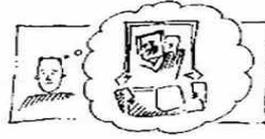


Many models, many views



Invite, share, listen, co-create



See who sees & reflect upon it



Global seeing & feeling

Magic Roundtables: Sharing and Gifting in traditional and modern Times

Sharing - Giving - Gifting – Appreciation - Attention – Co-Creation – Trading revisited

please note: this is a long updated version since long due which sets the stage – focussing additionally on anthropological and social-traditional aspects. See: [Genevieve VAUGHAN](#) and for societal/arts/media aspects [Lewis HYDE](#). Please check here later or request more from me or wait for the forthcoming FULL article in [MOTHER PELICAN](#).

heiner@benking.de

Original title:

The Spoons, Beads, and Birds

Phenomenon – Towards unconditional empowerment, co-creation, and appreciation cultures: SHARING & GIFTING: Donation Dialogues – the antidote to distribution and moderation formats in conversations

Introduction

Ex-change between people in conversations maybe to commune-icate and raise awareness towards agreement and shared action is a very basic and magical thing for me. Do we exchange in reciprocity – "tit for tat" – a blow for a blow? Is it reciprocal altruism as we know it from evolutionary biology?

Is it the same that is returned, or something else, at a later time and maybe even to "others"? Is it supporting and forming communion by giving encouragement, voice, interest and attention? On another level, in another form of another quality? See the Emergence Series we did with the Konrad Lorenz Institute.¹

We spoke 20 years ago about "Magic Roundtables" and we agreed with Barbara Marx-Hubbard that what can bring co-creation, a process taking place in groups – is not a translation or change but a transformation, possibly to a new quality.

Such question comes up in modern internet and media communication cultures, where there is recently a lot of talk about a Sharing Economy and Attention Economy; when some information suddenly goes "viral", or even faster! But maybe

there is also a stealing, grabbing and hijacking of attention, as we mention the "Talkers" in this article.

"Sharing" is subject to and depends on "what", "who", time-frames, expectations and assumptions it should be explored further. Is this something for free I share widely at a little or no cost? Is it of value?, personal?, conditional? With the expectation of reciprocity? Is it an altruistic, philanthropic empowerment without expectation? and return?

The question of when you give and with which expectations is very deep. Are you giving with "warm hands" and is there a communion in communities, is the gift given between generations and communities, or are we going into an impersonal "sharing attention and credit economy"?

It is obvious that the question of "objects" you share or give, the culture and situation and the time-span of a "possible transaction" and return is critical? With the work of the Nobel Prize laureate Elinor Ostrom on COMMONS in Economic Theory, this questions are suddenly en vogue.

Needless to say that the questions have been treated already in many circles. A magic, sacrifice and gift exchange in different cultures is a very special topic of sociology and anthropology. The Book "The Gift: forms and functions of exchange in archaic societies" by Marcel Mauss is a must and a good starting point for our theme here. How do we include the intangible, not given, new "commodities" and how do we include Claude Lévi-Strauss, the founder of structural anthropology the work of Claude Lévi-Strauss?²

¹ EMERGENZ UND DIE PSYCHOLOGIE DES MENSCHEN, Konrad Lorenz Institute for Evolution and Cognition Research, Altenberg, Austria <http://benking.de/worldview-compositions.html>

² See some excerpts, my transcript of an interview with Lévi-Strauss. ARTE television 2008

Looking back: Some traditions have not only used tokens or units as a currency – for example, shared cowry shells and coins, but they have also used other units like pieces of stone, fur, and also feathers, spoons, straws, cones, stones, seeds, eggs, etc. even keys or chips! And there is a little booklet of giving little pieces of “fur”³ as a means to give unconditionally.

The question about the use and symbolic meaning, like the wampum beads among the First Nations or ceremonial gifts in archeology, where tools are pieces of art, never to be uses.

Please note: In this essay we are not talking about a unit of value to support trading, like a currency, but about a unit which signals a “credit” entitling a person to something which empowers and provides attention, or works like a privilege and encouragement. It is important to clarify that we are not talking here about a fair sharing of pieces of a real/physical cake in a way everybody gets his/her part, with portions that are either larger or smaller. We are talking about a very special application of “*time-credits in meetings*”- please check out the collection done in the Union of International Association by Anthony Judge⁴ in the 90s. This sharing of time, ideas, attention, appreciation, etc. is something very special, because it is an intangible value which sometimes can be shared and even grows very fast, call it viral, as it is a leverage point which helps to make scales differences that matter!

I believe that this “giving, taking, sharing” is very central to the human predicament and how societies and civilizations are build and survive – or not.

There have been other commodities long before the internet and computer where you give without reciprocity, without considering the “return”. Think about “good news”⁵ you share, think about care and attention, think about love. Have you ever considered to “take your love back” when it was not returned? <sik>

The question of a new Humane Information Society

http://benking.de/futures/Transcript_Interview_Claude_Levi-Strauss.pdf This concern about Humanism and Structuralism goes dep into topological questions, identities, perspectivity, positionality and frames of references already touched in Footnote 1 “Emergence”.

³ Die kleinen Leute von Swabedoo a fairy-tale, author and details unknown. I also found something close in English: WARM FUZZY TALES

<http://www.emotional-literacy.com/fuzzy.htm> more
http://www.newciv.org/nl/newslog.php/_v396/_show_article/_a000396-000256.htm

⁴ Time Credits in Meetings <http://open-forum.de/time-credits.html> Anthony Judge and note there the description of using „empowerment“ tokens from 1995 by the authors of this booklet.

⁵ The Origins of Spreading Good Examples
<http://benking.de/futures/Heiner-Bob-3Minuter-May22-2013.pdf> and its „roots“ with reference to Robert Jungk:

which can either dumb us down or help us fly is also in the air since 20 years. What is happening when “scaling up” and how about values, emotions, ideas? Do they expand or implode?

This paper is about some group facilitation, dialogues, Salons we did over the years. But it is also about Virtual Conferencing, when now participants meet in the “Cloud” without any views, touch and feel.

We have used virtual tokens in virtual conferencing, check Stammtisch 3.0 and Government 2.0 (2009)⁶ So please fasten “seat belts” but also enjoy the magic of dialogue and conversations, as our inspiration have been Martin Buber and David Bohm. See for example the Bohm Dialogues in Ljubljana 1998 and the IFSR & Asilomar Conversations⁷.

Magic Roundtable Dialogues/ Conversations

With tokens we can make sure that nobody speaks longer than his/her time-allotment allows/provides. This is a special turn or add-on, a “Kunstgriff” that we do in Magic Roundtables. You are not encouraged to use up “your” time, but strongly encouraged to focus on a topic that someone else in the group has just suggested as a topic to be discussed more in depth. Tokens in the group are distributed equally in the beginning; everybody in the circle or in the audience has the same number, like 60 for 60 minutes, depending on how long the group agrees to sit together. After the introduction, everyone is asked to give units to the person who could best enlarge or explain their topic or answer their question. We then see that a qualitative, gravitational accumulation takes place. Some have more; others have less time to provide details and frameworks. The only rules are- that you can only speak when you have time-credits, and you can anytime dedicate or transfer units to a person you feel should speak, because your time would be better spent having someone else have the word. This is an open, self-organized, transparent, embodied, dynamic, and encouraging method which is not only democratic, but is called “Living Democracy”, that could be defined as a brief open-space with some other rules, in a much shorter time-slot.

There are as many tokens in the room as the groups want to spend time together, by doing the experience just once or repeating it several times.

You can find below procedural steps and links for the rules of the Game which we have been using for some time:

⁶ Ideen, Innovation, Inspiration (I 3) = Stammtisch 2.0 - Ein Rundgespräch im „Magic Roundtable“ Format Stammtisch 3.0 - Verteilte Partizipation und „Social Media“ at Government 2.0 BarCamp 2009.

⁷ DAVID BOHM Dialogues & Ljubljana Science Festival, October 1998 <http://benking.de/dialog/r-benking.html> and the ISSS IFSR Asilomar – Fuschl Conversations: <http://benking.de/IFSRnov98pp.htm>

Each person is given an equal number of beads, stones, or any tokens representing equal units of time. The total meeting time is divided into units matching the distributed tokens, thus valuing them. Each member then introduces her/himself, and if desired, offers a topic for dialogue. Members give then tokens to those whose proposals can offer to the group a larger selection in order to empower voices and joint interests, and enlarge the flow of dialogue. This “voting or encouraging” continues as topics generate more or less “empathy” or concern. As others join in the conversation, they can also receive tokens as encouragement to continue with their line of thought. This open, transparent format can encourage inhibited people to participate and minimize domination by authoritarian types. In case of unexpected changes in the meeting’s duration, the tokens can be re-/de-valued inflated/deflated to match the remaining available time. This method is one approach highlighted in the paper by Anthony J. N. Judge: [“Time-Sharing in Meetings”](#). It provides some general orientation and presents solutions and implementations over the years.

The difference:

The unique difference to other “time-credit” methods (See www.open-forum.de/time-sharing.html) is that tokens don’t simply represent speaking time as a personal budget or allotment you use up to the very end, but to delegate and focus attention and interest by giving time to encourage and empower individual offerings to the group in a dynamic fashion. Group interest is higher as the value or quality of attention increases by these “floating” embodied tokens which are given as presents or signs of encouragement during the process.

The procedure:

All participants sit or stand in a circle. Sometimes with an inner and outer ring, and often with spaces left so that people can move into the circle when they have received time credits. Typically a moderator or a volunteer who knows the process will act as a time-keeper and independent guardian of the common interest of the group.

Next there is an introductory round of brief proposals of issues or topics (1-2 minutes maximum) that the participants want to expand on if they get “encouragement” tokens. All participants and observers are then invited to give tokens to those whose proposals feel most important or worthy to discuss in the session. The moderator distributes tokens equaling the minutes planned for the roundtable. For example, with 60 minutes sessions and 10 participants, each person receives 6 tokens (if there are 30 people are in the room, each one receives 1 token or 2 tokens if there are 60 people).

After this snapshot round of offerings to the group, the moderator invites people to give their interest or empowerment tokens to the person they feel should

speak up, possibly accompanied by a certain focus or question.

This speaker can speak for as long as there are tokens, which the moderator collects or monitors as “used up” by visualizing the time already used from the visible “budget”. The speaker can continue if he/she receives more tokens while speaking. Someone else might then want to add onto the subject until his/her time budget is used up.

Short interventions while someone is speaking are not punished or discouraged because they might clarify the issue. But, they are watched carefully by the moderator as they might interfere with the line of thought or the flow of the topic under discussion. Therefore, they are considered, even when adding only 3 words or one sentence, as a full sentence or one token used.

This method can be considered a self-organizing, open, transparent, dynamic, and embodied way of participation and empowerment which cultivates differences and fosters co-creation. Here is more relevant information and a [Timeline of selected events](#).

We know that Native Americans passed around a talking stick, but did they consider having as many talking sticks as minutes, and visualizing attention and interest in order to co-create and empower? We played this game as “time is running out”, and introduced the concept that you pass the stick to someone you felt should talk during the time you received from another person. The whole idea is called Magic Roundtables (see the rules of the game)! It has been played now for some years. Now consider your allotted time melting the moment you start talking! And do not forget to have your words float in the circle until the right word comes at the right time, building and knitting a fabric of meaning. This empowers the un-heard and un-thought. It allows voices that matter to participate in reaching “mount awareness”, and make us aware that we as earthlings were given 2 ears and one mouth, not all mouth, no ears as we see with all those “talkers” these days.

This little booklet and essay is about empowerment, not just participation; it is about co-creation and not just giving and sharing, it is about “unconditional” giving, with no expectation except the joy of learning and growing and the spreading of ideas and insights. This is easier with intangible cultural expressions, contagious information and wisdom, as we experienced that so it can spread fast and grow without. It is harder with physical things, where you distribute, splitter, share, and sometimes even use up and finish.

You might have heard about the fairy-tale of the “Small People of Sabedoo”. It is about some people in the old days who had each a bag of little pieces of fur, soft and tender patches that were nice to touch and great to feel. They were also great to give

to others as a present which they can also enjoy and raise up their spirits. This story has a lesson for us, especially about how and why this tradition was stopped and how other feelings and ways and means entered into the worlds. It is highly recommended!

Over the years, we have been tempted to use shells and straws, sponges, coasters, cards, seeds, nuts, or any other kind of tokens and units, and have recorded it when introducing the “Magic Roundtables”. The most meaningful are the straws and seeds as they convey a similar meaning to the need or the unit you can let grow. See the “Seeds of Change” initiative and [Newsletter](#) mentioned below.

At other times we used spoons, cones, feathers, shells, sticks as these are universal “units” of value. Having many spoons makes you feel rich and flexible in the kitchen and in life. But this is very different in different cultures. A German woman farmer, for example, is given a “Spoon of the Kitchen” when she retires or goes on the “Sentential”. The young wife of her first son takes over. So, to have many precious and useful spoons is a great thing. Unfortunately, there is at least in Germany a saying that “Giving your spoon away” means you are going to die. We tried to consider the fact that there could be some lesson in having many spoons and giving like seeds to further generations and positive ends without end. But, unfortunately, this “negative” co-notation prevails, at least in Germany. Maybe there are other more positive examples elsewhere?

Besides, there is a WOODEN SPOON MUSEUM⁸, possibly unique in the world, in Germany in Bad Durkheim. Perhaps this is a beginning for spoon appreciation and sharing civilization. Let’s examine these ongoing discussion and the unearthing of the COMMONS. The ALMENDE – is another interesting development. It has to do with trust over time and we need to clearly distinguish between tangible and intangible “objects” or “units”. Intangible is the information that expands and travels faster than it is shared. It is not used up – like the “units” we give as presents, like a piece of cake. Does this something like a “heureka” moment for an individual in retreat or as part of his/her dreams? Or does it need a group or situation/instance which triggers and let the people subsume, resonate, and bring ideas into new spaces or “realms”?

Another issue is what are units? Feathers are units; wings or compounds are assemblages, organs, bodies, extremities. So, by sharing more complex objects or constructs, like in a community over generations – Elinor Ostrom [COMMONS and “no-walls”](#), it reaches another level and needs further consideration. This is the same as how the people around the Madrigal Sea share Mother Earth's beauty or dispose Mankind's debris. See “[Poetic](#)

Reminiscence – The Worlds”.

The issues is what do we share, is it a “unit” or a token, object we can own, or an intangible cultural good or expression. Is there viral growth, like when sharing information and knowledge, or is the “unit” outworn. One project were involved in is how to share books and build community, create cultural coherence and media literacy, and besides contribute to vocational training and environmental education and awareness. Maybe check this European project: [BookboXX](#):

We are entering here into another discussion: are we talking about grants or granting, giving, gifts and donations, or is it a legacy? Does the philanthropic turn of foundations and trusts, even co-operations which create community sustain the survival of any polis or habitat? You might want to read this 2 interviews also published in Institute für soziale Dreigliederung: Interview with Manfred Kannenberg: [Schenkende Wirtschaft. - Gifting Economy](#) and this article by Georg von Canal: [Alterndes Geld versus Schenkgeld - Aging versus Gifting Money.](#)

SUMMING UP – In a Nutshell:

This paper is about a Currency for trust, reputation and encouragement, giving voice and power to make a difference. It is about sharing, caring, daring and community building! It is about making intangible/immaterial issues real or concrete by weaving a fabric of commons. Maybe this is what we call culture and civilization: shared contexts and situations.

I was recently reminded that the Wampum Beads are a nice image of what I want to say. It is not about trade value – but with a vista towards a gift economy across scales! For “Economy” check: [Ignorance of Compassion?](#)

In circles with traditional people I have often heard in the closing circle the word “gifting circle” and I added that this is an “open” gifting circle with old and new approaches and means, but toward common ends. What is close to is called commoning nowadays. The general frame and the challenges we covered in honour of Elinor Ostrom are [here](#):

For this effort, in our little booklet, we felt that more positive slants are associated with shells and even more with feathers. We called that “Roots and Wings” people understand and need feathers to fly and can receive colourful birds done as presents out of the joy of giving for free and without expectations, encouragement, and curiosity.

More on co-creation and empowerment, and also an early story about the one beautiful Island Earth are available. Just start reading and follow the links and check the next files in this section.

Check the „[Seeds of Change](#)“ [Newsletter](#), the Seeds of Change blog [quergeist.info](#), and for further study: [open-forum.de](#) and [21stCenturyAgora.org](#)

⁸ Wooden Spoon Collection, recognition of UNESCO, Paris “World Cultural Heritage“
<http://www.holzloeffelsammlung.de/anfang.en.php>