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There is no easy way to thank the three reviewers for their attention to my book. I shall try to attend in turn to what I see as the major and most interesting of their criticisms, including those they share among them. These are principally the false concreteness of "Melanesia," along with the absence of such concreteness as far as history is concerned; and my underplaying of power, domination, terror and the "dark" side.

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The GDAT debate to which Paula Brown alludes was a debate in the strict sense of the term; I was technically the proposer of a motion. Obviously I made out as extreme a case as I could! That is not my position in *The Gender of the Gift*, which seeks rather to exemplify the proposition that "however useful the concept of society may be to analysis, we are not going to justify its use by appealing to indigenous counterparts" (p. 3).

Two points follow. First, I regard as a misplaced intellectualism the way in which Western anthropologists have read the concept of "society" into Melanesians' understandings of practices reported in the book. I set myself the task of imagining what the intellectual counterpart to such a concept could plausibly be. My evidence is drawn from artifacts, symbols, and acts that might yield clues as to the nature of the perceived and reproduced world. If I give the impression, as Brown indicates, that I think Melanesians are cultural puppets, it was a wrong impression--though I can see how it could arise. This book is not a sociological analysis (in the manner of Strathern 1972), was never meant to be, and consequently does not mobilize conventional social science understandings of agency and action, and does not equate agents with persons. Rather, it is an attempt to imagine what an indigenous "analysis" might look like (p. 309) if we took seriously the idea that these islanders might be endorsing their own theory of social action. It pushes to extremes, then, and makes explicit, an ethnographic enterprise that uncovers counterparts to the observer's concerns.

Second, I try to make it clear that I have not left the company of those observers whose works I criticize or deploy, for they are the reason (Melanesian: "base") for the enterprise in the first place. I seek to extend, not obliterate, necessarily so since my own earlier work is part of that base; I also appropriate and exploit their writings. Most principal assertions about Western "thought" are illustrated at some point in the words of fellow anthropologists-- the propositional language that gives us clues as to the nature of the world as these Melanesianists have perceived and reproduced it. In lieu of a survey (saving Brown), I have thus systematically tried to give evidence for my assertions about Western knowledge practices.

Proposition, assertion: Where the book falls down in my view is in its failure to be explicit about its interpretive methods. Here, of course, I join a throng of fellow Melanesianists. Their descriptive language is suffused with taken-for-granted assertions that appeal to the readers' common sense, most notably what might be understood by the terms "male" and "female." That pair I scrutinize at some length, but for the most part demonstrate the assertive nature of language by simple counterassertion. This is not at all satisfactory, and remains a shortcoming.

However, it is irrelevant that the language in which I describe Melanesian practices could also be used of Western, including Australian, ones (indeed where else could my own language have come from?). It is sufficient to have shown that a body of anthropologists/eth-

nographers (including myself) have developed for their own purposes a set of ideas that, in Roger Keesing's words, form a "conceptual system." But this they did not simply invent--it was drawn from among the many and diverse habits of thought that exist around them, and it is such a cultural background or horizon that I call "Western." The ideas anthropologists use are examples of Western thought in this sense. That does not mean such ideas are exhaustive of it, nor that they cannot be contradicted by other ideas. But I would argue that the set I have dwelt upon has been hegemonic in the manner in which we have been accustomed to think about Melanesia. Indeed, Keesing eloquently points out the questions that have been concealed by the conceptual systems of British and American anthropology--it is these and their strategies of concealment that I investigate.

The same is true of the term "Melanesia." If the depiction of Western habits of thinking comes from my reading of anthropologists, so the depiction of Melanesian practices comes from Hagen in the Western Highlands of Papua New Guinea. Margaret Jolly makes the point for me. This orientation is not concealed (see pp. 45, 280), On the contrary, I go to some pains to make it clear that one of the problematics of the book--collective life constituted as the affairs of men--is given by my understanding of Hagen. Of course, it is not necessarily a Kwaio-centric problematic. Nor is it one that belongs to Irian Jaya or Australia for that matter (pp. 46-47). Nor at the same time is it simply a Hagen invention. Hagen ideas are examples or versions of others found elsewhere.

I do not wish to trivialize the critique of my apparent regionalism. Rather, I would endorse the point that one could with equal analytical ingenuity (Keesing) find continuities elsewhere. But how often do we bother to bring this fact to surface view? I take the liberty of referring to a recent attempt (Strathern 1991) to address exactly the questions of analytical ingenuity, the production of knowledge, and the comparative units we create for ourselves --a problem that is not to be settled by simply pointing out the arbitrariness of any one unit of reference. In the meanwhile, I shall keep to "Melanesia" to indicate a horizon of cognate cultural and social data that has one crucial characteristic: that it is larger than and extends away from the society/culture that I made the center of my problematic.

Opening up a Highlands-based vision to a broader horizon does not imply, then, that I have charted a natural region, nor a culture with a unified common basis as quite properly worries Brown. "Melanesia" is in part, of course, constituted in the directions in which scholars have

communicated their findings with one another, and there were theoretical and analytical precedents for taking on board some of the rich literature from the Massim, as I was intrigued by Jolly's work in Vanuatu. If I have crossed a too radical divide between "mainland" and Oceanic language areas (Keesing's designation), it is more, not less, interesting that some of the transformations appear persuasive. In this ever-innovative part of the world, where the borrowing and importing of practices, cults, paraphernalia, and the sources of power is done so freely, I see no natural boundaries. I do see peoples insisting on certain (interested) interpretations of themselves, to draw an analogy Barth (1987) draws between schools of scholars and the exegetical exercises of different ritual experts from the Mountain Ok area in Papua New Guinea.

Most of the points about history are well taken. However, like feminism, historicism is not simply to be "added," and I would turn the caution back on itself. (1) There is a great temptation to use "history" to invest anthropological accounts with the narrative realism of events. (2) One frequently finds that what purports to be a description of a specific point in time turns out to be rendered in a generic language of timeless concepts. (3) The great trap of historical analysis is its presentism--the assumption that what goes on in the postwar, pacified Highlands, for example, can be put down to the fact that it is a period of postwar pacification. (4) Finally, the arrival of Westerners and the imposition of colonialism tends to overdetermine any understanding of local formations. My categories Melanesian and Western do not deny historical relations between "Europeans" and "Melanesians"; but they are more real as a fiction than is the fantasy that "Europeans" and "Melanesians" ever exchanged anything with one another. At least, Melanesians make exchanges with persons, not with "cultures" or regions or categories. 'Us" and "them" could never interact in "real historical time."<sup>1</sup> Meanwhile, there are other interesting problems, such as the accounts earlier anthropologists have given of the societies they studied. It is these that are my data, and this is the point at which I introduce historical specificity: the periods at which they were written, along with an (admittedly sketchy) attempt at a historical sequencing of anthropological concepts.

But dates aside, what about gifts and commodities and the mixing of regimes? Perhaps gift "economy" was too much of a concreteness on my part. It was not meant as an ideal type *of economy*, of which we might then find empirical and inevitably "mixed" examples on the ground (Keesing). It was intended (as Jolly notes) as a shorthand, or indeed a

caricature (Keesing's phrase), like the difference between "Eastern" and "Western" Highlands (p. 260), for organizing the description of a conceptual universe across a whole range of phenomena. It was, precisely, a rhetorical exercise.

Jolly and Keesing are probably right to imply that the exercise is locked within already-passé debates. My fiction of the gift economy is a reflex of a claim --that the logic of commodity economy colors our mode of thought--that Keesing exposes as old-fashioned. If it is old-fashioned (but see Webster 1990), I am thus responding to a conceptualization of the world that is already bypassed by other approaches in the philosophy of social sciences. But I would have the reader ponder on this. First, I hope to have demonstrated that much ethnographic/anthropological work--especially of the period with which I am concerned in the Highlands--is plausibly interpreted as itself a systematic application of commodity-logic thinking. The logic exists there if nowhere else! That is an issue that cannot be bypassed in any attempt to understand these societies through the medium of the anthropological analyses done on them. Second, the point is not to avoid coloring, but to make coloring evident. Does Keesing seriously think that one branch of social science can come to the rescue of another? It will inevitably displace it, substituting its own rhetoric. Now, it is in the shift from one place to another that we reveal ourselves to ourselves, but only if we are aware of what we are doing. Hence the transparency of my own *as if* shift to the language of "gift economy." The concept of gift economy does not pretend to have left its origin in commodity thinking: it is a device for subjecting that thinking to scrutiny and, saving Keesing, for presenting an internal cultural critique.

The real question is whether the exercise has enlarged on previous understandings-- whether it has brought one to a more adequate comprehension of the conundrum that objects circulate in relations to make relations in which objects can circulate (p. 221), or of the dovetailing of cause and effect, or of the significance of revelation and display, or of the manner in which people endure apparently impossible regimes. Or whether it has indeed illuminated what I take to be a Melanesian blind spot. I do, *pace* Keesing, have an external critique to make of Melanesian practices, namely "their" failure to do what "we" do so thoroughly, which is to present to our/themselves the symbolic nature of our/their constructions as constructions (reifications) (pp. 167, 189). (I sketch some of the "illusions" to which the Melanesian blind spot gives rise [e.g., p. 218].) Keesing claims that the production of symbols, along

with cultural critique, is a major concern of his. It also has to be mine, or there would have been no motivation to write the book. To the Enlightenment ideas of justice, humanity and dignity, however, I would add understanding. Like the other three, it entails an innocence of kind.<sup>2</sup> But I neither attack *nor* defend what I am trying to understand. How undramatic! The problem, and I suspect Keesing knows it, is that Sambia initiation practices and such were never just, though they may also have been, "brutalizations."

I offer the above observations to elucidate the perspectives from which *The Gender of the Gift* was written. One always has reasons! That does not mean that one could not find different reasons for different projects. Indeed, I hope that some of my elucidations of how anthropologists have dealt with the societies of Melanesia will help other projects, such as the writing of history or the analysis of economics. The reviewers have enlarged the horizon so to speak. And, of course, the reality is out there. The issue is how Westerners empirically know it: I was tremendously encouraged by Brown's note 2 and its suggestion of knowledge gained afresh.

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My view of the final set of comments is of a different order. The following are verbatim quotations from chapter 11.

How then are we to understand all those contexts . . . in which men are reported as asserting dominance over women? They demand obedience, roughride women's concerns, strike and beat their bodies. Frequently this is quite explicit as to gender: it is by virtue of men being men that women must listen to them. Yet everything that has been argued to this point suggests that domination cannot rest on the familiar (to Western eyes) structures of hierarchy, control, the organization of relations, or on the idea that at stake is the creation of society or the exploitation of a natural realm, and that in the process certain persons lose their right to self-expression. More accurately, men's acts of domination cannot symbolize such a structure, for it is not an object of Melanesian attention. (Pp. 325-326)

. . . I want to suggest a way in which we might both take into account Melanesian assumptions about the nature of social life and unpack those assumptions to indicate a form of domination that people do 'know' . . . [A]cts of dominance consist

in taking advantage of those relations created in the circulation of objects and [in] overriding the exchange of perspectives on which exchange as such rests. . . . [T]here [seems] a systemic inevitability about domination and a particular advantage afforded men. But, by the same token, acts of domination are tantamount to no more than taking advantage of this advantage. (Pp. 326-327)

The inevitability lies in the conventions governing the form which social action takes. Acts are innovative, for they are always constituted in the capacity of the agent to act 'for oneself'. It is only in acting thus as oneself that others are in turn constituted in one's regard. . . . Indeed, the agent is also the object of another's coercion in so acting, and an act is only evident in being impressed upon further persons. On this cultural premise, action is inherently forceful in its effects, for every act is a usurpation of a kind, substituting one relationship for another. To act from a vantage point is thus also in a sense to take advantage. This entails a behavioral ethos of assertiveness, and one which applies equally well to women as men. But beyond this, men often find themselves having an advantage women lack. To show this advantage it will be necessary to dismantle certain Melanesian concepts. . . . (P. 327)

My critique follows. Thus:

Single men can take refuge in the body of men; a man sees his acts replicated and multiplied in the acts of like others. This is the basis of those situations in which men appear to dominate women. *But the domination does not stand for anything else--for culture over nature or whatever--and does not have to engage our sympathy on that score. It is itself. It inheres in all the small personal encounters in which one man finds himself at an advantage because of the men at his back. Among the substitutions available to him, as it were, is the replication of all-male relations in the plural form which enlarges the capacity of each individual. This becomes its own reason for forcefulness. In a sense, the forcefulness always has to appear larger than the persons who register its effect. Such asymmetry turns rules into penalties; the enclosure of domestic life into confinement, and the cause of men's own activity into the wounds of someone who is beaten and given pain for it. (Pp. 327-328)*

I am puzzled that Jolly, whose reading is otherwise most acute, should think I have denied that male domination exists. I could not agree more with her conclusion.

In so far as they stand active and passive in relation to each other, the acts of men and women do not in themselves evince permanent domination. That one agent behaves with another in mind is what defines his/her agency. But a different way of putting this would be to suggest that every act is an act of domination. . . . (P. 334)

. . . [E]xcess provoked by the inherent asymmetry between an agent and the outcome registers the effects of that agency. We must remember that a cause may be equated with an effect, that is, the same persons who compel an agent to act may also be the registers of that action. Apart from the formal asymmetry of the agent and the cause/effect of his/her acts, a quantitative inequality can arise. The person who registers those acts may be too 'small'. There ceases to be a match between the agent and the aesthetic capacity of another to show the effects of that agency. That is, the exchange of perspectives is thrown out of balance. Consequently, the person/relationship that is the outcome of the acts is perceived as an insufficient medium. And that perception of diminution is, of course, in turn a consequence of the exaggeration itself. (P. 335)

Such loss of balance may affect relations between men. In relations between men and women it may well be perceived as inevitable and to be most acute under those very conditions of male growth which men perform 'for' women. Women appear insufficient by the very acts that make men's growth something they accomplish for themselves but also for the women they have in mind. Their insufficiency is thus anticipated in the enlarged sphere of all-male relations, where each individual man becomes in himself a register of the replication of men: in this enlarged form, as a 'big' man, he is confronted by 'small' women and children who carry the burden of registering his size. He is dependent on them; his strength can only take the form of their weakness. This I believe is a precondition for acts of male excess. (P. 336)

This was an attempt to avoid the gender symbolism inherent in the Western contrast between passive (objects) and active (subjects), which



itself rests on suppositions about the individual and society I did not feel were warranted. I was doomed to fail:

Men's advantage does not of itself lie in the constitution of action; men and women may act with equal assertion. At once I encounter the literary problem. Going against the grain of a language is going against its own aesthetic conventions: how one makes certain forms appear. . . .

It was argued . . . [that] men's collective endeavors are directed towards the same reproduction of relations of domestic kinship as concern women. And here lies the intractable Western aesthetic. It conjures a quite inappropriate gender symbolism. If I say that men's exchanges are oriented towards their wives' domestic concerns, then the statement will be read as men appropriating those concerns and turning them into their own use. If I say that women's domestic work is oriented towards their husbands' exchanges, then this will be read conversely, not as their appropriating men's activities, but as being subservient to them. I know of no narrative device that will overcome this skewing, because it inheres in the very form of the ideas in which we imagine men's and women's powers. (Pp. 328-329)

I anticipated my failure in order to make a point about the power of (Western) gender symbolism. It was also a feminist attempt to simultaneously recognize the conditions of oppression in Melanesia *and* not invest that oppression with more significance than it has. Here I take a perspective that is not just Hagen-centric, but Hagen-woman-centric (see *Women in Between*, Strathern 1972:152, top), It is one that would diminish claims to hegemony. But perhaps, as Jolly implies, this dissipates the focus of challenge, is too anarchic a view.

And to return to Keesing's objections, is it also too radical a theory of domination that would see domination everywhere, and not just in those brutalizing acts that we do not practice ourselves but seemingly (take pleasure from?) talk(ing) about? There is a new racism abroad in Britain today, born of the most charitable and Enlightened impulse: to think of Third World populations only in terms of the pinched faces of famine that occupy the television screen. It is an old sexism to reproduce descriptions of male domination through the unexamined gender stereotypes that endorse our evaluations as to what is and what is not significant. His disclaimers aside, the cumulative effect, the accretions, of

Keesing's own rhetoric is, of course, to portray Melanesian men as *undominated*. What dream is this?

I shall no doubt be accused of being less than serious if I record the wryness, if not actual amusement, with which I realize that my "little" account is insufficient for the "big" words he would prefer to use. I do address the nature of claims to power (ch. 5). But I obviously do not provide enough darkness with which to depict these Melanesians, nor enough terror, nor other things that excite. I do not evoke the world stage of political prisoners and starving peasants. It is too petty, it would seem, to show men's interests in the life and death moments of child-birth, literal and figurative, or their violence in domestic relations. I can only take a measure of comfort from the fact that at least I am hung by my own conclusion apropos Hagen: "If we are to look for domination in interaction between the sexes, it is in the manner in which individual men . . . override the particular interests of others by reference to categorical, collective imperatives. Women [in Hagen] have no such recourse" (p. 337).

For the outsider, that is a significant condition of both women's and men's lives in the Highlands; perhaps I could recast one of the intentions of the book and say that it tries to encompass the perspectives of both. The first step, of course, was to unlatch Highlanders' categorical imperatives from those we might otherwise take for granted in social science discourse. It does not matter that I have simply substituted an intellectual interest in "theories of social action" for that of "society." As performers of rituals and planters of gardens will tell you, the significant issue is the shift of perception that comes with the dislocation, the fresh growth that contains its own element of surprise. Shape-changing, elusive, self-transforming: These are also the conditions of cultural life as outsiders have encountered it in many parts of Melanesia.

## NOTES

1. Thomas may say commodity/gift *should not* be conflated with an opposition between us/them. But what essentialism is this? I *choose* to use the former as a way of symbolizing the latter.

2. Webster (1990:297) gives the following list of fundamental Enlightenment values, after Marx: freedom, equality, justice, private property, individualism.

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