes are used by the unemployed as a means to obtain things which would otherwise not be affordable, supporting the argument that some of their popularity is the result of a shortage of or unequal access to exchange.[37]

Many local currency schemes have been advocated with the explicit aim of protecting regions or groups which are particularly vulnerable to the forces of economic globalisation. It is argued that globalisation is only partial and that many groups will not participate in the global economy but will be marginalised members of a 'fourth world'. In the UK Demos has proposed the creation of a partially insulated economy with its own currency parallel to the formal economy in order to solve the problem of chronic unemployment.[38] Time Dollars were created as a strategy for rebuilding the 'non-market economy'.[39] There is also much interest in local currencies to revitalise poorer geographical areas, help insulate them from external shocks and provide a measure of local autonomy and independence.

Richard Douthwaite argues that local economic autonomy is impossible without an autonomous currency. A national currency forces local communities to trade externally, even at disadvantageous terms of trade. He gives the example of a village in India, where local trade can only take place if a rupee first comes into the economy from outside. Communities with no local currency are *forced* to trade outside their community first if they wish to be able to trade *inside*. There is no way for local economies to build their prosperity except through external trade, even though they may have little to trade. Thus, he argues:

> Community Currencies are one of the most powerful ways in which people, whether First World or Third, can take power away from the international markets and into their own hands.[40]

In addition to the ways in which the side-effects of monetary integration and economic globalisation have stimulated the development of survival strategies, there are arguably a number of other factors peculiar to the modern period which are encouraging the growth of alternative currencies. Perhaps the most significant contribution to the success of alternative currencies has been the rapid development of information and communication technologies. The development of reliable low-cost computing technologies has greatly facilitated the ease and speed with which both community and commercial barter schemes can be administered. Landsman, for example, distributes a software package for the administration of LETS accounts.[41] Information and debate about alternative currencies have also been widely disseminated through the internet. The internet enables a rapid exchange of ideas for those with access to it, and offers an efficient forum for the dissemination of ideas which it is difficult to get publicised in the mainstream media.[42]

The second major factor has been the growth in the environmental or green movement, which has pinpointed the existing monetary system as needing reform if the economy is to be run in an environmentally sustainable way. Much of the impetus for new money schemes has come from thinkers in this tradition, such as the proposals for EcoMoney in Japan, the proposal for Eco Currency in Europe, exchangeable for consumer scrap,[43] and Schumacher bonds in the UK.

A third factor is the reported decline of the nation-state. Some argue that as the nation-state was the prime factor in creating a currency monopoly, its decline will liberate the potential for money to be created by all sorts of different groups. Evidence given for this is the decline of the nation-state in money creation. Less than 3 per cent of UK currency is in the form of notes and coins; the rest is created as credit by private banks and an increasing list of other institutions. However, this currency is still denominated in official units, and moves towards currency union suggest that control over currency is passing upwards to international bodies rather than down to regional groups.

A challenge to monetary globalisation

There are three main ways in which alternative currencies may challenge monetary globalisation. The first is by providing an intellectual or moral alternative. The second is that alternative currencies might actually overthrow, replace or undermine the existing monetary order. The third is that, while posing no threat to the monetary order, they prevent it from being absolute, and attempt to ameliorate its worst excesses. Davies notes that alternative perspectives on money have been a constant of monetary history and argues furthermore that they periodically gain the upper hand, normally in time of crisis.[44] Thus it is to be expected that monetary dissenters will continue to challenge monetary globalisation.

Some of the supporters of alternative currencies argue that they are capable of overthrowing or substantially weakening the existing monetary system. For example, Michael Linton predicted that 40 per cent of Manchester businesses would be on LETS by 1999.[45] However, the small scale of such experiments (most LETS schemes have an average of 85 members, and the largest 550[46]) and the failure of the Manchester LETS-GO initiative to achieve its early targets suggest that such a claim may not be realistic. Other schemes, such as the WIR and JAK systems, are larger, with membership in the tens of thousands.

Historically, whenever schemes have started to gain widespread support, the authorities have banned them. For example, following the success of the Austrian stamp scrip initiative in Worgl, the Austrian National Bank intervened to prohibit the printing of local money. Similarly, in the USA, stamp scrip was not approved by the US government in 1933 because 'it was an attempt to restructure the American monetary system'.[47] An official campaign was started against the SYS-network launched in Switzerland, again on the grounds that it could theoretically wipe out the banking system.

However, the long-term ramifications of new developments with digital cash and changes in the power of the nation-state are not yet fully apparent. Davies likens this to the revolution entailed in the invention of paper money,[48] and Matonis argues that for the first time in history a serious opportunity has arisen for the launch of an alternative monetary system:

> Granted, small local experiments such as LETS and constants, with limited real-world penetration have always seemed to exist in one form or another. But, only lately with a global, inter-networked society can we truly say that the established monetary order is susceptible to challenge.[49]

The current burgeoning of alternative currency schemes suggests that, while they may not be able to seriously challenge the existing system at the moment, they are used to replace that system where it fails or abandons groups of people. It is argued that globalisation is leading to the creation of a 'fourth world' of people who are denied access to the benefits of the new global economy. It seems likely therefore that alternative currency schemes will play an important role within this 'fourth world' supplementing and replacing the monetary order where that order has withdrawn. Thus it is highly unlikely that there will ever be, even in the very long term, a global currency monopoly.

Conclusion

The resurgence in the use of alternative currencies during an era in which there is a general trend towards monetary integration is neither paradoxical nor economically irrational. Thanks to the contradiction between the function of money as a store of value and that of money as a means of exchange, there has always been tension between those seeking to maintain money's value through a tight money policy and those who have wished to expand its supply in order to facilitate trade. Historically, most successful alternative currency experiments have been established in times of depression or national emergency. Several decades of tight monetary policy, the virtual collapse of the monetary systems of many eastern European and Third World countries, and moves towards monetary integration at the same time as disparities between and within regions are increasing have led to a situation in which many people feel that money is expensive and in short supply, even though credit has been expanding at an unprecedented rate. In addition it has been argued that developments in digital cash will lead to a revolution in the monetary order equivalent to that brought about by the invention of paper money, a revolution, moreover, which favours the use of alternative currencies.

While it is unlikely at the moment that alternative currency forms a serious threat to the paramountcy of official currency, it is equally unlikely, even in the very long term, that the future belongs to one single integrated currency. Monetary dissent on the grounds of a shortage of means of exchange has been a constant of monetary history and is likely to remain so as long as certain sections of the economy feel that their access to money is restricted. Necessity combined with human ingenuity will always find ways of bypassing such restrictions.

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The Political Economy of Peer Production*

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Not since Marx identified the manufacturing plants of Manchester as the blueprint for the new capitalist society has there been a deeper transformation of the fundamentals of our social life. As political, economic, and social systems transform themselves into distributed networks, a new human dynamic is emerging: peer to peer (P2P). As P2P gives rise to the emergence of a third mode of production, a third mode of governance, and a third mode of property, it is poised to overhaul our political economy in unprecedented ways. This essay aims to develop a conceptual framework ('P2P theory') capable of explaining these new social processes.

Peer to Peer

P2P does not refer to all behavior or processes that takes place in distributed networks: P2P specifically designates those processes that aim to increase the most widespread participation by equipotential participants. We will define these terms when we examine the characteristics of P2P processes, but here are the most general and important characteristics.

P2P processes:

- produce use-value through the free cooperation of producers who have access to distributed capital: this is the P2P production mode, a 'third mode of production' different from for-profit or public production by state-owned enterprises. Its product is not exchange value for a market, but use-value for a community of users.
- are governed by the community of producers themselves, and not by market allocation or corporate hierarchy: this is the P2P governance mode, or 'third mode of governance.'
- make use-value freely accessible on a universal basis, through new common property regimes. This is its distribution or 'peer property mode': a 'third mode of ownership,' different from private property or public (state) property.

The Infrastructure of P2P

What has been needed to facilitate the emergence of peer to peer processes? The first requirement is the existence of a technological infrastructure that operates on peer to peer processes and enables distributed access to 'fixed' capital. Individual computers that enable a universal machine capable of executing any logical task are a form of distributed 'fixed capital,' available at low cost to many producers. The internet, as a point to point network, was specifically designed for participation by the edges (computer users) without the use of obligatory hubs. Although it is not fully in the hands of its participants, the internet is controlled through distributed governance, and outside the complete hegemony of particular private or state actors. The internet's hierarchical elements (such as the stacked IP protocols, the decentralized Domain Name System, etc...) do not deter participation. Viral communicators, or meshworks, are a logical extension of the internet. With this methodology, devices create their own networks through the use of excess capacity, bypassing the need for a pre-existing infrastructure. The 'Community Wi-Fi' movement, Open Spectrum advocacy, file-serving television, and alternative meshwork-based telecommunication infrastructures are exemplary of this trend.

The second requirement is alternative information and communication systems which allow for autonomous communication between cooperating agents. The web (in particular the Writeable Web and the Web 2.0 that is in the process of being established) allows for the universal autonomous production, dissemination, and 'consumption' of written material while the associated podcasting and webcasting developments create an 'alternative information and communication infrastructure' for audio and audiovisual creation. The existence of such an infrastructure enables autonomous content production that may be distributed without the intermediary of the classic publishing and broadcasting media (though new forms of mediation may arise).

The third requirement is the existence of a 'software' infrastructure for autonomous global cooperation. A growing number of collaborative tools, such as blogs and wiki's, embedded in social networking software facilitate the creation of trust and social capital, making it possible to create global groups that can create use-value without the intermediary of manufacturing or distribution by for-profit enterprises.

The fourth requirement is a legal infrastructure that enables the creation of use-value and protects it from private appropriation. The General Public License (which prohibits the appropriation of software code), the related Open Source Initiative, and certain versions of the Creative Commons license fulfill this role. They enable the protection of common use-value and use viral characteristics to spread. GPL and related material can only be used in projects that in turn put their adapted source code in the public domain.

The fifth requirement is cultural. The diffusion of mass intellectuality, (i.e. the distribution of human intelligence) and associated changes in ways of feeling and being (ontology), ways of knowing (epistemology) and value constellations (axiology) have been instrumental in creating the type of cooperative individualism needed to sustain an ethos which can enable P2P projects.

The Characteristics of P2P

P2P processes occur in distributed networks. Distributed networks are networks in which autonomous agents can freely determine their behavior and linkages without the intermediary of obligatory hubs. As Alexander Galloway insists in his book on protocollary power, distributed networks are not the same as decentralized networks, for which hubs are obligatory. P2P is based on distributed power and distributed access to resources. In a decentralized network such as the U.S.-based airport system, planes have to go through determined hubs; however, in distributed systems such as the internet or highway systems, hubs may exist, but are not obligatory and agents may always route around them.

P2P projects are characterized by equipotentiality or 'anti-credentialism.' This means that there is no *a priori* selection to participation. The capacity to cooperate is verified in the process of cooperation itself. Thus, projects are open to all comers provided they have the necessary skills to contribute to a project. These skills are verified, and communally validated, in the process of production itself. This is apparent in open publishing projects such as citizen journalism: anyone can post and anyone can verify the veracity of the articles. Reputation systems are used for communal validation. The filtering is *a posteriori*, not *a priori*. Anti-credentialism is therefore to be contrasted to traditional peer review, where credentials are an essential prerequisite to participate.

P2P projects are characterized by holoptism. Holoptism is the implied capacity and design of peer to peer processes that allows participants free access to all the information about the other participants; not in terms of privacy, but in terms of their existence and contributions (i.e. horizontal information) and access to the aims, metrics and documentation of the project as a whole (i.e. the vertical dimension). This can be contrasted to the panoptism which is characteristic of hierarchical projects: processes are designed to reserve 'total' knowledge for an elite, while participants only have access on a 'need to know' basis. However, with P2P projects, communication is not top-down and based on strictly defined reporting rules, but feedback is systemic, integrated in the protocol of the cooperative system.

The above does not exhaust the characteristics of peer production. Below, we will continue our investigation of these characteristics in the context of a comparison with other existing modes of production.

P2P and the Other Modes of Production

The framework of our comparison is the Relational Models theory of anthropologist Alan Page Fiske, discussed in his major work *The Structure of Social Life*. The fact that modes of production are embedded in inter-subjective relations -- that is, characterized by particular relational combinations -- provides the necessary framework to distinguish P2P. According to Fiske, there are four basic types of inter-subjective dynamics, valid across time and space, in his own words:

People use just four fundamental models for organizing most aspects of sociality most of the time in all cultures. These models are Communal Sharing, Authority Ranking, Equality Matching, and Market Pricing. Communal Sharing (CS) is a relationship in which people treat some dyad or group as equivalent and undifferentiated with respect to the social domain in question. Examples are people using a commons (CS with respect to utilization of the particular resource), people intensely in love (CS with respect to their social selves), people who "ask not for whom the bell tolls, for it tolls for thee" (CS with respect to shared suffering and common well-being), or people who kill any member of an enemy group indiscriminately in retaliation for an attack (CS with respect to collective responsibility). In Authority Ranking (AR) people have asymmetric positions in a linear hierarchy in which subordinates defer, respect, and (perhaps) obey, while superiors take precedence and take pastoral responsibility for subordinates. Examples are military hierarchies (AR in decisions, control, and many other matters), ancestor worship (AR in offerings of filial piety and expectations of protection and enforcement of norms), monotheistic religious moralities (AR for the definition of right and wrong by commandments or will of God), social status systems such as class or ethnic rankings (AR with respect to social value of identities), and rankings such as sports team standings (AR with respect to prestige). AR relationships are based on perceptions of legitimate asymmetries, not coercive power; they are not inherently exploitative (although they may involve power or cause harm).

In Equality Matching relationships people keep track of the balance or difference among participants and know what would be required to restore balance. Common manifestations are turn-taking, one-person one-vote elections, equal share distributions, and vengeance based on an-eye-for-an-eye, a-tooth-for-a-tooth. Examples include sports and games (EM with respect to the rules, procedures, equipment and terrain), baby-sitting co-ops (EM with respect to the exchange of child care), and restitution in-kind (EM with respect to righting a wrong). Market Pricing relationships are oriented to socially meaningful ratios or rates such as prices, wages, interest, rents, tithes, or cost-benefit analyses. Money need not be the medium, and MP relationships need not be selfish, competitive, maximizing, or materialistic -- any of the four models may exhibit any of these features. MP relationships are not necessarily individualistic; a family may be the CS or AR unit running a business that operates in an MP mode with respect to other enterprises. Examples are property that can be bought, sold, or treated as investment capital (land or objects as MP), marriages organized contractually or implicitly in terms of costs and benefits to the partners, prostitution (sex as MP), bureaucratic cost-effectiveness standards (resource allocation as MP), utilitarian judgments about the greatest good for the greatest number, or standards of equity in judging entitlements in proportion to contributions (two forms of morality as MP), considerations of "spending time" efficiently, and estimates of expected kill ratios (aggression as MP).[1]

Every type of society or civilization is a mixture of these four modes, but it can plausibly be argued that one mode is always dominant and imprints the other subservient modes. Historically, the first dominant mode was kinship or lineage based reciprocity, the so-called tribal gift economies. The key relational aspect was 'belonging'. Gifts created obligations and relations beyond the next of kin, creating a wider field of exchange. Agricultural or feudal-type societies were dominated by authority ranking, that is, they were based on allegiance. Finally, it is clear that the capitalist economy is dominated by market pricing.

P2P and the Gift Economy

P2P is often described as a 'gift economy' (see Richard Barbrook for an example). However, it is our contention that this is somewhat misleading. The key reason is that peer to peer is not a form of equality matching; it is not based on reciprocity. P2P follows the adage: each contributes according to his capacities and willingness, and each takes according to his needs. There is no obligatory reciprocity involved. In the pure forms of peer production, producers are not paid. Thus, if there is 'gifting' it is entirely non-reciprocal gifting, the use of peer-produced use-value does not create a contrary obligation. The emergence of peer to peer is contemporaneous with new forms of the gift economy, such as the Local Exchange Trading Systems and the use of reciprocity-based complementary currencies; however, these do not qualify as peer production.

That is not to say that these forms are not complementary, since both equality matching and communal shareholding derive from the same spirit of gifting. Peer production can most easily operate in the sphere of immaterial goods, where the input is free time and the available surplus of computing resources. Equality matching, reciprocity-based schemes and cooperative production are necessary in the material sphere where the cost of capital intervenes. At present, peer production offers no solution to the material survival of its participants. Therefore, many people inspired by the egalitarian ethos will resort to cooperative production, the social economy, and other schemes from which they can derive an income, while at the same time honoring their values. In this sense, these schemes are complementary.

P2P and Hierarchy

P2P is not hierarchy-less, not structure-less, but usually characterized by flexible hierarchies and structures based on merit that are used to enable participation. Leadership is also 'distributed.' Most often, P2P projects are led by a core of founders, who embody the original aims of the project, and who coordinate the vast number of individuals and microteams working on specific patches. Their authority and leadership derives from their input into the constitution of the project, and on their continued engagement. It is true that peer projects are sometimes said to be 'benevolent dictatorships'; however, one must not forget that since the cooperation is entirely voluntary, the continued existence of such projects is based on the consent of the community of producers, and on 'forking' (that is, the creation of a new independent project, is always possible).

The relation between authority and participation, and its historical evolution, has been most usefully outlined by John Heron:

There seem to be at least four degrees of cultural development, rooted in degrees of moral insight:

1. autocratic cultures which define rights in a limited and oppressive way and there are no rights of political participation;

2. narrow democratic cultures which practice political participation through representation, but have no or very limited participation of people in decision-making in all other realms, such

as research, religion, education, industry etc.;

3. wider democratic cultures which practice both political participation and varying degree of wider kinds of participation;

4. commons p2p cultures in a libertarian and abundance-oriented global network with equi-potential rights of participation of everyone in every field of human endeavor.

These four degrees could be stated in terms of the relations between hierarchy, co-operation and autonomy.

1. Hierarchy defines, controls and constrains co-operation and autonomy;

2. Hierarchy empowers a measure of co-operation and autonomy in the political sphere only;

3. Hierarchy empowers a measure of co-operation and autonomy in the political sphere and in varying degrees in other spheres;

4. The sole role of hierarchy is in its spontaneous emergence in the initiation and continuous flowering of autonomy-in-co-operation in all spheres of human endeavor.[2]

P2P and Communal Shareholding

With P2P, people voluntarily and cooperatively construct a commons according to the communist principle: "from each according to his abilities, to each according to his needs." The use-value created by P2P projects is generated through free cooperation, without coercion toward the producers, and users have free access to the resulting use value. The legal infrastructure that we have described above creates an 'Information Commons.' The new Commons is related to the older form of the commons (most notably the communal lands of the peasantry in the Middle Ages and of the original mutualities of the workers in the industrial age), but it also differs mostly through its largely immaterial characteristics. The older Commons were localized, used, and sometimes regulated by specific communities; the new Commons are universally available and regulated by global cyber-collectives, usually affinity groups. While the new Commons is centered around non-rival goods (that is, in a context of abundance) the older forms of physical Commons (air, water, etc.) increasingly function in the context of scarcity, thus becoming more regulated.

P2P and the Market: The Immanence vs. Transcendence of P2P

P2P and the Market

P2P exchange can be considered in market terms only in the sense that individuals are free to contribute, or take what they need, following their individual inclinations, with a invisible hand bringing it all together, but without any monetary mechanism. They are not true markets in any real sense: neither market pricing nor managerial command are required to make decisions regarding the allocation of resources. There are further differences:

- Markets do not function according to the criteria of collective intelligence and holoptism, but rather, in the form of insect-like swarming intelligence. Yes, there are autonomous agents in a distributed environment, but each individual only sees his own immediate benefit.
- Markets are based on 'neutral' cooperation, and not on synergistic cooperation: no reciprocity is created.
- Markets operate for the exchange value and profit, not directly for use value.

- Whereas P2P aims at full participation, markets only fulfill the needs of those with purchasing power.

The disadvantages of markets include:

- They do not function well for common needs that do not involve direct payment (national defense, general policing, education and public health). In addition, they fail to take into account negative externalities (the environment, social costs, future generations).
- Since open markets tend to lower profit and wages, they always give rise to anti-markets, where oligopolies and monopolies use their privileged position to have the state 'rig' the market to their benefit.

P2P and Capitalism

Despite significant differences, P2P and the capitalist market are highly interconnected. P2P is dependent on the market and the market is dependent on P2P.

Peer production is highly dependent on the market because peer production produces use-value through mostly immaterial production, without directly providing an income for its producers. Participants cannot live from peer production, though they derive meaning and value from it, and though it may out-compete, in efficiency and productivity terms, the market-based for-profit alternatives. Thus peer production covers only a section of production, while the market provides for nearly all sections; peer producers are dependent on the income provided by the market. So far, peer production has been created through the interstices of the market.

But the market and capitalism are also dependent on P2P. Capitalism has become a system relying on distributed networks, in particular on the P2P infrastructure in computing and communication. Productivity is highly reliant on cooperative teamwork, most often organized in ways that are derivative of peer production's governance. The support given by major IT companies to open-source development is a testimony to the use derived from even the new common property regimes. The general business model seems to be that business 'surfs' on the P2P infrastructure, and creates a surplus value through services, which can be packaged for exchange value. However, the support of free software and open sources by business poses an interesting problem. Is corporate-sponsored, and eventually corporate managed, FS/OS software still 'P2P': only partially. If it uses the GPL/OSI legal structures, it does result in common property regimes. If peer producers are made dependent on the income, and even more so, if the production becomes beholden to the corporate hierarchy, then it would no longer qualify as peer production. Thus, capitalist forces mostly use partial implementations of P2P. The tactical and instrumental use of P2P infrastructure, (collaborative practices) is only part of the story. In fact, contemporary capitalism's dependence on P2P is systemic. As the whole underlying infrastructure of capitalism becomes distributed, it generates P2P practices and becomes dependent on them. The French-Italian school of 'cognitive capitalism' stresses that value creation today is no longer confined to the enterprise, but beholden to the mass intellectuality of knowledge workers, who through their lifelong learning/experiencing and systemic connectivity, constantly innovate within and without the enterprise. This is an important argument, since it would justify what we see as the only solution for the expansion of the P2P sphere into society at large: the universal basic income. Only the independence of work and the salary structure can guarantee that peer producers can continue to create this sphere of highly productive use value.

Does all this mean that peer production is only immanent to the system, productive of capitalism, and not in any way transcendent to capitalism?

P2P and the Netarchists

More important than the generic relationship that we just described, is the fact that peer to peer processes also contribute to more specific forms of distributed capitalism. The massive use of open source software in business, enthusiastically supported by venture capital and large IT companies such as IBM, is creating a distributed software platform that will drastically undercut the monopolistic rents enjoyed by companies such as Microsoft and Oracle, while Skype and VoIP will drastically redistribute the telecom infrastructure. In addition, it also points to a new business model that is 'beyond' products, focusing instead on services associated with the nominally free FS/OS software model. Industries are gradually transforming themselves to incorporate user-generated innovation, and a new intermediation may occur around user-generated media. Many knowledge workers are choosing non-corporate paths and becoming mini-entrepreneurs, relying on an increasingly sophisticated participatory infrastructure, a kind of digital corporate commons.

The for-profit forces that are building and enabling these new platforms of participation represent a new subclass, which I call the netarchical class. If cognitive capitalism is to be defined by the primacy of intellectual assets over fixed capital industrial assets, and thus on the reliance of an extension of IP rights to establish monopolistic rents, (as the vectoral capitalists described by Mackenzie Wark derive their power from the control of the media vectors) then these new netarchical capitalists prosper from the enablement and exploitation of the participatory networks. It is significant that Amazon built itself around user reviews, eBay lives on a platform of worldwide distributed auctions, and Google is constituted by user-generated content. However, although these companies may rely on IP rights for the occasional extra buck, it is not in any sense the core of their power. Their power relies on their ownership of the platform.

More broadly, netarchical capitalism is a brand of capital that embraces the peer to peer revolution, all those ideological forces for whom capitalism is the ultimate horizon of human possibility. It is the force behind the immanence of peer to peer. Opposed to it, though linked to it in a temporary alliance, are the forces of Common-ism, those that put their faith in the transcendence of peer to peer, in a reform of the political economy beyond the domination of the market.

Transcendent Aspects of P2P

Indeed, our review of the immanent aspects of peer to peer, on how it is both dependent on and productive of capitalism, does not exhaust the subject. P2P has important transcendent aspects which go beyond the limitations set by the for-profit economy:

- peer production effectively enables the free cooperation of producers, who have access to their own means of production, and the resulting use-value of the projects supercedes for-profit alternatives.

Historically, though forces of higher productivity may be temporarily embedded in the old productive system, they ultimately lead to deep upheavals and reconstitutions of the political economy. The emergence of capitalist modes within the feudal system is a case in point. This is particularly significant because leading sectors of the for-profit economy are deliberately slowing down productive growth (in music; through patents) and trying to outlaw P2P production and sharing practices:

- peer governance transcends both the authority of the market and the state
- the new forms of universal common property, transcend the limitations of both private and public property models and are reconstituting a dynamic field of the Commons.

At a time when the very success of the capitalist mode of production endangers the biosphere and causes increasing psychic (and physical) damage to the population, the emergence of such an alternative is particularly appealing, and corresponds to the new cultural needs of large numbers of the population. The emergence and growth of P2P is therefore accompanied by a new work ethic (Pekka Himanen's *Hacker Ethic*), by new cultural practices such as peer circles in spiritual research (John Heron's cooperative inquiry), but most of all, by a new political and social movement which is intent on promoting its expansion. This still nascent P2P movement, (which includes the Free Software and Open Source movement, the open access movement, the free culture movement and others) which echoes the means of organization and aims of the alter-globalization movement, is fast becoming the equivalent of the socialist movement in the industrial age. It stands as a permanent alternative to the status quo, and the expression of the growth of a new social force: the knowledge workers.

In fact, the aim of peer to peer theory is to give a theoretical underpinning to the transformative practices of these movements. It is an attempt to create a radical understanding that a new kind of society, based on the centrality of the Commons, and within a reformed market and state, is in the realm of human possibility. Such a theory would have to explain not only the dynamic of peer to peer processes proper, but also their fit with other inter-subjective dynamics. For example, how P2P molds reciprocity modes, market modes and hierarchy modes; on what ontological, epistemological and axiological transformations this evolution is resting; and what a possible positive P2P ethos can be. A crucial element of such a peer to peer theory would be the development of tactics and strategy for such transformative practice. The key question is: can peer to peer be expanded beyond the immaterial sphere in which it was born?

The Expansion of the P2P mode of production

Given the dependence of P2P on the existing market mode, what are its chances to expand beyond the existing sphere of non-rival immaterial goods?

Here are a number of theses about this potential:

- P2P can arise not only in the immaterial sphere of intellectual and software production, but wherever there is access to distributed technology: spare computing cycles, distributed telecommunications and any kind of viral communicator meshwork.
- P2P can arise wherever other forms of distributed fixed capital are available: such is the case for carpooling, which is the second most used mode of transportation in the U.S.
- P2P can arise wherever the process of design may be separated from the process of physical production. Huge capital outlines for production can co-exist with a reliance on P2P processes for design and conception.
- P2P can arise wherever financial capital can be distributed. Initiatives such as the ZOPA bank point in that direction. Cooperative purchase and use of large capital goods are a possibility. State support and funding of open source development is another example.
- P2P could be expanded and sustained through the introduction of universal basic income.

The latter, which creates an income independent of salaried work, has the potential to sustain a further development of P2P-generated use-value. Through the 'full activity' ethos (rather than full employment) of P2P, the basic income receives a powerful new argument: not only as efficacious in terms of poverty and unemployment, but as creating important new use-value for the human community.

However, as it is difficult to see how use-value production and exchange could be the only form of production, it is more realistic to see peer to peer as part of a process of change. In such a scenario, peer to peer would both co-exist with and profoundly transform other intersubjective modes.

A Commons-based political economy would be centered around peer to peer, but it would co-exist with:

- A powerful and re-invigorated sphere of reciprocity (gift-economy) centered around the introduction of time-based complementary currencies.
- A reformed sphere for market exchange, the kind of 'natural capitalism' described by Paul Hawken, David Korten and Hazel Henderson, where the costs for natural and social reproduction are no longer externalized, and which abandons the growth imperative for a throughput economy as described by Herman Daly.
- A reformed state that operates within a context of multistakeholdership and which is no longer subsumed to corporate interests, but act as a fair arbiter between the Commons, the market and the gift economy.

Such a goal could be the inspiration for a powerful alternative to neoliberal dominance, and create a kaleidoscope of 'Common-ist' movements broadly inspired by such goals.

Resources

Pluralities/Integration monitors P2P developments and is archived at:
http://integralvisioning.org/index.php?topic=p2p

A longer manuscript and book-in-progress on the subject is available at: http://integralvisioning.org/article.php?story=p2ptheory1

The Foundation for P2P Alternatives has a website under construction at:
http://p2pfoundation.net/index.php/Manifesto

Notes

* This paper appeared on www.ctheory.com in December 2005.

1. Fiske website. http://www.sscnet.ucla.edu/anthro/faculty/fiske/relmodov.htm

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Escaping the Gift Economy

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Researchers have analyzed the dark side of the gift, but they have remained blind to what it implies about the market. Drawing on the experiences of a group of informants who participated in an ethnographical study of house moving in Montreal, Canada, this article provides significant evidence that the unattractiveness of the gift economy can incite people to turn to the market as an escape. It examines how people use the market to free themselves from the straitjacket of social expectations—from the sense of indebtedness and emotional oppression—which constrains them in their reciprocity relations inside the gift economy. The standard views of CCT researchers concerning the valorization of the gift economy are challenged, as well as the axiology that implicitly informs their research. As a result, it is necessary to discuss the inversion of this axiology.

> It would be complicated to entrust [my cousin] with the painting job because he won't charge me the market price. . . . I don't want to feel obliged. I don't want to feel that I will have to give back. (Mira)

Mira, 49, is a Yugoslav immigrant who works as an architect. When I met her, she had just purchased a condominium and was preparing her move. Mira considered hiring an unemployed cousin to paint her new home. She also thought of entrusting the moving of her possessions to Yugoslav immigrants she knew—people who were receiving social assistance. She gave up the idea of hiring these people, however, for fear of becoming indebted, preferring to pay professionals to do the job.

Mira's case reveals the difficulty of receiving gifts, services, or favors. It shows how the social indebtedness inherent in the gift-giving process can produce negative feelings, embarrassment, and a sense of dependence—a topic analyzed by consumer culture theory (CCT) researchers interested in the dark side of the gift (Giesler 2006; Joy 2001; Morales 2005). But Mira's case sheds new light on this topic because it indicates that people sometimes desire to avoid the gift economy and that it is possible for them to use the market as an escape. In other words, this case demonstrates how people may move *from* the gift economy *to* the market, and thus it raises new questions.

Notwithstanding the work on the dark side of the gift (Ruth, Otnes, and Brunel 1999; Sherry, McGrath, and Levy 1993), many CCT researchers continue to treat gift giving as a valorized alternative to commercial exchanges. They praise it for humanizing market relationships, for making the market meaningful, and for providing an escape from the commodifying logic of capitalist exchanges. They describe it as a social activity in which a humanizing logic is applied at the interpersonal level. A significant body of work—see, for example, Giesler (2006), Kozinets (2002), Thompson and Arsel (2004), and Thompson and Coskuner-Balli (2007)—has projected this idea up to the level of the gift economy; and the studies of brand communities by Muñiz and O'Guinn (2001) and by Muñiz and Schau (2005) have invoked a similar notion of the gift in order to make an invidious comparison with the conventional market economy, as have Price and Arnould (1999) in their research on commercial friendship. Few of these authors, however, have questioned the romantic view that exchanges in the gift economy are ennobling, humanizing, or of greater moral worth.

This article looks at the unwanted aspects of the reciprocity relations characteristic of the gift economy. It analyzes how people negotiate the social expectations inherent in these reciprocity relations and how they turn to the anonymity of marketplace exchanges as a kind of liberation from debt-oriented supplications to givers. It seeks to provide theoretical support for rethinking the celebratory accounts of the gift economy in the literature and to show that researchers have underestimated the extent to which the market can be used as an escape from the systems of im-

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placable indebtedness that reciprocity creates. The romanticization of the gift economy raises the following questions: (1) How is it possible for the gift economy to become unattractive? (2) What implications does the dark side of the gift economy have for the market? (3) How should the escape from the gift economy to the market be conceptualized? It is necessary to find answers to these questions.

The research presented here is from an ethnographical study of house moving carried out in Montreal, Canada. Moving is a social event particularly favorable to the emergence of reciprocity relations. Moreover, many people who move use both the gift economy and the market to do so. Thus the analysis of moving, the latter seen as a point of passage between the gift economy and the market, can help us to think beyond the literature on reciprocity and gift giving.

The article is structured as follows. The first section contains a review of the literature on gift giving and the gift economy. The second section sketches the methodology used, and the third provides an analysis of the findings. In the fourth section, the findings are examined in relation to the existing literature, and the implications for consumer research are discussed.

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE ON THE GIFT ECONOMY

In their studies of reciprocity relations, many CCT researchers—see, for example, Belk (1979), Belk and Coon (1993), Joy (2001), Morales (2005), Price, Arnould, and Curasi (2000), and Sherry (1983)—draw on the work of anthropologists like Lévi-Strauss (1976), Godelier (1999), Mauss (1923–24/2000), and Weiner (1992). Other researchers, for example, Kozinets (2002), cite Putnam's recent work (2000) in sociology. However, Gouldner's (1960) classic sociology article on the norm of reciprocity is by far the most popular reference of all, and Sahlins's (1972) discussion of reciprocity is perhaps the most influential.

Starting from the Hobbesian conception of social relations (Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan* [1651/1985]) as it pertains to Mauss's work (1923–24/2000) on the gift as a social contract, Sahlins (1972) devises a model for describing the various forms of reciprocity. His model presents three types of reciprocity that differ according to the kinds of relationships involved, the expectations of return, and the time horizon. Generalized reciprocity is characterized by exchanges that entail a low obligation to reciprocate or no obligation to reciprocate at all. Balanced reciprocity is characterized by direct exchanges where reciprocation is culturally equivalent and almost immediate. Negative reciprocity is characterized by transactions aimed at making a profit. According to Sahlins (1972), negative reciprocity dominates interactions among strangers and the market. It is characterized by suspicion and exploitation, and it involves an immediate return. As Osteen (2002) notes, Sahlins's (1972) spectrum is helpful for categorizing social expectations. The spectrum captures the duty-bound exchanges that occur among close relatives where no direct reciprocation is expected, at least in the near future. It shows that the less closely related the people involved in an exchange are, the more the obligation to reciprocate tends to increase and the more the time period for reciprocating tends to diminish.

There are some similarities between Sahlins's (1972) framework and the continuum of gift giving developed by Joy (2001), whose work describes how gift giving in the cultural context of Hong Kong is guided by various types of relationship norms. Joy (2001) reveals how relations with romantic others, close friends or "just" friends, as well as more distant and instrumental relations with people such as *guanxi*, entail different kinds of reciprocity. Like Sahlins's (1972) spectrum, Joy's (2001) continuum accounts for the increasing social distance between exchange partners. Contrary to Sahlins's (1972) spectrum, however, her continuum does not incorporate the market. Perhaps this is because for Joy (2001) and other researchers—see Granovetter's (1985) economic sociology and Kozinets's (2002) consumer research—the market is embedded in the matrix of social relations. Sahlins (1972) clearly implies that the market is located at the end of the spectrum of estrangement, but consumer researchers maintain that relations with people in the market can stand at almost any point on Joy's (2001) continuum and that these relations are not irreconcilable with proximity. In other words, they maintain that it is possible to have close relations with someone from the marketplace (Price and Arnould 1999).

Learning from the Dark Side of the Gift

Reciprocity in its various forms, from micro-individual-level (dyadic) exchanges to multilevel exchanges, is the focus of most CCT research on gift giving. It is the central concept in most of the research on the gift economy published in the *Journal of Consumer Research*, from Burning Man (Kozinets 2002) to Napster (Giesler 2006).

Grounded in cognitive consistency theory (Belk 1976), in economic rewards theory (Fisher and Ackerman 1998), in equity theory (Morales 2005), and in systemic theories of social solidarity (Giesler 2006), the notion of reciprocity used by consumer researchers often implies the norm of a balanced exchange. The idea that reciprocity may entail asymmetry, imbalances—even inequalities between the givers and the receivers—is nonetheless an important, indeed almost inescapable concept. At least, this is what emerges from CCT research on the dark side of reciprocity. The research on the topic uncovers the tensions manifest in one-sided exchanges (Belk 1976, 1979), in unbalanced exchanges (Belk and Coon 1993), not to mention those involved in extortion or theft (Giesler 2006). It analyzes the negative relational effects of gift giving (Ruth et al. 1999) and the anxiety that can accompany gift giving (Wooten 2000). It also reveals how a sense of indebtedness may produce negative feelings (Morales 2005), as well as how it may lead to a condition of dependence (Giesler 2006), even enslavement (Joy 2001). Sherry et al. (1993) question the assumption that the exchanges are equal, and they criticize what they view as the romanticized concept of gift giving. In doing so, they echo Mauss's classic work (1923–24/2000) on excessive gifts and Bataille's (1988) reflections on sacrificial gifts.

The research on the dark side of the gift suggests that gift giving is often embedded in less salubrious social dynamics. It highlights the asymmetry of gift-giving relations, the idea of the giver's superiority, as well as the possible use of gifts as a means of exerting power over people or even oppressing them. It also makes clear that the norm of balanced reciprocity (Sahlins 1972) described earlier may be idealized and that more romanticized views of the gift have a conceptual blind spot.

However, none of the research on the dark side of the gift has examined how the systems of indebtedness that reciprocity creates and the feeling of perpetual obligation that the gift often entails can affect peoples' attitudes toward the market. And the possibility of people escaping from the gift economy to the market is never discussed. This body of research has also failed to examine the ways in which people challenge the moral and ideological assumptions that underlie the gift economy–market antithesis. In other words, the authors who have analyzed the dark side of the gift have failed to see that the fundamental axiology that informs their own research is perhaps questionable.

Sociologists on the Concept of Escape

In critical sociology, French anti-utilitarians have an interesting reading of the concept of escape. Anti-utilitarians like Godbout (1994) acknowledge that reciprocity relations may be constraining. They suggest that by turning to the market for services that are usually obtained in the gift economy, people can avoid the sense of obligation that is inherent in the gift-giving process. In other words, for the anti-utilitarians, escaping to the market is a form of social divestment and can become a means of preserving autonomy.

It is important to mention that the anti-utilitarians consider the gift to be one of the foundations of social life. For anti-utilitarians like Caillé (1993, 2000), Godbout (1994, 1995, 1998), and Godbout and Caillé (1998), the obligation to give (as opposed to the Maussian obligation to reciprocate) lies at the heart of social bonding, as does the desire to give more to others than what one has received. As a result, escaping to the market can only be seen as a manifestation of rampant individualism, which leads to the dissolution of social bonds or, even worse, to the death of the gift.

The anti-utilitarians provide a critique of the utilitarian-instrumental construction of social relations that ostensibly prevails in disciplines such as economics. To a certain extent, their view corresponds to the position of authors like Hyde (1983) who talk about the gift as "erotic" commerce, which binds people together instead of separating and differentiating them the way the market does. Their view also corresponds to the position of CCT researchers like Belk and Coon (1993), who analyze agapic gifts that entail no reciprocation, or to the position of Kozinets (2002), who reflects on emancipatory consumption while taking care not to celebrate individualism.

However, the anti-utilitarian perspective raises moral and ideological questions. It has been criticized for idealizing and exoticizing gifts (Callon and Latour 1997): the anti-utilitarians' reading of Mauss (1923–24/2000), for example, depends on an idealistic interpretation of gift giving in "primitive" societies. According to this interpretation, gift exchanges in such societies are based on gratuity, generosity, and altruism, as opposed to calculation, interest, and instrumentality. But a closer reading reveals that the Melanesian, Polynesian, and Native American peoples described by Mauss (1923–24/2000) are also gift-giving calculators. It could even be argued that the anti-utilitarians' interpretation of the gift flirts with what Parry (1986) calls ideological obfuscation because it masks the fact that no one does anything for nothing.

By conceptualizing escape, the anti-utilitarian perspective helps to take us outside reciprocity relations (at the point where reciprocity is negated), but it becomes problematic to the extent that it pits the gift economy against the market and presupposes that the former is morally superior to the latter. Anti-utilitarians not only idealize the gift, they also hold the normative view that market relations are—by definition—less authentic, less human, less important.

Anthropologists like Miller (1998) would challenge the idea that the gift economy is inherently nobler than the market. Miller (2001) inverts the standard gift economy–market antithesis and even speaks of inalienable commodities and alienable gifts. He attacks, though only indirectly, social scientists such as the anti-utilitarians who idealize the gift, and he tries to lead us out of the moral trap into which their thinking has led us. Nevertheless, his position remains as thorny as theirs, for it fails to recognize the role of escape.

METHODOLOGY

From the perspective of CCT research, house moving is an interesting social phenomenon. It involves discourses, practices, and rituals that dictate who can or cannot manipulate the objects involved. When people move their possessions, the norms that govern their relationships come into play in revealing ways.

During a move, family members, friends—and also more distant relations or acquaintances—give, swap, exchange, and trade instrumental and emotional resources; they may sell them as well, usually informally and sometimes illicitly. They also draw on the market. Indeed, many of the people who were interviewed during the course of this study indicated that they often call on the market as a complement to, a substitute for, or an exit from the gift economy.

In line with Arnould and Thompson's (2005) position on CCT research, it can be argued that house moving is an exemplary social activity for researchers seeking concrete empirical access to theoretical insights on the escape from the gift economy to the market. In what follows, moving is considered as one of those social events that Price et al. (2000) describe as precipitating events. As such, it reveals some of the hidden aspects of reciprocity relations and the gift economy.

This analysis adopts a methodological perspective on family and social networks that is very similar to the one adopted by Epp and Price (2008), by Joy (2001), and by Üstüner and Holt (2007). It seeks to go beyond the individual level of analysis. On a philosophical level, the research presented here is in the tradition of the contemporary material culture studies that have developed since the 1990s at University College London based on the work of anthropologist Daniel Miller (Miller 1987; Miller and Tilley 1996). Contemporary material culture studies focus on how cultural phenomena become significant through the use of material objects. They suggest that researchers can develop an in-depth understanding of people's practices by actively participating in them—even in the most mundane activities—as they are actually taking place in the material world. In the case at hand, this meant getting actively involved in the moving of people's personal possessions.

The research presented here is from an ethnographical study that began in 1997 with a pilot project. Intensive fieldwork was carried out between January 1998 and July 1999, and follow-up was conducted until 2007. A mixture of methods (Tilley 2001) was used in the fieldwork, including formal interviewing, observation, and photography. Data were also collected through participant observation, that is, by accompanying people throughout the physical and metaphorical journey of their move, from the early stages, including the organizing and boxing of personal belongings, on through moving day and the arrival at the new home or residence. In many instances, in my role as researcher, I accompanied people as they did what might be described as an "archeological dig" in cluttered cupboards, chests of drawers, and basements. I sorted things with them, listened to them, and in some instances even helped them move their furniture.

During the fieldwork, some 30 adult informants were recruited. The informants were equally distributed between the ages of 18 and 89 (see appendix). In most cases, I met with them before moving day as well as during and after the move. The length of the follow-up ranged from a few weeks to a few months and sometimes to a few years. The follow-up depended on the relationship that I had developed with the informants, on their willingness to be accompanied, and on respect for their privacy. It is important to mention that people who are moving are often emotionally and psychologically vulnerable and that this situation calls for special care and concern on the part of the researcher. Indeed, some of the participants in this study were moving in the course of a separation or a divorce or because of health problems or the death of a partner. One elderly woman died during the research. When necessary, separate interviews were conducted with family members who emerged as important individuals. Interviews were also conducted with professional resources such as health care workers and social workers.

The data were analyzed following Thompson, Locander, and Pollio's (1990) interpretive methodology. As these authors point out, at the idiographic level, the issue is to understand how the phenomena under study are meaningfully organized in the participant's life world. At a nomothetic level, the question is whether or not similar patterns emerge for other participants. Particular attention was given at this stage to comparing (and contrasting) people's discourses and practices. My field study observations were then taken into account. These observations related to gift-giving behaviors that were not consciously or reflexively commented upon by informants themselves during the move. Three themes were identified as part of this iterative process: the bright side of the gift economy, the dark side of the gift economy, and the opposition between the gift economy and the market.

FINDINGS: THE TWO FACES OF THE GIFT ECONOMY

In Montreal, moving is grounded in the city's working-class history (Choko 1980; Linteau 2000). Historians report that until the 1960s–70s, working-class people and the poor, who moved in great numbers every year, were often forced to do so. In other words, moving was associated with poverty and lack of stability, a permanent family home being a privilege tied to social status and financial means.

The 1960s–70s constituted a particularly relevant era in this regard. The extremely high number of tenants moving in Montreal became a social concern. Unions, consumer associations, and tenants' associations fought for recognition of tenants' rights. They also called for greater state intervention in the relationship between landlords and tenants. It is worth mentioning that the 1960s–70s in the province of Quebec are known for a process of political, institutional, and social reforms commonly referred to as the Quiet Revolution (Dickinson and Young 1995). This period witnessed the establishment of the welfare state and the creation of various government programs in the housing sector as well as the adoption of legislation (commonly known as the Stability Policy [Jobin 1982]) aimed at correcting the imbalance of power between a small minority tenure class composed of powerful owners and a large majority tenant class (Brossard 1974–75). In 1971, fully 80.8% of the dwellings in Montreal were rented. In 1996, the year before I started my fieldwork, this percentage remained high at 72.8%. It was 65.6% in 2006 (Statistics Canada). The percentage of people who rent is important because most leases in Quebec are 1-year agreements beginning on July 1, which means that almost all of the Montrealers who move do so at the same time of the year.

Moving is still a strong feature of Montreal culture. It has been characterized in the media as a "hobby" and even as the "national sport" of the city's inhabitants (Abley 1996; Nadeau 1994). For many of them, moving is part of their identity—part of what it means to be a Montrealer. As such, it has inspired influential writers like Gabrielle Roy, whose acclaimed novel *The Tin Flute*, published in 1945, portrays the impoverished living conditions of a working-class family and their frequent moves. It inspired well-known Quebec author Réjean Ducharme and Quebec popular music icon Robert Charlebois to cowrite the hit song "Déménager ou rester là" [Move out or stay put], which was interpreted by Pauline Julien in 1972. More recently, it has influenced the local advertising of corporations like Labatt Breweries, McDonald's, and Wal-Mart (Centre d'archives publicitaires, Association des Agences de Publicité du Québec; see fig. 1).

Using the gift economy when moving was a widespread economic solution in the 1970s, the obvious thing to do, and this still remains the norm. Indeed, a popular image of moving day in Montreal is that of family unity and social network solidarity—a day when a few large pizzas are washed down with a case of beer on the veranda at the new house or on the balcony at the new apartment, the invitation to partake of this communal meal serving as a means of showing gratitude (Abley 1996). The situation is more complex, however, than it might appear at first sight.

The Bright Side of the Gift Economy

Cooperation. The Montreal media describe people who move themselves—those who do not use the market—as "self-movers," "apprentices," and "do-it-yourself movers." Marjo, 30, and Rupert, 28, who moved in together before the birth of their child, can be considered as such. Marjo explained proudly:

> We are almost professional movers [*laugh*]. . . . We got help from my father, his girlfriend and my sister. We also got help from my aunt, who came with her husband, my cousin who brought her partner, and some of my friends. . . . Overall, some 20 people helped with the carrying and the loading, cleaned rooms and arranged things at the new place, lent cars and trucks, and so forth.

Marjo's depiction recalls the popular cliché of the moving-day party. It stresses the importance of family solidarity, mutual aid, and resourcefulness. After the move was over, she declared, "It was fun. It was a nice moving day—almost a party. . . . Even if people struggle, well, it doesn't matter. There's beer and pizza. . . . It's a dirty job, but we have to do it. If we have fun, so much the better!"

When I first met Marjo and Rupert, they had low incomes and no job security. Marjo was a community worker, Rupert a nonunionized municipal employee. Both had university degrees in anthropology. Before moving in together, both lived in a rented apartment and shared expenses with their respective roommates. This form of arrangement is common in Montreal, especially among students and young adults.

People like Marjo and Rupert privilege the gift economy for economic purposes. The help they receive responds to the needs of the moment. To the extent that it is directed toward goals external to their relationship as a couple, it corresponds to Belk and Coon's (1993) definition of instrumental gifts. This type of gift is also important, however, as an expressive act of sharing. Rupert made this clear:

> These people who helped us, I've helped them move in the past. They helped me when I was seeking a job. . . . We, our kind of people . . . how should I say? Not leftists, socialists or, whatever, hippies, we don't bother with this. . . . We are proud, very proud to have people around us like this and to receive so much. You feel you're valued. Wow! People are here for you. You're not in a mess. You're not alone. You know some people. . . . I think it's a gift they've made to us. When they need some help in the future, I'll be there.

FIGURE 1

THE MOVING-DAY RITUAL

NOTE.—This image is from a Labatt Blue TV commercial that aired in 2000. The scene takes place on a staircase somewhere in Montreal. A man is moving with the help of his friends. They carry a sofa bed down the stairs while a woman brings up a case of beer. The ad emphasizes the sociality of the moving-day ritual and the festive character of the event. Image reproduced with the kind permission of Labatt Breweries.

Marjo and Rupert are people who praise resourcefulness. They subscribe to a cooperative, communal ethos and use the gift economy (as in the case of Kozinets's [2002] informants) to express this ideal. Their case finds an echo with other tenants and small homeowners who consider the gift economy an economic solution.

During the study, I also met people whose economic condition was precarious, poor people who were forced to use the gift economy when they moved. These people tended to praise the gift economy even if it created tensions in their lives. They were compelled to use solidarity relations—sometimes with very negative emotional consequences—but they still spoke about the help that they were receiving as if accepting it were a choice. Their explicitly articulated preference for the gift economy, and the embodiment of this preference in their concrete everyday behavior and practices, displayed what Bourdieu (1984) calls a "taste for necessity." They talked about an obligation, and they acted in accord with overriding necessity, in ways that suggested that it was a matter of free choice. In a word, they transformed a social constraint into a preference.

Informants like Marjo and Rupert differ from the poor people described above and from the working-class people described by Bourdieu (1984). They are young, educated, middle-class individuals with high cultural capital. Yet, just like Bourdieu's (1984) subjects, they celebrate an image—perhaps a romanticized one—of working-class solidarity. They extol the virtues of the gift economy as opposed to a form of individualism that is objectified by the market. They stand united against the market. Using the gift economy as opposed to the market is, for them, a means of affirming a shared, communal identity. This is clear when Marjo's expertise statement is examined. And it is obvious in Rupert's claim that "we" (as opposed to an abstract "other") know how to surround "ourselves" and share without keeping accounts. Unlike Giesler's (2006) informants, however, who derive meaning from the ideological comparison to the marketplace, these informants take pride in demonstrating their capacity to avoid what might be called "the easy way out."

The need to show resourcefulness is an important aspect of the norm of the gift economy. It evokes the opposition, documented by Kozinets (2002), between a creative, cooperative, collective effort and a passive, selfish, individualistic form of consumption. As such, it involves transforming a constraint—marginalization from the market—into a self-defining practice. In other words, moving becomes an opportunity to exhibit social skills in what Holt (1998) calls the "management of material contingencies." It becomes a means of affirming values.

Absolution. My field notes contain many observations on people who moved during hard times. In contrast to the previous informants, many of them used the market, but they did so only to the extent that it did not compromise their ideal of the gift.

The case of Bea, 41, is exemplary. Her friends "insisted" on helping her on moving day because she was moving as a result of a separation (field notes, June 27). They contended that it was unwise for her to try to confront adversity alone by taking on too many responsibilities without outside help.

Bea was pleased to be surrounded by her friends—her "network"—at such a difficult time. A single mother and teacher, Bea was a strong advocate of the gift economy. As in Marjo and Rupert's case, she identified herself with her support network, composed essentially of women with children. She went so far as to describe her network as her family.

When I met her, Bea was receiving help from her friends. But she insisted that it was essential for her to contribute actively to her network and to help the other members when needed. She maintained that the women of her network continually help each other by swapping resources. Although her friends did not provide the physical labor required to move Bea's possessions from her old residence to her new one, they did help her to get settled in by cleaning rooms and arranging things. They knew that she wanted to be able to take her children to the new home the same evening.

Bea's network, which provided her with basic instrumental help, became truly meaningful owing to the emotional and moral support that it provided. This is clear when considering that she hired movers so as to spare her friends the riskiest part of the work:

> It is not worth hurting ourselves. I never let [my friends] move things like the fridge, the washing machine, and the dryer. . . . I prefer to hire people who are used to doing this kind of job. . . . They don't hurt themselves. They are paid for this job. They have their own insurance policy. Everyone is happy. I find it less dangerous.

Another case is that of Mathilde, 79, who acted as a caretaker when her sister, Mrs. Bolduc, 89, moved into a care facility. She was her sister's only relative and sole resource. She felt that she had to take care of everything. She explained:

> My sister did not want any strangers in her house. She did not want strangers to handle her possessions. . . . I am the one who has been taking care of everything. . . . I have been fixing her meals, checking her medications, looking after her. . . . I found her a room in residential care. I will decorate that room. . . . [*Pause*] My sister is unable to do anything. She is lucky, really, that someone takes care of her. . . . It's been an unpleasant chore. It wasn't fun at all. I'm the one who did everything. Was I right? [*She asks me the question.*]

While Bea's friends spontaneously made themselves available—in fact, nearly imposed themselves—Mathilde felt duty-bound to help her sister. She did so at great effort, however, going so far as to risk her own health despite her age and her own family's advice. Indeed, she added, "I wonder if [my sister] is not relying too much on me. . . . Now, my son and my daughter-in-law fear that I put too many responsibilities on my shoulders. They worry for my health." The gifts, the services, and the favors provided by Bea's friends and the efforts made by Mathilde acquire a particular meaning when cast into a broader ritual process. They become a form of sacrifice (Miller 2001). This is consistent with Ruth et al. (1999), who speak of how the amount of effort and care invested in a gift reflects a relationship's degree of intensity.

If we push this line of thought further, we may begin to appreciate why lack of effort is usually interpreted negatively. Mrs. Debray, 68, who was depressed at the idea of moving into residential care, expected her children to help her. Mrs. Debray had hired a moving company to spare them the most difficult part of the work, hoping that this would encourage them to show up. On moving day, however, no one but her brother came to help, which affected her (field notes, December 29). The social worker who followed Mrs. Debray told me that her children only showed up when there were gifts for them: "Otherwise, they are not involved at all."

If the gift-giving effort is an essential part of the ritual, the effort required from the givers is often a source of embarrassment for the receivers. The informants who participated in this study often talked about the embarrassment and the fear of imposing themselves. Many of them used the market to make sure that friends and family members were not involved in reciprocal exchanges, at least not in the riskiest ones, or in the most effortful or degrading parts of the work. They released their friends and family members from the obligation, or from the responsibility, to help them. They used the market as a gift of absolution. As explained earlier, Bea hired professional movers because she did not want to expose her friends to the risk of injury. Mrs. Debray hired movers because she did not want to burden her children and grandchildren with the chores involved in moving. Other informants radically withheld any requests for gifts, services, or favors from significant others. One informant even said that she refused to impose "slave labor" on her friends.

The gift of absolution can be seen as an altruistic gesture. It entails or authorizes using the market to help negotiate the expectations of the gift economy. This use of the market does not compromise a person's faith in the gift, however. Nor does it challenge the moral and ideological primacy of the gift economy. It reinforces an axiology that becomes particularly meaningful in times of necessity. Of course, my informants' condition of necessity differs from that of the working-class people analyzed by Bourdieu (1984) who have no other choice but to rely on solidarity relations. Their condition of necessity also differs from that of the disenfranchised Turkish women studied by Üstüner and Holt (2007), who offer another example of the "taste for necessity" and for whom social networks provide a fundamental means of surviving on the margins of the market. Nevertheless, moving is still a chore. It often reveals a crisis, and it can be, in itself, a crisis to get through. Mrs. Debray, who suffered from a heart condition and who was depressed at the idea of moving into a care facility, died only a few days afterward. I cannot adequately assess whether there is a relationship between her move into a seniors' residence, the absence of her children at the peak of the crisis, and the tragic deterioration of her condition, but it is plausible to think that her move had a harmful effect.

The Dark Side of the Gift Economy

Subjection. In his research on the gift, Godelier (1999) talks about the paradox of the gift. He contends that a gift is an act of generosity and an act of subjection, for it places the recipient in a position of dependence until the gift is reciprocated, if it is ever reciprocated.

Mrs. Bolduc, for instance, knew about everything her sister was doing for her. She knew that Mathilde generously sacrificed herself, going so far as to put her health at risk. She was grateful to her sister. At the same time, however, she resented accepting her sister's help. She explained:

> It is difficult to watch Mathilde take care of everything and not be able to help her. . . . It is appalling to feel so powerless. . . . I always lived on my own, without asking anyone. I have always been independent. It is a question of pride. . . . Isn't it? [*She reflects loudly.*] No, it is a question of freedom. My freedom is my wealth. It is difficult to lose it.

Mrs. Bolduc's case stands apart because of her old age, her dependence on others, and her incapacity to reciprocate (or pay back her debt) in like fashion, that is, by performing strenuous labor. Nevertheless, her case is quite significant, because it points to the feeling of subjection resulting from the systems of indebtedness that the gift economy often creates.

The relation of subjection that a gift instills (Godelier 1999) is inherent in many of the cases that were observed during the course of the research presented here, even in the cases involving the brightest manifestations of the gift economy, as Mrs. Bolduc's case shows. If Mrs. Bolduc accepted—with resignation—this condition of subjection, most of my informants resisted their loss of freedom. For example, Bea often praised her support network. She stressed how important it was for her to contribute to it, but it is clear that insisting on her capacity to give to others was essentially an effort to protect her sense of autonomy.

The fear of subjection is nowhere more evident, however, than in the case of Mira, who, as explained in the introduction, refused to draw on her personal network when she moved. During the interviews, Mira often took pride in saying that she had started from nothing when she had come to Canada and that she had achieved a great deal. She often stated that she could manage by herself. Her experience of war and deprivation had probably tinged her view of solidarity and the gift economy. She mentioned that during the war in Yugoslavia, she had obtained basic goods, like shoes, from the Red Cross. She went on to explain: "It is never easy, you know, to accept help from other people. . . . It is not easy for the one who receives it, but also for the one who helps." In fact, what Marjo and Rupert celebrated—the romanticized ideal of working-class solidarity—was something that Mira did not want to be associated with at all.

Mira knew that she could count on her cousin and her compatriots. They had already offered her their services. She was also aware of the possibility of offending them by refusing their help. In this context, her refusal to become obliged and her stressing the difficulty that receiving help entails are very relevant. Her attitude in this respect tends to show that she saw herself as the one who would be helped if she accepted special treatment. Her decision to favor the market over the gift economy brings to mind the Turkish women followed by Üstüner and Holt (2007), who distanced themselves from the primary networks associated with basic help, survival, and resourcefulness. However, Üstüner and Holt's (2007) informants used the market to break with tradition, whereas Mira acted as if she wanted to show that she had freed herself from necessity. She refused to appear needy, "broke," or unable to provide for herself. Her case points to the social stigma attached to solidarity relations.

There is a link between the fear of subjection, as described by Godelier (1999), and indebtedness, as analyzed in consumer research. This link relates more to social than to economic deficits (Giesler 2006; Joy 2001; Morales 2005). Mrs. Bolduc was trapped into Godelier's (1999) paradox because of her incapacity to reciprocate. Bea sought to avoid this trap by actively contributing to the gift economy. As for Mira, she escaped the dilemma altogether by turning away from the gift economy. She turned to the market in order to shun any favored treatment, avoid obligations, and preserve her autonomy. In a sense, she personifies the anti-utilitarians' fear of the dissolution of social bonding. Her use of the market is diametrically opposed to the gift of absolution. It is the perfect expression of the anti-gift.

People like Mrs. Bolduc, Bea, and Mira are not, properly speaking, examples of the dark side of the gift as researchers such as Ruth et al. (1999) and Sherry et al. (1993) understand it. Yet they reveal the relational costs that can make the gift economy unattractive. Their cases remind us that accepting help from others can create obligations and demanding expectations. They highlight the fact that becoming socially indebted through the expectation of reciprocity is sometimes embarrassing.

Humiliation. As pointed out earlier, moving reveals some of the hidden aspects of reciprocity relations. It often exposes the deeper conflicts within the gift economy. The case of the Lamberts is illuminating in this respect. They preferred not to call upon their family when they moved into their new bungalow. Instead they relied on acquaintances and colleagues for help.

Members of a nontraditional church, they contended that their family rejected them because of their religious beliefs. During a conversation with Mr. Lambert, 47, I commented that moving was often a family matter, but he was evasive and simply insisted that "many" of his colleagues had offered their help. Mrs. Lambert, 42, explained:

> We are not a religious sect. But they [our families] don't understand us. . . . My husband's parents have been looking at us as if we were weirdoes. They went as far as talking about disinheriting us. . . . After all, we don't care. We don't need money.

Mr. Richer, 81, who had had no contact with all but one of his six children since the death of his ex-wife 10 years earlier, provides another illuminating example. When he moved, he refused to call upon his children, preferring to rely on old friends, acquaintances, and ideally, the market. He explained:

> I don't want to ask my children for anything. I don't want to oblige them to help me. . . . My children have not spoken to me since the death of my ex-wife because I refused to attend her funeral. . . . I have no close family anymore. . . . One of my daughters, the older one, keeps going at me. She never forgave me. I heard that, when she got married, she was pleased to drop her maiden name. . . . I admit that I was a bad provider. . . . But come on! They're the ones who should take the first steps.

Mr. Richer is not the only elderly person interviewed who felt deeply uncomfortable about reciprocity relations at the time of a move. Mrs. Bouchard, 69, talked about the anxiety involved in depending on others and being left on her own. She said, "I was scared, scared of having no one." Like Mr. Richer, she feared having to ask for help:

> I asked my daughter and my son-in-law for some help. But I had to pay someone else for the painting and someone else for cleaning the kitchen. . . . For me, the whole situation is stressful because I depend a lot on my daughter and her husband. . . . What makes it so difficult is to ask those people for help. . . . It is difficult when you must ask them for favors.

Mr. Richer and Mrs. Bouchard both felt entitled to receive help from their family. They alluded to family justice or some form of equity. And yet they preferred not to claim what they considered to be their due. Mr. Richer, for instance, refused to call upon his children even when his health deteriorated critically. This was a matter of pride for him. He declared, "Never! I never want to take the first steps. . . . I'd rather die than ask them for some help."

As in the cases examined in the previous section, a fear of subjection pervades these testimonies. An additional issue also arises as important, however. It is the humiliation of requesting gifts, services, or favors from family members who should normally offer them spontaneously. People feel deeply apprehensive about begging for help.

Anti-utilitarians like Godbout (2000) argue that help is a special category of gift. In contrast to other gifts, which must be provided voluntarily (Belk and Coon 1993; Godelier 1999), it can be requested when circumstances justify it. But this conception of help does not fit well with the cases examined here: the Lamberts rejected the idea of requesting help from the people who had repudiated them; Mr. Richer talked about the humiliation involved in begging his children for aid; and Mrs. Bouchard dreaded requesting favors from her daughter and possibly facing rejection.

It is not relevant, for the purpose of this discussion, to disclose the reasons for the family tensions and disputes. They relate to disagreements over values and beliefs, and to unresolved conflicts. They conceal intimate, personal, and family issues as well as taboos and secrets. There is also the question of power and personal autonomy, especially in the case of elderly people who feel that they depend on others. The important point, however, is that using reciprocity relations—even for basic, material, and instrumental purposes—may revive conflicts and tensions. It may cause difficult memories to resurface, because it is impossible to mobilize family, friends, and social networks without bringing into play, at the same time, the emotional history attached to them.

Ruth et al. (1999), as well as Belk, Wallendorf, and Sherry (1989), note that gifts are often accompanied by bittersweet memories and emotions. This is what is observed here. The emotional effort that plays a central role in the gift-giving ritual becomes an obstacle. Indeed, requesting a gift, a service, or a favor may be so embarrassing that people prefer more distant, more instrumental, less committing relations to more intimate ones. People who do not share the same history become useful because they do not bring the same emotional baggage with them. Weak ties (cf. Granovetter 1973) take on a new meaning. There are no previous exchanges with them and, thus, no bad memories. Their neutral, "virgin" character makes them less difficult to deal with.

Pushing this line of thought further, it is important to consider how anonymous market exchanges can represent a positive alternative to difficult reciprocity relations with friends, family members, and social networks. Mr. Richer's attempt to use the market can be understood in this light. He desperately tried to find someone he could pay to move his possessions instead of going through the humiliation of asking help from his children. He said, "I just want to pay and be free from any constraints."

However, 7 months after this ethnographical study began, Mr. Richer's health seriously deteriorated, and he was forced to move into a care facility (field notes, April 19). His sons ended a 10-year silence and agreed to help him. They came on moving day (field notes, May 22). They moved the bulk of his possessions, but they left as soon as the job was done, 3 hours after their arrival. Mr. Richer's attempts to invite his sons for a meal, give them personal belongings as a token of appreciation, and set up another meeting all failed. One of his sons told him that he had no time for lunch. The other one said that he was not hungry. They acted as if they had fulfilled their duty or paid back what they had owed him.

Afterward, Mr. Richer deeply regretted having gotten his hopes up. A few days after the move, he said, with a sigh of despair, "I stirred up all these memories. . . . For what? I'm not even sure I will see them again."

Oppression. One last case needs to be discussed because it illustrates the emotional oppression that is exerted via the gift economy. When I met Sandra, 41, she was receiving social assistance and living in a government-subsidized housing complex. The first interview took place 2 weeks before she was supposed to be expelled from her home and relocated. In a word, she was moving at a time of crisis.

Sandra's situation was extremely precarious. She had very little financial means. One of her sons did not reply to her request for help. The other showed up but did not confirm that he would be coming until the very last minute. She had been relying exclusively on her boyfriend's help, but 2 weeks before her move, they had had a serious argument. She explained how she felt about her situation:

> I'm really fed up. The guys, in fact everybody, let me down. Then my boyfriend has not shown up for the last two weeks. We had an argument; we had a fight. [*Sandra had been physically assaulted by her ex-boyfriend.*] I told him he would regret it. He's a jerk! . . . He'd promised me he would give me a hand and help me paint the rooms. . . . I don't know what to do. I don't even have enough money to hire someone.

These statements do not fully reveal the emotional oppression and nervousness that Sandra expressed during the interview. What emerged from our first meeting was that she depended on her boyfriend's help and that she felt that he was trying to emotionally blackmail her. The worst part was that she could not afford to pay someone else to do the work. The situation became even more complex when Sandra and her boyfriend separated just a few days before moving day. An excerpt from an interview conducted after the move is relevant:

> Moving day was tough. My ex was there. My son and his girlfriend were there, too. . . . That morning, my ex said, "I told you I would help you. I kept my word." During the day everybody was cool, making jokes, but I kept everything inside. That was hard because nobody except the two of us knew that we had split up. . . . On top of that, my son called me the following morning to give me a load of bullshit. He criticized me for not ordering pizza. I said I had offered the Pepsi to everyone, but I had no money for the food.

Sandra relied exclusively on the gift economy. She broke up with her boyfriend before the move and had to bear his presence because she needed his help. Her condition of dependence is reminiscent of Mrs. Bolduc's situation, discussed earlier, but there is an important difference between the two cases. To move into a care facility, Mrs. Bolduc received the help of her sister Mathilde, who felt duty-bound to make an apparently generous sacrifice for her. In contrast, Sandra's ex-boyfriend was clearly acting with ill intentions. He was trying to take advantage of the situation.

There is also a parallel between Sandra and Mr. Richer, who depended on his children's help. Both of their cases reveal the asymmetry between the giver and the receiver (Belk 1976; Belk and Coon 1993) by showing that the receiver may be vulnerable and that the context of exchange may exacerbate his or her vulnerability. Their cases resonate with the work of Mauss (1923–24/2000), who describes excessive gift giving as a means for the giver to exert control. According to Mauss (1923–24/2000), the incapacity to reciprocate and the resulting feeling of indebtedness cause embarrassment, with the possibility of emotional exploitation and abuse. We see this in Sandra's case.

Sandra's case also raises the issue of intimate domination, which must be distinguished from statutory domination (Sherry et al. 1993). The latter involves officially sanctioned hierarchical power relations in a public space. Intimate domination involves power imbalances between persons such as family members or close friends. Intimacy becomes a form of tyranny that creates tremendous emotional pressure. It is clear that through the manipulation of reciprocity relations, this form of domination can occur in the gift economy. Sandra's ex-boyfriend used the "privileged" position that intimacy conferred upon him to exert control. He attempted to take advantage of the context of necessity that Sandra's move created. He knew that she could not afford to pay someone else, and he deliberately manipulated her. Borrowing Ruth et al.'s (1999) expression, we could say that he tried to "hijack" the performance of the gift.

It is true that Sandra's case involves a considerable degree of violence and that this sets it apart. Nevertheless, her case shows that intimate relations who exchange or offer services—even the most instrumental ones—may be doing so in order to exert oppressive emotional pressure. In other words, it is possible for the gift economy to become a tyranny.

DISCUSSION: INVERTING THE AXIOLOGY OF THE GIFT ECONOMY AND THE MARKET

The cases presented above have revealed the tensions that often prevail within the gift economy and the pressure to pull out. They have shown that the gift economy can be emotionally demanding, perhaps even humiliating, or tyrannical.

It is true that like the informants in Kozinets's (2002) Burning Man study, some of the participants in the present study imbued the gift economy with higher moral values. The Burning Man participants struggled to seek refuge from what they perceived as the almost inescapable dehumanization brought on by the all-pervasive market (Kozinets 2002), while some of the informants in the present study, in particular Marjo and Rupert, decided to turn away from the market because they perceived it as the easy way out and felt pride in opting for the gift economy as a personal choice. Other participants in the present study, in particular Bea and Mrs. Debray, withheld requests for gifts for fear of imposing themselves. They drew on the market, but they decommodified it and subjected it to the logic of the gift, as Holt (1998) would put it. They used the market as a gift of absolution.

However, many of the participants in the present study did not invest the gift economy with higher values, in the way that Kozinets's (2002) informants did. In some cases—think of Mr. Richer and his difficult relationship with his children—they may have secretly wished or hoped that the gift economy would live up to some higher, more idealistic standard of human conduct, but they still saw the gift economy, nevertheless, as disagreeable and even threatening because of the emotional pressure and the sense of indebtedness created by reciprocity relations, and they attempted to avoid it by turning to the market. In other words, if Kozinets's (2002) research demonstrates that people may seek to escape the market through festival events like Burning Man that have the ritual power to "invert," overturn temporarily, or deny social order, the present research provides significant evidence for the opposite tendency. It shows that people may turn to the market in order to escape the unattractiveness of the gift economy.

It is obvious that these observations run contrary to the expectations of researchers like Kozinets (2002), but it is also clear that they belie the expectations of researchers like Joy (2001). Indeed, when analyzing the data using Joy's (2001) model of reciprocity, we can reasonably expect that participants will privilege distant relations—strangers (even the market)—for instrumental exchanges and that they will reserve their closest or most intimate relations for higher moral purposes such as emotional support. Yet neither Kozinets's (2002) nor Joy's (2001) model can account for the possibility of these participants' turning away from intimate relations in favor of the anonymous marketplace in order to avoid emotional exchanges in times of crisis. In contrast to Joy's (2001) informants, the people described here are not merely protecting their intimate relations by ensuring that they do not have to do instrumental (inferior) work. They are also protecting themselves from their intimate relations, that is to say, from the difficult memories associated with them, and from the emotional turmoil that may result from participating in a network of gift exchanges with them.

But these observations not only challenge the expectations of specific CCT researchers, they also put into question some of the fundamental tenets of consumer research on the gift. The gift is often praised for humanizing market relationships, for making the market meaningful, and for providing an alternative to the commodifying logic of capitalist exchanges. Yet the research presented here shows that the market is not always feared as dehumanizing, impersonal, or anonymous. On the contrary, it can be valorized precisely because of these features. This challenges the way researchers in this field and elsewhere in the social sciences understand the axiology that underpins the gift economy–market antithesis. In other words, it shows that people may invert this axiology—at least temporarily—and belie researchers' expectations.

Of course, house moving involves a specific type of physical activity that may partially explain why people who move often privilege the market. But it would be a mistake to reduce house moving to nothing over and above a specific instance of the instrumentalization of physical labor. For house moving is a social phenomenon that often includes or requires sustained involvement in the reciprocity relations characteristic of the gift economy. We have seen that for some people, the emotional cost of such involvement may be too high and that they may turn to the market as an escape. However, the question remains: How should we conceptualize the escape from the gift economy?

Revisiting the Concept of Escape

In the course of the discussion, several anthropologists and sociologists have been mentioned. It should be clear by now that the work of these social scientists does not provide a sufficient conceptual apparatus for coming to terms with the full complexity of the relationship between the gift economy and the market.

Sahlins's (1972) analysis takes market exchanges into account, but it considers these under the umbrella of reciprocity relations and describes them as a negative form. As one moves along Sahlins's (1972) spectrum of social relations, as more and more alien members and outsiders become participants in exchanges and, most importantly, as market people become involved in these exchanges, the fear of exploitation increases and there is an inversion of the logic of reciprocity—a switch from generosity to exploitation.

As for the anti-utilitarians, they provide some insights into the question of escape. Authors like Godbout (1994, 1995, 1998) and Godbout and Caillé (1998) think that the market can provide an escape from social networks. But for them, turning to the market is symptomatic of the dissolution of social bonding. They are strong advocates of the primacy of the gift. Thus they believe that privileging the market and challenging the axiology that underpins the gift economy–market antithesis are concomitant with moral and social decline.

Miller (2001) stands in contrast to these authors, for he questions the assumptions underlying the standard interpretation of the gift economy–market antithesis. His work shows that commodity relations have the potential to objectify disinterested manifestations of generosity. Although Miller (2001) does not use the specific term, it is clear that for him commodity relations can be emancipatory. But Miller (2001) not only attempts to invert the standard analysis of the gift economy–market antithesis, he also challenges the very idea of the antithesis itself. His position echoes that of researchers like Granovetter (1985), Joy (2001), and Kozinets (2002), for whom the market is socially embedded. This means that there is no room for escape, that escape is a conceptual impossibility.

The situation is much more complex, however, than the above authors suggest. It cannot be an a priori truth, as Sahlins (1972) implies, that market relations are necessarily located at the far end of the spectrum. In some instances, as CCT researchers have documented, people can have close, trustworthy dealings with those they interact with in the market (Price and Arnould 1999). As for the anti-utilitarian concept of exit, it is problematic because it is imbued with moral and ideological connotations. It idealizes the gift while treating the market with great suspicion. And Miller's (2001) position is insightful, but it fails to account for the perspective of people who are actually negotiating their way through what—at the very least—they experience as a fundamental opposition. In other words, it neglects the values that people actually attach to the gift economy–market antithesis. Indeed, the present study has shown that this antithesis, which Miller (2001) seeks to overcome, has concrete meaning for the people observed. It reflects a fundamental construction of values that cannot be ignored.

In reality, people constantly move between the gift economy and the market. Deviations from the norm of the gift economy are mainly related to the systems of implacable indebtedness that reciprocity creates. It is important to recognize, however, that withholding requests for gifts, services, and favors from significant others can be a driving force for using the market. Thus researchers must not overlook the essential distinction between the gift of absolution, which reinforces the fundamental axiology underpinning the gift economy–market antithesis, and the escape from the gift economy, which challenges this axiology (see fig. 2).

The fear of indebtedness cannot be equated with selfishness in any simple sense. Indeed, freeing oneself from the obligations of the gift economy may mean freeing oneself from emotional oppression and coercion, as they arise or are exerted in the gift economy.

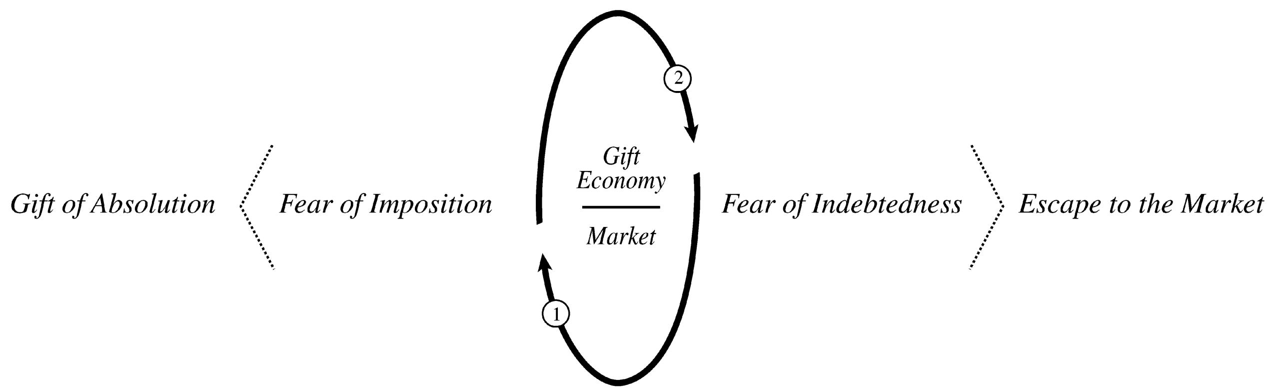
Implications for Consumer Research

The research presented here accords with the research of Epp and Price (2008) and could enrich the framework that they propose. It shows that people negotiate the social expectations of their relatives by using the market as a complement to the family or as a substitute for it. People may do this to take pressure off their families or to protect them, but they also withdraw—they even attempt to escape completely—from family exchange relationships because of the obligations that are entailed. In a word, the research presented here draws attention to "the ebb and flow" (Epp and Price 2008) of exchange relationships in and out of the family.

However, it also reveals some of the limitations of Epp and Price's (2008) framework. For it shows the need to develop a systematic framework for studying family consumption in a way that better integrates the issues of gift giving, exchanging, and sharing. Epp and Price (2008) discuss intergenerational transfers but remain silent on the logic that governs these exchanges and the power relations that underlie them. The family is at the heart of the gift economy. It is a privileged provider of emotional and instrumental gifts, services, and favors, especially in times of need. It would be an idealistic romanticization of the family (Pitrou 1996), however, to assume that gift exchanges between family members are completely gratuitous and never carry with them the obligation to reciprocate. In times of need, people often have to decide between the family and the market, and this requires that they weigh the instrumental, emotional,

FIGURE 2

TENSIONS IN THE GIFT ECONOMY



NOTE.—This figure represents the tension between the bright side (*left*) and the dark side (*right*) of the gift economy. The gift of absolution, which is related to the fear of imposition, authorizes a use of the market that does not compromise the primacy of the gift economy. Instead, it reinforces the fundamental axiology. This is depicted by the arrow that points up (1). In contrast, the escape to the market, which is related to the fear of indebtedness, challenges this axiology. It inverts the hierarchy of the gift economy and the market. This is depicted by the arrow that points down (2).

and relational costs and benefits of relying on their relatives for help. As we have seen, some people are afraid of indebtedness and wary of normative expectations. This shows that gift exchanges between relatives are not always gratuitous and that the norm of reciprocity plays a fundamental role in families.

In other words, we need to provide a better account of the dark side of family exchanges and their implications for the market. We need to enrich the current reflections on the generalized form of reciprocity that prevails inside families, as well as among close and intimate relations (Sahlins 1972). A generalized form of reciprocity entails almost no obligation to reciprocate, but it brings with it other forms of personal, intimate, and emotional expectations that have the potential to become oppressive. Epp and Price (2008) discuss at length the use of marketplace resources and the threat that the outsourcing of family tasks to the market may pose. This question is important, but the evidence presented here also shows the need to address the question of the inverse tendency. For it highlights the threat of not turning to the market.

While it is difficult to discuss the family or the gift economy without addressing the question of indebtedness, it is also difficult to analyze the moral aspects of owing without tackling the issue of memory. Indeed, we cannot understand how people choose between the gift economy and the market merely by looking at the record of previous exchanges. When making a decision, people do not simply weigh up what they owe to others with respect to what they have given others. People's personal histories and their most intimate memories (the positive ones as well the negative ones, for instance, those concerning tensions, taboos, and secrets) are important in explaining the choice between the gift economy and the market.

A debt can be paid—and erased—but the memories of previous exchanges do not simply vanish. On the contrary, they often become part of a person's, a family's, or a network's history. In other words, previous exchanges become part of what Epp and Price (2008) call a person's sense of continuity. Extending the conclusions of these authors' work, it seems safe to suggest that gift economy exchanges are related to identity formation and that indebtedness, particularly when it comes to debts that cannot be paid or to those that are too difficult to bear, will be avoided, at least ideally, so as to ward off threats to personal identity or autonomy. Nevertheless, more investigation may be needed here.

CONCLUSION

In spite of the work on the dark side of the gift, most consumer research has ignored the question of how negative experience in the gift economy can affect attitudes and behavior toward the market. Researchers have analyzed the gift economy and the market separately as two autonomous entities, and they have given almost no consideration to the moral and ideological hierarchy of the two. They have often demonstrated that the gift economy can be a protective haven against the alienation of the market and that gift giving can be a means of appropriating the market, contesting it, or even escaping from it. Yet they have been blind to the inverse tendency. They have failed to see that the unattractiveness of reciprocity relations can lead people to turn away from the gift economy and privilege the market.

The present article has taken a different stance. It has shown that people often confront the social expectations and consequences of the gift economy—for example, they try to avoid indebtedness—by shifting back and forth between the gift economy and the market. But more importantly, and contrary to what the work of many CCT researchers would lead one to expect, it has shown that people may escape *to* the market. The research presented here offers a fresh look at the fundamental axiology informing our understanding of the gift economy–market antithesis. It suggests that the escape to the market can be understood as an inversion of this axiology. The claim is not, however, that the market can or should be imbued with the higher moral values that consumer researchers and social scientists have traditionally attributed to the gift economy. The claim is that consumer researchers cannot avoid recognizing and questioning the moral and ideological hierarchy of the gift economy and the market. In other words, they must acknowledge that the antithesis of the two spheres of exchange plays a meaningful role in consumer behavior.

It is hoped that the present discussion will help consumer researchers to achieve a better understanding of how people choose between the gift economy and the market, how they shift back and forth from one to the other, and how they sometimes come to privilege the market over the gift economy, contrary to what CCT research has led us to expect. By recognizing that people sometimes challenge the axiology that underpins the gift economy–market antithesis, researchers will be able to work out a more adequate analysis of the regimes of value that guide consumer behavior.

APPENDIX

PROFILES OF INFORMANTS

Pseudonym	Age	Sex	Family status	Children	Occupation	New status
Kim	18	F	Single		University student	Tenant
Marie-Sol	18	F	Single		University student	Tenant
Julia	20	F	In couple		University student	Tenant
Caroline	23	F	Single		Horticulturist	Tenant
Julius	25	M	In couple		Delivery person	Tenant
Celine	25	F	Single		Student	Tenant
Charles	26	M	Single		Social worker	Owner
Julie	27	F	Single		Social worker	Tenant
Rupert	28	M	In couple	1 daughter	Municipal employee	Tenant
Marjo	30	F	In couple	1 daughter	Community worker	Tenant
Ann	30	F	Single		Professional researcher	Tenant
Mr. Rivera	34	M	Married	2 daughters, 1 son	Print worker	Tenant
Regina	37	F	Single		Chief nursing assistant	Owner
Mrs. Rivera	38	F	Married	2 daughters, 1 son	Manufacturing worker	Tenant
Gigi	40	F	Single	1 son	Unemployed	Tenant
Sandra	41	F	Separated	3 sons	Unemployed	Tenant
Mrs. Blackburn	41	F	Separated	1 son	Teacher	Owner
Bea	41	F	Separated	2 sons	Teacher	Owner
Mrs. Lambert	42	F	Married	1 daughter, 1 son	Part-time shop assistant	Owner
Mr. Lambert	47	M	Married	1 daughter, 1 son	Electrician	Owner
Mira	49	F	Single	1 daughter	Architect	Owner
Mr. Legrand	63	M	Single		Retired civil servant	Tenant
Mrs. Debray	68	F	Widowed	1 daughter, 2 son	Retired writer	Tenant
Mrs. Bouchard	69	F	Divorced	1 daughter	Retired waitress	Tenant
Mr. Ricard	71	M	Widowed	1 daughter, 3 sons	Retired teacher	Tenant
Mr. Trenet	73	M	Single		Retired musician	Tenant
Mrs. Cabot	78	F	Widowed	2 daughters, 1 son	Retired homemaker	Tenant
Mr. Richer	81	M	Divorced	4 daughters, 2 sons	Retired foreman	Tenant
Mrs. Hebert	89	F	Widowed	2 sons	Retired secretary	Tenant
Mrs. Bolduc	89	F	Single		Retired fashion designer	Tenant

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