

## **WORKSHOP 4: CALCULABILITY, RECIPROCITY AND ETHICS 11.15-13.00**

**Antina Von Schnitzler**

Columbia, email: [acv31@columbia.edu](mailto:acv31@columbia.edu)

### **Measuring Life: Technology and the Production of Calculability in Soweto**

Since the first general elections in 1994, the post-apartheid state has been faced by widespread non-payment of service charges in townships, often interpreted as a "culture of non-payment" stemming from the anti-apartheid "rent boycotts" in the 1980s. After the spectacular failure of a campaign to encourage payment for services and in a context of neoliberal reforms prescribing "cost recovery", many municipalities resorted to the large-scale deployment of prepaid meters, devices that self-disconnect households following non-payment. This paper focuses on Operation Gcin'amanzi (Zulu for "Save Water"), a controversial large-scale project initiated by the recently corporatized utility Johannesburg Water to install prepaid water meters in all Soweto households. Taking this project and the protests against it as a point of departure, I trace the history of prepayment technology in South Africa from its initial development as a punitive and depoliticizing device by apartheid era engineers during the rent boycotts to its present deployment in the context of neoliberal reforms. While the apartheid origins remain inscribed in the technology, in the post-apartheid period the prepaid meter has been re-rationalized as a pedagogical device "aiding" residents to calculate and economize their consumption behavior. I show how the installation of prepaid water meters transformed conceptions of water and its consumption. Most centrally, it entailed creation of what Michel Callon has called "spaces of calculability", forcing especially poor Soweto residents to subject their daily consumption practices to a constant metrological scrutiny. I conclude by suggesting that the history of prepayment is emblematic of the larger problematic of citizenship in a context of post-apartheid neoliberal reforms: While inclusion in and connection to the state become contingent upon the successful performance of an ethic that fuses civic duty and entrepreneurial comportment, the neoliberal aspiration to bring into being calculative citizens licences the recourse to decidedly illiberal political techniques.

**Gregers Petersen**

Copenhagen Business School, email: [gp.ioa@cbs.dk](mailto:gp.ioa@cbs.dk)

### **Circulating property. Free software as inalienable object and the reality of giving-while-keeping.**

Circulating property. Free software as inalienable object and the reality of giving-while-keeping. We seem to be living in a world which thrives on alienating objects - the process of objectifying and detaching from its original owner. The commodification of cultural products is an essential foundation block of capitalist economy. This paper will explore how the circulation of free software - as a particular form of property - equals resistance to, and a rethinking of, present economic relations. Free software is developed and distributed under a copyleft license, of which the most common is GPL. Software licensed under GPL is characterized by both securing individual copyright (as original author) and the right to free re-distribution, to change and use it in accordance with the text of the license. Free software is hence both individually owned and

circulating freely, and it is not possible to "buy" it . This raises lines of questions; then is it possible to alienate free software from its owner, and if not how does this influence exchange relations and the economical thinking of the market? Free software is given away, it's transacted, exchanged and in constant circulation. But, it is never alienated from its owner. This is a clash with the notion of calculative agency, based on the objectification of cultural products, as the distinguishing trait of the market. A clash of robust resistance which points towards a post-capitalist economy. It is the intention of this paper to weave the inalienable together with resistance and trace the lines into an emerging economic reality. The background is an ongoing fieldwork which explores ownership and property relations in the boundary location between a free software project and commercial companies.

### **Andres Dapuez**

Johns Hopkins University, email: dapuez@jhu.edu

#### **The turbulences of the present**

Even if the current use "reciprocity" can mean almost anything (Graeber 2001: 217), what certainly signals, in the context of most ethnographic accounts, is a timeless metaphysic of sociality expressed by a timely repayment (Bourdieu 1990). Reciprocity has been devised by Kant as an abstract relationship in a canceled time. In this paper I will address Kant's signature on Malinowski's teachings (Parry 1986) on reciprocity. Secondly, my suggestion to avoid reducing reciprocity as an "urban ideology" (Weiner 1992: 29) will be to attend more carefully to the turbulences of temporalities each reciprocal act implies. In looking for a fluid mechanics for such turbulences, I will return to Mauss (1925) understanding *The Gift* as a sociological approach to the norm or reciprocity or relation (Allen 2000: 92). Therefore, contra the last interpretations of reciprocity as an "interested" phenomenon (Bourdieu 1990, 1997; Derrida 1992, 1996; Marion 1997, 2001), Mauss' conclusions suggest that actual and different forms of reciprocity will reappear not only in the academic discourse but to reshape sociality because what it is really impossible is to affirm a pure-present-tense temporality. Otherwise exposed, only if a pure-present-time is impossible, only if any present-time itself implies a loop of tenses, Maussian notion of reciprocity reemerge as a common source of normativity (Caillé 2002). In Mauss words, the "morality of former times", alive among ourselves as "survivals", will return in the "near future" in the form of a system of total prestations. Or, otherwise, do we think we can we keep "our" present and "our" near future unaffected from past and future acts of reciprocity?

### **Helen Busby**

ISS, University of Nottingham, email: Helen.Busby@nottingham.ac.uk

#### **The contested values, promises and ethics of commercial cord blood banking- and their implications for thinking about 'the bioeconomy'**

Human tissues and cells are an essential resource for both biotechnologies and biomedicine. This paper will explore the conjuncture of the promissory dynamic that many consider to be at the heart of the biotech industry, with the terrain of tissue banking that is traditionally associated with considerations of public health and common good. The case of private cord blood banking is an example of attempts to capitalise on the desire for autologous tissue products, where the patients own cells would be used

for therapeutic application. Commercial cord banks have been active in Europe since 1997. They advertise to parents the possibility of storing umbilical cord blood privately, immediately after the birth of a child, in the hope that the stem cells derived from these tissues might be used by the child themselves or for another member of the family. Stem cells derived from cord blood have established uses in transplant medicine, and hopes for their future novel applications are high. Notions of ethics feature centrally in the marketing, consuming and regulation of this commercial activity. The paper will discuss the contested values, promises and ethics of cord banking, and will draw on two aspects of ongoing empirical research. Firstly, an exploration of the moral and social positions that parents in the UK draw on and enact when they 'bank' cord blood with various organisations-public, private and 'in between. Secondly, an analysis of the websites of private cord banks: these feature promissory statements, along with references to preliminary research, and to the possibility of 'breakthroughs' in the science and clinical applications of these cells. The paper will conclude by beginning to consider the implications of these various engagements with the ethics and promises of cord banking for more formal economic analyses of the 'the bioeconomy'.