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## **A terrible beauty is burned: gifts, sacrifice and community in Northern Ireland**

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**A Terrible Beauty is Burned: Gifts, Sacrifice and Community  
in Northern Ireland**

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## A Terrible Beauty is Burned: Gifts, Sacrifice and Community in Northern Ireland

### Abstract

Sacrifice, integral to gift giving, remains unexplored and undertheorized in marketing. We address this shortfall by analyzing the dynamics of sacrifice and theorizing how it serves as an engine of the gift chimney. Our ethnographic investigation of public ceremonial gift giving in sectarian Northern Ireland describes and interprets the complex nature of the gift. We show that sacrifice is a plausible mechanism of the gift chimney and that the co-occurrence of monadic, dyadic, and systemic giving in the same ritual acts as an accelerant. Sacrifice propels circulation of the gift, creating a social bond between antagonists whose ethos of mutuality depends upon ritualized reciprocal recognition of entangled loss. We analyze how public ceremonial gift giving induces sectarian communities to risk convocation, enabling them to exorcize trauma sustained at one another's hands and to build a platform for future cross-community cohesion in a context of ineffective institutional efforts.

### Keywords

gift; sacrifice; art; community; sectarianism

In the weeks surrounding the vernal equinox of 2015, an elaborate temple was constructed in the Northern Irish city of Derry-Londonderry (hereafter DL) by an American artist directing a local team of volunteers. Once its frame was erected, visitors inscribed artifacts and personal messages conveying thoughts, emotions, and intentions around trauma sustained in their experience of the city. These gifts became objects of contemplation for locals and others during a week of visitation that drew tens of thousands of pilgrims across a volatile sectarian divide. At week's end, the gift-laden temple was burned to the ground in a moving public ceremony. The residue of the fire was plowed under, leaving no physical trace of the event. Only the memory of its experience lives with participants.

Community cohesion drives reciprocity, which in turn reinforces community cohesion (Arnould 2018; Belk 1979; Malinowski 1922; Mauss 1990; Sahlins 2017; Sherry 1983). While

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3 gifts emanate from individuals' desire to maintain social solidarity, they may also be used to  
4 initiate it. By engaging the sacrificial heart of the gift, sectarian donors and recipients in DL  
5 were able to build cross-community relationships. We analyze the dynamics of this effort by  
6 exploring how place is sacralized, draws pilgrims into its orbit, and dematerializes to produce  
7 embodied effects.  
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### 17 THE ARGUMENT

19 Mauss (1925/1990) wrote a novel essay on the relation between gifting, reciprocity, and  
20 social structure. While groundbreaking, it focuses primarily on the “agonistic” gift (Mauss  
21 1925/1990, 7) whose exchange perpetuates a debt “whirlpool” (Godelier 2002, 27) of potentially  
22 endless status seeking. We redress this imbalance by investigating non-agonistic gift giving,  
23 virtually ignored by Mauss (Godelier 2002, 25). Non-agonistic gifting assumes the shape of a  
24 gift “chimney” (Harvey 2002, p.1) that functions as a temporary status leveler. Our ethnographic  
25 investigation reveals how non-agonistic giving is motivated by sacrifice, which gives the  
26 “postmodern potlatch” its distinctive character. Like Mauss, we present our inquiry in an essay  
27 format that encourages creating cognate treatments of a complex cultural ritual.  
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40 We explore sacrifice in the context of a temple structure gifted to the communities of  
41 sectarian Northern Ireland. We find that sacrifice is a critical element of gift giving, serving as  
42 the engine to unleash a continuing cycle of in-kind circulations. Consumer research into gift  
43 giving has been conducted almost exclusively in established communities with a tradition of  
44 social continuity. In our field context, two Northern Irish communities have lived side by side for  
45 hundreds of years in an often violent state of segregation approaching apartheid, but have in the  
46 past two decades adopted a consociational relationship to mitigate hostilities. Attempts at social  
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3 integration are fraught with ethno-cultural resistance, and few vernacular institutions promote  
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5 cross-community cohesion.  
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8 Ceremonial gifting—"public reciprocal recognition mediated by goods given" (Hénaff  
9  
10 2010, 114)— draws disputative communities together in common cause, enabling them to form a  
11  
12 collective "cross-community" from the embers of trauma. In contemporary society, the "demand  
13  
14 for and offer of *reciprocal recognition*" characteristic of ceremonial gift giving has been  
15  
16 displaced by "public recognition accorded each person by law," but neither "civil membership"  
17  
18 nor "economic interdependence" encourages people to "recognize the other *as a person*." This  
19  
20 suggests that premodern forms of gift giving will endure to acknowledge the "priceless dignity of  
21  
22 the human being" (Hénaff 2010, 397). Postmodern variations of premodern ritual may be  
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24 especially attractive to societies riven by sectarian strife.  
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### 28 **CONSUMER RESEARCH ON SACRIFICE**

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31 Consumer research into sacrifice suggests contours without thorough analysis. In an early  
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33 conceptual piece, Sherry (1983, 165) theorized that "a comprehensive perspective requires that  
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35 gift giving be interpreted in the context of behaviors in which it is embedded." Later (Sherry  
36  
37 1996), he identified sacrifice as such a context and urged consideration of such gifts as grace  
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39 (incorporeal) and sacrifice (corporeal). Belk maintained that sacrifice was a component of the  
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41 "perfect" (Belk 1996) or "true" gift (Belk and Coon 1993), though he did not explore its  
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43 dynamics. Belk, Wallendorf and Sherry (1989) recognized sacrifice as a property of the sacred  
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45 and gift giving as a sacralizing ritual process, but did not explore the intersection of sacrifice and  
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47 gift. Sherry (2005) also inquired into the sacred/sacrifice interface in his revision of liminality  
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49 theory, but did not broach the topic of the gift. Bonsu and Belk (2003) paralleled sacrifice with  
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51 how Ghanaian death ritual consumption was employed by bereaved relatives to increase their  
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3 social standing, but did not theorize the comparison. Bradford and Sherry (2017) described the  
4 sacrificial destruction and consumption of rival mascots in the context of collegiate tailgating  
5 rites, but neither interpreted them within a gift giving framework.  
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10 Miller (1989) leveraged Bataille to theorize shopping as a devotional ritual driven by  
11 sacrifice. Thrift is construed not merely as a husbanding of resources, but as a “devotional gift to  
12 the future” (102), a deferment or economizing whose fruits are consumed in the sacrifice of  
13 shopping to provide loved ones with pleasing, edifying goods. In this study of provisioning,  
14 Miller provides a compelling analysis of the practice of love. Nonetheless, his emphasis on the  
15 sublimated violence and habitual manifestation of sacrifice in the private realm differs from our  
16 focus on the extraordinary character of contemporary ceremonial sacrificial gift giving.  
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26 Several studies presage our proposed contribution. Sherry and Kozinets (2003; 2007)  
27 observed that Burning Man Temple participants were purified and renewed in their sacrificial  
28 engagement and articulated Harvey’s (2002) notion of a gift chimney, but left the mechanism of  
29 the chimney underspecified. Bradford and Boyd (2018) proposed categories of sacrifice and  
30 explored mechanisms and interactions in the context of live organ donation. While they  
31 emphasized the typologizing of gifts and practices animating private, person-to-person gifts, our  
32 study focuses on the sacralizing process that infuses public ceremonial gifting and facilitates the  
33 transformation of personal grief to communal reconciliation. Notably, Bradford (2020) has  
34 reaffirmed the relationship of sacrifice to community. We expand on these studies to provide an  
35 analysis of sacrificial gift giving that emphasizes the cultural significance of ritual action and  
36 refinement of ritual mechanism.  
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## 51 **THEORIZING SACRIFICE AND THE GIFT**

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3 Gifts are “contested constructions of social transactions” that “provide powerful  
4 metaphors for reconceptualizing relationships and identities” (Algazi 2003, 4; 24). For us, as for  
5 Godbout (1998, 214), the gift “is always a story.” Moore (2011, 24) observes that the “concept of  
6 the gift has both anthropological and phenomenological lineages.” Social scientists have adopted  
7 a largely empirical approach to gift giving, while philosophers have developed their inquiry  
8 largely from phenomenology. These approaches have led to differing insights, including that the  
9 gift may not exist at all or that its promise may be unrealizable. Theorists (e.g. Deleuze and  
10 Guattari 2004) have thus referred to “actual” and “virtual” gifts in reckoning discrepant insights  
11 (Moore 2011, 75).  
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24 There is a second distinctive categorization of gift giving: economic and aneconomic. We  
25 seek to hybridize some of their underlying intuitions. Most gift studies conducted by consumer  
26 researchers have been of an anthropological-economic type, with the exception of some CCT  
27 work that might be considered phenomenological and economic in character. Most philosophical  
28 inquiry has been phenomenological and aneconomic in nature. Our essay addresses this deficit  
29 by exploring anthropological and aneconomic gift giving, stressing the criticality of sacrifice to a  
30 gift’s essence. Even in imagining “the impossibility of the capture of the gift in actuality,  
31 sacrifice...enables the gift to live on beyond any instantiation thereof; what enables the eternal  
32 return of its promise” (Moore, 2011, 29).  
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45 The gift has several sacrificial components. The first is nominal, reflecting the cost of  
46 acquisition to the donor. There may be financial sacrifice, represented by the gift’s purchase  
47 price. There may be physical sacrifice of the labor value invested in its making if the gift is  
48 created rather than bought. There is emotional sacrifice in the imbuing of the gift with the  
49 donor’s spirit. The second sacrificial component of the gift entails its surrender by the donor.  
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3 This is the actual giving of the gift, an offering to a recipient by a donor who has alienated the  
4 gift from himself to place it in circulation. A gift's third sacrificial component concerns the  
5 donor's and recipient's motivations to collaborate. On a manifest level, they regulate their dyadic  
6 relationship. On a latent level, they maintain the gift "economy" system in which they are  
7 embedded and from which a flow of indirect, diffuse, or asymmetrical countergifts—and,  
8 ultimately, a measure of social cohesion—is expected. Donor and recipient sacrifice effort to  
9 sustain the system. This system (and society) may be a surrogate for a supernatural recipient.  
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20 As a gift-giving mechanism, sacrifice requires transformation of a material offering  
21 before a donor can transmit it to an extra-human recipient. Transformation is achieved in many  
22 ways, such as removal of the object from the profane world and investing it with the essence of  
23 the donor, or in the actual giving, when the object is physically alienated from the donor. Further,  
24 a sacrifice can destroy what it consecrates (Flood 2013, 120). This is exemplified by the Temple  
25 project, where the gift is destroyed by its transformation from artifact to energy/essence in the  
26 burning.  
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36 In Christian tradition, "the transformation of goods and persons is achieved by the  
37 practice of the gift," which is imbued with sacrifice (S.-Christen 2013, 276; 279). This  
38 transformation symbolizes "the need and the potential of the world to be remade in likeness of  
39 the divine" (Zachhuber and Meszaros 2013, 5), a notion that recalls how a deity can be replaced  
40 by a secular recipient who has been exalted through sacrifice. For Žižek (2001, 56), "sacrifice is  
41 a 'gift of reconciliation' to the Other . . ."  
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50 Mauss's belief that giving and receiving form the basis of civil society resolves to this  
51 formative principle: "[t]he gift of each person is himself, and each received in turn the other  
52 members of the whole" (Geary, 2003, 139). Arnould (2018, 46) identifies the "basic idea" behind  
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3 Mauss's gift theorizing as "things have motivational force." Meshel (2013, 567) maintains that  
4 the "relation between form and meaning remains one of the mysteries of sacrifice." We explore  
5 the motivational force and meaning of transmogrified materiality below.  
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10 In our sectarian context, "the... loss of communal cohesion... indicated by the receding  
11 willingness of individuals to give up something precious...for the good of the group" is a widely  
12 recognized social problem. As one small corrective, the Temple project challenged participants  
13 to consider that the "willingness to sacrifice" may correlate with "the integration of the  
14 individual into a larger social whole" (Zachhuber 2013, 13). At least three forms of sacrifice  
15 occurred at the Temple: a gift of something valued and enjoyed, a self-sacrifice of experiences  
16 and values closely held by the donor, and life-dedication in the form of an activist pledge of  
17 service to a higher calling (Frazier 2013, 110-113). We illustrate these forms throughout our  
18 account.  
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### 30 **SACRIFICE AS AN ENGINE OF THE GIFT CHIMNEY**

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33 Harvey (2002) articulated the concept of a gift chimney to account for the kind of  
34 "postmodern potlach" behavior evident in temporary autonomous zones (Bey 2011; Kozinets  
35 2002) that triggers a cascade of gift giving, resulting in the creation and maintenance of a sense  
36 of community. Harvey (2002, p. 1) describes the gift as a nexus of the bonding and bridging of  
37 social capital, the former morphing into the latter when "collaborative acts of social expression  
38 are given to a civic world." This morphing creates a "social convection current" he calls a  
39 "chimney," which grows more "transcendent" as the gift grows larger. "Giving to a greater gift"  
40 beyond the social dyad causes the process to accelerate and social connections to multiply.  
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51 According to Harvey, one becomes the gift by participating in the sacrificial rite. Thus, "[i]t is  
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3 *the gift as it consumes you, not as you consume it that matters* (2002, p. 1). The mechanics of  
4  
5 this process have not been fully theorized.  
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## 10 CULTURAL CONTEXT OF THE TEMPLE

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13 In Northern Ireland, each ethno-national community (Protestant unionist / Catholic  
14 nationalist) feels it inhabits a space where it competes with the other for cultural survival.  
15 Emblematic of the violent struggle that has prevailed for over 500 years is the prolonged conflict,  
16 termed the “Troubles” (roughly 1968-1998), that left over 3,500 dead. The Good Friday  
17 Agreement of 1998 presaged an uneasy ceasefire, but hostility remains. While physical violence  
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19 has decreased, symbolic violence runs rampant.  
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28 Exclusionary ‘no-go’ areas and segregated neighborhoods are norms the Temple  
29 challenged. Up until opening day, residents doubted anyone would visit, alleging each group  
30 would not transgress the other’s boundaries (Harvey 2017, 303). And yet, the spirit of the gift  
31 requires that “everyone must place something of himself at *risk outside of his own place*, and  
32 receive something from others *within his own space*,” thereby achieving an extension of selves  
33 into the “core” of others (Hénaff 2010, 127).  
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42 The legacy of violence is mirrored in high rates of anti-depressant use, social deprivation,  
43 emigration, and communal malaise (Gregory et al., (2013). DL is plagued with massive  
44 unemployment, high rates of alcoholism and mental illness, and a distressing incidence of  
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46 suicide (Tomlinson (2006, 2012). Northern Ireland is a mass-medicated society.  
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52 The Northern Irish government has undertaken initiatives to promote cross-community  
53 collaboration—notably, the decommissioning of bellicose sectarian art and a repurposing of  
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4 public aesthetics to bridge the divide in the “post-conflict” era (Downey and Sherry 2014;  
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6 Edwards and McGrattan 2010; Mulholland 2002; Nic Craith 2003). Creative producer Artichoke,  
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8 a London charity, assisted by Kickstarter gifts, brought renowned artist David Best to DL. Best’s  
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10 Burning Man ties and neutrality as an “outsider” helped bridge the sectarian divide (Harvey  
11  
12 2017, 320). 60,000 people visited the Temple over seven days, adorning it with messages before  
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14 the entire installation was burned.  
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We began interviews in November 2014 with the artist and event organizers to orient ourselves to the project and intentions of its principals. We monitored developments via social media and press coverage during the early stages of organization and construction. One researcher was on site on the last day of the building phase (March 2015) to observe and conduct interviews with the artist, organizers, Temple Crew, security, community leaders, and other volunteers.

During the week the Temple was accessible to the public, researchers inhabited the site, employing participant observation, ethnographic interviews, photography, and videography to document the cultural dimensions of the milieu and visitor experience. Additional ethnographic work was undertaken off-site with other community stakeholders, and intercept interviews were conducted to gauge awareness of the event among the local public. We monitored social media and press coverage throughout the week of the installation’s public existence and burning. We remained on site the day after the burn to document the immediate aftermath of the event and then relied on press coverage, social media, and interviews with informants to glean some early consequences of the event on peoples’ lives.

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3 While our nine days of ethnographic immersion were bookended by interviews and  
4 archival work, we also conducted follow-up interviews a year later to obtain a longer term  
5 perspective. At the time of this writing, seven years have elapsed since the actual burn, and we  
6 continue to monitor media and conduct occasional follow-up interviews to stay apprised of social  
7 conditions relevant to the Temple's aftermath.  
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15 Researchers worked primarily as solitary ethnographers on-site to minimize their impact  
16 on participants' experience, but conferred regularly on the event's periphery in a way that helped  
17 shape the emergent research design (Miles and Huberman 1984). Off-site work with community  
18 stakeholders and other consumers was frequently conducted as a dyad where the presence of  
19 several researchers was deemed less intrusive. Our sampling frame included observations and  
20 interviews with all collaborating constituencies. We also interviewed non-attendees. We sampled  
21 through the week by maximum variation, critical case, snowball, typical case, intensity,  
22 politically important case, criterion, opportunistic, and convenience styles (Miles and Huberman  
23 1984). Because of the event's ephemeral nature, intensive field immersion was required to  
24 ensure comprehensive coverage, rendering participant observation especially important. All of  
25 our description is drawn from field notes. In all, we conducted several hundred interviews  
26 ranging from quick intercepts to leisurely conversations to more structured sessions off-site.  
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28 Because of the event's brief duration, the iterative tacking between library and field that  
29 characterizes longer term ethnographic consumer research projects (Belk et al. 1989) was  
30 truncated.  
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50 Data sharing and strategizing occurred before and after each day's field immersion. Each  
51 researcher had prior knowledge of Northern Ireland's public art, and one had investigated  
52 previous Temple burns at the Burning Man festival. One researcher, a Northern Ireland native,  
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3 facilitated access to informants and aided interpretation. One of us is Protestant and the other  
4 Catholic, which helped us probe across the sectarian divide. Though this may have hindered  
5 some interactions, our nonlocal identities mitigated the issue.  
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10 Constant comparison guided data analysis. We followed conventional  
11 open/axial/selective coding procedures (Strauss and Corbin 1998) to identify meaningful themes.  
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13 Post-field analysis incorporated negotiation between the authors where material seemed  
14 especially polyvalent (Sherry 2006). Authors met regularly for post-field analysis, which  
15 included hermeneutic engagement with data and part-to-whole tacking that generated grounded  
16 insight. Follow-up interviews in the post-field phase were conducted with earlier participants and  
17 newly recruited informants.  
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### 26 **GIFT CIRCUITS IN THE TEMPLE: CHIMNEY DYNAMICS**

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29 David Best's gift of the temple project to the DL communities was a catalyzing event that  
30 unleashed a series of in-kind circulations. We identify these progressive circulations as the  
31 *construction* of the offering, the *convection* sparked by energized participants, the *connection*  
32 engendered in the installation's engagement, and the *conjunction* of communities the event  
33 enabled.  
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#### 42 *Construction: Cocreating the Event*

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44 Best's vision of engaging local youth to cocreate the gift of a temple was achieved by a  
45 high level of cross-community involvement, as evidenced by the intricate frieze panels created in  
46 the DL Nerve Center's FabLab. The panels celebrate unity in diversity, self-determination,  
47 remembrance, friendship, hope for a better future, and renewal. Best also instilled a sense of  
48 ownership in the co-creators, frequently remarking, "This [Temple] is yours. It's yours." This  
49 sense of ownership led Pauline (30s), a Temple Guardian, to observe:  
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3 [The Temple experience] brings out something protective in me. I want to  
4 protect these people and keep them safe, keep this space safe for them to  
5 share and release their emotions. It's like a gift. My gift to them.  
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8 The Temple Crew was consecrated by virtue of another gift: the opportunity to inscribe in  
9 sacramental silence prior to the formal public ritual. One Temple crew member (Kevin, 30s) was  
10 especially touched by one of the artist's gestures:  
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15 David had the Crew write on the spire. It was special for us, the workers...It  
16 was as silent as a gravesite while we were thinking and writing. It was very  
17 solemn, especially after a rowdy, noisy week of building!  
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20 The evolving Temple also became a systemic gift given by the DL communities to themselves  
21 and one another (Bradford and Sherry 2013; Giesler 2006; Weinberger and Wallendorf 2012;  
22 Weinberger 2015).  
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27 These offerings can be compartmentalized as follows: *Spontaneous* gifts are improvised  
28 and immediate, consisting of direct inscriptions by participants upon the Temple framing.  
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30 *Sympathetic* gifts derive their essence from imitation and natural elements relating to the Temple.  
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32 They include wood blocks, wood work (e.g., plaques, eggs), origami and paper art, ceramics, and  
33 flowers. *Linguistic-Pictorial* gifts involve literal and figurative elaboration. More evolved and  
34 considered than spontaneous gifts, they comprise notes both sealed and unsealed, notebooks,  
35 diaries, drawings, paintings, and photographs. *Repository* gifts are vessels of enigmatic content  
36 containing something of mysterious value. These encompass evocative packaging, gift bags and  
37 boxes, a velvet pouch, an absinthe bottle, and various mugs. *Talismanic* gifts are a kind of  
38 charmed accessory that might serve as a personal totem or fetish. They include crocheted hearts,  
39 necklaces and amulets, religious medals, rosary beads, ornaments, votive candles, and holy  
40 cards. Finally, *Vestigial* gifts represent a relic of a loved one; they appear to be highly cathected  
41 personal effects. Among them we include an infant pacifier, an asthma inhaler, dog collars,  
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gloves, costume bunny ears, inflatable figures, and compact discs. These six types overlap, each manifesting suffering from witnessing to palliation.

We sort these orientations into five themes:

- Grief Acknowledged* Salutations and valedictions (e.g., “Renewed hope for you all.” “For all the sadnesses of the past 20 years – here’s to hoping...we can look to a brand new bright tomorrow”), and confessions and apologies (e.g., “My husband had sex with another woman in our house.” “Sorry for all the wrong things in my life”).
- Grief Declaimed* “Traumalogues,” both sectarian (e.g., inscriptions recalling “Bloody Sunday,” “10 Hunger Strikers always in my thoughts.”) and ecumenical (e.g., treatises on subjects such as domestic abuse, self-medication and lost love), and memorials and lamentations (e.g., “I bring my last years. They weigh heavily on me. I bring them here to rest. In Peace.” “I am fed up with this life”).
- Grief Confronted* Aphorisms and epigrams (e.g., the misspelled mock-Latin “Iligetimi non carborundum.” “Noli Timere. – Seamus Heaney” “Ever tried. Ever failed. No matter. Try again. Fail again. Fail better. – Samuel Beckett”), and observations and proclamations (e.g., “I’m learning to live again and hope,” “Forgive but don’t forget”).
- Grief Consoled* Reassurances and condolences (e.g., “It will be OK.” “For all the women who were raped, murdered, and living through abuse. May your pain burn away in these flames. And may the ashes of hope land on you and your home. Be safe, loved + happy. I love you all.”), and prayers and thanksgivings (e.g., “May the people of Derry be United,” “May our division burn away and flowers kindle our love,” “Thank you for this.”)
- Grief Defied* Aspirations and affirmations (e.g., “I am healed. I am healed. March 18, 2015.” “I will be a better husband”), and exhortations and entreaties (e.g., “Park your guilt and throw away the keys.” “Poverty Tribal Politics, Sectarianism, Hatred - be gone. Hell to them all”).

As with artifact types, themes intergrade and give a sense of the range of suffering that ritual seeks to alleviate.

Further, each inscription that marked the artifact and the Temple as a gift from each pilgrim to themselves is a monadic gift. Both the inscriptions and the artifacts were gifts to those

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2  
3 remembered and those who contemplated the offerings— a dyadic gift, sometimes with agapic  
4 overtones (Belk and Coon 1993). Inscriptions and memorabilia can also be understood as hybrids  
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6 of supplication and soteriological gifts (Moufahim 2013).  
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11 The oblations and sacrificial gifts of the Temple recall the “restorative” gift (Drenten et  
12 al. 2017). Here, a bereaved donor makes a gift to a decedent both to restore the expired  
13 relationship and to occasionally seek experiential signs of response. The power of restorative gifts  
14 stems from their materiality and newness, making them apt vessels for the donor’s identity and  
15 creation of new memories (431, 439). This tangibility and the gravesite itself tether the decedent  
16 to the physical world (439).  
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25 The restorative gift contextually integrates social, monadic, and particularly agapic giving  
26 (46). Temple gifts highlight the sacrificial importance of handmade materiality, their personally  
27 crafted character and ephemeral tangibility. Sacrificial offerings of historical and ethnographic  
28 record, animal or plant, are of a domesticated rather than wild nature, suggesting that a worthy  
29 offering should encode a meaningful margin of human effort as its distinctive value. The  
30 handmade quality of our informants’ gifts epitomizes this ethos.  
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#### 40 *Convection: Energizing the Installation*

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42 Participants’ gifts served as objects of contemplation, secular prayers for a  
43 transformational future and stimuli to further gift generation. Even apparently religious gift  
44 offerings had extra-religious or “spiritual” connotations less concerned with the afterlife than  
45 with improving mundane existence. Participants were also gifted with impromptu performances  
46 by musicians and singers moved to artistic expression. Field notes capture an instance of  
47 reciprocal giving:  
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3 One of the guys (William, 30s) I met out here a few days ago is back today. He's a  
4 musician. ... He has 2 CDs with some tracks he feels are especially appropriate to the  
5 Temple, and...wants to give them to David [Best]. He hands them to me, and asks me  
6 to pass them along. As we are speaking, I [notice] David on the far side of the  
7 Temple...William...catches up to David and delivers the gift.  
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10 The intensity of so much gift giving in such close quarters made the structure seem specifically  
11 designed to draw gifts into the space and vent emotions released in circulation.  
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14 Procession heightened the pilgrims' sense of the gifts' aura. As participants passed  
15 through the altar, anterior passages, and pillars, often in bodily contact with other visitors, many  
16 instances of individuals emotionally overwhelmed and comforted by others were observed. Even  
17 the stoic would remark, "Everything I see just makes me want to cry!" Grief counselors (present  
18 by design of the organizers) moved among the crowds, ready to assist as needed. Purgation was  
19 sought and sometimes achieved through deep inscription, reflection, conversation, and ultimately  
20 conflagration.  
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30 The most consistent observation we elicited centered on the mystery of sacrifice. For  
31 example, a Temple Guardian (female, 20s) told us, "The most common question I get is 'Why  
32 are you burning it?'" The sacrifice of beauty and effort pained participants:  
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37 We're going to chain ourselves to it [the Temple] in protest. It's too beautiful to burn." (Devon  
38 and Andrew, 50s)  
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40 It's a wanton crime to burn it! It should be constructed 3 times larger out of metal, and set up in  
41 the City Centre. (Stephen, 70s)  
42  
43

44 Devon's and Andrew's whimsical threats recall self-immolation and self-sacrifice and hint at  
45 embodied devotion that has them imaginatively becoming part of the Temple beyond mere  
46 divestiture of artifacts or meaning. Stephen preferred to install a permanent monumental  
47 testament to the power of the gift to transmute suffering into cross-community cohesion. The  
48 evocative power of materiality, its ability to mobilize, is captured in his remark.  
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55 *Connection: Engagement through Ritual*  
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3 Often, participants articulated precisely the gift-based dynamics of sacrifice:  
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5 I realized in the warehouse why it was OK to burn something so beautiful. You have to *miss* it!  
6 (Kevin, 30s)  
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8 The temporary nature [of the Temple] is important. If it were permanent, it would become  
9 institutionalized, like institutional religion, and take on some of the same bad characteristics. So  
10 it's good that it lives only in memory. . . . Its burning made the Temple compelling. The fire  
11 itself, the fact that it [the Temple] won't be here afterwards . . . You were part of it, and now it's  
12 part of you. (Eileen, 30s)  
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15 Kevin's quasi-Derridan epiphany (Derrida 1974) recalls the sacrifice of O. Henry's lovers in *The*  
16 *Gift of the Magi* (1906) and of the palpability of absence. The presence of absence transforms  
17 simple remembering into a re-remembering that characterizes the reconfiguring of social relations  
18 that sacrifice enables. Eileen speaks eloquently of the introjection and embodiment of the  
19 Temple by participants renewing and refurbishing the self. The pristine nature of ephemeral  
20 experience, uncorrupted by base material remains, exalted in its incarnation, is revealed to  
21 participants through sacrifice. Eileen's reference to fire *sui generis*, the immediacy of its  
22 presence, highlights the propriety of this sacrificial medium. Anspach (1984) understands the gift  
23 in Girardian perspective as an introjection of the logic of sacrifice.  
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35 That such a laboriously and beautifully crafted object should be burned speaks to the  
36 primacy of aesthetic and spiritual process rather than to its materiality. The artifact is a means to  
37 an end, which is the immediacy of the lived experience of loss and release, of celebration and  
38 exaltation. For "art therapy" (a term some informants employed) to succeed, a visceral feeling of  
39 valuable presence exorcised, of palpable absence, is required.  
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47 The ultimate gift circuit may be described as the sacrifice of the entire co-creative  
48 enterprise by the temporary cross-community to some sacred and/or secular *mysterium*  
49 *tremendum et fascinans* (Belk Wallendorf and Sherry 1989; Otto 1923) in the hope that shared  
50 suffering might be transmuted into persistent, peaceful cross-community cohesion. Given the  
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3 overall ritual process of the Temple was conducted in spiritual, political, and aesthetic keys, the  
4 intended recipient, whether deity, zeitgeist, or kalogenic universe (Henning 2005, 5), was  
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6 importuned to reciprocate the collective gift of pain with gifts of healing and cohesion, the  
7  
8 “terrible beauty” (Yeats 1921) we allude to in the title of this article. By sacrificing, by  
9  
10 exorcising personal trauma and affirming a desire to live more hopeful lives, and by surrendering  
11  
12 sectarian bitterness and suffering, participants aimed to establish an ongoing, personally  
13  
14 authentic, non-sectarian, shared community.  
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19 On a systemic level, the Temple is at once an instance of intracommunity gifting that  
20  
21 seeks to “repave” the moral economy of the region (Weinberger and Wallendorf 2012, 90) and  
22  
23 intercommunity gifting that seeks to provide the stones with which to cobble a common  
24  
25 pavement. The Temple also reframes dominant consumption rituals and repositions non-  
26  
27 celebrants in a way that encourages dissolution of traditional social boundaries and promotes  
28  
29 new relationship and identity goals (Weinberger 2015). The forging of solidarity in plural  
30  
31 societies amidst conflicting inclusion and exclusion practices is problematic, as the forces of  
32  
33 agency and structure vie to shape behavior.  
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38 Recall the ambivalence over the distortional “gift economy” metaphor acknowledged in  
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40 our opening pages. Derrida describes what he perceives to be the “double bind” of the gift: the  
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42 gift “*as gift*” ought “*not appear as gift, either to the donee or the donor.*” “If there is a gift, it  
43  
44 must be “*aneconomic,*” involving “no reciprocity, return, exchange, counter-gift, or debt.”  
45  
46 (Derrida 1992, 7-19). The Temple context is as close to an extraeconomic phenomenon as is  
47  
48 possible to approximate in a neoliberal era, impelled as it might be in part by back-of-mind  
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50 economic forces, and oriented in part by back-of-mind hope of eventual economic prosperity. It  
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52 is characterized by instances of generalized, balanced, and asymmetrical reciprocity, although no  
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3 economic gain is evident. That the Temple unfolds in both profane and sacred time speaks to the  
4 poignancy of the “moment” or the ‘instant’ in which sacrifice delivers informants to immanence  
5 and transcendence. Familiar usage of consumer research concepts such as “countergift” masks  
6 the decommodifying moment to which sacrifice is a portal.  
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12 *Conjunction: Moments of Cross-Community*  
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15 Lavish gift giving and gratuitous destruction of gifts is emblematic of the outward  
16 appearance of the potlatch, just as the provisioning of the Temple to elicit gifts of reconciliation  
17 and cohesion superficially resembles the cargo cult. And yet, the disbursement of gifts levels  
18 rather than raises status. Trust and respect, not mockery and humiliation, attend the gifts’  
19 presentation. The economic value of material goods destroyed is dwarfed by the comity realized  
20 in their sacrifice. Their creation, circulation, and destruction diminish grief. Grief is contained by  
21 detaching it from the body and transmuting it in the gift-giving experience. Trauma is made  
22 visible and given a voice. Public validation of the donor’s pain is given, received, and  
23 reciprocated. The evanescent nature of the Temple—the fiery sacrifice of anxiety, the promise  
24 of renewal from the ashes—lent an aura of urgency to the ritual.  
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38 The conspicuous destruction of excess read against the grain of sectarian relations  
39 emphasizes the promise of reconciliation. In Eagleton’s (2018, 124) view, the “most strikingly  
40 gratuitous act is that of forgiveness, which ruptures . . . reciprocities . . . [such that the] power of  
41 mimesis is accordingly broken. . . . Forgiveness is the enemy of exchange value.” This notion  
42 returns us to the organizers’ goal for the event, and to our discussion of the role of material  
43 objects in traumaturgical perspective. In Eagleton’s (2018, 125) estimation:  
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51 [F]orgiveness is more a matter of remembrance, in the Freudian sense of the word, than oblivion.  
52 It requires you to actively confront and relive the past, not least to avoid being enslaved by it in  
53 the manner of the neurotic. Otherwise one remains perpetually in thrall to the offender . . . If  
54 those who offend can be forgiven, it is partly because they, too, are the products of a situation not  
55 of their own making.  
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4 Forgiving but not forgetting is a precondition for rapprochement in the post-conflict era.

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6 Forgiving is not merely the giving away of an owed debt, it is the assigning of a new meaning to  
7  
8 the past—the gift of a new beginning (Caputo 2002). The Temple ritual is a hybrid of Augé's  
9  
10 (2004, 56-57) rites of suspense and re-beginning, whereby the present is found either by  
11  
12 forgetting a future that is a return to the past or by reconfiguring the future as a proliferation of  
13  
14 limitless possibilities by forgetting the past, as long as we substitute the term “bracketing” for  
15  
16 Augé's “forgetting.” Participation in the Temple brought many of our informants one step closer  
17  
18 to a new beginning.  
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23 The interplay of the material and the experiential is captured in our discussion of fiery  
24  
25 transformation. Contrasting the Temple with sectarian bonfires was a common occurrence  
26  
27 among our informants, as these observations by our informants indicate:  
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30 We've spent years trying to convince people to stop building bonfires and quit with the  
31  
32 graffiti, and now we're going to celebrate it. I hope it works. (Aengus, male, late 50s)

33  
34 Sure we've been tryin' to stop our boys from burnin' them bonfires all these years, and  
35  
36 someone comes across to burn one and get paid for it! (Kieran, 40s)

37  
38 It's better than watching pallets and a bunch of bloody tyres! (young male voice in the  
39  
40 crowd)

41  
42 The distinction between these types of fires is compelling. A sectarian bonfire is the torching of a  
43  
44 monumental silo of wooden pallets erected by the individual community in its own territory and  
45  
46 invariably containing some sacra of the other community (whether political flags, effigies,  
47  
48 religious images and statues, etc.) along with bellicose banners taunting it. The bonfire is an  
49  
50 aggressive act of defiance, a divisive spectacle that celebrates ethnocultural identity and often  
51  
52 results in violence. In contrast, the Temple is a cross-community project comprising sacrificial  
53  
54 gifts which symbolize traumatic baggage, selves, and inclusive communal affiliation.

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56 Participants sacrifice gifts to one another and to the transcendent ontological ground to achieve  
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3 temporary communion, catharsis, and the prospect of reconciliation. The Temple is “the gift of  
4 everyone to everyone” (Sahlins 2018, 18), something that recalls solidarity rituals in premodern  
5 societies.  
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10 Occasionally, sacrificial transformation is likened to an exorcism, as Margaret (late 50s)  
11 remarks:  
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14 I had a daughter, Caitlin, killed by a drunk driver a few years back...I could not or would not let  
15 this man go from my head . . . Every waking hour was devoted to hating[him]...I was consumed  
16 with [him] and there was no room to grieve for my Caitlin...Then the Temple came and friends  
17 suggested I should go... I took all the material I had kept about this man and...put this collection  
18 of hate into the Temple...I walked away that day able to forgive this man...Now I can remember  
19 Caitlin how she was....Friends and family know how life-changing this has been for me.  
20  
21

22 Margaret describes the enervating consequences of obsession, the liberating consequences of  
23 sacrifice, and the joyful consequences of forgiveness. Her account serves as a parable for the  
24 sectarian straits the city has long endured. Her actions illustrate Harvey’s (2002, p. 2) description  
25 of a gift chimney producing a “social convection current” resulting in “radical inclusivity”  
26 (Harvey 2002). As does Godbout (1998, 210) we recognize forgiveness as a “fundamental gift.”  
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### 33 CONCLUSION

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36 We have shown that sacrifice is a plausible mechanism of the gift chimney. The gift  
37 chimney serves not only as an engine for attracting gifts but for creating community among  
38 historically hostile groups in Northern Ireland. Further, by transmuted the materiality of their  
39 presents to the immanence of presence, community members achieved an experience of  
40 transcendence beyond their ordinary straits. The violence and danger inherent in sacrifice, the  
41 visceral creative destruction so foreign to everyday experience, canalized in the immolationist  
42 character of the ritual, produced a chain reaction that drew ever more participants into its orbit.  
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The social levelling and time sensitivity of the co-creation process generated a sense of urgency  
that permeated the event.

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3 Sacrifice, the engine of the Temple as a gift chimney (Harvey, 2002), lends authentic  
4 expressions of the self to be transfigured in the sharing. One offering encourages another, ad  
5 infinitum, in a chain reaction of mimetic ardor. Through asymmetrical reciprocity, donors give to  
6  
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9 a cross-community or metaphysical process rather than to specific individual recipients.  
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12 The Temple is a gift chimney in both a literal and metaphoric sense. Physically, the altar  
13 is archetypal of a firebox, the spacious expanse beneath the vault comprising the flue and  
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12 We have analyzed how public ceremonial sacrificial gift giving serves as a mechanism  
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12 Transgressing no-go areas, trusting that traditionally hostile behaviors would be productively  
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12 Unfortunately, one consequence of Brexit, an unsatisfactory stopgap to prevent the  
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3 2020 after a three-year suspension has done little to depressurize sectarian relationships. In the  
4  
5 short run, innovative public art installations are one means of promoting cross-community  
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7 cohesion as political turmoil threatens to undermine whatever institutional gain aesthetic  
8  
9 interventions post.  
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11  
12 The artifacts, inscriptions, and extravagant intricacy of the Temple comprising the  
13  
14 material aspect of the gift, invested both with the spirit of the donor and cosmological  
15  
16 authentication of centuries of Northern Irish grief, are abnegated and immolated, their alienable  
17  
18 aspect being appreciated and eventually consumed in circulation and their inalienable aspect  
19  
20 being liberated and retained by all. The gift embodies sacrifice at its core, the personal suffering  
21  
22 it encodes publically circulated for contemplation and comment. The gift is sacrificed, destroyed  
23  
24 to consecrate the dream of a healed body and body politic. The transfiguring of possessions to  
25  
26 dispossessions, the transmogrifying of objects to subjects, and the transforming of matter into  
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28 energy are accomplished through the sacrificial gift. While digital images remain as trace  
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30 measures of the event, the introjection of the Temple that our informants report is the true  
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32 hallmark of participation.  
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