

## ***Transfers: a deductive approach to gifts, gambles, and economy at large***

### **SHORT TITLE**

*Transfers*

### **ABSTRACT**

This paper reinterprets core issues in economic anthropology by exploring what would happen if *transfers* became one of its key theoretical resources. After briefly describing examples of use of the term “transfer” in anthropology and economics, where it is both pervasive and somewhat nebulous, *transfers* are defined as movements of economic matter while transactions are the forms that arise through the configuration of *transfers*.

Transactional sub-categories such as Maussian gift exchange or market exchange are then taken as socio-cultural and/or theoretical reifications, thereby becoming the goal of anthropological description. Examining the politics of creating and sustaining transactional sub-categories by first looking at the elementary *transfers* out of which they are constructed places ‘one-way transfers’ such as slavery and theft on the same conceptual plane as reciprocal and market transactions, rather than as a derivative or a remainder of either/both. Gifts and gambling are considered in greater detail. Gambling and ‘pure gifts’ become types of ‘one-way transfers,’ engineered to possess only one component *transfer*, and Maussian gifts explicitly connect *transfers* together in a particular politics. The paper then picks out effective examples from the existing anthropological literature that employ an incipient version of the *transfer* strategy and in-so-doing demonstrate its nascent explanatory promise.

### **PAPER**

I here recommend a terminology based upon the notion of *transfers* for use when dealing with economic transactions. In this terminology transactions are built out of the movements of economic matter within them, each movement with a single directionality being a *transfer*.<sup>1</sup> *Transfers* work as an ideological leveller when juxtaposing transactive forms that are privileged by anthropology, such as pure gifts, bride wealth payments, Maussian gifts and commodity exchanges, with those that are largely peripheral to anthropology (but not so to other disciplines), such as gambling, social security schemes, and barter. Instead of defining each of these forms of transaction before proceeding to contrast them, I start with transactions' constituent *transfers*. For that reason, and to lean on a wan metaphor, this essay provides a description of the ecosystem of transactions that envelope us all, together with the mitochondrial energy *transfers* that sustain the ecosystem as a whole. As suggested by my metaphor, "transactions" here mean each and every imaginable instance during which congealed human activity is considered to move.<sup>2</sup> Subsumed within the meta-category "transaction" and dissected by the micro-category *transfer*, the ideological opposition between such categories as gifts and commodities are shuffled over from their usual place as starting points of analysis, becoming instead ethnographic particulars belonging to given contexts that *result from* the political work of defining the nature of *transfers*. Only later do I turn to Maussian gifts, pure gifts, gambling etc., the megafauna populating our transactional Anthropocene, seeing each as sustained by materiality, politics, power and enumerative processes all bundled together through iteration and precedent. The framework intentionally places the specificity, temporality, inventiveness, and disputed nature of dealing in transactional categories centre stage from the outset.

A shift of emphasis toward *transfers* is not intended as a dismissal of the existing anthropological categories of circulation, but a lateral move. The initial choice of unit should likewise do nothing to invalidate or denude the power of such forces as obligation,

reciprocity or alienation, only expand the domain of study while simplifying the terms of analysis in what has become a bewildering set of debates. The questions posed by economic activity and the literature surrounding it are then ever so slightly restructured, creating an opportunity to turn over old stones.

The novelty of *transfers* is that of a tool to analyse the problematics of transactional sub-categories such as gifts from the start of the description, rather than reaching problematization as a conclusion, which is where existing literature usually ends. With *transfers* one starts from ambiguity and then reaches axioms of exchange by describing how ambiguities come to appear resolved (or fail to do so), rather than the other way round. Not without irony, this theoretical article therefore aims to facilitate more ethnographically led and reflective analyses that highlight 1) the specificity of situations that evoke thought and action, with their own temporalities, which may be invented in the moment, and 2) the terms under which the participants define what they are doing and thinking. I will also infer how systemic interpretation might apply to *transfers*, as it does to gifts and markets. When I zero in on Maussian gifts and gambling, the former is imagined as an expression of struggles to anchor economic *transfers* to reciprocal obligation, the latter cast as a manifestation of efforts to decouple economic *transfers* from reciprocal obligation.

### **One-way transfers**

Given the expansive scope, it is appropriate to begin with James Carrier's (2005) edited volume *A Handbook of Economic Anthropology*, Part III of which contains five chapters under the heading "CIRCULATION." These are "Ceremonial exchange," "The gift and gift economy," "Barter," "The anthropology of markets," and "One-way economic transfers." In his short introduction Carrier appropriately points out that circulation has been the most fruitful and impactful area of economic anthropological investigation, but also notes that this

attention has fallen unevenly, particularly with respect to the last subfield, “One-way economic transfers.” This has received scant attention despite the fact that it “quietly” raises important questions about the assumption that “circulation requires the exchange of value” (Carrier 2005:229). I hope to raise the volume here, suggesting that the one-way-ness of one-way transfers are already an important part of our analysis of multi-directional transactions, and that by recognising as much, and by embracing the implications, anthropologists might generate a productive dialogue about transactions at the broadest level. Indeed the problem of whether circulation requires the exchange of value should lose its relevance if, as I suggest, *transfers* are equally operative in both exchanges of value and one-way transfers.

In 1977, in a largely forgotten book called *The Origins of the Economy*, Frederic Pryor turned to the term “one-way transfer” as a means of categorising his data on economic activity. Pryor needed to distinguish between transmissions of wealth that were balanced by a material counterpart, which he called “exchange” (and which included market or commodity transactions), and ones which were not, called “one-way transfers.” Pryor’s larger aim was to use statistical regressions to establish correlations between various aspects of diverse economies. His categorisation (probably taken from economics) cut through a proliferation of anthropological jargon obscuring the cross-cultural hard data he had collated on the transmission of valuables.

<u>One-way transfer</u>	<u>Rationale</u>
Household pooling	Parents transfer to all their children, but care for ageing parents is generally restricted to a subset of a parent’s children.
Forager food-sharing	Allocation is not commensurate with status or participation in acquisitive activity.
Inheritance	The inheritance is generally not on the basis of prior

	economic interaction.
Endowments	Donors are not supposed to retain any control over the assets.
Theft	Thieves take from victims for their gain.
Hospitality	The host cares for the guest whether or not they will meet again.
Gambling	The winner takes wealth from a loser without binding obligation.

Table 1: A list of Pryor’s exemplars of one-way transfers, together with the rationale given.

Robert Hunt (2000, 2002, 2005) took up Pryor's exchanges/one-way transfers distinction and championed adding the term transfer to the economic anthropological lexicon. The two dominant conceptual frameworks for circulation, Hunt argues, are gift and market, both of which are kinds of exchange within which one party and another compare the things they exchange. Market exchange is of the greatest interest to economists, while gift exchange has been most central to anthropology. Hunt provides a handy definition of a third mode of circulation, transfers. A transfer is “the shift of a valued (X) from one social unit (A) to another social unit (B). The valued can be tangible, a service, or knowledge. The shift can refer to changes in possession, as well as to shifts in ownership. ... The X being transferred has economic content. It contains the efforts of production (work, skill, and experience)” (Hunt 2002:108).

Hunt’s definition implies that transfers are the basic unit of which all transactions are made, and exchange is a kind of elaboration (where another transfer replaces the original) (see also Hunt 2000). Pryor (1977:30) had likewise concluded that generalised exchange (i.e. intercommunity sharing, demand sharing)<sup>3</sup> is actually a series of transfers because these

transactions never reach a formal balance. But Hunt's observation passes by almost unexplored and instead those transfers that have no counterpart are juxtaposed to exchanges as categories of transaction belonging on the same scale: gift, market, and transfer (Hunt 2002). I surmise that for Hunt transactional types are essentially ethnographic empirical units, and therefore transfers cease to be transfers once they are recognised empirically as exchanges (e.g. Hunt 2000:19-21). It is only by operating at the scale of empirical phenomena that one-way transfers could be said to pose questions about the exchange of value found in other, equally empirically observable kinds of transaction because the problems depend on the reification of these subcategories. Only as a reified transaction-type can transfers be said to have no return counterpart, and thus no clear basis for an exchange of value.

By the time the *Handbook of Economic Anthropology* comes out, Hunt (2005) seems to have retreated from the implication that the transfer is of a different order to exchange and is content to represent what he calls "one-way transfers" as simply an underexplored subfield (which it undoubtedly is). But faced with an already creaking transaction vocabulary, I want to use Hunt's original insight to instead clear some brush.

In fact it is the retreat that presents the bigger problems, because a subcategory of "one-way transfers" looks positively dysmorphic, lumping together what would otherwise be considered radically different transactions. In the Handbook these include household pooling, forager food-sharing, inheritance, endowments, theft, charity, pensions, slavery, and gambling. Not that we should expect any formal elegance in human activities, but the situation is clearly obstructive when theft and charity are in one subcategory that is then opposed as a whole to gift exchange. It seems that in the literature of economic anthropology, one-way transfers are largely residual, a collection of bones found in the same cave.

Nevertheless it is evident that one-way transfers, such as they exist empirically, together represent both a vast amount of value and a huge proportion of wealth movements. In 2014 the market value of the endowment funds of colleges and universities in the United States was US\$535 billion (NCES 2016:744). The total value of stolen goods in the UK was £1.8 billion in 2013-2014, down from £6.9 billion in 1995 (Home Office 2015). These are large absolute numbers, but they are small potatoes compared to the slavery upon which the United States' economic development was built (Fogel and Engerman 1974). Inheritance currently stands at 11% of French national income (Piketty 2014:380). Welfare provision in the UK accounted for 10% of UK Government spending in 2016 (HM Treasury 2016).

The above one-way transfers are undeniably significant, but consider the proportion of all transactions in immediate-return hunter-gatherer societies that are one-way transfers (Hunt 2000; Woodburn 1998). Consider also aggregating all the household pooling that occurs in single-income households in (post)industrialised economies. Pryor (1977) was able to estimate that in 1970 intra-family transfers accounted for a startling 39 per cent of national income in the United States. While these one-way transfers may look deviant or at least unusual in either anthropological or indeed economic theories that highlight bi- or multi-lateral exchanges, they clearly are not empirically uncommon or tricky for the lay person to grasp. In fact, boiled down to its bare bones the physical law of entropy makes a system of one-way transfers the essential condition for all reproductive life since it must replace itself. One-way transfers are simply theoretically undervalued (but see Schokkaert 2006; Ythier 2006).

While these activities have very different effects and politics, they are united theoretically because there is no apparent counter to the transfer of wealth from one entity to another. Specifically it is both that nothing moves in the other direction and that there is no definitive obligation to make a return. Reasons for lack of obligation to return range broadly,

from the death of the donor, the recipient's impending demise, that the wealth was won, stolen, or, as in slavery, the recipient took ownership of the donor and all that they produce. It is in terms of lack that these transactions are thought through by scholars. In anthropology typical responses to one-way transfers such as charity take the theoretical vantage of exchange as their starting point, discussing charitable situations as attempts to systematically discount the ever-present tendency to feel obliged to reciprocate. Thus in the language of exchange charity is a chastened gift or a commodity denied a market (Laidlaw 2000; M. Strathern 2012). In this way an exchange-centred anthropology has somehow managed to render one-way transfers simultaneously parochial to the everyday practice of anthropology and to turn them into curious puzzles to be elaborately deciphered from within the exchange paradigm.

### **Transfers in Economics**

Economists meanwhile have been using transfers as a concept for decades (if not developing it theoretically), most textbooks tracing transfers back at least as far as a debate between John Maynard Keynes and Bertil Ohlin in 1929. Brakman and van Marrewijk (1998) inform us that all economic exchanges involve transfers, most of which are purchases and therefore “bilateral transfers,” but they go on to focus, as all economic research on transfers seems to do, on “unilateral” transfers, what Robert Hunt called “one-way transfers,” i.e. a movement of wealth not matched by a return. It must be noted first that economists need not and often have not applied the same rules as anthropologists have in determining whether a transfer is “unilateral,” for economists it can be enough that an exchange of transfers is uneven, it need not be entirely unidirectional—a tendency probably related to their primary interest in market transactions.<sup>4</sup> It would be fair to say that economists have built considerable knowledge of the metrics of transfers, particularly their relationships to other transactions, but the nature of



those transfers has been neglected. For economists transfers are simply found imbalances in the flow of value. In international trade and relations aid, debt forgiveness, investment grants, damages payments and remittances are characterised as “international transfers.” Within states the term “transfer payments” is applied most often to welfare programs, which transfer wealth or wealth-in-kind from those able to pay for it to those in need (called “public transfers”), and by extension to movements of wealth that occur within families (“private transfers”).

Economists also use “transfer pricing” to denote the price strategies that firms use when they sell valuables between operations in one jurisdiction and operations in another. Companies manipulate these transfer prices, selling their own wares to another subsidiary based in a higher tax regime at high prices, thereby moving their profits to the lower tax jurisdiction. The deliberate result is an imbalanced flow of wealth from one jurisdiction to another. There are papers confirming that transfer pricing responds to tax rates (Clausing 2003), determining which jurisdictions transfer pricing operates across (Bartelsman and Beetsma 2003), and discussing the technical problem of independent company “profit centres” in different jurisdictions each aiming to increase its own profit, potentially at the expense of the company as a whole (Hirshleifer 1956).

As one would expect, an economic analysis of intra-familial “private transfers” centres on the measurability of non-market movements of wealth, with a focus upon the effectiveness of these activities in fostering generalised financial wellbeing. Papers investigate the relationship between “public-transfer” programs (welfare programs) and intra-family level “private-transfers” (Cox and Jakubson 1995; Jensen 2003), others the relationship between “private-transfers” and income (Cox et al. 2004), yet others compare intra-family transfers from parents to children during life with bequests upon parents’ deaths (McGarry 1999). Although they do not express themselves in these terms, the papers explore

quantitatively the complicated and often conflicting human experiences of determining the one-way-ness or not of these transfers, potentially complimenting qualitative anthropological accounts of welfare (e.g. Edgar and Russell 1998; Gudeman and Rivera 1990; Morgen and Maskovsky 2003).

“Conditional cash transfers” meanwhile link state interests in ‘good citizenship’ to economic transfers. These are welfare programmes requiring a recipient to make prespecified investments (usually in their children). As policy tools these have mushroomed in importance since the mid-1990s (World Bank 2009:4). Two of the earliest iterations of conditional cash transfers, Brazil’s *Bolsa Família* and Mexico’s Oportunidades (formerly PROGRESA), are now the largest social assistance programs in their respective countries, covering millions of households and families (Eger and Damo 2014). Anthropologically, conditional cash transfers can be seen as governmental attempts to exert control over the effects of, among other things, intra-family transfers that thwart government’s stated aims.

Economists have encountered definitional issues around such matters as whether pensions are transfers, which depends on whether they are linked conceptually to the payments one makes before retirement or to the income the fund generates and pays out after retirement (Moon 1984). Anthropology is critically equipped to address such questions, but to do so, I would argue, requires a re-evaluation of the bi-/multi-lateral exchange-based paradigm we share with economics. What both disciplines have right now are categories derived from ideal types that leave “one-way” or “unilateral” transfers as the residue of other forms of exchange, and which are therefore characterised in terms of what they ‘lack.’

I now propose upending this situation: release the idea of a *transfer* from the inductive “one-way transfer” group of empirical phenomena and apply the *transfer* deductively as a micro-concept to all transactions as a kind of toolkit for theoretical bricolage. Instead of being an empirical outlier to more normal multilateral exchanges, the *transfer* then becomes a

theoretical motive (in the sense of movement) force that scaffolds all the world's emergent transactions.

### *Transfers*

To state things precisely, I use “transaction” as the collective term for the totality of overlapping ways that “valuables” are circulated within an economy, including both tangibles and intangibles such as knowledge. Instead of creating subcategories based on ideal-typical modes of circulation,<sup>5</sup> I envisage skipping down to *transfers*, which are modelled as operating at an infra-transactional level.

In discussion of concrete transactions I propose using the analytical term *transfer* to denote one isolated unidirectional component within that transaction, i.e. something passing from me to you or you to me;<sup>7</sup> the component may or may not be reciprocated in the future, and may or may not be linked to a past transaction. The movement of a valuable from one entity to another is a “*transfer*,” it may be balanced with a return, in which case it becomes an “exchange” of two (or more) *transfers* (e.g. barter, purchase, or like for like exchange). If the return happens later, this would be a “delayed exchange” of two *transfers* (i.e. tit for tat). A “*transfer*” that is not accompanied by a return and has no prospect of generating one in the future is a “one-way transfer.” Such a “one-way transfer” is of course no less and no more a cultural artefact than an “exchange of *transfers*,” but a “one-way transfer” and an “exchange of *transfers*” can be analytically distinguished because the former contains only one component “*transfer*,” while the latter has two or more. The valuables in motion during a “one-way transfer” do not have a counter-valuable against which their value can be directly compared, whereas an “exchange of *transfers*” offers an opportunity for direct comparison.<sup>8</sup> There is therefore a qualitative difference between one-way *transfers* and two-way *transfers*, or exchanges, even if that difference can be crosscut by the parties' intentions. A delayed

exchange conceptually bridges the two until it is completed, or the return is no longer possible. To mark the difference I use italics when I refer to the analytical category *transfer*. Ethnographically-reified transactions such as the “one-way transfer” appear in roman.

The *transfer* is emphatically not claimed as a universally held principle in the same way as has been argued for terms like exchange, reciprocity, or the gift. However, as an analytical category the *transfer* can be used to delimit components within all the transactions that might be employed to propagate and enact what one takes to be either universal or localised principles. *Transfers* are not a reality to be found, they are a concept to be used, even if in some cases they are also a concept used by one’s subjects.

The form of *transfers* that are included within each “transaction” will often be murky, for three reasons elaborated below: 1) the *transfer* may not be deemed delineable or enumerable (e.g. suckling an infant). 2) Linking one *transfer* to another and calling it a certain kind of transaction is as much about political recognition as it is about the items themselves. (In gambling for instance the winner is not obliged to compensate a loser, but that does not stop people from demanding that they do just that.) 3) Intangibles such as respect, status and/or obligation that may accrue in return for a *transfer* are only as concrete as their effects, and may be retrospectively enhanced or denuded by subsequent events, changing the balance of the *transfers* within a transaction if they are traced back to it. Starting at this lower, infra-conceptual level is a way to circumvent the *a priori* assumption within the term “exchange” that a return is expected, a point I elaborate on later. This is not to say that exchange and reciprocity are irrelevant, only that they require establishment and maintenance. By coupling the heuristic term “transaction” with the micro-level *transfer* one might incorporate that murkiness, and avoid employing the false clarity of prescriptive sub-categories.

1) Instead of a moment of exchange, which sits somewhere in the convergence of perspectives that may never have actually converged (e.g. Strathern and Stewart 2000:17-18), let the particle of circulation be the *transfer* of congealed human activity from the control of one entity to another. Any given transaction can then accommodate multiple perspectives from each angle. The point of convergence at which a *transfer* takes place is then an arena for both competing valuations of the thing or service being *transferred* but also, and as part of the determination of value, the competing values of various economic philosophies and/or pragmatics.

Encompassing exchanges within the scientific jargon of *transfers* does not place every kind of *transfer* on a single measurable scale. It is surely impossible to live without making categories for comparison and creating value comparisons, but the generality of the means of measurement are themselves highly variable and of differing degrees of abstraction within natural languages (Gudeman 2001:14). The term *transfer* is designed rather to free up discussion of the commensurative possibilities, constraints, and perspectives that occur around a *transfer* or grouping of *transfers*. The nature of the *transferred* item as a unit is also not necessary prior to the *transfer*, or a necessary consequence of it. *Transfers* are possible not because the things that move are immutable objects, but because the properties of things in the social world are given immutability that appears objective (Verran 2001). Indeed the establishment, perpetuation, or erasure of the *transferred* object's status as a unit may well be an important feature in identifying its politics and the social reality generating it (Pickles 2013; M. Strathern 1992). The accretion of immutability through continued circulation provides parameters within which each party establishes their own valuations as a function of their separation as parties to a transaction.

2) The mutual recognition of the coupling of *transfers* does not presuppose that each party is an autonomous agent acting in the rational pursuit of material self-interest (or any

other form of self-maximisation); the goal is to instead foreground the political constitution of distinction and mutuality through the work of delineating in each case what counts as a *transferrable* object, what are the appropriate ways that it might move, and how might that movement be innovated upon to the benefit of those it is being used to delineate.

The *transfer* is not to be equated with disinterested giving (*contra* Sneath 2006, 2012)<sup>9</sup> except under conditions where that motivation can be clearly delineated (e.g. Davis 1992). A given actor may choose to assess their transactions in instrumental terms, or for that matter through any other political philosophy. The project of understanding transactions in terms of *transfers* thereby necessitates localized ethnographic knowledge of how transactions are perceived. A *transfer* can create chains that are characterised by one party as involving some *transfers* and not others, while the other party may include and exclude completely different past and future *transfers* and partners.

3) There are various ways in which a *transfer* is proscribed or limited by the nature of the wealth under consideration, especially in the case of permanent sources of production such as land, which may, for example, be allotted by a matriline, usufruct rights given, or the land may be leased by legal contract. In the case of valuables such as cash money or a harvest, which are locally unanchored and therefore have the capacity to flow out of immediate communities, *transfers* may be more often accompanied by a counter-*transfer*, as in market exchange. Some items that might conceivably be *transferred* but which are too important to do so in practice are often considered priceless or ungiftable (what Annette Weiner (1992) called “inalienable wealth”), negating their *transfer*-ability to outsiders and defining the boundary of insider and outsider. These heirlooms are *transferred* inter-generationally, proffering continuity on the political entity asserting to have kept them.

Side-stepping atemporal economic abstractions allows a view of historical processes by which valuables are recontextualised and revalued through the action of outgoing *transfers*

or equally active efforts at retentive *transfers*. Retention precipitates a form of valuation that evades enumeration and commensuration but may also be the subject of strategic action, as when a frequent traveller holds onto a few euros just in case. Bringing *transferrable* objects into association with inalienable wealth is another strategic action that augments their value, for instance a letterhead that carries a crest.

I outline these limits because a shift in lexicon is no elixir and I am certainly no Pollyanna. The shadow cast by shifting focus onto transactions as composed of *transfers* both enables and necessitates switching perspectives again so as to illuminate the contours of both a theory and its shadow (see Jiménez and Willerslev 2007). *Transfer* is useful as a reflective prompt because it carries far less conceptual content than anthropological terms such as “gift exchange,” “commodity exchange,” “barter” or “hospitality,” let alone “exchange” itself. It is both more general, and more basic, enabling one to include a far broader array of transactions when filling in the content without the problem of certain forms slipping through the cracks.

To demonstrate this potential I now discuss two transactions with distinct but complementary *transfer* dynamics: first gifting and then gambling. The coupling of the *transfers* involved in each case are politically charged in a manner that invites their productive juxtaposition.

### **Pure Gifts, Maussian Gifts, Unaccompanied *Transfers***

Anthropological orthodoxy distinguishes “pure gifts” from “Maussian gifts.” A pure gift is altruistic, an act of generosity without concern for a return, i.e. a one-way transfer. A Maussian gift appears the same, it too is an item conferred by a donor upon a recipient under the auspice that a return is voluntary. However, in a Maussian gift this auspice is deemed to be to various degrees delusory. Parties know that a return is obligatory and that the other party knows that they know that it is obligatory (Mauss 1954). Everyone participates in a

contrived game of free will, and early debate centred on whether self-interest was all that was behind it (Malinowski's (1926:27) position) or whether generosity played an operative role for the individual and the interest in reciprocity came from the moral person as defined by the social unit (Mauss' position [see Parry 1986:455-456]). The timing of a return upon a Maussian gift is potentially open-ended, but in every case there is an expectation among at least one party to the transaction that a return *transfer* will eventually take effect. This may end the exchange, or instigate yet other *transfers* in an ongoing web known as an exchange system. Godelier (1999:10) points out it was Mauss' genius to reconnect the point of departure of original gifts to the point of arrival of their returns. I contend that this reconnection during analysis, and its negation (seen in the pure gift) is always essentially an ideological project. Lack of reciprocation is basically excluded from consideration by Mauss by virtue of Mauss' interest in gifts *insofar as they were* precursors to contractual law, in the Durkheimian evolutionary tradition (Parry 1986:457).

Pure gifts are also complicated *transfers* in their own ways: categorically destroying all feelings of obligation may be considered undesirable or even impossible (Laidlaw 2000); or pure gifts may have a de-purifying effect on the gift itself (Parry 1986); or lastly because of the niggling faculty that humans have for conjuring immaterial counterweights (Bourdieu 1977). These complications are important, but all can potentially agree that a pure gift, if it does exist, must necessarily be a one-way transfer.

Posing Maussian gift exchange as the structural opposite of capitalism is a straw man regularly unmasked in lecture theatres and seminar rooms. To achieve this unveiling, most oversimplify C.A. Gregory's (1982) *Gifts and Commodities* to say that in gift economies (as opposed to capitalist economies) the important result is always and only the relationship that the contributions represent or bring into being, rather than the gift itself that participants really desire. Meanwhile in capitalist economies things characteristically take the form of



commodities divorced from their producers, and because that is how their subjects are accustomed to thinking of objects, people tend to desire the thing that is given and not the abstract labour relationships that created it. From that polemical starting point it is a short step to revealing that societies that organise their economy through delayed reciprocity (famous examples being the kula ring in Papua New Guinea, and potlatch in the Pacific Northwest) intensely desire the things themselves for themselves after all. *Ipsa facto* one can then reveal that the relationship represented by a gift in a commodity economy is often in fact far more important than the object. It is by now well-established that the gift can be seen in the market transaction and object fetishism in the gift (e.g. Appadurai 1986; Carrier 1990; Gell 1992). The romantic association between altruistic giving and simple economies who practice gift exchange is then revealed as a commodity-induced projection, because the very possibility of separation of interest from gift is shown to be an artefact that is, if not peculiar to a capitalist economy, then at least correlated with it (Carrier 1990). Nowadays the current consensus on the importance of Maussian gifts versus pure gifts follows Parry's common sense wisdom, that empirically "it is not a question of either an ideology of reciprocity or of its repudiation, but rather of a significant difference in the extent to which these possibilities are elaborated" (Parry 1986:466).

The gift literature bedims further when one considers whether the gift itself (pure or Maussian) contains a spirituality that is either socially generative or polluting, and in turn whether that spirit emanates from the donor or some more mystical source. These occur most notably in debates surrounding the properties of the Maori *hau* or the Hindu *dan/dana* (e.g. Firth 1929; Graeber 2001; Laidlaw 2000; Levi-Strauss 1973; Parry 1986; Sahlins 1972). Whether or not the gift is literally or figuratively part of the person of the giver does not concern me here. I here bracket the "spirit of the gift" so as to draw attention to a more

prosaic point about how *transfers* become either one-way transfers known as pure gifts, or get coupled up to become Maussian gifts.

In this article a Maussian gift occurs when an attempt to couple the outgoing *transfer* of economic matter to a *transfer* that is perceived as a return is socially recognised. A pure gift occurs where a return *transfer* is deemed unnecessary or inappropriate by all parties or by the presiding authority. The focus instantly shifts to the political constitution of forms of transaction out of their component *transfers*. It also immediately strikes one that, framed in this way, a pure gift requires a strong consensus or authority if it is to be accepted as pure and not Maussian. This is because any suspicion that the pure *transfer* might in fact be Maussian from either party (or any such ambiguity in the presiding authority) rather poisons the well for everyone. The unaccompanied *transfer* is always at risk because the mind works through connection, it therefore makes sense that unaccompanied transfers would be more common in authoritarian societies, where conceptual connections between *transfers* can be effectively sanctioned.

I take a particular interest in Maussian gifts because they are conceptually more common than their altruistic counterparts, and because where I conduct research in Papua New Guinea reciprocal gifting and ceremonial exchanges are extremely conspicuous. The first explorers, colonial officers, missionaries and anthropologists in the Highlands of Papua New Guinea found some of its peoples had developed what looks like Maussian gift exchange into their most exulted cultural forms, a to and fro that played out over and beyond the lifecycle of its individual members, and involved the most valued items: usually pigs, shells, dog's teeth, feathers and axes. Thousands of pigs and shells moved through vast networks for the bragging rights of political leaders whose fame and authority was manifested in large part through their transactive prowess. The colonisers fed this grand

competition (and ultimately undermined it) by paying those who assisted them with shells, steel and later money (Strathern and Stewart 2000).

Consequently, Melanesian anthropology has its own flavour of ambivalence toward the Maussian gift. It is a paradigm-setting concept ever associated with Melanesia through Mauss' use of Malinowski's Trobriand material, and because Melanesia figured prominently as ethnographic exemplar in the anthropological discourse following from the translation of Mauss' *Essai sur le don* into English (e.g. Foster 1995; Gregory 1982; Munn 1986; A. Strathern 1971; M. Strathern 1988; Thomas 1991; Weiner 1992). And yet, as James Carrier (1992) has argued, the gift was far less prevalent in Melanesia than it appeared, the commodity transaction far more common, and the ambiguities of real economic life were too often hidden by an essentialising character in Melanesian anthropology (see also Gell 1992). The application of Maussian gift-logic undoubtedly cloaks a great deal of Melanesian economic activity (but see Hart 1986; Healey 1990; Rappaport 1984), but negative or complicating argumentation such as Carrier's is hard to rally behind, and tends to reproduce itself. No wonder it has become common in the exchange literature to attach the prefix "so-called" before using the term, so "exchange societies" become "so-called exchange societies" (e.g. Keane 2001), and in Melanesia in particular "gift exchange" became "so-called gift exchange" (e.g. Feil 1988; Gregory 1980; M. Strathern 1991). Diacritics such as these are a good sign that the current terms are creaking under the weight of their annotations. In the absence of alternatives and through the canonising effect of continual diacritical exegeses, the Maussian gift developed into Melanesia's dominant conceptual device. It became Melanesian anthropological orthodoxy to interrogate the idea that the gift, either competitive gifting or communistic sharing, but always binding, reciprocal and total, was at one point the organising principle for Melanesian sociality, and that the situation has since been muddied by European encroachment (Akin and Robbins 1999). In so doing, and in spite of many

authors' efforts, the gift-commodity paradigm has been reinforced even while it was tempered.

Anthropologists of Melanesia share with their interlocutors an overriding concern with setting the boundaries of transactions, implicating people in transactions with appeals to definitive obligations but in the knowledge that their appeals were transparently contingent (Pickles 2013, forthcoming). Like Melanesianists David Akin and Joel Robbins (1999), I found that my interlocutors “regularly work to differentiate kinds of exchanges, kinds of relationships, and kinds of objects” (9), and are anxious about the collapse of these distinctions. It therefore seemed apt to shift the lens toward the prospecting work of achieving the desired transactive forms (Pickles, forthcoming; cf. Munn 1986). In a context that foregrounds reciprocal giving *as an ideal*, this meant concentrating on the human work of connecting or disconnecting all those endless *transfers*.

Furthermore, I am always affected on fieldwork by the sense of continual disappointment with the many failures usually involved in conscious attempts to make lasting connections through things. In present-day Papua New Guinea in particular, a peripheral nation in the grip of bad faith politicians and extractive industries and struggling with runaway inequalities, it is at least as important to theorise failure to successfully make exchanges stick as it once was to understand them working effectively. Analysing exchanges as *transfers* to be connected renders attempts to achieve a desired transaction that are perceived by a party to have failed on an equal analytical footing with those that succeed. This is probably the area in which the term *transfer* has the most potential. In Papua New Guinea at least, failure to agree on the form of a transaction and its proper deployment make up a very large proportion of the sum of all perspectives on transactions, and while this may have been exacerbated since colonial intervention, it must always have been more important

than it has appeared in exchange literature by default of the “exchange” unit of analysis (but see Munn 1986).

While Papua New Guineans brought me to this conclusion, I am more and more convinced that regardless of site, reciprocal gift exchange as “observed” has always depended on a leap of faith on the part of the observer. Anthropologists are all too ready to follow *some* of their interlocutors’ statements, prioritising the ones that formulate “exchange” as balanced in a formal, abstracted sense (Bourdieu 1977: pp4-9; A. Strathern 1971:101, 104; Strathern and Stewart 2000:22-23). In some specific circumstances people do exchange one thing for an equivalent object at the same time. But delayed exchanges form the bulk of the exchange literature, and these depend on extrapolation from either the idea of exchange of identical items, or commodity exchange (but see Foster 1990). The time and space between the *transfers* in a delayed exchange invites explication, and this has fore-fronted reciprocity, mutuality and obligation as connecting forces. But there exists also a great deal of contingency, threat and existential uncertainty. Anthropologists missed a trick when we made a rule of assuming that gifts are usually returned, then marking out occasions when a return is unwelcome, rather than factoring in that they often aren’t (but see Bourdieu 1977). It is not a sufficient question to ask, as Godelier (1999) has asked “which principle *prevails* in the society and why?” (14, emphasis in original). The question must instead be: how a practice is instituted into a prevailing principle within and across social boundaries, and why? Not beginning from the gift concept, one is far less likely to overextend it. Beginning at a smaller scale with less conceptual content and building up towards transaction types might get us closer to people’s attempts to muddle through their economic lives.

The argument thus far somewhat resembles Pierre Bourdieu’s *Outline of a Theory of Practice* (1977), within which Lévi-Strauss treatment of the Maussian gift is eviscerated. Lévi-Strauss is charged with objectifying reciprocity by foregrounding *rules of exchange*.

Bourdieu castigates Lévi-Strauss, claiming he effectively reified with rules a profoundly temporal and thus uncertain practice into a certainty, and in-so-doing overlaid upon the world the conditions of his own being as a socially separated, intellectually elevated rule-deriver. For Bourdieu the ‘full truth of the gift’ is the coexistence of two opposing truths, the objective model of gift-exchange as a total system, and the subjective contingency by which the system is experienced and reproduced. It is the temporality of gift-exchange that enables these two truths to coexist, and it is the responsibility of anthropology to articulate the full package—model, contingent experience, and temporality—as a dynamic. Where Bourdieu highlights temporality and its embodiment in practice as productive of social institutions, I use *transfers* to codify the multitude of available units which are the traffic of that temporality and the object of directed objectification by both analyst and practitioner. It is hoped that *transfers* can be used as part of anthropologists’ conceptual tool-set to make descriptions that stand up to Bourdieu’s high standards. The aim is to enable anthropologists to start whereabouts Bourdieu’s and other critiques of exchange left off, and not to simply repeat the critique.

Maurer similarly argued that contemporary economic anthropology is at its best when it shifts “the optic from exchange to flow or circulation ... [returning] the objects of exchange to “the space and time of their genesis” (Eiss 2002:293; Gilbert 2005; Keane 2001), revealing relationships missed by the reification of subjects and objects that is sometimes presumed by the analytical category of exchange” (2006:21; see also Munn 1986). And yet Hann (2006:215, 221) argues that the term *transfer* represents an abandonment of the broadly effective Maussian paradigm dominating economic anthropology, a paradigm which has done much to underscore obligation as the irreducible element within exchange. I am arguing instead that there is in fact no mutual exclusivity between *transfers* and the Maussian paradigm and will show that *transfer* is already an unacknowledged technique in economic

anthropology within and without the Maussian paradigm. As an analytical Lego brick within exchanges, *transfers* in no sense displace existential social forces such as reciprocity or self-maximisation, instead they aid anthropological description of their constitution. I now demonstrate the utility of *transfers* in folding one of the transactions side-lined by the Maussian tradition into our discourse, gambling.

### **Gambling**

As a sub-category of transaction, gambling inevitably has fuzzy borders open to ideological expansion or contraction. The Oxford English Dictionary (2017) defines “gamble” as 1: “Play games of chance for money; bet.” And 2: “Take risky action in the hope of a desired result”. The definition is complicated when one considers either whether financial speculation has to be gambling by definitional necessity, or whether betting on games of skill or athleticism as opposed to chance are gambling. Still, few would go so far as to claim that gambling did not exist as a transactional type. For most gambling is both distinctive and deeply ingrained, and many assume it to be a universal feature of all societies, though in fact it is not (Pickles 2014a). Anglo-Saxons are among those who habitually project gambling onto other activities, often claiming that this or that activity is gambling if you think about it. Much of this has to do with popular understandings of risk, probability, and evolutionary theory (Reith 1999; Schüll 2012). The gambling that “lies underneath” other activities is therefore not *prima facie* explanatory, but rather an ethnographic indicator of a particular cosmological frame that considers gambling so relevant that it gets projected outward.

Where gambling’s history is short, and where one cannot assume that the same associations with risk, probability and evolutionary theory have been instilled, then the contours of gambling can be quite different (Pickles 2014b). Given this diversity, I have often asked myself what is unique to gambling that we all seem to recognise it when we see it?

Where does it sit in relation to other kinds of transaction, and how variable might that position be? Why exactly is it close to financial speculation, and why is it far from a Christmas present?

Seen from Pryor's (1977:255) perspective gambling is a kind of one-way transfer: the winner is not obliged to make a return to the loser(s). From another perspective (one promoted by the gambling industry) a player spends money in order to gain the pleasure of gameplay, making for a market exchange of *transfers*. This perspective has been found to facilitate the legitimization of gambling as one among many entertainment products. The larger game surrounds sometimes lend themselves to still another perspective, one in which losers are indirectly compensated by winners with peripheral items or chances to play again, resulting in an imbalanced exchange of *transfers*. It is immediately obvious that the link between *transfers* surrounding gambling (or lack thereof) are an arena for politics that has considerable effect upon not only the moral status of the activity but also the value created, exchanged or destroyed by it.

From the perspective of most players there is no doubt that during play the defining mechanic is betting, which translates as the opportunity for players to elicit a one-way transfer towards themselves. By staking money (i.e. by committing it to being part of a consolidated *transfer*) gamblers attempt to gain valuables that have been divorced from reciprocal obligation, and so cause a one-way transfer in their own direction. (A winner regains his stake, and therefore can be said not to have made an outgoing transfer.) Leaving aside the "gambling as exchange" perspective so beloved by industry and some anthropologists, and concentrating on most players' perspective of gambling as one-way transfer, brings to light some interesting effects that gambling has on the value of stakes. In betting, the value of the stakes are compared as they are consolidated, as opposed to what happens in a contemporaneous exchange of *transfers*, when the value of the wealth is



compared as the things are exchanged. It is valuation by association rather than valuation by friction. Valuation is underdetermined compared to an exchange of *transfers* because winning allows the victor to take home both the value of their stake as well as some (or all) of the other valuables staked by others. Gambling therefore privileges subjective assessments of the value of one's stake as opposed to the market value of that stake. Subjective valuation is heightened by the repeated rounds of play, in which participants may choose to anchor their success against highpoints, lowpoints, or the starting point of their bank.

In staking their subjective assessments of value gamblers explore and potentially master the flow of *transfers* that are the building blocks of economic life in what equates to a "tournament of value" (Appadurai 1986). The manipulation of value is most apparent in gambling partly because the transactions that occur are not straightforwardly economic. Under normal exchange conditions the economic value of items is made evident when the *transfers* are exchanged, but in gambling the items are *transferred* from one person to another without referent to anything outside of the pot. Money is moved without it being made to correspond to another object or service. Gambling shares this property with other one-way forms of *transfer* (grants, charity, household pooling, and theft) and, to a lesser extent, to acts of delayed reciprocity.

By contrast to Maussian gifting, gambling enforces certain rules that purport to make it stand out from everyday rounds of give and take as a one-sided transaction rather than a gift bound up with obligations of return. In gambling the stake is tied to the unforeseeable result of an event that, when resolved, strictly determines an outcome. Gambling therefore has among its defining characteristics the *negation of* a mutual assumption among players that one *should be* obliged to reciprocate the flow of valuables that occurs during the course of a game. If one was obliged to give a loser an amount equivalent to what one won, this would not be gambling. Compensation must be *voluntary*. Gambling must therefore be seen

as a one-way transfer. If reciprocity is felt necessary, it usually comes in the form of a free game, a token return, or the axiom that a winner must keep playing until a loser gives up. Gambling is in this respect a vehicle for increasing not just your wealth but also choice about whether to donate and who to donate to, as well as propagating a preponderance of one-way transfers. It is only by reifying the excitement of play (which must be done at a remove from play itself) that it can appear on another level as an exchange of *transfers* (excitement for money), but to generate the excitement itself it must be experienced as a one-way transfer. Part of that excitement is often generated by repeat play, when the one-way transfers are themselves linked together in a run that is the subject of both lay and expert reflection. Here statistics and speculation alike ponder the connection of paradigmatically unconnected transactions.

As such gambling can be seen as a schema of transaction in which the carrot of a one-way transfer induces *transfers* to be consolidated and then redistributed. The impetus for the trustworthiness of the one-way transfer is mandated by an event or set of events that are perceived to occur beyond the capacity for any one stakeholder to determine with certainty. Gambling is a particularly underdetermined one-way transfer, offering the potential for exploration of both possibility and an interrogation of the valuables that are *transferred*. Apparently divorced from obligation, the participants are free to make their own plays and initiate their own flows of reciprocity with their winnings and losses. It therefore sits at the nexus of transactional possibilities, modelling an initiatory gift, the play of reciprocity over time, and the exchange of wealth for entertainment.

The language of *transfers* opens up the conceptual possibilities of gambling, revealing a broader exploration of the potential for generally accepted stores of value to respond to individual efforts to make those valuables work for them, with distinct effects under different conceptual conditions, but always with the potential to make more of people's transactions

into one-way transfers and to expand the domain of ‘one-way transfers’ as an explanatory idiom. By reifying the enjoyment of play and/or heightening distribution choices, it may also highlight the contingency involved in connecting up *transfers*. One can likewise easily compare the *transfer* dynamics of Maussian gifts and gambling. Where Maussian gifts involve *transfers* that are spread over time so that they risk becoming one-way transfers and are ultimately satisfying when resolved, gambling intensifies *transfers* over a short time while playing up their one-way status and generating the expectation that the next win is just around the corner and causing speculation upon the nature of links between discrete transactions. Gambling and Maussian gifting are therefore a kind of *transfer* chiasmatic image of each other.

If the potential utility of using *transfers* analytically consists of stripping back any transaction’s politics in order to describe that politics as process, it will bolster my argument if I can demonstrate that, in fact, anthropologists have been using the English vernacular word ‘transfer’ to do just the same thing for quite some time, although without acknowledging as much and therefore underutilising that potential.

### **Existing “*transfer*” work in Anthropology**

In an effort to clarify their politics, anthropologists often strip transactions back to an untheorized, vernacular usage of the word ‘transfer’ – noun: “1. An act of moving something or someone to another place, organization, team, etc.” (OED 2018). A *transfer* stratagem therefore exists nascently in a good deal of the anthropological literature, establishing precedents to the current argument and more importantly demonstrating *transfer*’s utility. In economic anthropology the vernacular language of *transfer* is consistently used to describe the moment of movement in a transaction under conditions where the nature of the

transaction described is yet to be established by argument. For instance, in *Towards an Anthropological Theory of Value* David Graeber (2001) uses “transfer” or “transferring” when he wishes to highlight the ambiguity of either the motivation behind the movement of a valuable or its economic status, hence: “a potlatch turned on a contrast between two sorts of transfer: the host received a unique title ... at the same time defining the guests as faceless and generic in comparison,” “we have encountered extremely complicated systems of transfer in which the exact dimensions of “groups” are rarely entirely clear,” “the subsequent transfer of names occurs not only within one’s own moiety but within one’s matriclan” (210, 226, 143). Graeber even adopts a definition of gifts that hinges on the emptiness of the term *transfer*: “To give a gift is to transfer something without any immediate return, or guarantee that there will ever be one.” (Graeber 2001:225, citing Godbout and Caillé 1998). Gregory and Parry both use *transfer* in much the same way, as does Yan.<sup>13</sup>

Carrier (1990) characterises Mauss as claiming that a gift acquires meaning insofar as it is “the transfer of something identified with the giver” (24). This becomes increasingly problematic under capitalism, Carrier shows, because people rarely make what they give or acquire it through gifting, and that therefore the gift becomes a special kind of transaction. In other words, in the construction “the transfer of something identified with the giver” the word “transfer” does the work of opening us to the possibility that there might be other kinds of transaction that would still result in the same *transfer* of that thing to that other person. Some ambiguity is welcomed in, and this is a most useful property of the emptiness of the vernacular word *transfer*, which implies movement without intimating cause or consequence, a word that can cover everything from iron-on pictures for clothing, changing form of transportation on the same ticket, all the way to professional sportspeople switching employers.

All this is perhaps unsurprising, because in describing the charge ascribed to movements of wealth one often needs recourse to a term that does not already imply such charge, and *transfer* fits the bill well. By contrast, Laidlaw's (2000) discussion of alms for Shvetambar Jain renouncers as among the closest real world parallel to "pure gifts" contains no such reference to *transfers*, perhaps because the argument is that pure gifts create no friends and therefore no space for such ambiguities.

It is precisely the politics of ambiguity that Marilyn Strathern (2012) depicts at play in the donation of human bodily material and its use for scientific or medicinal purposes in the UK. Given the sheer technical specialism required to appropriately remove, artificially sustain, implant or otherwise utilize each kind of bodily material, the term *transfer* seems uniquely appropriate to the subject matter, and it is certainly not a coincidence that "organ transfer" is a technical term. More than this, Strathern argues that the absence of a system of monetary purchase to grease the wheels of bodily material transfers heightens the ambiguity surrounding them, thereby heightening the sense in which these movements are best seen as "transfers." "It is as though a shadowy contract had been created by the transfer, maintained as a debt the one owes or has discharged to the other" (Strathern 2012:401). Tensions are high because in most of the cases Strathern describes the donor of bodily material is dying or has died just minutes ago. The material is anthropologically fertile because it is an ethnographic situation so riddled with ambiguity and yet so suffused with high feeling that any use of a term which is not devoid of conceptual content could not manage to describe it. This time it is the ambiguity of the term "transfer" in "organ transfer" used throughout the text that enables the conflicts to coexist.

Nancy Munn's (1986) work on value and exchange on Gawa within the Kula Ring also uses *transfers* in the same untheorized but content-stripping way that Graeber, Strathern, Gregory, Parry and Yan do. In Munn's terms human action consists of attempts to control

intersubjective space-time, extending it out with your Maussian gifts to your partners and allies, such that the waves created by your actions are reified into fame. Fame is the endpoint rather than exchange for the sake of exchange. The means for achieving this goal is to engage creatively with extant types of exchange, rather than simply replicating exchange forms. The result is a transformation of intersubjective space-time. Graeber conjectures that the reason Munn's theory has been little taken up is that it seems to evade any solid transactional form such that we might say that such-and-such amount of value has been invested in such-and-such object (Graeber 2001:45-46). It is perhaps the best example of theorising economy through terms that are themselves processual, which it does by developing a language of its own before turning to ethnographic description. I would hope that developing a usable language that can deal with inconsistent transactional forms could facilitate more of this kind of ethnography.

Among these anthropologists 'transfer' is used just as it is in the English vernacular, to imply movement in possession without assuming the nature of the connection. It would be likewise informative to look at other languages' 'transfer' equivalents and to problematize the conceptual biases of using the English language, even at this level of abstraction. I nevertheless think that, given that we must at least begin with our common language, the *transfer* is an advantageous one to begin with for the purposes of explicating ethnographic ideas, practices, and pragmatics of transaction.

## **Conclusion**

Linking transactions in terms of *transfers* rather than at the level of types of exchange sets gambling and other neglected transactional forms as equals among transactions. It also provides a process-oriented concept that enables description, a unit that can be put to work to

describe the traffic of temporality. I have argued that really any coherent analytical method that shifts our attention away from a market vs gift exchange, economist vs anthropologist set of dichotomies is a potentially valuable resource. Especially so given the persistent feeling that contemporary anthropologists who highlight reciprocity are merely arguing against economists who are in fact long dead while current economists simply ignore, or never hear the critique. I have no desire to rehearse anthropology's exchange-centric denouncement of homo-economicus again. Economics and anthropology apparently once had a productive relationship, but it was considered long gone as early as 1962 (Burling 1962; see also Hart 1986). The problem of marrying economic and anthropological perspectives on economy was put succinctly by Stephen Gudeman (2001:81), who proposed that anthropologists and economists are caught in a dialectic; both offering clearly distinct but equally essentialist views, anthropologists overemphasise reciprocity, relationality and altruism, economists do the same for atomism, markets and egoism (but see Schokkaert 2006). As Davis notes, charity and altruism are as awkward to market economists as theft and barter are to "reciprocalist economists" (read anthropologists) (Davis 1992:24). Their contrast is a product of the dyadic, totalising tendencies of the disciplines, which we would do well to circumvent, and it so happens I think *transfers* fits the bill.

We have been critiquing economists for their emphasis on markets, but many moved on long ago to an interest in *transfers*, and it is time anthropologists gave their own theoretical clarity to the concept. Economic analysis is in the business of testing the connections between *transfers* in a causal manner. What anthropology can bring to the economic analysis of *transfers* is a micro-analysis of the politics involved in correlating *transfers*, both on the ground and in a publicly engaged discipline. What economics brings is hard data on whether and in what ways the economic matter moved by *transfers* has empirical effects on later *transfers* whether or not they are conceptually connected by those

involved. Anthropology is then able to offer analyses that account both for the micro-politics of *transfer* connection, but also the blind-spots, the cognitive dissonance, and the uncanny connections that are there but go unseen.

I have attempted to hold my gaze firmly on the *transfers* themselves and compare them before characterising the nature of the obligations or desires generating them. This is not to throw out or ignore the politics that lead to alienation in the production and sale of commodities any more than it is to forget that reciprocity is an ever present possibility that can take communistic as well as competitive forms. These are as important points as they have ever been. The aim of my argument, however, is to get away from the idea of transactions as the locus of vague conceptual unity, with its birds-eye view, contractual, agreement bias, and move towards a language in which things as conceptually challenging as gambling and bride wealth payments can be schematised without contradiction using the scale of movement which unites them. To do so is to introduce a degree of diversity and contingency that both confounds a separation of us as market transactors and they as gifters and makes the transactive possibilities simultaneously familiar and relatable. I placed gambling and Maussian gifting alongside each other, but we could in fact go much further and broader in our comparisons while retaining a processual, temporal descriptive frame.

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<sup>1</sup> Thus keeping fealty with the French and Latin source of the English word: transfér-er or transferre, meaning to bear, carry or bring across (OED 2018).

<sup>2</sup> I therefore use the term “transaction” in a far more general way than, for instance, Strathern and Stewart (2000), or transactionalist theory in general (see Barth 1966).

<sup>3</sup> What Gell (1992) called the “indigenous service economy” and Sahlins (1965) called “generalised reciprocity.”

<sup>4</sup> For instance the conception of a welfare system as either national insurance or as institutionalised charity would colour an anthropologists description of that system as constituting a complex ‘one-way transfer’ or not, when this opinion is not necessarily of concern to the economist.

<sup>5</sup> Davis (1992:29) for example makes a partial repertoire of British exchanges, listing 42 possible kinds of exchange. The jargon situation has not improved since then (Hann 2006).

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<sup>7</sup> The component should be locally defined. E.g. if, when contributing to a mortuary payment, a portion of sweet potato must always accompany a pig then pig+sweet potato may be considered a single *transfer*.

<sup>8</sup> The value of the valuable involved in a one-way transfer can of course still be compared to other valuables in the abstract.

<sup>9</sup> David Sneath takes up the term 'transfers' in an analysis of corruption in Mongolia, conflating 'exchange' with 'transaction,' which are both to be understood as two-way movements of wealth (2006; 2012). Following Hunt, for Sneath one-way transfers represent an enaction of social relations through materialisation, to be associated with hospitality and other role-defined traditional obligations and expectations and non-instrumental unaccounted generalised reciprocity. One-way transfers are the domain of both kin and moral action with others, and are therefore distinct from exchanges/transactions, which are open to interpretations of corruption by Mongolians. Sneath narrows the field of one-way transfers, mentioning only those that fit with morally positive evaluations in an effort to draw a contrast that explains perceptions of corruption.

<sup>13</sup> (Gregory 1982:67, 137, 164; Parry 1986:457-464; Yan 1996:57, 88, 182, 186-187, 200-202).