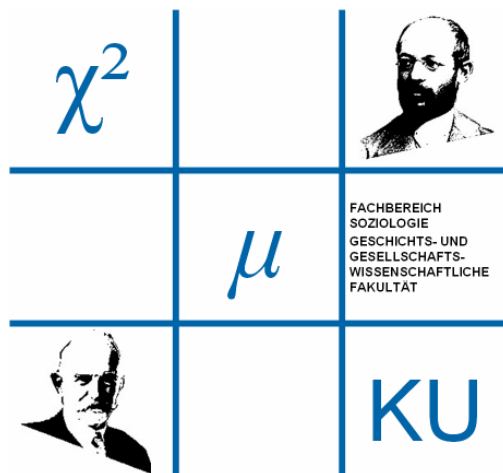


Intercultural Atmospheres – The Affective Quality of Gift Situations

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Intercultural Atmospheres – The Affective Quality of Gift Situations

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Abstract

The paper deals with atmospheres in situations of gift exchange, focusing on implications for sociological theory. Emphasising the importance of a situational perspective in sociology, and combining it with recent arguments for stronger inclusion of affectivity in the discipline, I argue that an atmospheric perspective, emphasising on both affectivity and situativity, is a fruitful approach to view both particular social phenomena and social relations in general in a new light. To elaborate on this this, I focus on intercultural gift exchange, drawing both upon Marcel Mauss' ground-breaking essay *The Gift* and a handful of historical studies dealing with accounts of situations of diplomatic gift exchange. I conclude firstly, that the analysed gift situations point towards a common theme of 'extraordinary' atmospheres, simultaneously producing and restricting effervescence. Furthermore, the analysed situations seem to require a certain amount of felt ambiguity to leverage the trust required for giving and receiving a gift. Finally, producing and handling this interplay of trust and ambiguity, here symbolised by the gift object itself, is an important competence for both intercultural and intracultural relations.

Keywords

Affect, Atmosphere, Gift, Situation, Sociological Theory

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1 Introduction

Marcel Mauss' essay *The Gift* has given rise to numerous interpretations, musings and studies on the seeming universality of gift-based reciprocal relations. In Germany, ongoing translations of Mauss' oeuvre, the most recent examples being a collection of texts on religion (Mauss 2012a) and a lecture on ethnography (Mauss 2013), as well as translations of French works building on Mauss (for example Caillé 2008; Hénaff 2014; Marion 2014), further intensify his reception.

As such, Maussian thought is gaining broader influence in a variety of fields; of particular interest to me is his impact on sociological theory: Here, a contemporary re-reading of Mauss joins the critique on the traditional sociological paradigms of holism and individualism, the reduction of social life to structure and agency, macro and micro level, respectively. This is done, in reference to *The Gift*, by pointing out that gift relations point towards fundamental mechanics of symbolic reciprocity within social relations in general, and that this reciprocity can be reduced neither to individual motivations nor structural forces, and instead of creating false dichotomies one should turn toward the actual situated practices of creating and maintaining social relations (cf. e.g. Caillé 2008; Adloff 2013).

This emphasis on situated practice is the hallmark of a sociological current that can be called interactionism or theory of practice. Interactionism is, at least to my knowledge, the more widespread and general label for this current and will hence serve as the umbrella term in this paper. Part of the reason for this multitude of labels can be seen in a fragmentation of discourse: Until not too long ago, despite their common ground, interactionist theorists placed special emphasis on their favoured author: Apart from Mauss, there are interactionist theoretical strains invoking e.g. Durkheim, Mead, Goffman or Bourdieu.

As the fragmented discussions are slowly beginning to intertwine, new issues have arisen. Following Anne Rawls, through Goffman it can be shown that, implicitly or explicitly, an interactionist theory must presuppose a common situatedness linking the participants of a particular situation, which can furthermore arise from the situation itself (cf. Rawls 1987; 1989; also Rawls & David 2006). Similarly, Alain Caillé speaks of the necessity of common trust for the unfolding of social interaction (Caillé 2008, pp. 61, 68). However, what in my view requires further emphasis is that this situational grounding has its own particular, experienced quality – its atmosphere or ambiance – and is both subject to practices shaping it as well as delineating the horizon of practices that take place within it.

Going full circle, this paper will discuss the merits of such an atmospheric perspective on the study of gift relations and, by extension, of social relations in general. An empirical anchor in the form of secondary analysis of intercultural gift relationships has been chosen for three reasons: First, purely theoretical musings would lack the potential for creative irritation, something even mere reflection on already analysed data can provide (cf. on the

relationship between theoretical and empirical work e.g. Merleau-Ponty 1964; Kalthoff et al. 2008). Second, following Bernhard Waldenfels, I consider interculturality closely related to intersubjectivity, allowing for further reflection on intersubjectivity in general. And third, I assume that intercultural situations are more contingent, more sensitive and more dependent on situational factors than their intracultural counterparts. Coupled with the emotional forces involved in gift relations, this will hopefully bring a potential role of atmospheres closer to the foreground.

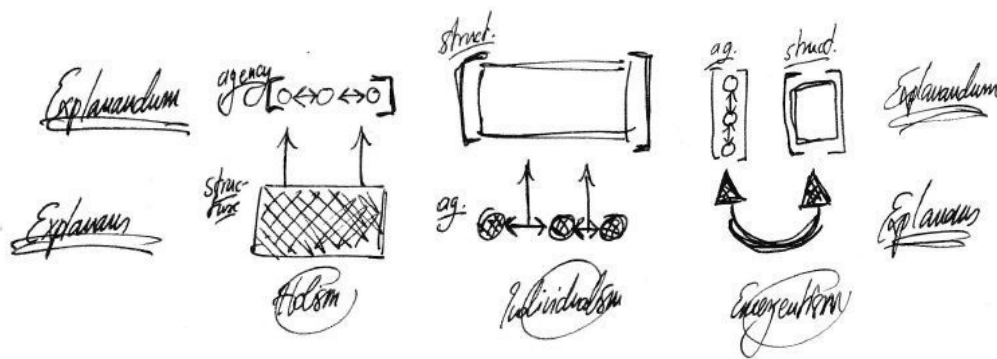
The paper begins with a discussion on sociological paradigms and the merits of interactionism (2). This is followed by an introduction to the notion of atmospheres as a way not only to empirically utilise interactionism but also to discuss and perhaps rectify some of its shortcomings (3). I will then review a handful of exemplary studies on intercultural gift exchange (4), coupled with concluding remarks on gift atmospheres in particular and social atmospheres in general (5).

Two small caveats must be made regarding the scope of this paper. First, the research the arguments herein build upon is still a work in progress and should be taken with a grain of salt. Second, the empirical base in the form of secondary analysis did not show any explicit interest in atmospheres and as such pales in comparison to e.g. a hypothetical ethnographic first-hand experience recorded with atmospheres as a point of interest.

2 Sociological Paradigms

The question of the relation between social action and social structure has given rise to fundamental conflicts in sociology. These conflicts mainly argue on the methodological level; here, the two traditional positions are holism and individualism, placing explanatory emphasis on structure or agency respectively. Since the explanans of the one is the explanandum of the other, these two positions should be impossible to reconcile. Nevertheless, there are attempts at reconciliation which I will here call emergentism. Trying to avoid a reduction to micro or macro level, emergentists propose the emergence of one out of the other, a relationship ultimately implying downward causation (cf. e.g. Sawyer 2005). Meaning, the emergent phenomenon, for instance an organisation such as a university, can be described as gaining an unintended momentum, giving rise to dynamics that in turn influence its constituting elements, such as students and faculty. This results in a shift in perspective: No longer a vertical difference between micro and macro, but a horizontal relationship with a common ground in dialectical movement (Fig. 1).

Figure 1



While remaining on the level of methodology, the idea of a micro-macro-relation and the resulting conundrum of choosing between conflicting paradigms can be resolved by proclaiming a dependency of the chosen perspective on the aspect of social existence one wishes to study, for example historical developments of social inequality versus individual practices of handling inequality in everyday life. This way, one avoids problematic ontological discussions, but also, in my opinion, calls the relevance of one's research in question: Since the argument utilised here is circular, it ultimately limits anything that follows to a self-referential narrative maintenance of sociological discourse.

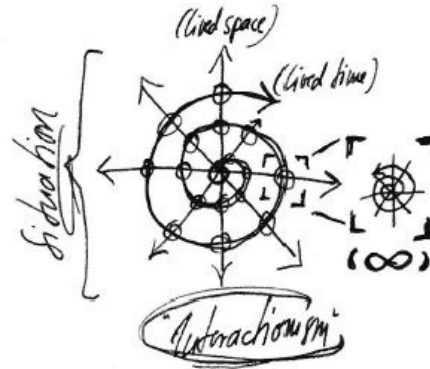
In case sociologists actually do wish to make claims on experienced and experientable realities, even in the broadest of sense, they must make explicit or implicit ontological assumptions. The three positions mentioned so far point towards the reducibility of experienced social existence – reduction to actor, structure or dialectic.¹ As this leads to proclaiming aspects of experience as illusory or incomplete, all three subscribe to what Paul Ricoeur has called a hermeneutics of suspicion (cf. Ricoeur 1970), the quasi-Gnostic claim of being able to find hidden truths under the misleading surface of experience.

A final position which, in my view, instead proclaims the impossibility of such reducibility can be called interactionism. Akin to phenomenology, it argues not against experience, but strives to ground itself in it – its argument against naïve everyday reflexions not that they are misguided by experience but rather, on the contrary, that they depart from it too soon. For example, a psychoanalyst reading of a text might aim at finding a hidden meaning behind the text or even a hidden intention of the author, and thus would fall under a hermeneutics of suspicion in the aforementioned sense. However, this is not the case when the analyst turns upon him- or herself, focusing on the situative conditions allowing him or her to make these interpretations in the first place. Trying to stay grounded in experience, interactionist analysis of social life ideally does not distinguish between the different realms

¹ On 'reduction to dialectic', compare Mikel Dufrenne's critique on Hegel: "The term 'dialectic' signifies that movement is more real than what is moved, and that mediation is more real than the terms it opposes and unites." (Dufrenne 1966, p. 38)

of structure and agency. Instead, both contexts and elements of concrete social situations are grasped as theoretically infinitely linked social situations themselves (Fig. 2).

Figure 2



The reasoning in favour of this perspective tends to boil down to a critique against Cartesian dualism with its the related distinction between objectivism (or empiricism) and subjectivism (or idealism) and might briefly need to be explained: From an antidualist standpoint, we do not perceive the world as divided into ‘us’ (the subject) and ‘everything else’ (the world), nor do we see objects within this world merely as static things. Instead, at any given moment, we perceive the world depending on how we could interact with it, i.e. in terms of virtual situations or potential practices, inscribed within our lived body (cf. e.g. Merleau-Ponty 1962; Noë 2006).

For example, when I see a statue, I do not merely perceive what I am physically able to see with my eyes, i.e. its front. I also perceive it ‘knowing’ (in the loosest of sense) that I could touch it or walk around it, and moreover ‘feel’ its texture with my eyes (and hence being surprised e.g. if the statue was made of painted rubber instead of marble). These practices of perception, which I count among what Mauss called techniques of the body, already differ greatly within a given culture (cf. Mauss 1973). Therefore, possible perceptions of the world are numerous, the ultimate consequence of this being a seemingly infinite number of possible realities themselves (cf. on this notion e.g. Mehan & Wood 1975). Continuing with the example, the statue might be a beautiful work of art for one, a lump of stone for the next and an example of shoddy neoclassicist romanticisation of Ancient Greece for another.

Furthermore, with French phenomenologist Mikel Dufrenne it can also be said that we perceive the world as related to the virtual and actual practices of *others*. This means that we regard other subjects or even objects as capable of the expressive character of subjective action – and, in the case of objects, turning them into quasi-subjects, which we can in turn submit ourselves to, as quasi-objects (cf. Dufrenne 1973, p. 393f.; and, in a way, Latour 1988). The statue brings with it also a reference to its act of creation and therefore carries

with it a reference to a virtual artist.² This notion of quasi-subjectivity can also be seen in our relation towards natural objects, hence Mauss and Hubert pointing out that the explanations of magic and science are closely related and part of the same mode of explaining the world (cf. Mauss & Hubert 2001, p. 178). What this boils down to is that the relation between man and the world is grounded in actual and virtual actions, endlessly referring to further actions, with shifting dynamics between subjectivity and objectivity.

Now, a final question for interactionism remains in the form of social order: Something must be found that is transcending particular situations and their elements (which, again, should be thought of as situations in themselves and so on); this connection is commonly found in notions of materiality. These materially based transsubjective – and therefore transsituative – relations do not simply belong to a determined linear causal chain, but have the potential to affect one another back and forth, e.g. via expectations and revisions. Picking up the statue example one last time, while the statue can be seen differently (as beautiful work of art or example of neoclassicism), and while this perspective can be both pre- and refigured, a common point of reference remains in the form of the material existence of the statue itself.

There are some differences in what precisely should primarily be viewed as the material base of social transsituativity; for instance, Pierre Bourdieu emphasises the habitus, the ability of the body to generate, maintain and rearrange practices (Bourdieu 1977, pp. 78ff.), while Erving Goffman points towards the concrete materiality our situational framings refer back to (Goffman 1986, p. 26). Here, I will follow Dufrenne's position in his *Notion of the A Priori*, which in a sense combines these two perspectives. To avoid a "regress from Kant to Leibniz" and thus to the determinism of the "pre-established harmony" of Leibniz' monads (Dufrenne 1966, p. 219) – i.e., if all relations between the elements of the universe were already harmonious, we could not speak of free will (Dufrenne 1966, pp. 222ff.) – Dufrenne proposes the common ground of experience being the lived human body in reciprocal and primal complicity with nature (Dufrenne 1966, p. 225). This means that the arrangement of situational contexts does not merely constitute an 'ontologically flat' (Schatzki) 'network' (Latour) or 'rhizome' (Deleuze & Guattari). Their arrangement also gives rise to a concrete world for lived bodies to inhabit while simultaneously, in the form of practices, giving the same lived bodies room to influence this arrangement itself.

3 Atmospheres and Interactionism

Now, following the proponents of a so-called 'affective turn' (cf. Clough & Halley 2007) (in the same vein as linguistic, body or emotional turns), I consider atmospheres the felt quality or

² Another example: In a sense, I am not actually writing this paper, rather I am letting the paper write itself through me.

'affective tonality' (cf. Massumi 2011, p. 65) of a particular situational arrangement. I furthermore consider these atmospheres not merely a by-product of situativity, but a deciding factor in the unfolding of the situation it represents, pushing towards its solidifying or dissolving, and making atmospheres themselves subject to practices in the form of 'affective labour' (cf. e.g. Wissinger 2007). A brief example: A group experiences a particular situational arrangement, such as a night out in a bar, in such a way that it will actively draw upon practices to maintain the quality of this particular configuration; e.g. ordering more drinks and maintaining conversation instead of yawning and asking for the bill (which can fail, for instance, if too many drinks are ordered too quickly or the conversation moves to an uncomfortable topic). On the other hand, if a new influential and conflicting element, such as timely constraints in the form of the bar closing, enters the situational arrangement, it will be felt and make the situation less pleasant for those this constraint is present – until practices are employed to change the arrangement, like finding another place to drink or collectively deciding that everyone is tired and it's late anyway.

While interactionism, due to its emphasis on concrete situations as a whole, shows more potential for a theoretical inclusion of atmospheres than other sociological paradigms, this potential requires some elaboration. In the first part of this paper, I have tried to sketch some reasons for a focus on atmospheres within sociology due to the merits of interactionism; what follows is an attempt to show just where in interactionist theory atmospheres can be made fruitful.

Firstly, when understood as affective tonality, atmospheres can be connected to the *mana* as elaborated upon by Mauss and Hubert (or, for a contemporary example, to Randall Collin's notion of emotional energy), which similarly concerns itself with affective relations and thus operates within the same frame of reference: "*It is really mana which gives things and people value, not only magical religious values, but social value as well*" (Mauss & Hubert 2001, p. 134). Further, *Mana* can be understood as the transsubjective felt force binding things (and therefore situations) together: "*In sum, mana is first of all an action of a certain kind, that is, a spiritual action that works at a distance and between sympathetic beings*" (Mauss & Hubert 2001, p. 138). I would posit here that this points towards *mana* being akin to the experience of the common ground of man/nature complicity introduced through Dufrenne.

The second connection to sociology requires particular emphasis on the characterisation of atmospheres as blanketing situations as a *whole*.³ An example of this view can be found in the work of the aforementioned Dufrenne. He conceptualises atmospheres as the affective quality of the experience of a particular situation, which is so

³ This picks up on sociologist Jean-Paul Thibaud's interpretation of atmospheres as John Dewey's 'pervasive quality' of a situation (cf. Thibaud 2011). The connections between Dewey's and Dufrenne's thought would in my opinion break the scope of this paper and will have to be delayed for future endeavors.

encompassing that for him it is preferable to speak instead of a particular *world* (Dufrenne 1973, pp. 177ff., 186f.). This idea of situations as particular worlds that we find ourselves in has its sociological counterpart, for instance, in Goffman's conception of frames: For Goffman, different frames allow our experience to become meaningful in different ways (Goffman 1986, p. 8). Not merely subjective and in line with what I have mentioned before regarding the common material ground of human experience in nature, I will repeat here that for Goffman the choice of frame is not contingent, but relies on given material contexts (Goffman 1986, p. 26). Introducing atmospheres as the affective quality of particular ways of framing a given situation allows a closer look at the role frames play on affect and emotion, something Goffman already pointed towards (Goffman 1986, pp. 573ff.).

Drawing on Goffman allows me to further elaborate on what has already been implied with the notion of multiple realities: That the same situation can potentially have very different frames and thus atmospheres for its participants, potentially leading to what Goffman calls "frame disputes" (Goffman 1986, pp. 321ff.). This leads us to the next section, as intercultural situations seem to be prime candidates for finding such frame disputes and practices of resolving (or avoiding) them.

4 Atmospheres and Intercultural Gift Relations

I will begin this section with a brief sketch on the role of atmospheres in Mauss' *The Gift* itself. Of interest here will be a) atmospheres *of* the gift, as in, the affective effects of gifts on a situation, and b) atmospheres *for* the gift, the affective labour surrounding gift exchange.

Atmospheres of gifted objects can be found, for instance, in the *vaygu'a*, gifts received during the *kula* exchange on the Trobriand Islands. These have an "*exhilarating, comforting, soothing*" effect on their owner; "*mere contact with them is enough to make them transmit their virtues*" (Mauss 1966, p. 22). Also worth mentioning is the notion of spirit (*hau*) in Maori gift (*taonga*) relations, where the gift still carries with it a part of the giver (Mauss 1966, p. 9). It is here that the atmospheric quality of gifts becomes most apparent: "*For the taonga is animated with the hau of its forest, its soil, its homeland, and the hau pursues him who holds it*" (Mauss 1966, p. 9). Furthermore, in a reciprocal gift relation, a world is returned; "*some kind of taonga of their own, some property or merchandise or labour, by means of feasts, entertainments or gifts of equivalent or superior value*" (Mauss 1966, p. 10).

It can be said, then, that first, we can find the subjective force that a gift is borrowing from its owner, turning it into a quasi-subject and allowing it to evoke affective reactions in the recipient. Second, we also find a full situational context the original owner is implicitly being linked with, an imaginary or virtual situational arrangement evoking a certain atmosphere, the 'world' of the gifted object. In a sense, what is being given are not just objects or emotionally charged fetishes or quasi-subjects. More than a "[mingling] of

sentiments and persons”, a “confusion of personalities and things” (Mauss 1966, p. 18), whole situations and their atmospheres are involved in the exchange, or indeed, are at the core of what is being exchanged.

So much for the atmosphere of the gift. What is left to discuss is the atmosphere of giving.⁴ Turning to Mauss again, the situational context for the potlatch of North American Indians is “*in continuous festival, in banquets, fairs and markets which at the same time are solemn tribal gatherings*”, coupled with “*a spirit of rivalry and antagonism which dominates all their activities*” (Mauss 1966, p. 4). They are “in a perpetual state of effervescence” (Mauss 1966, pp. 32f.). Differently described is the intertribal *kula* of the Trobriand Islands. Mauss mentions that it is “*carried out in a noble fashion, disinterestedly and modestly*”, distinguishing it from ordinary gimwali, but can at the same time occur in its “*largest, most solemn and highly competitive form*” (Mauss 1966, p. 20). E.g., the intertribal *kula* can be interpreted as requiring ceremonial pomp and ritual as a mark of distinction, being an opportunity to display “*freedom and as well as one’s magnanimity*” (Mauss 1966, p. 21).

Both potlatch and *kula* are intertribal affairs; as such, parts of Mauss’ analysis can be read through a lens of interculturality, albeit ‘interculturality’ in the form of long since institutionalised ‘intercultural tradition’. The agonistic gift relations of potlatch, for example, occur between different North American Indian tribes who have, according to Mauss, “*been in contact with each other from very early days*” (Mauss 1966, p. 32). Nevertheless, *kula* and potlatch still require extraordinary atmospheres, either in the form of sacred solemnness or as effervescent excess.

The following discussion of studies with an explicit interest in ‘younger’ intercultural gift relations may bring further insights to this topic. Three of these studies are mostly concerned with gift-giving practices in relations of diplomacy and can be said to be concerned with agonistic, competitive gift-giving. These will be discussed first. The final study also concerns itself with everyday reciprocal gift relations in intercultural contexts. All four studies emphasise an interest in tracing the situated embedding of the exchanges.

First, the diplomatic gift exchange. The studies in question are as follows: An investigation by Christian Windler into the diplomatic relationship between France and Tunis between 1700 and 1840, particularly through the diaries and correspondence of Philippe Devoize (1745-1832). In the second study, Peter Burschel investigates the relations between 17th century Austria and the Ottoman Empire through the actions of Habsburg diplomat Hans Ludwig von Kuefstein. The final study on gift exchange and diplomacy is by Kim Siebenhüner and concerns itself with relations between Europe and India.

The central theme in these studies is the notion of a common, quasi-neutral ground: For instance, in the case of France-Tunis-relations, a third language was being used for

⁴ Naturally, the two are intertwined: A gift requires a ‘fitting’ atmosphere it resonates with, and the atmosphere of the gift event remains inside the gift long after it has occurred.

negotiations (Windler 2000, p. 31f.). Furthermore, the diplomats often saw themselves as 'brokers' or mediators, third parties living between cultures (Windler 2000, pp. 35ff.) – all the while still primarily keeping the interest of their employer in mind (cf. especially Burschel 2013, pp. 547ff.). Siebenhüner further stresses the importance of the general *"intercultural competences, financial resources and attitudes"* of the diplomats, which are not merely part of a particular tradition evolving from interaction between two given cultures (Siebenhüner 2013, p. 530).

This common ground was especially necessary to mediate frame disputes; the involved parties often had very different ideas of the nature of the gifts being exchanged: For example, whereas one power saw their gifts as a symbol of a reciprocal personal relation, the other considered it a tribute (Windler 2000, p. 41; Burschel 2013, p. 554) or a symbolic representation of their existential status (Siebenhüner 2013, p. 538). A solution was, then, to fill the gifts with double meaning through what I would call 'affective labour'; this double meaning primarily concerned the atmosphere of the gift in question: *"For the consul, the gift in the form of Tunisian crafts, animal skins and beasts of prey painted the picture of a barbaric Maghreb, a potential object for civilising acts of domination. For the Bey [of Tunis], the beasts of prey in particular were an expression of his dignity as a sovereign."* (Windler 2000, p. 49, transl. BW) It also concerned the atmosphere surrounding the gift: For example, in one instance France deliberately waited seven years, before delivering eagerly expected gifts to a new sultan, all the while dodging inquiries over the missing gifts (Windler 2000, p. 43). This ambiguity allowed everyone involved to save face within their own cultural context (Windler 2000, p. 41).

Interestingly, both parties tended to be fully aware of their relation's ambiguity, but rarely talked about it (Burschel 2013, p. 554). According to Windler, some relations even depended upon a silent agreement of not mentioning this known ambiguity (Windler 2000, p. 53). He ascribes the maintenance of this paradoxical situation to a *"situative determination of the interacting participants [of a gift situation] to enforce their own interpretation of the action [upon one another]"* (Windler 2000, p. 53; see also Burschel 2013, pp. 554f.). That means, in the case of competitive gift giving, a frame dispute is actively negotiated through symbolically charging the gift with the atmosphere of one's own frame. The recipient in turn has the opportunity to downplay the importance of the gift as to limit the threat to their frame, as done by the consul in above example.

Moving on towards everyday intercultural gift exchange, this will be covered via review of a study by Wim De Winter, who has been investigating the interactions between Japanese commoners and European sailors in the 17th century. The gift relations here are described as spontaneous practices as a means of dealing with interactional uncertainty (De Winter 2013, p. 567), and in turn symbolising this practice as a whole (Winter 2013, p. 579).

One of his examples seems again to point towards a tendency of creating a separate intercultural frame: *“Local villagers figured the ship and its crew could have divine origins, and according to their ‘magical worldview’, ships were the domain of gods and, therefore, a place where normal human relations were suspended”* (Winter 2013, p. 571).

On the part of the sailors, what seemed to have contributed to the possibility of gift-exchange were, similar to what Siebenhüner has pointed out in the case of the diplomats, elaborate practices of general interculturality; De Winter speaks of three phrases regularly being used to describe gift exchanges in written accounts: *“According to the Custome of the COUNTRY”, “I entertayned them as best I could” and “no one disapproved”* (De Winter 2013, p. 572f.). The notion of ‘custom’ is highly important for De Winter (DeWinter 2013, p. 579), and seems to refer to a general respect for foreign frameworks as a condition for these exchanges (DeWinter 2013, p. 579). The other two phrases could furthermore be seen as equally important, pointing not only towards the necessity of affective labour in creating a particular (entertaining) situation, but also the aforementioned necessity of trust for the gift relation.

Finally, unlike in the case of competitive diplomatic gift exchanges, where the gifts were surrounded by and charged with an atmosphere of superiority, here the gifts served more to emphasise the amicability of the relation between locals and foreigners, interestingly often by proxy of the locals’ children. For instance: *“Ould Synemon Dono sent his yong daughter of 3 months ould, with her nurce, and brought me a barso of wyne and egges for a present. And i gave the child a silk coate.”* (De Winter 2013, p. 577) While De Winter does not elaborate further on this custom, I would suggest that sending one’s young child is another display of trust, in this case initiated by the local.

5 Concluding Remarks

The studies on intercultural gift relations reviewed here all seem to point to a common theme of extraordinary atmospheres. I would posit that the establishment of these atmospheres are attempts to produce and at the same time draw boundaries of effervescence, born of the necessity due to the intercultural, boundary-crossing nature of the gift exchange and the general relation itself.

A short inquiry into the phenomenology of interculturality should shed some light on this interpretation. According to German phenomenologist Bernhard Waldenfels, intersubjectivity and interculturality are closely related: For Waldenfels, *“that which happens between cultures mirrors in part that which happens between – and within – individuals”* (Waldenfels 2006, p. 109, transl. BW). Just as intersubjectivity involves the experience of something other, different from myself, for Waldenfels interculturality must always point towards the unknown (Waldenfeld 2006, p. 110). Now, according to Waldenfels, to

experience this unknown through the other, we have to recognise it in ourselves, meaning that instead of pointing towards separation, this experience points towards a – paradoxically inaccessible – common ground (Waldenfels 2006, pp. 118ff.). However, in interculturality this experience of the unknown is a lot more noticeable than in intersubjectivity: It is akin to Merleau-Ponty's "wild region" that never wholly belongs to any given culture, and which thus, according to Waldenfels, allows for intercultural entanglement (Waldenfels 2006, p. 120). While it cannot serve as a common ground for intercultural communication (Waldenfels 2006, p. 125), it perhaps can act as its impulse (in the form of wanting to 'tame' it, so to speak). I would like to suggest at this point that this is close what I have referred to with Dufrenne as the reciprocal and primal complicity of man and nature.

Furthermore, as has been pointed out by Anne Rawls and Gary David, in situations where there are no clear boundaries or frameworks delineating 'us' versus 'them', "situated solidarity" has to take place as "*new type of morality through shared commitment to interaction*" (Rawls & David 2006, p. 470). As this must be worked out and maintained in interaction itself without recourse to mutual stabilising shared "narratives", this solidarity can break down (Rawls & David 2006, p. 480). I would suggest here that the necessary situated solidarity involves invoking this 'wild region' through a shared affective resonance, wherein the situation's participants give up part of their subjectivity in a form of mutual trust; and further, that in gift relations, the gift object serves as the catalyst that evokes and symbolises, but also limits (or 'tames') this region.

This means, then, regarding the concluding question of favourable situational arrangements and their atmospheres for the development and maintenance of an intercultural gift relation, I would point towards Caillé's emphasis on the 'irreducible ambivalence' of the gift (Caillé 2008, p. 62), only expanding it to an ambivalence of the situation surrounding it. The creation of a reference towards primal being already invokes this ambivalence due to its inexhaustibility (for we can never fully 'grasp' nature). However, in encounters with other cultures, this requirement of situational ambiguity also depends on whether or not there is, in a sense, sufficient room for openness towards unfamiliar frameworks within one's primary framework. Practices of handling this ambiguity in the form of affective labour – either professionalised, as with the case of diplomats, or based on competences in everyday interaction – must be employed. What is important to note is that it is not enough to 'wing it' until the situation is over: As the influence of the gift resonates long after it has been given, the situation must leave to be reframed in an intracultural context, and as such demands situated action that allows for this sort of reframing on both sides.

To summarise, I am closing with the perhaps rather unexciting statement that a gift must resonate with its situation. More precisely, situation and gift must affectively resonate with one another. As the object of the gift becomes a focus of attention, the atmosphere (as

quasi-subject) must either point towards the object (where it becomes a seemingly spontaneous gift, as perhaps in the case of the gift of a silk coat for the local's child), or the atmosphere (as quasi-object) must be appointed by the object calling for it. While both these modes can with likelihood occur at the same time, the latter seems especially true in agonistic contexts, where gifts serve as ammunition in the conflict for frame-related dominance.

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