

“Thou shall not calculate!” or How To Symmetricalize Gift and Capital

by Bruno Latour and Michel Callon, CSI, ENSMP, Paris
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“To the bewilderment of thinking minds, unheard-of wealth turned out to be inseparable from unheard-of poverty. Scholars proclaimed in unison that a science had been discovered which put the laws governing man’s world beyond any doubt. It was at the behest of these laws that compassion was removed from the hearts, and a stoic determination to renounce human solidarity in the name of the greatest happiness of the greatest number gained the dignity of secular religion.” (102). Karl Polanyi, The Great Transformation: the Political and Economic Origins of Our Time.

Now that capitalism seems to have triumphed, it might be possible to study it by itself. That is, to study capitalism without adding to it a series of monstrosities that it does not have, without lending to it a series of virtues that it has never possessed and, most importantly, without believing that inflexible laws guide its development. To parody Marx, one could say, “philosophers (or economists) have up until now only transformed the world, it is now time to understand it.” Our chapter deals with a classical set of problems albeit from a rather non-classical, yet simple, hypothesis: the categorical imperative “you should not calculate!” is applicable to all forms of mobilization of goods and people, no matter how paradoxical this might seem at first. Such an unforeseen consequence of the anthropological study of scientific instruments extended to all “valorimeters,” should allow us, first, to reformulate the debate between liberalism and anti-utilitarianism. Second, it should permit us to reevaluate the performative role of both economic and social sciences. Finally, it should give us the opportunity to make a new use of symmetrical anthropology in order to establish different rules of behavior vis-à-vis the seemingly ubiquitous monster that is usually called, a bit hastily, the “world market.”

One way among others of organizing markets

Let us begin with some definitions that will help limit the scope of this paper. We shall define capitalism as a way among others of organizing markets. Such a definition, which is firmly rooted in a tradition established by the works of Karl Marx, Karl Polanyi and Fernand Braudel, has considerable merit for it allows us to not identify capitalism with the market, and yet, it does not foreclose the possibility of thinking the various relationships between both of these elements (capitalism and the market). At this point, the following question might be raised: how is one to define a market? Of course, one could answer this question in many different ways. However, Guesnerie's answer seems especially suitable for our purposes¹. For Guesnerie, a market is a *dispositif* of coordination in which: a) agents seek to pursue their interested goals and in order to do so, engage in an economic calculation which might be considered equivalent to an operation of optimization and/or maximization; b) the agents' interests are usually divergent which makes them c) engage in a series of transactions that resolve the conflict of interests by coming up with a price. As a result, in R. Guesnerie's words, "a market opposes buyers and sellers, and the prices that untangle this conflict are, in a way, both the data and the outcome of the agents' economic calculation" (18). This definition has the merit of insisting on what is fundamental; namely, the decentralization of decisions, the staging of calculating agents, and the conflicts of interest resolved in a transaction establishing an equivalence which is measured by price. The fundamental point here is that the agents enter and exit the exchange as strangers. Once the transaction is completed, the agents call it quits and even if they have abandoned anonymity for a brief moment—the duration of the transaction—they quickly return to this original state².

It follows from the conception of the market outlined above that market and market economy are not the same thing. Given that market economy is defined by the centrality that the various markets have in it, there cannot be any market economy without the previous deployment of property rights—understood as both an inciting device [to engage in a transaction] and a guarantee against spoliation—and without the existence of money tendentiously constituting itself, despite all of the contrary forces, into a universal equivalent.

Finally, market economy as an always ongoing program that aims to formalize, interconnect, aggregate and coordinate scattered, local markets leads us to the notion of capitalism. A note of caution might be offered at this point: if our aim were to provide a strictly realistic account of the dynamics of capitalism, we should speak of capitalisms—in the plural—just as we speak of markets in the plural. What authorizes us to produce a description of such a slippery and multiform phenomenon by using the word "capitalism" in the singular is the fact that all capitalisms share the common trait of raising the market to the highest pitch. Here, as elsewhere, we shall name "capitalism" the ongoing, unflagging, violent effort to define, format, gather together, and extend "market economy" as an autonomous sphere which would have its own laws, its own history, and its own essence and thereby seeking to constitute itself as the one and only agent of any possible history. The origin of such an endless movement is to be found in

¹ Roger Guesnerie, *L'Économie de marché*, Flammarion, Paris, 1996.

² This is an essential point. In a wonderful book which we comment on later in the paper, *Entangled Objects. Exchange, Material Culture and Colonialism in the Pacific* (Harvard UP, Cambridge, Mass., 1991), Nicholas Thomas makes this point clear in his comparative analysis of commercial transactions and the gift: "Commodities are here understood as objects, persons, or elements of persons which are placed in a context in which they have exchange value and can be alienated. The alienation of a thing is its *dissociation* from producers, former user, or prior context" (p.39).

the unflagging construction of centers of profit whose aim is to relentlessly increase the dissymmetry between various economic agents that struggle to increase their calculative and speculative capacities in order to integrate and shape those of the other agents'. To sum up, capitalism is neither a product of reason nor a directly observable phenomenon; it is neither a theoretical construct which—by means of an ever increasing degree of abstraction—would discover a hidden reality, nor a piece of evidence to be unveiled by the shrewd observer. Rather, it is both things at the same time: capitalism is the theory of its own practice and the practice of its own theory, the formatting of its own formatting. As it will be readily apparent in the next pages, capitalism triggers an irresistible feeling of belief and attraction that accounts for a good part of its effects and to which we shall oppose a contrary effort of anthropologization.

Disciplining, formatting, and performing economy.

Let us begin this section by defining more precisely the notion of “formatting.” A great deal of the difficulty of our argument derives from the fact that we seek to endow the notion of formatting with a very strong meaning. For us, formatting implies a threefold effort that is simultaneously carried out at the level of representations, of institutions, and of the agents' economic calculations³. Whether we speak of a market in the singular, of market economies or even of capitalisms, we are referring to three different types of economy, all of them inhabited by calculating, optimizing economic agents. What is at stake, then, is the general question of the emergence of these agents. Indeed, the only difference between the above-mentioned types of economy lies in the distribution, concentration, and extension of the calculating agencies. Another aspect that is relevant here is the fact that the notion of formatting allows us to avoid two common pitfalls; namely, the naturalization of economic categories, and the belief that such categories hide a more complex social reality. Briefly, the notion of formatting refers to the always ongoing and effective performance of economic categories, which are definitely real as long as they are networked to other mechanisms that not only do not hide them but actively contribute to their reality.

It should be noted here that such an argument is hardly original: the history of the social sciences made an analogous move well before we did. Since the work of Michel Foucault it is commonly accepted that sex is not an irrepressible force that would be opposed to discourse but rather the product of discourse itself. Pierre Nora and his students have taught us that the history of France is complexly related to what happened in the *Hexagone*, and that history-as-discipline constantly shapes the representations, decisions, and actions of history-as-thing. Another case in point would be the line of investigation pursued by the group *Hérodote* and the journal *Espace-temps*. For them, geography is not a mere “frame” in which independent events occur but rather the active performance of the stage upon which history will be played—one of the principal stages being, of course, the Hexagone itself, which has been endlessly drawn, copied and hung. As for sociology, since the work of Auguste Comte we are aware—albeit less assuredly—of the complex mediations between sociology-as-discipline and a world that we barely dare to call “social.” Even though society-as-thing has little to do with the “social world” as conceived by sociology, sociology-as-discipline actively performs the “social world,” defines its components and suggests ways in which it could be reformed. In all of these disciplines the practical, transformative, and performative aims—or even the emancipatory and revolutionary

³ See the term recently put forward by Laurent Thévenot in “Les investissements de forme,” *Cahiers du centre de l'emploi*, 1986, p.21-71.

aims—have always outweighed their “purely descriptive” dimension. In this respect the social sciences have followed the model imposed by their elder sisters, the hard sciences, which are much stronger at the meticulous performance, in the laboratory, of experiments and facts. But this is another story that does not concern us here⁴.

In order to make the most of the notions of discipline, formatting, and performance in the realm of economy, it is necessary to avoid any reification of “capitalism”; therefore, one should not identify capitalism with whatever happens between humans and things when they are mobilized. A multitude of things pass into new hands, rise from obscurity, and return to it; human multitudes come to life, become wealthy or poor, travel around and get used up,. But this general mobilization of people and things cannot be adequately summarized by the notion of capitalism. As it has already been noted, capitalism refers to the formatting of markets; it has nothing to do with whatever would happen, so to speak, “under” the formatting operation itself. In other words, we do not know what happens in this multifarious mobilization in which humans and things interact and get mutually transformed. And in particular, we do not know whether the origin of this endless movement is to be attributed to calculating agents or, rather, to unselfish agents. To sum up, such a mobilization of people and things does not constitute the well-known object of the social world, but rather, its *terra incognita*.

At this point an objection might be raised: is it not the object of economic science to “describe,” to “predict” and to “calculate” as accurately as possible the above-mentioned mobilization of people and things? It could then be said that this *terra incognita* has already been located, its bearings have already been taken, and it has already been exhaustively charted by economy-as-discipline. Is it not fair to say then that economics, by means of successive epistemological breaks and increasing abstractions, has managed to make visible what used to be hidden, to expose the omnipresence of calculation underlying falsely disinterested behaviors? Thus, the ignorance of the age-old work done by economics would be an absurdity to which even sociologists could not afford to fall prey. Yes, but as sociologists of science, it is precisely our task both to acknowledge and to evaluate the gigantic and respectable work accomplished by the economic disciplines. What interests us in this chapter are the practical and political consequences derived from the analysis of economic science from the perspective of the sociology of social sciences. Such an analysis would not view economic science as a simple description—no matter how theoretical—of an ever fleeting reality, but would rather consider, quite seriously, the effects produced by economics itself.

It is worth noting here that the consequences derived from the considerations outlined above are rarely fleshed out. For, as we have already noted, economy is usually seen as the only entity lacking a performative dimension. Many a brilliant scholar uses economy-as-thing to explain the development—or the underdevelopment—of the rest of social sciences. In their scheme, economy is the “context” in which the other social sciences would be located, and metaphors of economy are the chosen device to explain the development of history, geography, and sociology. In stark opposition to these metaphors of economy, another set of equally brilliant scholars—many of whom write in this journal—takes pains to save humanity by courageously putting forth, under the banner of anti-utilitarianism, an alternative conception of human beings. The fact of the matter is that both the efforts to increase and to reduce the economization of social and historical relations tend to forget the formatting dimension proper to economy-as-

⁴ See Ian Hacking’s beautiful example, “The Self-Vindication of the Laboratory Sciences,” in A. Pickering, ed., *Science as Practice and Culture*, The University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1992, p.29-64.

discipline, a dimension without which the notion of capital—whether real or symbolic—would have no effect.

We shall then call economy-as-discipline the set of activities that contribute to the production of calculating agents. It should be noted here that even the most theoretical economic science is constantly performing this formatting operation, for its work is much more practical, down to earth, and effective than it would admit. Indeed, economic science extracts from the mobilization of people and things the necessary elements to make the exchanges calculable—and it is precisely this set of operations that we have in mind when we use the notion of formatting. In any given situation, economy-as-discipline takes whatever is necessary to do a calculation, to produce calculating economic agents participating in an exchange. And we insist again, economy-as-discipline does not give a more or less accurate description of an objective thing (economy) that would have an autonomous existence outside of the discipline itself. Far from being the object of an ostensive definition, economy-as-thing (*economy*⁵) is the performative byproduct of economy-as-discipline (*economics*), no matter how paradoxical this may seem. Economists incessantly shape something that is not at all economic in order to extract from it—by filtration, purification, and imposition—something else that looks like calculability, governmentality, and market organization. After all, it is not a coincidence that people talk about economy as a discipline.

How can one limit the excesses of the exchange?

In order to better evaluate the essential contribution of economics, its most distinctive trait should be recalled here. As a form of organization, economics is characterized by the presence of calculating agents who participate in transactions which are limited both in space and time and which end when all of the parties come to a satisfactory agreement.

Such an elementary formatting of two calculating wills unknown to each other and who pursue their own interests requires, nonetheless, a good number of investments. For an agent to participate in a calculating operation, a list of the possible future states of affairs needs to be made; a hierarchy between these various states of affairs needs to be established; and, the actions that are likely to produce, with more or less certainty, any of the states of affairs mentioned above need to be identified and described. As many exemplary studies have shown⁶, the agent—whether she is buying or selling—cannot conduct any of the above operations, that is, she cannot become a calculating agent, unless she has the necessary equipment. A company without accounting-books, reports, a board of directors, administrative management, market research, and quality controls, has no chance to conduct any of the possible actions, to anticipate any of the possible consequences and, thereby, to establish a list of preferences⁷. Mutatis mutandi, the consumer deprived of the means to classify, compare, and evaluate the different products offered to her, cannot make but an ill-informed decision. The same remarks would apply to the State:

⁵ Both “economy” and “economics” are in English in the original. In order to make the text less cumbersome, I will take advantage of the fact that, contrary to what happens with French, English does make the distinction between economics and economy. Thus, in the rest of the text I shall use “economics” to refer to what the authors call “economy-as-discipline” and “economy” to refer to “economy-as-thing.” [Note of the translator.]

⁶ Marie-France García, “La construction sociale d’un marché parfait: le marché au cadran de Fontaines-en-Sologne,” *Actes de la recherche en sciences sociales*, n. 65, 1986, p.2-13; Madeleine Akrich, *Inscriptions et coordinations socio-techniques*, dissertation on the socio-economy of innovation, École des mines de Paris, 1993.

⁷ Jean-Philippe Bouillaud et Bernard-Pierre Lécuyer, Eds. *L’invention de la gestion. Histoire et pratique*, L’Harmattan, Paris, 1994; Peter Miller, “The Factory as Laboratory,” *Science in Context*, vol.7 (3), 1994, p.469-496; Michael Power, Ed. *Accounting and Science: National Inquiry and Commercial Reason*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1995.

without national accounting, industry surveys, price indexes, follow-ups of the different categories of monetary masses, the State would be doomed to both impotence and paralysis⁸.

It should be clear by now that the word calculation should not be given a metaphorical sense, as if in the minds of the agents there was a mental arithmetic of sorts that would be later materialized in a real calculation on paper, in accounting-books. On the contrary, historical research on calculation shows that it must be given a material sense; calculation is then an operation that deals with numbers and tables, that is conducted by means of graphical instruments, carried out in the quasi-laboratory of the accountant, and whose ultimate goal is to convince one's business partners. What applies to the metrology of the kilometer or the kilogram, also applies to the metrology of economic calculation: before establishing a standard, and before making the meticulous reproduction of such standard, no measurement can be taken⁹. In this scheme, all of the measuring instruments are, so to speak, measuring measures and not measured measures. This already established finding within the exact sciences can now be extended to the social sciences.

Happily for us, economists have already produced the conceptual apparatus that will allow us to think of the exterior of their formatting operations, the wood chips, so to speak, that do not belong to their workbenches. Indeed, the notion of externality is of particular interest here. On the one hand, the notion of internality refers to all of the elements that will be taken into account—in the literal sense of the expression—in an interaction that is not, in itself, a relation of exchange. The notion of externality, on the other hand, refers to whatever exceeds the boundaries of the transaction, that is, all of the indefinite elements—and as such they are eagerly conceptualized by economists—that might have some bearing, at a later moment, upon the transaction but which will not enter, for the time being, the calculation¹⁰. We shall call positive externality whatever will favor, by chance, the outcome of an interaction that turned out to have more causal links than was expected; in its turn, the notion of negative externality alludes to the elements that were eliminated a bit too hastily from the calculation and which, in the guise of unforeseen consequences, now threaten to thwart its outcome. In a sense, most of the work done in economics—or at least in micro-economics—consists in nibbling at externalities in order to take into account, by means of an ever more accurate metrology, the largest possible number of elements that are located beyond the fringes of the transaction, on the other side of the sacred *limes* of calculation.

Among all social scientists, economists are the only ones to have explicitly conceptualized the fringes of their discipline. No matter how scornful their indifference to reality, their taste for abstract models, and their apparent impatience with whatever might complicate their stylized case-studies, economists have foreseen in great detail the reasons why all of the elements overflowing the calculation could not, and should not, be taken into account for the calculation to work out evenly. Indeed, it is for the production of internalities—and not for constantly overflowing the most simple acts of buying and selling with externalities, thereby reducing the hope of securing a gain—that economists are mainly payed. We shall take advantage, then, of this most extraordinary feature of economics; namely, its ability to define both a set and its complement.

⁸ Alain Desrosières, *La Politique des grands nombres. Histoire de la raison statistique*, La Découverte, Paris, 1993.

⁹ Norton Wise, Ed., *The Value of Precision and Exactitude*, Princeton University Press, Princeton, 1996.

¹⁰ On the notion of adding-up/overflow, see Michel Callon, “La sociologie peut-elle enrichir l’analyse économique des externalités? Petit essai sur le cadrage-débordement,” in *Innovations et performances des entreprises, Revue économique, Revue française de gestion, Sociologie du travail*, Éditions de l’EHESS, 1997.

As we have already suggested, internalities allow a calculation to work out evenly. But let us be more precise and more general at the same time: internalities allow us to de-fine (in the sense of bringing to an end) an interaction, to add it up, to be done with it—whether we are talking about a contract or a price. As is well known to both economists and agents, without this formatting of internalities, the interaction would never come to a close, it would be impossible to know who is the owner of a given entity and who profits from it. Put in a nutshell: without internalities, it would be impossible to call it quits. The problem here is that that which we call the “formatting of internalities” is an operation so familiar to us, it is so much a part of ourselves—especially if we are used to struggle against utilitarianism—that we tend to forget how difficult it would be for us, in practice, to find out who is the owner and who the profiteer, should the difference between internalities and externalities not be constantly enforced. Only economists, no matter how paradoxical this may seem, are well aware of the fact that without the always ongoing work of the formatting operations, externalities would constantly perturbate, put at risk, internalities. Calculation would then become infinite; private appropriation would turn out to be impossible; profit would always be the object of endless disputes. Furthermore, all of the components of a collectivity would have their say over the most trivial exchange between private persons—that is, persons deprived of the associations that incessantly overflow the even interaction. To sum up, the obsession of economists is to produce the economization of the world by constantly replacing the non-economic, or costly, overflows with relations that are economic in all of the senses of the word. Economists are then engaged in a constant battle with the overflows proper to externalities. To reproach economists for “not taking into account reality” would be tantamount to expect the border patrol to give free entry to all people and merchandise without paying close attention to them.

In its most elaborate form, Coase’s theorem captures the essence of the work of economization with which economics engages. The always ongoing effort to make the overflows add up, the constant effort to internalize the externalities, cannot be successful unless a previous sensible distribution of property rights has taken place¹¹. And here “sensible” means that the agents should not only be able to engage in a bilateral calculation of their transactions but also, and foremost, that only the agents that will maximize their utility function—and thereby increase their contribution to the collective wealth—should be encouraged to invest. Thus, the chain that links individual interests to collective interests is fastened.

We would like to insist: economics, far from defining either subjective or objective relations, is that which sets apart, extracts, selects, and typologizes relations in order to make them calculable. And economics is without a doubt a discipline: at the same time it obtains a double conformity, that of the agents and that of the economists; the purpose of the agents’ conformity being to make their interactions add up, that of the economists to avoid the temptation of being carried away with overflows instead of internalizing them. It should be noted here that both the internalization of externalities and the adding up of interactions are unending, always ongoing operations. Bearing these ideas in mind, it would then be possible to read the history of political economy as a continually renewed effort to make untimely overflows add up; standard economy would be responsible for the difficult task of containing potential overflows, whereas the other heterodox varieties of economy—ranging from the critique of political economy inaugurated by Marx to the most recent scholarship in socio-economy—would

¹¹ R. Coase, “The Problem of Social Costs,” *Journal of Law and Economics*, 3, 1960, p.1-44. For a thought-provoking presentation on property rights theory, see Pierre-Yves Gómez, *Le Gouvernement de l’entreprise*, Interéditions, 1996.

have the barely joyful privilege of multiplying the associations, of showing that calculating agents are constantly overflowing¹².

Marx's discussion about exchange value and labor value is significant here. As is well known, Marx views classical economy to be deceiving because it substitutes labor value—for him, the only value corresponding to reality—for exchange value. Well, economists certainly did their homework. By using the metrology of exchange value, the calculation worked out evenly: the contract between the employer and the worker was completed to “the satisfaction” of

both parties, who called it quits. If one were to calculate these same relations by using labor value, there would be no way to be even—and this is precisely the point: the employer would be indefinitely indebted to the worker who would have given her more than she would have received. The point here is not so much to find out whether labor value is more real than exchange value—the discussion has been going on for more than one hundred years and we have not advanced the argument a bit¹³—but rather to know what are the ways in which interactions may be formatted in order to obtain either finite contracts or contracts otherwise defined. Marxists have tried, just as the classical economists they sought to criticize did, to put an end to the calculations. That is, they tried to absorb certain negative externalities, such as rampant misery and alienation, while leaving behind others such as public and political life.

It should be noted in passing that the move above outlined is also part and parcel of the numerous objections raised against the notion of *Homo oeconomicus*, which has been accused, on the one hand, of promoting too shallow a conception of humanity that betrays the richness of real human beings, that brushes aside their personal relations, and that denies the existence of trustful relations among them; and, on the other hand, of reducing to mere effects the institutional settings that shape and energize the values and preferences of human beings. However, to ask of an economist—whether classical or marxist—to take into account all of the externalities is tantamount to asking her to change her being and to denying that economy, as the discipline that performs finite exchanges, is pertinent at all. Here, we may note that the exclusive focus of one's critical energies on the overflows has a considerable downside: that of being unaware that, at the same time that one asks the economist to absorb negative externalities, one engages in an action that furthers her task—by constantly offering her new calculations to square—and underestimates the economist's ability to actively participate, along with the agents, in formatting the market.

A little critique of anti-utilitarianism

The consideration of economic calculation as the outcome of a long and patient labor of formatting leads to the revaluation of the conceptual moves, the critical positions, and the analyses carried out by those who work under the banner of anti-utilitarianism. For one thing, anti-utilitarianism is not a critique of liberalism, but rather, the other side of the liberal coin. While liberalism seems to believe in a conception of human beings as intrinsically calculating and as always acting in order to maximize their utility, anti-utilitarianism opposes this most reductive conception by putting forth an anthropological foundation common to all societies, both primitive and modern, that works as a matrix of sorts in which economic relations would develop.

¹² See the case of the job market of lawyers, which is brilliantly discussed by Lucien Karpik in *Les Avocats. Entre l'État, le public et le marché*, Gallimard, Paris, 1995.

¹³ Gérard Jorland, *Les Paradoxes du capital*, Éditions Odile Jacob, Paris, 1995.

Given that the MAUSS has been one of the most prominent research groups in anti-utilitarianism, it might be of interest to remark here our disagreement with the theory of capitalism that such research implies—even though we are in accord with both the MAUSS’s general intentions and their empirical projects. If our hypothesis were to be right, anti-utilitarianism would then give too much credit to the utilitarian positions that it tries so hard to fight and not enough to the societies for which it presumably speaks. It would be advisable to know, when capitalist economies are attacked, whether it is the internalities or the externalities that are targeted, or whether it is the totality formed by the set—the internalities—, by its complement—the externalities—and by the labor of cutting the set out of its complement that is at stake.

To be sure, if the internalities are the only topic open for discussion, such a discussion can hardly be productive. To simply point out that in a capitalist economy there are individual calculating agents that seek to maximize their profit is equal to mistaking the effect for the cause, the waffle for the waffle-iron. This exclusive focus on the internalities can be conceptualized, rather unproductively, as follows: as the result of a long labor of formatting, certain local effects are obtained that can be understood, from the interior of the exchange itself, as an agreement reached by two parties who call it quits at the end of the exchange. The only conclusion to be reached by such an analysis is that a number of individuals exist who engage in calculations, who transfer equivalent values, and whose exchange will end. To believe that calculating individuals actually exist is to interpellate the bad guy on the screen believing that he is actually out there in the flesh! This is wrong because the bad guy is always a projection: he is nothing more than a flux of photons that lavishly illuminates the screen in a dark theater that might close down at any time due to a lack of customers, of electrical power, of reels. And yet, anti-utilitarians actually believe that there are evil utilitarians on the stage at whom one should throw tomatoes so that they leave the theater in shame! To be sure, the screen will be stained. But, it goes without saying, nothing will have changed at the end of the movie.

If externalities are the only element to be considered, the picture changes radically: just as the moment in which the movie stops and the lights are turned on again. What concerns one in this scheme is whatever overflows the stage, the work of the gigantic industry that allows the screen to be momentarily visible in the darkness. From such a perspective, neither capitalism nor the market exist; there is no known system that can hold the mobilization of people and things in a relation of exchange between economic agents that would be even at the end of the transaction. Just as there is no known system, to build on our metaphor, to hang the dark theater on the screen—even if the movie is a movie about making movies, like Truffaut’s La nuit américaine. It is not in capitalism’s power to have no externalities—either positive or negative ones. On the contrary, capitalism is constantly producing tons of externalities and this is its main job, and perhaps even its only job as we shall later explain. In other words, one is not to find in capitalism the explanation of its own development. Primitive accumulation is an always ongoing process, the labor of formatting is endless: if one is to solely focus on the complement, not one observable entity will be in accord with what is expected from a capitalist world. This is the reason why the metaphor of *embeddedness* does not work; externalities are not the room where market economy takes a rest but rather they are what does not fit in Procrustes’ bed, they are what is of no use to conceptualize a social context or to do—for the moment at least—a calculation.

What is the error, then, that anti-utilitarians have made? To be sure, it is a symmetrical error—liberals have made it in numerous manuals and political discourses. It consists in forgetting the labor of formatting and, more specifically, the labor of formatting disinterestedness.

In order to have a more symmetrical picture, it becomes necessary to take into consideration all of the following three entities: the set [the internalities], its complement [the externalities], and the delicate labor of cutting the set out of its complement. In this scheme, the so much talked about difference between the paradigm of the gift and that of calculation will not appear so stark. For in both cases, a labor of formatting needs to be carried out in order to establish which elements may enter the calculation and which ones may not, these being momentarily kept in the dark. The belief in a great divide between gift and exchange of equivalents may be traced back to the belief in a set of isolated internalities. The result of such a belief has been the psychologization of the difference along with the creation of individual economic agents that would have in their minds selfish motivations.

The problem with this hypothesis is that the economic agents who do the calculations cannot be said to be calculators from the point of view of cognition. This insight, which we have proven recently with respect to the economists who were the models of classical economy¹⁴ and which has recently been extended by cognitive anthropology to all kinds of agents¹⁵, has an important implication for the conceptualization of calculation. Indeed, calculation is a complex, collective practice in which the agents need to mobilize a much greater number of cognitive competences than epistemologists or economists are ready to accept. Conversely, the material dimension of calculation, that is, the figures, the writing instruments, and the inscriptions, are all crucial to its performance¹⁶. Thus, just because calculations are done in the quasi-laboratories of the economic agencies—the notion of the agent gives too much credit to the individual—one should not inductively conclude that calculating beings actually exist, no matter how much information they have. As cognitive scientist Ed Hutchins has brilliantly proven, it is impossible to infer individual competence from collective performance¹⁷.

Of particular interest here is to remark that the conclusions that apply to the utilitarian calculator equally apply to the unselfish, anti-utilitarian non-calculator—the hero that cheers up the spirits of our friends working in the MAUSS and that allegedly constitutes our only hope to defeat capitalism¹⁸. In other words, neither of these characters actually exist: the utilitarian calculating agent is not more real than the unselfish donor—and, by the way, this is the reason why we have been discussing the interestedness and the disinterestedness of the “savage” for about the same time that we have been attempting to calculate labor value¹⁹. The fact that the dis/interestedness of the savage has been a seemingly unending question is best understood if one bears in mind Hutchins’ insight, which is applicable to all forms of calculation and goes as follows: from the collective performance of a gift it is impossible to infer individual competence of the agent. Just as an agent, without being a calculator herself, is traversed by calculation in capitalist formatting regimes, the same agent, without being herself a donor or a recipient, traversed by the gift in pre-capitalist or anti-capitalist formatting regimes. The fact of the matter

¹⁴ Bruno Latour, “Sur le travail des théoriciens,” in J.-M. Barbier, Ed., *Savoirs théoriques et savoirs d’action*, PUF, Paris, 1996, p. 131-146; “Ces réseaux que la raison ignore: laboratoires, bibliothèques, collections” in C. Jacob et M. Baraton, Eds, *Le pouvoir des bibliothèques. La mémoire des livres dans la culture occidentale*, Albin Michel, Paris, 1996, p.23-46.

¹⁵ Roy d’Andrade, *The Development of Cognitive Anthropology*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1995.

¹⁶ See a soon to be published dissertation by Franck Cochoy (tentative title: *La Partie de main chaude du marketing*, La Découverte, Paris).

¹⁷ Edwin Hutchins, *Cognition in the Wild*, MIT Press, Cambridge, Mass., 1995; Bruno Latour, “Cogito ergo sumus, a review of Ed Hutchins’s Cognition in the Wild,” *Mind, Culture and Activity*, vol.3 (1), 1996, p.54-63.

¹⁸ Alain Caillé, “Ni le holisme ni individualisme méthodologiques. Marcel Mauss et le paradigme du don,” *Revue Européenne des Sciences Sociales*, XXXIV, n° 105, 1996, p.181-224.

¹⁹ Jacques T. Godbout (in collaboration with Alain Caillé), *L’esprit du don*, La Découverte, Paris, 1992.

is that one cannot infer from these different performances radically different competencies; both sociology of science and cognitive anthropology prevent us from making such a move.

Both gift and exchange need a previous labor of formatting

Insofar as this insight symmetrically applies to primitive “savages” and present-day “capitalists,” it allows us to redefine them both. Indeed, the same amount of formatting labor is necessary to define a collective act of donation and to de-fine—that is, to terminate—a collective act of exchange. Such is the central hypothesis of our chapter. Once the psychology that fills the capitalist world with selfish calculators and the pre-capitalist world with unselfish donors is abandoned, it finally becomes possible to sort out with some precision the true differences between both formatting regimes. At this point, it may be noted that both regimes share a common categorical imperative, which can be summarized by the interdiction “you should not calculate!”; the difference, then, has to do with whatever should not be taken into account by each regime.

As Marcel Mauss has pointed out, in the paradigm of the gift, the interdiction of making a calculation is carefully defined so that no party can call it quits. In the same vein, economic anthropology has shown that what is at stake in the economy of the gift is not psychological dis/interestedness, but rather, the presupposition of an ever incomplete transaction. As Nicholas Thomas has put it, in the economy of the gift “you will never discharge your debt, you will never be done with your business, you will never escape the *entanglement*.” The more people and goods circulate, the stronger the associations between them will be, and the more they will be connected to each other²⁰.

At this point, it should be noted that the question of what should not be calculated, that is, of what should not enter the calculation because it could ruin both the social fabric and the calculation itself, is also very much present in a capitalist regime. Thus, the only difference between a capitalist and a pre-capitalist formatting regime has to do with the distribution between what actually enters the calculation and what should not enter. The imperative proper to the capitalist formatting regime goes as follows: “calculate internalities so that you can call it quits and dismiss all of the other associations as either negative or positive externalities that should not be taken into account.” Thus, given the fact that both the exchange and the gift issue interdictions of calculation, they cannot be considered as opposite concepts. In the case of a capitalist regime, the interdiction of calculation, which is called an “externality,” can be easily enforced because many an association has been dismissed; conversely, in a non-capitalist regime the interdiction of calculation appears under the guise of “disinterestedness” and is enforced by the fact that the agents are not allowed to follow the associations’ thread by calculating inscriptions.

The difference is admittedly an important one, even a decisive one. However, it should not be exaggerated nor, at any rate, psychologized. What this “little” difference does not allow us to do is to conclude that there would be calculating individuals exchanging equivalents in capitalism, and non-calculating individuals in pre-capitalism. To believe this is tantamount to reinforcing capitalism and falling prey to the worst kind of exoticism—for it encourages the idea that “primitive” people have a series of virtues and defects that are denied to us. In fact, as far as disinterestedness and interestedness go, there is no difference between “us” and “primitive” people. For the only thing that differentiates us from them is the way in which we distribute the associations we wish to highlight and those we do not want to trace at any price. As compared to the exchange, the gift cannot be said to be a more primary, a more natural, or a more

²⁰ Maurice Godelier, *L'énigme du don*, Fayard, Paris, 1996.

elementary phenomenon; on the contrary, the gift is obtained by a labor of formatting that is just about as artificial, as violent, and as institutionalized as that of the profit.

How is one, then, to deal with the difference outlined above without exaggerating it? Let us point out that there might be some regimes with a tendency to rarefy the overflows and others with a tendency to make them proliferate. The *Achuars*, who became famous thanks to Philippe Descola, actually multiply the associations so that no person or thing—that is, the people, the gods, the vegetables, the trees, the animals, the other clans—would ever call it quits²¹. In its temporal dimension, this proliferation of the overflows makes the Achuars permanently revisit past associations: just as death sustains life, a past association keeps a new one going. The more one circulates and bustles about, the more one gets attached to both life and death, much like the fly that gets more and more entangled in the spider's web as it desperately tries to escape from it.

Another case in point would be Pierre Lemmonier's observations in relation to the circulation of hogs among the Angas of New-Guinea. The circulation of hogs, Lemmonier tells us, is arranged—not calculated—in such a way that, again, no one can call it quits. This thereby guarantees that the chain that mobilizes the hogs and the people will not come to a halt, will keep going, season after season²². It is precisely because the difference between both formatting regimes is so tenuous that anthropologists find it hard to distinguish between them and finally end up dealing with hybrid, tangled examples as the ones we find in the work of Nicholas Thomas or Arjun Appadurai²³.

But the production of disinterestedness is never so apparent as in our [Western] societies, where it has to fight the opposing force, that is, the formatting regime of interestedness and utilitarianism. Let us recall here the impressive *dispositif* set up by the Association Française contre les Myopathies [French Society Against Myopathies] during its annual televised fundraising campaign (its annual telethon)²⁴. The goal, here as in other fundraising events, is to encourage the viewers to become benefactors by creating an atmosphere of collective generosity. The objective being so defined, everything in the production and the development of the TV program is geared toward the creation of a dense network of associations that links all of the participants in the event and makes them more and more dependent on each other. Television has this most wonderful ability of reshaping space and time, thereby actualizing past commitments and making visible what would have been otherwise forgotten. Thanks to television a multitude of agents converge on the same stage: audiences which are apart from each other and institutional benefactors, researchers and members of the “Lyons Club,” along with manufacturers, and finally, the sick and their families. As the show goes on, the anchors laboriously pile up one association on top of the other, expanding the network of associations. By the end of the show, we have a long, open-ended catalogue of tightly-knit associations designed to move the audience as the anchors, so to speak, stir them up. As is readily apparent, calculation is not totally absent from such an event, and yet, contrary to what happens with the formatting regime of interestedness, the point here is neither to be done with the calculation nor to engage in an operation of maximization.

²¹ Philippe Descola, *La Nature domestique. Symbolisme et praxis dans l'écologie des Achuar*, Maison des Sciences de l'Homme, Paris, 1986.

²² Pierre Lemmonier, “Le porc comme substitut de vie: forme de compensation et échanges en Nouvelle-Guinée,” *Social Anthropology*, vol. (1), part 1 (A), 1992, p.33-35.

²³ Arjun Appadurai, Ed., *The Social Life of Things. Commodities in Cultural Perspective*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1986.

²⁴ The example comes from a research project being developed at the CSI by Michel Callon and Vololona Rabeharisoa.

What is at stake here is not a keeping of the books in a closed, balanced fashion, but rather a record-keeping of the associations as they happen, in order to better stress their indefinite, open-ended character. The responsibility of performing such an awkward book-keeping falls on the ever-present grand total indicator: as it keeps record, minute after minute, of the successive promises of donations, it parallels the irresistible movement of the overflows. The price is never right because the grand total indicator does not square. Especially created for a formatting regime of disinterestedness, the grand total indicator is a new type of instrument whose only function is to constantly follow and to visually display the ever-growing, open-ended network of associations that get established between the benefactors, the researchers, and the sick. In this scheme, the goal of raising a greater sum than the preceding year can be seen as a way of organizing the overflow, of making the overflow an end in itself. As the description outline above makes clear, the investments needed to successfully carry out the telethon are comparable to those needed to set up the rigorous “adding up mechanisms” proper to a market economy. In order to enter the regime of the gift it is not enough to let the associations naturally unfold by protecting them from the forces of utilitarianism! Gift and disinterestedness are no more artificial or natural than exchange and interest: all of them are the outputs of duly formatted collective practices²⁵.

Of course, the size of the formatting investments is contingent upon both the circumstances of each case and the characteristics of the *dispositif* one seeks to establish. Nevertheless, what all situations have in common is their hybrid character: indeed, as the following example will show, the agents are always the target of alternate investments.

Let us imagine a farm in the middle of the Corsican country-side at the beginning of the season of the *brocciu*²⁶. The room where Mrs. Casalta manufactures the cheese is full of friends and neighbors who are chatting as they wait for their share of *brocciu*. Among the voices, Mrs. Paoli’s is easily recognizable: despite being eighty years old, she eagerly participates in every discussion. Mrs. Paoli certainly feels at home and Mrs. Casalta, the lady of the house, calls her by her nickname, as if she were family. When the moment to pay for the cheese arrives, Mrs. Paoli manages to be the last one to have to pay. She then goes to the room where Mrs. Casalta is sitting at a table, a sort of counter in which the transaction will take place. After the *brocciu* has been weighed and wrapped in a plastic bag, Mrs. Paoli gives a 50 Franc note to Mrs. Casalta as payment in full for the cheese. Then, Mrs. Casalta puts the money in a metal box that serves the function of a cash register and she utters the following: “Thank you Mrs. Paoli. Are you also going to get some cheese tomorrow?”. The words have the desired effect, for Mrs. Paoli flushes with anger as she turns to the sociologist: “It’s always the same! She knows that this infuriates me, but she doesn’t care. You see, I have known her since she was a little girl. I am even the godmother of her daughter—and in Corsica, being a godmother is something! It is like being the mother of the child. You see, I am like the mother of her daughter, and yet, whenever I pay her she addresses me as Mrs. Paoli!” Thus, indignation seems the only resource available to Mrs. Paoli in her attempt to build an alternate formatting regime that would neutralize Mrs. Casalta’s efforts to carefully stage the facts as a completed transaction at the end of which the parties would be even with each other. Indeed, the transformation of the room into a shop, the table/counter,

²⁵ One might say that the telethon is a form of gift under the surveillance of the capitalist market, but then the same definition should apply to the contemporary *kula* forms described by Thomas, which are neither traditional nor part of a market economy. If we have never been modern, it is in relation to the market that such an insight is readily perceivable.

²⁶ The Brocciu is made following an old recipe by mixing goat whey and milk and by heating the mixture in a big pot for 45 minutes at a temperature that should not exceed 80°C.

the metal box/cash register and the distancing effect of addressing her old friend as Mrs. Paoli—thereby offending her—are by no means gratuitous; all serve the purpose of building the formatting regime proper to commercial exchanges.

Confronted with and trying to resist such a formatting regime Mrs. Paoli desperately tries to multiply the ties, the relations, the associations, in the hope that the transaction will swing into the formatting regime of the gift: “I am the mother of her daughter.” It should be clear by now that the transaction can be formatted into either the commercial mode or the gift mode. The point here is that, regardless of their character, both formatting operations are costly and require a minimum amount of investment. Of course, the Corsican old lady is far from being able to mobilize the same energies that sustain the telethon. And yet, the same question is posed in both cases: are we in a commercial formatting regime or in the formatting regime of disinterestedness? Are we in the market or in the space of disinterestedness? The answers to such questions are contingent upon the agents’ abilities to either rarefy or multiply the associations, to either organize the adding up operation or stage the overflow. Indeed, as [Nicholas] Thomas points out, “the transformation and contextual mutations of objects cannot be appreciated if it is presumed that gifts are invariably gifts and commodities are invariably commodities²⁷.” What makes the difference is the use of a strategy of, so to speak, entanglement or of disentanglement.

But let us push symmetry a little bit further. Given that it takes the same amount of research, energy, and shrewdness to make associations proliferate as to make them add up, the social sciences might lend some of its forces to such an enterprise. At this point, the work of symmetrical anthropologists like Nicholas Thomas is of great interest. His position, which we have partially adopted, is a subtle one. Without denying that there is a difference between a gift and a commercial transaction, he fiercely opposes the idea that there is a great divide between commercial societies and non-commercial—gift—societies.

In order to show the futility of such an opposition, he reevaluates a number of anthropological works which seemed exclusively devoted to the radicalization of the differences, to the widening of the gap between disinterestedness and interestedness. A case in point would be his rereading of Malinowski’s work. Contrary to what Malinowski himself thought, Thomas identifies numerous commercial transactions at the heart of the *kula*. Of course, such commercial transactions presuppose a simple operation of disentanglement of the associations, not the existence of a formal market in which the interplay between supply and demand results in a price. For Thomas, then, it is impossible to talk about a gift [non-commercial] regime just as it is absurd to postulate the existence of a market economy: here as elsewhere, realities are always composite, hybrid²⁸.

Still, a question remains: why is it so easy for anthropologists to show that all commercial exchanges are permanently on the verge of overflowing with social relations? One way to answer this question would be to recall the fact that anthropology, just as economics, is a discipline with the power to format relations, albeit in a different fashion. In this scheme, economics’ ambition to produce internalities, to rarefy, make calculable and add up transactions is parallel to cultural anthropology’s efforts to make the invisible visible, to make manifest that which was hidden or latent, to unveil the mechanisms of the collective unconscious, to expose

²⁷ *Op cit.*, p. 39.

²⁸ Arjun Appadurai is very close to the solution when he theorizes the “social life of things” but he forgets to reestablish the difference between the formatting regime of the gift and that of exchange. He lets things live their lives, that is, go from the regime of the gift to that of commercial exchange, but fails to take into account the investments that will allow for such a change of state.

and describe the multiplicity of layers by means of the *thick descriptions* so dear to Clifford Geertz. The anthropologist has a number of devices to make visible the social relations that lie underneath the exchange, that is, he has a number of tools to format disinterestedness. It is sufficient for the anthropologist to demonstrate the uniqueness of a given situation by multiplying the eye-witness accounts and the narrative perspectives or, in a more forceful manner, by reconstructing the history of the transactions. Just as the obsession to make calculations add up is inscribed in the body of the isolated, close-minded economist, the obsession of overflow finds its expression in the professional attitudes of “endearing,” “open-minded” anthropologists.

A note of caution might be offered here: anthropologists are far from being alone in carrying the burden of disinterestedness. The agents are equally capable of producing the necessary tools and *dispositifs* to bring about a regime of gift and overflow—or, alternatively, a regime of interest and internalities. This anthropology centered on the agents’ competencies—which, by the way, do not account for the agents’ generosity, but rather, for their ability to participate in the formatting operations of disinterestedness—is an area of research which remains largely unexamined; we have tried to suggest what it would look like, however, in our discussions of the telethon and the *brocciu*.

Let us consider, for instance, the grand total indicator: it is the brainchild of the show’s creators, not the anthropologists. This fact does not preclude the possibility, of course, that social sciences mobilize to participate in the creation of a more powerful mechanism that would increase the amount of overflows, that would make the associations proliferate at an ever greater speed. Carrying out surveys to know more accurately the motivations of the donors and the reactions of the audience could serve such a purpose. At any rate, the challenge for both the grand total indicator and the sociologist is to closely follow the overflows, not to make them square, but rather, to provide them with enough space to grow and to proliferate. Thus, if our hypothesis is correct, it becomes possible to set the social sciences free from the paralyzing distinction between gift and commercial exchange. Once they have been symmetricalized, the social sciences are free to study both the adding up operations of the overflows and the overflows themselves.

Is capitalism “the unsurpassable horizon of our times”?

The commonly accepted wisdom with which we opened our chapter, that is, the view of capitalism as an ineluctable phenomenon, can now be formulated in somewhat different terms. What is at stake, then, is not a zero-sum game; nor it is the measurement of the degree of deterritorialization reached by capitalism. It should be clear by now that what we need to focus on is the dynamics between the formatting investments that produce disinterestedness and those that produce utilitarianism.

But how does this insight affect our conceptualization of our own regimes of mobilization, that is, our view of capitalism? Let us not assume, first, that our regimes of mobilization are free from associations. Ultimately, the adoption of such an attitude would revert to the isolated study of internalities and would be tantamount to taking capitalism for what it says it is, for what it strives to be, for what the economists perform. In our regimes, we carefully distinguish between the internalities which will be taken into account and the immense, amorphous set of elements that we throw back into the uncertain, surprising status of externalities, either positive or negative. The ingredients are the same everywhere: clans, forests, gods, vegetables, hogs, genes. Indeed, as one of us has shown elsewhere, the number of ingredients is much larger and contains a much greater amount of non-human elements which are literally—not symbolically—

socialized in the collectivity²⁹. But the crucial point here is to acknowledge that the division between the internalities and the externalities is not an equal one: all of the indefinite elements described above are considered externalities; as such, they are not taken into account at the same moment, in the same temporality, as those which enter the calculation. It is precisely this difference between the interior and the exterior of the calculation, between what is taken into account and what is not, between what is commensurable and what is not, between what is calculable and what is incalculable, between what is present and what might appear at a later moment, it is precisely this difference, that will allow some to consider themselves as being free of debt.

In a capitalist regime, what is important is not the exchange of equivalents—that is, what happens in the narrow, even stage of the internalities—but rather the inconmensurability between, on the one hand, the exchange of equivalents, and, on the other, the diffuse and the—literally—incalculable multiplicity of externalities. It should be noted here that the production of relations of exchange between equivalents is only possible if the internalities absolutely differ from the externalities; without such a compulsory production of inconmensurability, nothing could be equi-valent to anything else. More importantly, nothing would be completed or limited; every movement of a person or a good would reverberate in the entirety of the collectivity; the act of appropriation itself would become unreadable; it would be impossible to inscribe the profit because a multitude of unforeseen consequences would instantaneously drown the costly advantages acquired on the even stage of the internalities. And yet, since Locke, the exchange of equivalents has elicited an almost exclusive attention. But, as it should be clear by now, the exchange of equivalents does not have, in practice, any privilege whatsoever. For it is nothing more than the provisional, terminal byproduct of a production of inequivalents which, under the guise of externalities, have been thrown back in the dark and which are waiting, more or less patiently, for the right time to strike back.

Here as elsewhere, if differences should not be minimized, they should not be exaggerated either. Non-capitalist societies are not able to internalize everything any more than capitalist societies are able to externalize everything. Indeed, it is possible to identify in all pre-capitalist societies some types of relations that look very much like those present in capitalist regimes so redefined. We have in mind here all the relations which, in a pre-capitalist society, happen between complete strangers or those which, as happened with Mrs. Paoli, strive to establish a distance between the parties. In the fringes of such societies, as in the long run markets, the capitalist maxim is obstinately applied: “engage in exchanges likely to be completed once and for all, so that you will call it quits; they (the other parties) do not belong to your world, and the likelihood is that you will never see them again.”

Conversely, and contrary to its own belief, capitalism is never completely out of debt: in a capitalist regime trustful relations are developed between suppliers, bankers, clans, gangs, or in the marketplace; it is, then, the rigorous law proper to the non-capitalist regimes that applies here: “whatever you do, do not ever call it quits and never treat your party as a stranger.” To sum up, neither the savages nor capitalism should be the object of our exotic fantasies. Indeed, the amount of work that forbids calculation fares quite well in both regimes.

By recognizing the possibility of applying the maxim of one regime to the other, one might begin to understand how to move from one to the other—even though the history of this passage does not concern us here. Indeed, to go from a pre-capitalist to a capitalist regime, it will suffice to perform two tiny, minuscule deformations; namely, to treat one’s near kin and friends

²⁹ Bruno Latour, *Nous n’avons jamais été modernes. Essai d’anthropologie symétrique*. La Découverte, Paris, 1991.

like perfect strangers with whom one will call it quits, and to treat remote strangers like intimate friends with whom one will call it quits. Capitalism is not an extraterrestrial monster that came to earth to destroy the primitive, anti-utilitarian humanity that used to inhabit the Eden of gift. It is doubtless a monster, but its teratology—just as that of two-headed calves or three-eyed frogs—is definitely an earthly matter. It will suffice to lightly deform the division between what enters the calculation and what should not enter it at any cost, that is, it will suffice to lightly deform the paradigm of disinterestedness, in order to obtain what is neither its contrary nor its opposite, but rather, strictly speaking, its anamorphosis. As such, the capitalist regime would be nothing more than the projection of the pre-capitalist surface onto another surface.

By acknowledging such a deformation we are not trying to weaken it, but rather, to replace a brutal discontinuity with a continuous transition. By all means, there is something frightening in treating a close friend with whom all exchanges used to take place now as a stranger with whom we are even. Indeed, —and this is precisely the point—something has been broken in the movement that goes from the indefinite character of exchange to the glacial calculation of interest. But what is glacial in the calculation of interest? Specifically, it is the fact that such a calculation can be completely finished. My near kin, my protégé, my servant, or even my father, are suddenly treated as these remote strangers who are not to be seen again and with whom the goal of the exchange was to call it quits—or, to put it more brutally, to quit for good, so to speak, the relationship itself.

If we may return to the second deformation described above, there seems to be something even more dreadful than seeing a former close friend, now transformed into a stranger: being answerable to a group of newly acquired intimate friends hundreds or even thousands of kilometres away, and being obliged to enter a relationship of total, indefinite dependency with them. While in a pre-capitalist regime the indefinite character of exchange held together people in the community, in a capitalist regime exchange bonds the local agent to a group of remote strangers with whom she will never call it quits. Such a double dread is also inscribed in the image that capitalists have of primitive men as always being confined to the narrow framework of their tribe and as being irredeemably incapable of entering the world market thereby parting with their careless life by adopting its “culture of revenue.”

As a theory of capitalism, liberalism exaggerates the distinction between the pre-capitalist and the capitalist regimes. Specifically, liberalism makes two mistakes, the first being to substitute both the labor of severing the associations and the labor of building back other types of association with a set of universal laws that come straight from epistemology. In the liberal scheme, the brutal division that makes one treat intimate friends as strangers is seen as a deliverance from the bondage of an archaic past that, by connecting exchange to social and moral considerations, prevented the “development of productive forces.” Instead of seeing the labor of formatting that allows the externalities to be dropped, liberalism sees the emergence of rationality and the end of barbarism and savagery: the natural essence of humanity finally emerges from its social and anthropological matrix. The second error of liberalism consists in hiding the group of allies and accomplices to which the local exchange is now necessarily attached. To these groups, clans, and gangs, liberalism substitutes an allegedly deterritorialized, unrestrained “world market” that has no grounding whatsoever. If, in a first moment, liberalism misses the severance of ties among the members of the local community, in a second moment it misses the creation of associations in the midst of a dream-like world inhabited by universal laws that would be applied without agents, telegraphs, memorandums, offices, institutions, or territories. Thus, the universal dimension of economic laws hides both the local production of, so to speak, detachable strangers and their local reattachment to remote groups in which trust and

entanglement play an increasingly important role. Because of this foolish idea that it is possible for a capitalism without associations to exist, the labor of making and unmaking the associations is doubly lost.

Given that one of liberalism's tasks is to performatively participate in the production of capitalism so that the internalities might be cut away from all of the externalities, its errors are forgivable. But, what are we to say about the enemies of capitalism, about those who would be directly interested in not believing in it? Well, those are unforgivable because they truly believe in a deterritorialized, universal, ahistoric, inhuman—and even “a-anthropological”—world capitalism whose inexorable evolution would be internally determined. Ironically, this might explain the failures of successive leftist projects: the enemies of capitalism eagerly take liberalism at its word, but only to find detestable the universal law that liberalism's supporters celebrate as the eighth wonder of the world. The enemies of capitalism are outraged in the face of its crass reductiveness and yet, they are incapable of believing in the existence of externalities. For them, the glacial exchange of interests actually rules the world, or at least the world produced by capitalism. What is even more strange is that they accept that capitalism, after having severed all communal bonds, actually exists without territory and without fatherland, even though, upon closer examination, the specific associations to particular groups and locations through determinate inscriptions should have helped them chart the territories onto which the interactions have simply been displaced.

What liberalism discards and conceals, the enemies of liberalism discard and conceal even more forcefully. Such an exaggeration is easily understandable: capitalists know what they are doing and thus know what they are intentionally disregarding; they certainly feel the pressure of the incalculable masses they externalize and of the local associations that get dangerously close. The enemies of capitalism, in contrast, only see the magnificent stage where capitalism parades, and thus get mad at both the world market and the relations of exchange. And yet, as it should be clear by now, the relations of exchange are no more real than the world market—unless the fact that every set has a complement is utterly ignored.

In order to get rid of such a complacent fascination, it is advisable to begin to understand the word capitalism as another form of orientalism³⁰. Of all the exoticisms, the one triggered by capitalism is doubtless the most harmful. By considering capitalism as a local deformation of ordinary anthropology, the difference that capitalism tries so hard to establish is not reinforced; in any case, by reconceptualizing capitalism as such, we are not helping it—and this is the least that might be expected from its enemies. But let us try to better explain what lies at the origin of such a deformation.

The thread that capitalism breaks and that anti-capitalists take so much pains in recovering is far from being invisible. Indeed, it is the result of the introduction at all points of a series of networks made of scientific and technological—in the large sense of this word—elements that allow for a dislocation of both the temporal and the spatial frameworks³¹. How is it possible to treat one's near kin and friends like perfect strangers and to treat remote strangers like intimate friends, without dislocating the definitions of the local and the distant, the past and the future? And, how is it possible to obtain the effects of uprootedness, of attachment, of long distance relations, of long term actions, or of remote actions, without the intervention of the

³⁰ We use the term “orientalism” as conceptualized by Edward W. Said in *Orientalism*, Vintage Books, New York, 1979.

³¹ For more information on this topic, see the last chapter of Bruno Latour, *La Science en action. Introduction à la sociologie des sciences*, Folio-Essais, Gallimard, Paris, 1995 (second edition).

numerous agents produced by the sciences and technologies³²? Without them, capitalization would be nothing more than an idle word: indeed, it would be impossible either to uproot anyone from their community for a certain amount of time or to associate this same person, through the abyss of space and time, to remote groups. Even God, who has been so often considered as the patron saint and the boss of capitalization, would have no hold on either uprootedness or attachment. This being so, it seems ever more pressing to do extensive research into the history of science, technology, and metrology, which is the only type of scholarship that will provide us with the practical means to explain, on the one hand, the breaking down of the local and, on the other hand, to replace the illusion of a world market by a series of power networks which are entirely traceable and assignable.

If the history of the social sciences is indispensable to understanding how the formatting of capitalism is at all possible, only the history of the exact sciences allows us to understand how such a formatting becomes real. What deforms the paradigm of the gift—thereby causing the local anamorphosis described above—is a particular configuration of the sciences and the technologies; and the adjective particular is of great importance here because, as we should explain later on, the sciences and the technologies are not necessarily absent from the formatting regime of the gift. By bringing science and technology back into the picture, we shall see a series of continuities, associations, and networks in place of the series of breaks and discontinuities that both the enemies and the supporters of liberalism perceive. We shall also find a way out of the following false alternative: to either accept the universal laws of liberalism that reign without dispute and that cannot be opposed without the accusation of irrationality; or to subscribe to a form of anti-capitalism which, built upon a dubious exoticism, allows us both to admire the world market and to abhor it—in both instances without risk, because we are not responsible for either its expansion or its—more than improbable—overthrow. Indeed, by conceptualizing capitalism as network of assignable ties, it becomes possible to shift the terms of the debate and to begin to think about the cutting of such ties.

What would be appropriate conduct with regard to capitalism?

Now that our hypothesis is outlined, what can be done against capitalism? First of all, one should not believe in it. Capitalism, in the singular, is nothing more than the formatting of all of the interactions under the unique and singular reign “of” capitalism. Yes, capitalism is our only horizon but, happily for us, it does not exist! Thus, the first rule of method, of politics and almost of morals, is the following categorical imperative: nothing in your actions, your thoughts, or your research should further the unification of capitalism or its existence as the only mechanism of its own development. This rule should allow us to get rid of a good number of liberal assertions as well as of Marxism’s pernicious fascination with capitalism, the monster that was to be “dialectically” overthrown and annihilated—the ruins of such a folly are still among us. The old beaver must have gotten lost in the underground tunnels, because it is still lying, crushed, under the rubble!

Second, one should respect the economists’ work instead of endlessly complaining about their incapacity to make predictions and to calculate. A passionate attention to the performative dimension of economics should replace the vain denunciation of its limits. Of course, economics has its limits. Indeed, it is to impose limitations, to add up calculations, and to internalize

³² See the beautiful examples put forward by Daniel R. Headrick in *The Tentacles of Progress. Technology Transfer in the Age of Imperialism, 1850-1940*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1988; *The Invisible Weapon: Telecommunications and International Politics, 1851-1945*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1992.

exchanges that economics exist. It is the general economization of all the interactions that becomes the monster whose extension, means, and quasi-laboratories need to be tracked, whose difficulties need to be emphasized, whose controversies need to be encouraged. Economy is not the foundation of the world, the foundation of humanity, the foundation of exchange, but rather, the surface—a shining, gleaming surface. Far from closing up the horizon by means of universal, unrivalled, unbeatable laws, economy, more than any other social science, can be turned around—in fact, economy was made to be turned around, not to be imitated—as sociologists of the social [du social] think—or to be opposed—as anti-utilitarians surmise.

The third rule of action can be derived from our own reasoning: capitalism does not exist as a set, but rather as the set of a complement. Should we add to capitalism the externalities that it produces, it ceases to exist as capitalization, as appropriation, as profit. It even ceases to radically differ from its pre-capitalist past and, understandably enough, from its non-capitalist future. As the set of a complement, capitalism has no past, no present, and no future. Let us be clear on this, capitalism certainly has countless effects, but the fact of the matter is that capitalism seeks not to describe these effects in its own sphere. The question, then, becomes: how is one to consider both the set and its complement? That is, how is one to take charge of the externalities?

Obviously, the economy cannot be expected to absorb all of the externalities. As it has been noted already, such a demand would be tantamount to asking to economics to abandon its main goal—the creation of calculable and governable spaces through the production of internalities. Economy can nibble bit by bit what exceeds it, but without being forced. At any rate, what cannot take charge of the externalities is a sociology of *embeddedness* that would substitute the idolatry of capital for the idolatry of social relations and of institutional frameworks. By enveloping the economic world—in its strict sense—with an economic world in a diffuse sense, the sociologists of the social believe to be going in the right direction but, in doing so, they miss the incommensurable difference that divides the internalities from the externalities. Their denunciation of the Machiavelic calculations, the maneuvers, the power asymmetries, and the conflicts of interest does not fit an imaginary economy in a real society, but rather, annihilates the externalities by making the social world a simple Bantustan of economics. Because of this kind of sociology, sociology has become—at least in some of its quarters—a sort of economy without calculation, a huge pre-formatting operation of market transactions. Such an endeavor, as will be later explained, is not totally without interest. At any rate, it is not the only possibility.

Thus, the question remains: how is one to take charge of the externalities incessantly produced by the formatting machines of the social sciences? The answer, here as elsewhere, consists in shifting one's position, in entering the logic of the formatting regime of the gift that aims at making proliferate the associations, at producing *entanglement*. As countless examples from anthropological economy show, the formatting regimes of the gift do not distinguish between what enters the finite exchange and what is indefinite and incommensurable with the exchange, but rather, trace the mobilization of people and things so that there is no end to it, so that the parties never call it quits. By emphasizing the ties, by insisting on the existence of relations, by producing a memory of associations that is always ready to pop up at the moment of the transaction, the tracing operations of anthropological economy make both the past and that which is distant present. Following the lead of anthropological economy, both the hard sciences and technology might be mobilized to produce traces and to emphasize ties but without necessarily allowing the calculation, the adding up of relations and exchanges. Thus the hard sciences and technology make possible, at the same time, both the coexistence of and the

disjunction between the regime of the gift and the regime of capital³³. All of these mechanisms, by establishing the exteriority of both regimes and by organizing and making compatible the different formatting investments, become the practical answer to the theoretical question at the beginning of this paragraph. Both the adding up and the proliferation of the associations are at play. But the adding up operations are not seen as a mutilating reduction of reality, just as the overflow is not the remainder of the lost paradise. While the adding up operations allow calculating and effective action, the entanglement makes the social body present.

The eventual coordination of the formatting operations leads to a better appreciation of both regimes. The virtue of the market is, precisely, that which makes it criticizable in the eyes of the anti-utilitarians: that is, allowing for calculations to take place, facilitating the expression of particular, divergent interests, and multiplying transactions that allow the parties to call it quits. In this context, the market is like a highly efficient machine that multiplies use values and that makes decentralized plans and the mobilization of resources compatible. In contrast, the virtue of the gift is to net social ties by manufacturing attachments, by reinvigorating and extending the associations. If both formatting regimes are taken together, the question of the social is resolved. The market exchange individualizes, internalizes, manufactures, and separates calculating, interested agencies which, once the transaction is completed, call it quits; the gift, in contrast, makes the associations proliferate, unerringly linking together a series of existences. Both hot and cold elements are necessary to the social machinery, and it is the task of politics to adjust this delicate Carnot Cycle. And here, politics should not be mistaken for the authorities or the government, given that the State is as superficial and as formatted as the market itself.

Such a hypothesis allows us to move away from the calamitous opposition between “the market” and “the State.” Politics is not a sphere that should be added to the economic sphere—or that, on the contrary, should be wiped away so that the “market forces” are “liberated.” Politics pop up wherever an agent takes the floor to make the associations proliferate: “We all exist and your existence mingles with ours. Don’t try to escape, too many ties link us.” The recent truck driver’s strike was a case in point: there are thousand ways to make ourselves present outside of the exchange of equivalents, to interrupt the production of internalities so that entanglement is increased, and to avoid that the parties call it quits. The angry truck drivers were not asking for compensation, they were weaving under our noses the social web in which we are caught with them, thereby demanding that the fragile and provisional balance between the commercial formatting regime and the formatting regime of disinterestedness be reconsidered.

In a similar vein, when Bernard Barataud, the president of the AFM [French Society Against Myopathies], arbitrates between the public agencies, the financial resources coming from collective fund-raising events, and the private investments of the industry in order to decide the allocation of resources to either basic research or the purchase and development of prostheses for the sick, he engages in a most fundamental political task; namely, that of reaching a balance between, and establishing the complementarities of, the different formatting regimes. This task, in its turn, presupposes endless research about the benefactor’s motivations, their preferences,

³³ As in the case of the Telethon, a two-faced Janus of sorts. On the side of the viewer and the benefactor, the grand total indicator visually displays the proliferation of associations, the ever-growing complexification of entanglement that shows up in every television take; on the side of the AFM, the grand total indicator allows for a series of capitalization and internalisation operations that will increase research funding, further the construction of industrial programs and contracts, and clear the path to a market economy. What is at stake is a calculation that is in between rational action (I give in order to eradicate the illness) and disinterestedness (I give in order to become more attached), between efficacy and generosity, instrumentality and expressivity.

and their take on the role of public generosity—whether and why it can and must take the place of the State or the investments of powerful industrial companies.

While no social science can take charge of the externalities without participating, sooner or later, in their inscription and internalization, political life can. What is at stake is not the paralysis of politics by the economic sphere, but rather, a superficial formatting of the interactions that discards an indefinite mass of associations as externalities. As such, these externalities constitute, so to speak, an always available, ready to be mobilized reserve army capable of complicating—or rather, of implicating—the economy at any moment. Mobilized by politics, the externalities do not come back in the guise of competing interests but rather as strangers that want to become close, as unexpected consequences that demand to be expected, accepted, and included. In this context, the modest contribution of the social sciences to the formatting of disinterestedness might be to allow certain actors—by multiplying the traces and indexes that are not susceptible to capitalization—to make incalculable the consequences of a capitalism that is constantly expanding its centers of calculation. But with the condition, of course, that they get rid of their accountant-like morality—that is, their obsessive calculation of the forces at stake doubled by their moral indignation against all forms of calculation.