

## Limits of the Gift: Exploring Interaction in Antiquarian Bookshops

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### Abstract

This article is based on an ongoing organisational ethnography of antiquarian bookshops. It argues that studying the exchange of antiquarian books offers new insight on the phenomenon of gift-giving. First, the general tendency in the literature on gifts (i.e. Bourdieu and Derrida) is how gifts are commoditized, while in the antiquarian bookshop it makes more sense to consider how commodities are transformed into gifts. Second, the literature on gifts argues that actual gifts are either impossible or at least undecidable since they cause the receiver to be indebted to the giver, and a separation in time is necessary either to evaluate the gift or to make it possible. However, in the antiquarian bookshop this situation is different since such a debt is directed towards the book rather than the giver. The receiver is indeed indebted but the debt takes the form of a responsibility to care for the book. In analysing our material, we argue that every meeting between antiquarian and bookshop visitor results in liminal ceremonies that produce a space (what we, adopted from Lefebvre, call a representational space) for their interaction. Such analysis suggests that the interactions are taking place somewhere on a continuum of spaces stretching from commodity to gift. The role of the antiquarian thus stretches from seller to giver, the visitor, from buyer to receiver, and the bookshop, from shop to collection.

### Introduction

*One day a man walked into my shop, he was dressed in suit and tie. I immediately recognized him as one of my favourite customers, no big spender, but with a taste in fiction close to my own, and always with a kind word. In his early seventies - a retired physician - he was normally accompanied by his wife, but today he was on his own, and I straight away noticed that something was wrong; the man didn't look well, far from it!*

*Normally a very discreet man, only discussing literature, he now started talking about his childhood. There was something desperate about the way he spoke, like he needed to share these memories, and was pressed for time. While I listened to his anecdotes, I realised that I would never see him again!*

*When he finished, he smiled - I think he felt a little embarrassed - then he nodded, and bid me farewell. When he left I noticed that he used a cane. Sure enough, two weeks later, this quiet man was dead - cancer of the lungs! His wife - now a widow - called me, and wanted me to go through his books, and I agreed.*

*This happened more than five years ago, but I can still remember that day, when I went through his books - many of them bought in my shop - a very sad day!*

This short story was written by an antiquarian that we met while doing ethnography on antiquarian bookshops. We quickly found the conduct of their owners and visitors to defy the conventional logic of business. Interactions that would elsewhere be straightforward and businesslike here often failed to make sense. We wondered why and found an answer in the conception of antiquarian bookshops as sites of what van Gennep (1909/1960) called *rite de passage*, and more specifically transitional rites or liminal rites, as developed by Turner (1974). Our analysis suggests that the activities in such places are situated on a continuum from shop to collection. The role of the antiquarian thus stretches from seller to giver, the visitor, from buyer to receiver, and the book, from commodity to gift. For this transformation to happen, there must be a connection between the three (the book, the antiquarian and the visitor). This connection is created through ceremonies.

To see this, we must augment Turner's liminal ceremonies with Lefebvre's work on space (1974/1991). The notions of 'spatial practises' and 'representations of space' capture in a very general sense what takes place in the liminal ceremonies. Lefebvre would call the outcome of these liminal ceremonies 'representational space' and we use these three concepts to analyse the space of the antiquarian bookshop as something that is both lived and created.

From an anthropological perspective (e.g. Malinowski, 1920, Mauss, 1925 and later Levi-Strauss, 1958), gift-giving is a form of exchange that to some extent operates outside a regular product-monetary exchange. Bourdieu (1997) emphasises time as the crucial factor in perceiving a gift as a gift and argues that for something to be a gift the acts of giving and receiving must be forgotten. Derrida (1992) agrees in principle with this need for forgetting but explores further giving as a paradox. The acts of giving and receiving are fluid and it is impossible to know whether the gift will be nullified by a return gift of equal or greater value at some future time. Gifts are therefore according to Derrida always necessarily undecidable. The undecidability and in-betweenness of gift-giving have been explored by other researchers, but normally as a feature of historical or so-called primitive societies (e.g. Malinowski, 1920, Mauss, 1925 and later Levi-Strauss, 1958), rather than as an integral part of contemporary life. Due to this empirical orientation, those analyses focus on gift-giving and stress the possible commoditization of gifts as a means of including them into an economic model. We will on the other hand demonstrate that commodities can be morphed into gifts as well. That is, in the case of antiquarian bookshops, a commodity (a book) can be completely or partially transformed into a gift.

Our thesis in this paper is that it is the production of certain spaces that makes gift-giving possible (or impossible) in antiquarian bookshops, not a separation in time as argued by Bourdieu and Derrida in more traditional cases of gift-giving. Through this transformation, a responsibility (debt) is transferred to the receiver, but the responsibility is to the object rather than the giver. The undecidability and possibility of gift-giving are in this case collectively constructed in each encounter, rather than evaluated by the actions and intentions in retrospection. Thus, the antiquarian seeks an answer to the question of whether the customer will be capable and willing to care for the book while the customer seeks an answer to questions of what will be required for the antiquarian to relinquish control of the object.

### **Field account: The antiquarian bookshop**

We started our fieldwork with observations complemented with interviews, a rather classical design for organisational ethnography (e.g. Kostera, 2007). Our experiences during the fieldwork made us widen the search for narratives, such as public stories (e.g. web pages), personal stories (interviews), and we also started to collect fictive stories – stories written by the antiquarians themselves – like the story introducing this paper. Based on the method of narrative collage (Kostera, 2005), we wrote the first sentence, and then we asked the antiquarians to finalize the story.

Following Czarniawska (2004), we believe that narratives represent not only events but also modes of knowledge. Thus, they are means not only of description and communication but also manifestations of the enactment of social life. The antiquarians have repeatedly emphasised the importance of spending time and being part of the everyday life "as an antiquarian bookshop has an atmosphere that can be felt". In the spirit of that account, the antiquarian bookshop that the reader is about to spend some time in is a fictional one, made up as an amalgam of the antiquarian bookshops that are part of our ongoing organisational ethnography. All the described events have happened, and all the quotes are taken from interviews, web pages, newspaper articles, and other kind of texts that we have collected during the study. The section is written as if we were walking around in the antiquarian bookshop together. We will point out things that we find particularly interesting; we will observe interactions between the antiquarian and his visitors; read newspaper articles; we will tell you a few anecdotes from our study; and we will

also ask the antiquarian a few questions. It is our intention that some of these manifestations of an antiquarian bookshop will be experienced through the story.

Before we go into the antiquarian bookshop, we pause outside for a while in order to look at the books in the shop-window. It is our understanding, however, that experienced visitors don't bother to do this before they enter an antiquarian bookshop as they already know what they are looking for (and they certainly won't find it in the shop window), but we will start here nevertheless. At a first glance it seems unorganized does it not? You find a little bit of everything, without any particular order or hierarchy. But lean closer to the window, look at each volume – what do you see? Often, as is also the case here, you discover that the window is mirroring the present-day – these days often TV-shows. Look, there are books on gardening, climate change, home styling, and, of course, some Ian Flemming and a couple of (well known and fairly light) classics. As an antiquarian bookshop is, almost without exception, specialised in one or two fields, those might be represented as well. It's not really necessary though – collectors know very well which bookshop to go to, they are often part of networks and circulation lists of various kinds, and the antiquarians also recommend each other to their visitors.

Without further ado, let's go inside. Antiquarian bookshops usually have several sections that are separated from each other; most of them also have several small rooms. Even if the premise where the antiquarian bookshop is housed only offers one physical room, the place will be structured in such a way, making use of bookshelves and other material, that several spaces are created and, not the least, experienced. Some of the spaces are public, some private, and some are somewhere in-between. There will also be several hidden or secret spaces that not all visitors can get access to.

In our antiquarian bookshop, the outer room, located closest to the street and thus the entrance, is looked after diligently. From the door you see the counter straight ahead. Walking towards it, you have factual literature on display (i.e. what this antiquarian is specialised on) on your right side, and there's only one row of books there. On your left side, you find some fiction (i.e. books to read) and you can see several rows behind it. Before we walk up to the counter, however, and meet the antiquarian himself (yes, we have so far in this study only met male ones) – we will linger in this first room with its several sections somewhat more.

We turn left, passing alongside the window and walk to the last row of books. From here we can work our way, row by row, until we hit the counter again. Here we find philosophy and, to our surprise, when we turn into a new row, an impressive collection of children's literature. Don't move too fast! Take the time to read the small signs that can be found all over the shop, on the bookshelves, on the walls or any other free space. Here's one that is informing the visitors that mobile phones should kindly not be used; the next one is about the current movements in the "city-struggle"; and further down the aisle there are also a few intriguing newspaper articles regarding second-hand bookshops. Look at this one; it's a piece on how antiquarians describe themselves online. The web page is where the antiquarian communicates to other antiquarians and book collectors. Because, as said, the shop-window is meant for costumers that buy books to read, and not intended for book collectors looking for a certain item. This orientation actually shows in the text presented on the web pages of various antiquarian bookshops. They differ from the shop windows by stressing books as collector items as well as the professional skill of the antiquarians. The Ian Flemming books from the shop window are nowhere to be seen. Consider the following quotes:

*It was a lovely shop! High ceiling and jammed with books all the way up to the gypsum stucco. The counter was covered of bundles of books, primarily recalled or limited editions, and in one side of the counter there were a place for cover paper and straps, i.e. pre-modern plastic bag.*

*Being involved with books is for us a profession as well as a hobby.*

*I would like to describe the Antiquarian bookshop as a typical Swedish antiquarian book shop; a well organized shop with a wide and varied range. There is a lot of Swedish topography, and the shelves with the finest selection are behind the counter. After pondering around among the shelves most of visitors should be able to find something suitable. The prices are not that discouraging. The enthusiast can most likely find a bargain or two within their specific domain.*

Let's move on to a better position in order to observe a few interactions between the antiquarian and his visitors, but don't miss the poster, on the bookshelf over there, closer to the counter, all the antiquarian bookshops of the town are listed there. And on the counter you should find folders with addresses and special areas of the antiquarians in the network. If you can't find it, ask him, it's there somewhere, perhaps he has forgotten to refill it, that's all. But let's stay here, behind the shelf for a while, or perhaps, if you find that more appealing, move on to the section of books on history. You see, when we entered the shop two middle-aged men entered together with us, and they have been lingering in the first, or outer, room, just like us. One of them now asks the shop manager if he has a book by Strindberg that he has been looking for. He does, and the man buys it. A short while

later, the other customer first walks towards the inner room then suddenly leaves the shop without talking to the antiquarian, who looks a bit annoyed.

Now an old man enters the shop. Let's have a look at the section with Swedish poetry while they talk. The antiquarian says "I brought the book for you" and leaves the shop through the main entrance. The man stands next to the counter desk, waiting, impatiently. The antiquarian returns with a large book in his hand but, even before the antiquarian has closed the door, the man says "no, it's not the one" with disappointment in his voice. They talk for almost 20 minutes about the book that the man is looking for. It turns out that when the man was young a journalist interviewed him, and the interview appears in the book – a book about the local town. He has never seen the final result and has now been looking for the book for 20 years. After long consultations, the antiquarian takes some notes and the man leaves.

An elderly woman enters the shop; she goes straight to the counter with three books in her hand (they must be from the book boxes standing outside the shop). Listen! She tries to haggle over the price (three for the price of two, she says), but she has no luck - the antiquarian is adamant. She tries once more, gives up, decides to buy two books, and leaves the shop. A bit annoyed. And so is the antiquarian.

As she leaves, an old man enters, with two books in his hands. The antiquarian says to him: "just one of these is 5 SEK. The other one is 20 SEK, so perhaps you would prefer to choose another one". Without any more words he offers the man his chair, reaches after a pile of post cards that he keeps under the counter, and gives them to the old man who is now seated in the chair. The man sits down on the chair and starts to study the postcards very carefully.

Apart from the old man studying post cards, the shop is empty. This is our chance to ask a few questions. We have been here many times before, and he knows why we are here today. That's the reason why we have been able to sneak about here for so long without any interaction with him. He likes that we are here, observing. Through our observations we have gotten to know the story of the old man who is studying post cards over there. He comes in almost every day, he looks briefly at the books, often in the book boxes outside, and then he tries to buy one or two. His main interest is not books, however; he is a collector of post cards. Especially post cards with railroad station houses from Sweden. In his hands right now he has a few newly arrived ones, but he probably won't find anything new today either. It gives him pleasure to go through them, and that's what this is mostly about anyway – spending some time in the bookshop. Since the antiquarian knows that he does not have a lot of money, he tries to help him a bit with what he buys. Most days the man just buys a book for the pleasure of carrying it home, and the antiquarian figures that in those cases it might as well be one from the book box, since they are just 5 SEK apiece.

Let's think about the book boxes and the woman who tried to haggle over the price. Prices are normally something to be negotiated, but not for the books in the boxes outside. The costumers like book boxes because of the sense of 'searching for lost treasures' as the antiquarian would say. In order to make the costumers take the step from the book box to the shelves, he tries to have something interesting there all the time. Mainly, however, he puts books there that do not really belong in an antiquarian bookshop or books that have been difficult to sell. This 'may-fly literature' often comes as part of the package when the antiquarian buys book collections from relatives to deceased persons. Those books wear him out and he takes a loss on them regardless. He used to procure all the books he was offered but nowadays he is more selective, even if it saddens him to turn the hopeful relatives away when they bring the books of their loved ones. He often emphasises that an antiquarian has to be very cautious regarding the quality of the books he offers; there cannot be any tarnished or worn down books, every tome is selected carefully because of its general character and finish. This extends also to some degree into the content of the books. He often speaks of "love for the book", and we should let him explain what that is:

*It is the passion and love..... it is.... You have to be... Okay, that [points towards a shelf with modern literature] I don't like. But I think.... Well, love is perhaps not the right word. But look [he picks up a old volume from a shelf] I think this book is wonderful to hold in my hand. You have to love... I like to hold this. Beautiful books like this you see [hands the book to us], it is from 1801, it is in Spanish. Perhaps love is not the right word. But I am fascinated by the books. It is the knowledge that the books keep. And the image you get when you read them. You can't get that from anything else. That is fascinating. You can tell me something, but that is not preserved. But in a book it is. You can open it again and again. If you tell me something I might forget it. But a book doesn't.*

He turns and looks at the books that he keeps behind the counter, and continues:

*Once, when I had invited my colleague [another antiquarian] to my house, he offered me a large amount of money for three of my bookshelves. It was enough money to buy a really nice car. He said 'you will have the money on your account on Monday morning'. But I just laughed at him. I mean, he*

*was serious, he wanted that collection. But I said no. That is how much I love books: I love my books more than money.*

During our conversation, a woman has entered the shop, and she walks up to the old man who is looking at the postcards. He has been here for over 20 minutes by now. "It's time to go" she says. The woman is a care taker; here to take the man home. The old man gives the antiquarian 5 SEK for the book he brought in from the book box and then he leaves together with the woman.

A man in working attire enters the bookshop as they leave. The antiquarian greets him quite loudly, they exchange some phrases about the every day life in a small town; an estate – rather spectacular we understand – has been sold, and another neighbour has started a renovation project which – according the two men – seems to be a bit out of their league. Then the man dodges in behind a shelf and we will not hear from him again for over an hour.

A man enters, perhaps 35 years old. He greets the antiquarian, quietly asks him something, then disappears into the inner room. Let's follow him there. You know, we have been here for almost an hour now, and he's the first one to go there.

In the inner room, the rows of shelves stretch from floor to ceiling and are considerably dustier than in the first room. Here we find specialised subjects, like this column – with Spanish linguistics, or look at the one to your left – with biology, gardening, plants generally and a few odd books on organisms. Or here, why not these old and yellowish books on book collection and book care taking. When we reach the deepest reaches of the shop, dusty old tomes, wrecked books and piles of yellowing whitepapers on homemade bookshelves from floor to roof surround us. It is silent – not even the man we followed in here reaches this far during his 30 minutes in here – the books are semi-ordered and give a rather haphazard impression, there are also some old catalogues and even some pieces of broken furniture. The innermost corner is separated from the rest of the room by a broom, an old and tarnished leather band and the remains of a broken reading chair. Despite this, the secluded space is clearly different, primarily through being considerably messier. Let's dwell here for a while, absorbing the atmosphere of tranquillity in this dusty room where no other clients will venture during our observation.

Now an old man enters – let's see what he wants. He asks, cautiously but with anticipation, for a bibliography on a local poet. "I look for NN. I have been at the NN-house and you have a street named NN-street. So if I am to find this book somewhere, I thought it had to be in this city." The antiquarian answers: "I know which book you mean but I do not have it." The old man counters, now with disappointment in his eyes: "You could only find it in second-hand bookshops?" and the manager answers: "Yes". The old man can do nothing but leave the shop as the antiquarian glares after him.

The man we followed to the inner room appears again. He goes straight to the counter with a book in his hand. Keyed up, holding the book in front of the antiquarian, he excitedly starts to talk about the book – the book was his favourite book as a child – and then leaves the book on the counter while asking for some other books. The antiquarian makes some notes, because he does not have them at the moment, but he will do his best to find them for him. The antiquarian asks where the man is from and what his profession is, and tells him that he is welcome back any time. The man leaves the shop without buying anything.

Now the man in working attire appears behind the shelves, his arms are jammed with books about aquariums – he tells the antiquarian that he is about to start one. The antiquarian says that he has some newly arrived books that should complement the man's book collection on gardening, but the man answers "not today", pays for the books on aquariums, leaves and then an elderly man with a plastic bag full of empty bottles enters the shop. He quickly moves around the shop and then exits, without interacting with anybody.

Before we leave, let's ask the antiquarian about why he became an antiquarian and about his relationship to books. "Wait", says the antiquarian, with his eyes on an older well-dressed man that has just entered the shop. "This is one of my favourite costumers," he whispers, "he is a genuine and knowledgeable book collector and he comes to the shop at least two times a week." The antiquarian returns a greeting, leaving his position behind the counter and starts to show the man some new books. Then he leaves him to his own searches and walks back to us:

*Yes, I spent a lot of time in Paris in 67, 68 and 69, the important years there, and I had a strong interest in film and during that time literature on directors, film and such was very scarce. So it started with private collecting. And then I came into contact with some people who would meet and barter books with each other. Suddenly one had doubles as the own book collection was growing. Because I was a librarian, there was no Internet in those days, colleagues from other libraries asked me: could not you, who are an antiquarian, acquire a certain book. And thus one became more and more of a link and this caused the dilemma that since the buyer was a library, they required an invoice – creating a need to have a business. ... And then I really had to make a choice, what am I entering? One had heard a lot about bookkeeping and everything and that was not what I wanted to do. It was the books, I wanted to mediate books. It was not like if I experienced any wish to start a company. It was on the contrary very*

*problematic, I am a man of the sixties and, I finished school in the sixties, you know, the border between the private and the public and as a librarian I belonged to the public then, the public sector and you know the businessmen, how lowly they stood. So it took me many, many years to get over that.*

Apart from the books – to mediate books, as he puts it himself – the people receiving the books are important:

*Then there are all the people that come to me. All different kinds of people that I meet. That is amazing. Sometimes in the car, in the morning, I ponder over ‘will someone come today’ and ‘what will happen today’. You never know who you will meet. In this business extraordinary things happens all the time. Just in one day. I have always liked to meet people. I think that is one of the great joys in life to be able to do that. To see each other to meet people. I would not be able to go on of it were not for all good relations I have.*

This might seem a little bit weird, since we have seen that he does not always pay attention to every visitor, and some of them even seem to bother him with their presence. One gets the impression, in any case, that the seller/buyer relation is somewhat unique in this case, especially when the interaction is a positive one, since the transaction is held together by the common interest of the parties. It not so much about ‘finding’ customers as it is about finding solutions that will make possible the transfer that is actually wished for by both parties. As an example, the first time we were here, the antiquarian did several things to get to know us, or to test our interest in books. While the antiquarian was talking to a customer, we found an interesting bookshelf, and we started to study the books a bit more carefully. Suddenly the antiquarian, who had apparently been following our movements said, “It’s going to be interesting to see what books you choose, there are a few books there I’m really found of.”

We selected a few books and brought them to him. He picked up one book, looked at us for a while and then he showed us a few books that he kept under the counter. He explained that he had brought these books from his home, they were for a customer that collects books for his son, but if we wanted to, and if we would find any of the books interesting, we could choose some of them. He then went over them, one by one, pointed out the publication year, or something else that was particularly interesting for him, while he asked us questions about the author, about a few concepts in the books and the like. At the end of the day we had six books that we wanted to buy: three from his private collection, two non-fiction books from the bookshelves and a trilogy from a classic Finnish author. He looked a bit worried, picking up the books, one by one, talking for himself (or to the books), saying things like “what do we have here”; “what shall we do with this” and so forth, and then he looked at us and said a price that is less than half the price of what the books are altogether, and he said “what do you think, can we live with this”.

This is enough for today, let’s leave the antiquarian to his business. The man who the antiquarian has a lot of respect for, wants his attention. He has found a book of fairy tales. A first edition. He pays and then, after exchanging some more pleasantries, he leaves the shop. So do we.

## **The liminal space of the gift**

The literature on the concept of gift is extensive. It stretches from some of the seminal works of anthropology e.g. Malinowski (1920), Mauss (1925), Levi-Strauss (1958); over sociologists like Bourdieu; to philosophers like Derrida.

Inspired by observations on traditional loans of livestock by Kabyl peasants, where the lender felt an obligation to the borrower because the later cared for the animal during the loan, Bourdieu (2005) argues that the basis of our economic model is in essence an ahistorical vision of singular exchanges. Continuing to explore this responsibility, as West (1996) points out, a bond was created between the giver and the receiver: “although the recipient becomes responsible for his own obligations, there is no corresponding loss of responsibility on the part of the giver. If anything, the giver becomes still more implicated in the predicament of the receiver” (West, 1996, p. 11), indicated a collective responsibility for the object, incomprehensible from a purely economic point of view. Bourdieu (2000) investigated gift-giving as a part of a more general social system, which facilitated the accumulation of symbolic rather than financial capital, and the creation of long-term resilient relationships.

Such relationships were already a feature of the Kula-system that Malinowski (1920) described based on his observations during fieldwork in the Trobriand Archipelago. This system of interlinked ceremonial exchanges “based primarily upon the circulation of two articles of high value, but of no real use” (Malinowski, 1920, p. 97) co-existed with a parallel system of barter that in turn was based on the social relations formed by the Kula-system.

Based on Malinowski’s findings, Mauss (1925) and Levi-Strauss (1958) turned the gift into a part of a structural model by analysing notions of circular exchanges. For Mauss (1925) gifts could only be understood by treating together the object given and the social relations regulating giving, receiving and repaying while Lévi-Strauss (1958) by treating expectations of counter-gifts as a general dimension of communication expanded the scope of such reciprocal structural models. In order to distinguish the gift from such calculable exchange models of the economy, Bourdieu added irregularity into the system. He introduced the

perspective of time in gift-giving. As Ssorin-Chaikov (2006, p. 362) puts it, what is important is “the time when it is neither too early nor too late to reciprocate”. That is, the period of time between the gift and counter-gift makes it possible to deny the self-interest, and perceive the gift as free, i.e. a gift, where no reciprocity is expected.

Derrida (1992) does not accept such temporal asymmetry and instead emphasises the debt a gift creates, which, according to Derrida, lingers until it is negated by a counter gift: “Even though all the anthropologies, indeed the metaphysics of the gift have, *quite rightly and justifiably*, treated *together*, as a system, the gift and the debt, the gift and the cycle of restitution, the gift and the loan, the gift and credit, the gift and the counter gift” (Derrida, 1992:13, italics as in original). To explore this further Derrida (1992) accepts this argument as a description of a position within a general structural system but develops the position by arguing that for a gift to really be a gift, it needs to never be reimbursed. Something given within the framework of gifts and counter gifts would therefore be poisonous, since it implies the unspoken expectation of reimbursement at a future point in time. This expectation is unspoken, however, and this is what causes the undecidability. It has therefore been argued that “Derrida positions responsibility not in the space of certitude that one has done the right thing or known which path to take, but instead responsibility involves undecidability” (Jones, 2007, p. 526).

Common for these scholars are that they tend to understand gifts by incorporating them into a commercial framework, where something is exchanged for something else or by challenging the very separation of the social economy from the financial economy.

The literature on Gifts is, of course, widely known and studied in the areas of anthropology, sociology and business administration. While for example Derrida’s discussion on gift and responsibility has been used to problematise for example business ethics (Jones, 2003), others have tried to explain what they call ‘gift economies’ e.g. a system of free bicycles (Nelson, Rademacher, & Paek, 2007); or to explain the importance of personal networks and exchange (Sjöstrand, 2008); or to discuss ‘free’ and ‘open, in e.g. ‘high tech gift economies’ (Shumarova and Swatman, 2007) or software sharing communities online (Rehn, 2004); or to environmental studies, such as exchange models for sustainability (Coates and Leahy, 2006); or to academic production (as altruistic) (Rehn, 2004 and Martínez-Alemána, 2007). Most of them are applying the notion of gift economy metaphorically, as pointed out by Rehn (2004). Such studies propose gift economy as being an alternative to market economy, or they make use gift economy to account for uneconomical or irrational elements in the market. If at all, the temporality is discussed in terms of a separation between gift and counter-gift, and the objects given and received are seldom objects or even something that is owned by any individual. Rehn (2004) touches on responsibility to the result rather than the developers in software development and discusses virtuality and interaction. Although it is not his focus and therefore not something elaborated on, Rehn (2004) observes a spatial conceptualisation adopted from Baudrillard.

In the case of antiquarian bookshops we have observed a commodity that seemingly is completely or partially transformed into a gift. As in Bourdieu’s and Derrida’s analysis, this is not always clearly the case; the situation is ambiguous. It is not, however, due to a separation in time, but rather due what we understand as the liminal space of the gift; it stretches from commodity to gift, and the responsibility that the object evokes.

Van Gennep (1909) introduced liminality in his work on the structure and classification of social ceremonies, *rites de passage*. To a great extent this classification concerned life-altering situations such as birth, betrothal, marriage, pregnancy, childbirth, funerals. But Van Gennep also tried to understand and classify more mundane situations, where the economical or intellectual spheres were not enough to explain the interaction. He thus differs between the profane (economical and/or intellectual) and the sacred (symbolic and/or cultural). Three rites constituted a *rites de passage* consisting of the preliminal rite of separation, the liminal rite of transition and the postliminal rite of incorporation. Further, for Van Gennep, a “passage from one social position to another is identified with a *territorial passage*” (Van Gennep, p. 192, italics as in original), in semi-civilized tribes this often meant literary a boarder or certain place.

Liminality as a conception of its own has since then been adopted in many ways, not the least by Turner (1974), who defines liminality as “the midpoint of transition in a status-sequence between two positions” (Turner, 1974, p. 237). In Turner’s early work this meant the analysis of temporal rituals or ceremonies, where the rituals are unspecific and with uncertain outcomes, and in his later work to analyse groups of people, communities, such as hippies and monastery life (Turner 1974).

We use liminality to analyse the spatial dimension of the gift, stretching from commodity to gift. Further, the transformations taking place during the liminal ceremonies are considered as collective phenomena in which the visitor, the antiquarian and the book(s) create an understanding of their meeting. Thus we need a conceptual apparatus that can serve as analytical tool for the construction and outcome of this liminality.

Since Lefebvre (1974/1991) introduced his ideas regarding the importance of social space, separating social space and the physical world is becoming increasingly popular. Social space is not neutral; rather it is shaped from power relations and social strife, which is trying to bend it. Space is thus used in the model as a concept encompassing more than the physical world. Rather space is something that is simultaneously socially produced and socially productive: “Through the adaptation of the physical

world, the social and cultural worlds have also come into being. ... The spaces and places around us construct us as we construct them” (Dale & Burrell, 2008, p. 1). There are sets of perceptions that guide our understanding of and interaction with our surroundings.

Although Hernes (2004) introduced Lefebvre to organization studies years ago, we have chosen to adopt Lefebvre directly. We describe processes of formation using Lefebvre’s conceptual apparatus of Spatial Practises, Representation of Space and Representational Space, while Hernes model encompasses notions of physical, social and mental space and therefore goes somewhat beyond the scope of this article.

The first two concepts, Spatial Practises and Representation of Space, are involved in deciding the outcome of the transformation, as the spatial practises regards the participant’s mode of competence regarding how to handle the interaction (the perceived) and representation of space regards the participant’s mode of conceptualising their interaction (the conceived). The Representational Space is the concept used to describe the pattern of interaction in which visitor and antiquarian ends up after and during the transformation (the lived), as the representational space is the mode of directly living space through the symbols and images connected to such space.

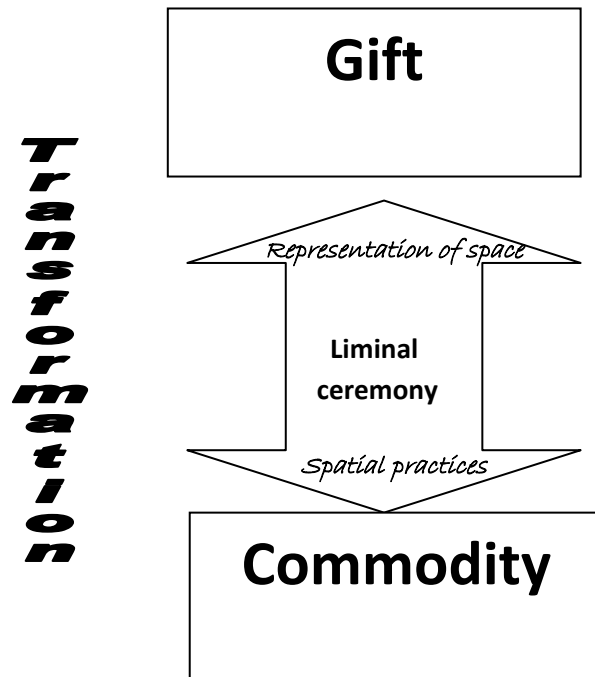
### Interaction in antiquarian bookshops: model and its analysis

The empirical difficulties to pinpoint and separate gifts and commodities have been described by among others Bourdieu and Derrida, and that has been our starting point for the analysis. However, in our case, we have a reversed situation. We have a business practice that cannot be understood from conventional business logic. That is, we are trying to understand seller-buyer relationships, rather than giver-receiver relationships, where a commodity seemingly can be transformed into a gift. In sum, in each instance of interaction, the exchange of antiquarian books can be understood differently. An antiquarian bookshop can be perceived as anything between a shop (where seller offers commodities to a buyer) and a collection (where a giver offers a gift to a receiver).

We have created the model below to illustrate how our concepts are interlinked and to describe the continuum along which the interaction in the antiquarian bookshop takes place. Using examples of transformations resulting in four different representational spaces, we will below offer empirical illustrations of the model.

In the first case a visitor picks up three books in the book box outside the antiquarian bookshop and enters the shop with them in order to haggle over the price of the books. This spatial practise implies representing the space of the antiquarian bookstore as a place for bargaining over cheap books and suits badly with what the antiquarian would prefer it to be. Thus, in the trisection of the cheap books, the antiquarian and the haggling visitor the outcome of the liminal ceremony becomes an interaction between buyer and seller focused on the books as commodities. The representational space caused by this transformation is one with minimal understanding and interaction between antiquarian and visitor.

### *Representational Space*



**Figure 1:** Liminal space of the gift

Thus, what kind of relationship you get with the antiquarian depends to a large extent on which books you express interest in. This interest can be expressed by a visitor by using spatial practises like for instance talking to the antiquarian about books,



moving through the antiquarian bookshop in specific way or sometimes even by simply touching the books. In a simplified sense, you express through spatial practises and the demonstrated representation of the space of the bookshop whether you for instance consider yourself moving through a shop or among a collection.

When an elderly man enters the bookshop somewhat later and buys a similar cheap book from the book box, without haggling, and sits down to study some postcards it amounts to a totally different encounter. The antiquarian knows the elderly man and believes that he becomes happy when buying books. Therefore, even though the antiquarian himself doesn't hold much respect for the cheap books, through his manifested joy of buying books the elderly man demonstrates a different spatial practise compared to the previous visitor. Furthermore, since the man is also a collector of postcards the antiquarian considers him to be part of a different representation of the bookshop space. The elderly man is even prevented from buying a more expensive book by the antiquarian who in this way offers a kind of gift in ensuring that the man, as a receiver, saves his money for possible collector items.

The book boxes are there for the costumers to touch, and to start searching for a book worth buying – but really, they are there to get people to search for real treasures among the shelves. Therefore, to the antiquarian there is a fundamental difference between the haggling visitor and the elderly man. On the surface, they acted in the same way; they were searching for treasures in the book box, found something they liked, and entered the shop. However, the woman just wanted to buy the books – and she had no further interest in the antiquarian or the antiquarian bookshop. The man on the other hand, could go through the book box without eliciting anger from the owner, since he cared for the books; it was the best part of the day for the old man (the owner imagined) and this gave them a special relation. Also, he was a real collector of something, real treasures, which is really the reason he is there – his passion for post cards (especially of railroad station houses).

The liminal ceremony results in very different transformations and thus in very different representational spaces. The elderly man passed through a threshold in the system that makes him something more than a mere bargain hunter; he's after real treasures, treasures that includes the antiquarian as guide, companion or owner/holder of these treasures.

It is like the case of the man we followed into the inner room. He entered the bookshop and almost immediately disappeared into the inner rooms. We were intrigued by this and cautiously moved in the same direction to check on his movements and actions. As we did this, another visitor entered the bookshop and walked up to the counter to inquire about a certain book on a poet. The antiquarian answers negatively and gives no further information. Then the first visitor returns with a book and talks with the antiquarian about it for a while before he asks about another book. In this case the antiquarian takes some notes and apparently seems intent on keeping a lookout for this title. Again, the second visitor was there to buy a certain commodity and in the interaction with the antiquarian this ceremony resulted in a transformation, opening a representational space oriented towards buying and selling. The first visitor on the other hand behaves as a collector, meandering around the collection. Thus, when the spatial practises of the visitor are confronted with the antiquarian's understanding of how space is represented a representational space very different from the previous one is brought about by the meeting.

We believe that these examples demonstrate how the perceived special features of the book are guiding the interaction or ceremonies taking place in the antiquarian bookshop. Much like the objects exchanged in the Kula system described by Malinowski (1920), the books are considered valuable despite not being intended for any real use. Furthermore, when considering the books only as useful objects (for reading) it seems as if the bookshop visitor actually depreciates their value in the eyes of the antiquarian. It is only when visitor and antiquarian consider each other as parts of the same system of book collectors that their interaction becomes aimed at something more than a mere transaction. The visitor below who on a certain occasion refuses to buy some books on gardening further illustrates this.

In the third case, a visitor that apparently knows the antiquarian enters the shop and they exchange gossip for a while. He then disappears among the bookshelves and upon his return to the desk he brings with him a number of books on aquariums. At this point the antiquarian offers to show him some new books on gardening that might develop his collection but the man blankly refuses to see them. Thus, in this case the man was normally a collector of books and the antiquarian treats him as such. He has been thinking about this collector and not only assembled a number of books that ought to be interesting for him but also kept them hidden beneath the counter. In this way demonstrating the spatial practise and representation of space that was connected to a representational space where they were both collectors, simultaneously giving and receiving in their exchange. In this case however, this liminal ceremony breaks down as the visitor is there looking to buy commodities (books on aquarium). The transformation therefore blurs and breaks down as the collector on this specific day experience only the shop.

The fourth example is from our own experience. Upon approaching the counter, having wandered around in the antiquarian bookshop for a while and in some cases even being asked by the antiquarian to pick out some books, it sometimes happens that the antiquarian decides to show some books that were actually put away for other customers. When we buy these and/or some other books, the antiquarian then starts haggling with himself, reducing the price with as much as 50 %. In the meeting between the antiquarian's and our own representations of space as well as spatial practises, a transformation positioning our interaction

somewhere between the collector type and the shop type of interaction takes place. In a way it could be argued that the antiquarian actually gives away half of the books at hand. However, as the following analysis will demonstrate, the situation is a bit more complicated than that.

### The exchange of antiquarian books: responsibility and debt

In antiquarian bookshops, it seems, the exchange can be considered as partially or potentially a give/receive situation as well as a buy/sell situation, with the consequence that we have a situation where commodities sometimes can morph into something that can be understood as gifts. In this section, drawing upon our conceptual understanding on gifts together with our experiences in the antiquarian bookshops, we argue that the exchange of antiquarian books might contain an added dimension compared to our general understanding of gifts.

It could be argued, as Derrida (1992) does, that gifts contain a poisonous dimension since they imply a temporary asymmetry that places the receiver in debt. In the case of antiquarian books the representational space resulting from the exchange is however affected by the existence of the book as a distinct third element. There are situations when the customer must qualify himself to be allowed to buy and receive a certain book, since buying it is not enough. In such a situation, there is of course an exchange of money for object but antiquarians tend to offer very generous terms of payment if need be. Regardless, the customer (the receiver) receives the object and would thereby be exposed to its poisonous nature since she is supposedly indebted to the antiquarian (the giver). Even if this might to some extent be the case, the special dimension in this case is that the debt is transferred from the giver to the object. Upon having proved oneself worthy and receiving the book, the debt that the receiver in a gift situation ought to feel towards the giver is moved to the book. The receiver in this case accepts an obligation and expectation to take care of the object, which has been succeeded by the previous holder.

In the logic and terminology of Mauss (1925) it can be argued that the three obligations of a gift, to give, to receive and to repay are realigned since the obligations to give and receive are played out between giver and receiver while the obligation to repay are in this case transferred to the object.

In the model we have illustrated (figure 2) this situation in which a gift is received and how this gift causes the debt owed to the object by the holder to be moved to the receiver. Thus the receiver's debt to the giver is at least to some extent negated by the transference of the debt owed to the object by the giver. We have tried to show this situation in the model below, which describe how the visitor, the book and the antiquarian interact in a liminal ceremony that gives rise to a giver/receiver situation.

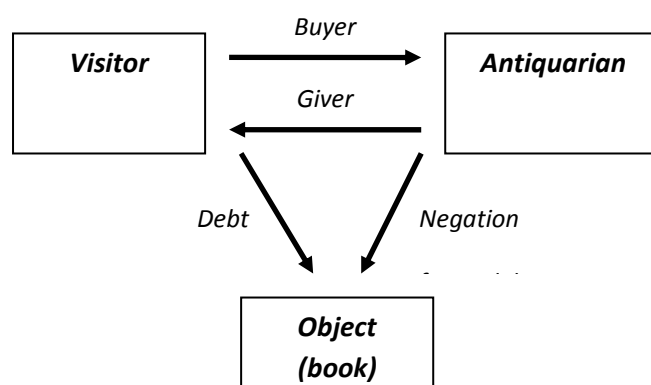
The negation of the own debt of the antiquarian refers to the circumstance that he accepted a debt (responsibility) for the object (book) when he received it. In the Kula trade described by Malinowski (1920), there is a requirement for the receiver to care for the symbolic object but also to subsequently move it along to someone else. There is a difference in the case of antiquarian books, since the receiver is more or less supposed to have lifelong possession of and responsibility for the book. This is apparent in the antiquarian's story ending with him reclaiming the objects (books) once succeeded to the other collector and thereby reversing the flow in the sense that he was buying and simultaneously recouping again the debt in the form of the responsibility for them. The chain of collection is broken and the books retraced to the previous owner and thus in one sense all the previous successions were for naught. Further, our experiences where the antiquarians start haggling with themselves further illustrate this. The antiquarian feels confident that we will care for the books, even the ones put away under the counter, and is therefore willing to sell them. He reduces the price, however, since the exchange is not only between buyer and seller but also one between giver and receiver. We receive the books but we are also indebted in return. Not to the antiquarian as Bourdieu or Derrida would suggest but rather to the object itself. In receiving the book(s) we also accept the responsibility for them. We get a discount but also a lingering debt to the object that we received.

### Conclusion

The short story that introduced our paper is written by an antiquarian. We asked him to write a story (fictional or real) informed by everyday life in an antiquarian bookshop. When we gave him the starting line he immediately questioned the use of the word shop: "This is an antiquarian bookshop", he said, "more than just a shop".

Already this story demonstrates many of the findings we have presented in this article. There are motives for the actions of both visitors and antiquarians that transcend those of traditional roles of buyer and seller. This is not always the case however, but rather a very specific outcome when what we

**Figure 2:** The exchange of antiquarian books: responsibility and debt



inspired by Lefebvre call the spatial practises and the representations of space coincide and allow for the creation of another space that encompasses both visitor and antiquarian. In this representational space, the lived experiences of the visitor, the antiquarian, and the book together form the foundation for a co-creation of common space. Instead of seller and customer, the participants becomes collectors and the exchange of books are complicated by an added dimension of gifts. In our analysis it is the construction of such space that makes giving and receiving possible, rather than a separation in time, that is crucial for Bourdieu's (2000) analysis of gift-giving.

The second part of our analysis suggests that this gift is not poisonous in the sense proposed by Derrida (1992) and to some extent Bourdieu (2005) in that the receiver is indebted to the giver. This is not to imply that no debt emanates from the gift. The receiver is still indebted but the debt is due to the object (book) rather than the giver (antiquarian). The debt is transformed to a responsibility to care for the book since it would not be given unless the giver believed the receiver capable of handling such a responsibility. It may even be that the giver is indebted in the same sense since the book was once succeeded to him and that the transition of the book is also a succession of debt and responsibility. Just like the antiquarian describes in his story, indeed a very sad day!

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