Theorising the Gift through Visual Culture

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This thesis is presented for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy of Murdoch University 2004
I declare that this thesis is my own account of my research.

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ABSTRACT

This thesis examines the relationship of the gift and its resistances to meaning. The ambiguous and unstable meaning attributed to the gift is examined via critical theory, particularly within the methodology of Derridean analysis. Derridean deconstruction operates as an analytic process that mirrors certain features of the gift and these features are utilised to investigate the visual in terms of the gift as a system of giftness, hence an economy of exchange. Giftness is claimed to function as a sliding quality of meaning that contributes to the instability of discursive exchange with respect to the gift. Selected Foucauldian and Kristevan concepts are employed to devise a typology of gifts and discursive practices in terms of the image. The spatio-cultural qualities of giftness are discussed; certain gifts creating forms of resistance and disruption through disguising representations. Such disruption operates within a type of space that can be seen as socio-culturally defined and played out through various textual orders.

The relationship between subjectivity and the gift is questioned from a psychoanalytical viewpoint. It contemplates the interpersonal qualities between pleasure, play and the gift as circumstances of exchange in subjectivity, also looking at how pleasure and play operate in terms of the subject and the gift. Finally, the analytic situation of transference and countertransference is read as a discourse of the gift relationship and a form of gift exchange (between analyst and analysand as giver and receiver).
Introduction: On Giftness

1. Situating the Gift
   1.1 *Point de capiton*
   1.2 *Glissement* as giftness
   1.3 Interpretation and Identification: Polysemy

2. The Parasitology of the Gift and The Force of Spectres
   2.1 Parasitology/Virology
   2.2 The Torment of Internal Drifting: Terrorism, Confinement and the Gift
   2.3 At the Limit
   2.4 On the Double
   2.5 The Gift, the Spectre and the Mirror

3. Relationships of Investment: Power and Gift
   3.1 Subject Exchange and Investment in Visual Culture
   3.2 Bodies and Gifts: Analysis of power relations through investment

4. Discursive Practices, the Subject and the Gift
   4.1 Semiotics and the gift
   4.2 Positionalities within discourse
   4.3 Enunciating the gift

5. Disruption & Space: Locating the gift
   5.1 Disruptive Space
5.2 Carnivalesque Space
5.3 Liminal Space
5.4 Utopic Space

6. Pleasure and play: Object, Transition, Subject, & Gift
6.1 On Pleasure
6.2 Communication and play: Bateson
6.3 Abstraction
6.4 The Frame
6.5 Paradox and Repetition

7. Transference and Countertransference: A discourse of the gift
7.1 Transference, Countertransference, Dora
7.2 Transference as gift
7.3 The circular ambiguity
7.4 The Impossible Possible, the Possible Impossible

Conclusion: On Giftness

Bibliography