

From Plato to the Voucher

Why the Maze-Bank Shows Itself as It Does — An Essay for Those Who Build It

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Preface

This essay was written for a fellow builder. It summarizes an evening of reasoning that led to the form of the maze-bank. Whoever is given only the assignment can merely execute. Whoever knows the reasoning can think along — and deviate where the code gives reason to do so. That is the intention.

The core in one sentence: the maze-bank is not a bank but a memory of deeds, and every design choice follows from a twenty-five-century history of language that has gone precisely the wrong way.

1. The Question That Has No Answer

The evening began with a question that seemed simple: what is being exchanged?

Walk through anthropology and the answer slips away everywhere. Among the San, sharing takes place without a ledger. In the Kula, bracelets travel that nobody is allowed to keep. In hawala, nothing moves at all — only an instruction passes between people who trust one another. In reciprocity, what is “exchanged” is an action, not a thing. Only in barter between strangers and in money is there a real what: the good, the banknote.

That is no coincidence. The question word “what” demands an independent entity — a substantivum, something that exists apart from context. The question “what is being exchanged” forces the answer into thing-form before anything has been said. It can only be answered in systems that have already been objectified. Everywhere else, the honest answer is: there is no what. Something is being done, not given.

The question itself is therefore the test: wherever it has an answer, the action has already solidified into a thing.

2. The Language Has Been Rebuilt

Why, then, does our language make us ask that question so naturally? Michael Reddy counted it in 1979: seventy percent of English is structured by a single metaphor, the

conduit metaphor. Thoughts are objects. Words are containers. Communicating is sending containers. And the percentage is rising.

The rebuilding has one direction: verb becomes noun, doing becomes thing, action becomes inventory. The force behind it is the valuation of abstraction-upward — the One, unification, the standpoint from which everything can be surveyed and governed. In *Paths of Change* this is called the Unity gaze: control, planning, expectation. Useful as one gaze among four. Sick when it swallows the other three — the addiction to control is called paranoid.

Heidegger gave the end state a name: the *Gestell*, which turns everything into *Bestand* — standing reserve, inventory, a warehouse of potential. Husserl saw the same thing: mathematization lays a blanket over the lifeworld. The language in which we speak about exchange is that blanket.

3. Plato Warned Us at the Beginning

The first container was writing. In the *Phaedrus*, Plato has King Thamus tell the inventor Theuth: this will not provide memory but remembrance from outside; people will appear wise without actually being so. Living, embodied, contextual knowledge was converted into signs that travel without context.

The resistance existed as well, and it had a technique: the memory palace. Simonides, the rhetoricians, the *ars memoriae* — knowledge stored in places and images, with context, in the body. Giordano Bruno was its last great master. He carried two dangers at once: unmediated knowledge, where no priest is required between you and knowing, and an infinite universe without a center — no standpoint from which the whole can be governed. In 1600 he was burned.

There is no need to tell a conspiracy story. Selection through filters is enough: orders that live by fixed positions remove what closes positions. Wörgl, where demurrage money demonstrably worked in 1932, was stopped by decree. The same pattern, a smaller pyre.

4. Debt: The Word That Gives It Away

Dutch preserves what English split apart. *Schuld* means both guilt and debt — one word. The moral concept comes from the financial one, and the powerful have played with that single word.

The Church created the eternal negative balance: original sin, a debt you are born with and that can never be closed. It then sold indulgences: debt literally monetized. The financial order did the same with interest and public debt — positions that, by

construction, never come home. A debt that can never be closed is a relationship that can never change: one remains master, the other remains slave, forever.

Money is the completion of this history: the conduit metaphor made material. Value as an object, inside a container, sent through a channel. Potential-action: the action placed inside a box so that it can be preserved, hoarded and controlled — cut loose from who, what, where and when.

5. What Is Actually Happening — The 2007 Model

If nothing crosses over — what happens in reciprocity?

The answer has been on constable.blog since 2007, in the mapping of interpersonal theory (Horowitz) onto *Paths of Change*. Two axes carry all human relationships: communion (from indifference to love) and agency (from dominating to submitting). Together they form the circumplex. At the center stands consciousness, the observer — the balance.

The relationship in that theory is not a connection but a switch: it connects two parts that are separated and remain separated. Nothing crosses over. What a voucher records is the switch itself.

Beneath that lies an even simpler pair: Control (compression, back toward the Void) and Desire (expansion, away from it). Where they coincide they annihilate — back to the Void, the state of infinite potential. The zero of the trit system is that Void: not an empty position but the potential state itself. Plus and minus are actualized tension around it. Money is potential held outside the Void — frozen potential that can no longer annihilate. Demurrage brings it back to zero, where potential belongs.

And the health of a relationship is not a position but the continuing switching of position. Two people who complement each other's expected behavior feel "related" — giver finds receiver, master finds slave. Healthy as long as the roles alternate. Pathological as soon as they freeze. Normal people are also sick, but they switch constantly, so you do not see it. This explains the dangerous signature of a circle: concentration rises, circulation falls — the circle freezes into fixed roles. The well-regulated phase preceding collapse is the frozen relationship, scaled up.

6. The Emotion Loop — The 1998 Model

How does this land in a human being? The emotion model from the addiction project draws the chain, and the direction is decisive: from right to left, from body to understanding.

An event first touches the actor — empathy, intuition — and evokes a primary emotion: desire, fright, panic, aggression, surrender. Only then comes Focus/Power: do I have control here — dominate or submit. Then Valuation/Attraction: attract or repel. Only then Understanding/Identity: want or must, in images and words. This structures expectation, stretched between fear and hope; expectation drives action; action ends in disappointment or joy; and the explorer turns it into experience.

Two consequences. First, experience arises only from a breach of expectation accompanied by emotion — without emotion, nothing is remembered. Second, the social emotions surrounding giving and obligation are identity emotions. Recognition feeds pride. A visibly outstanding debt feeds shame. A ranking feeds envy. And every number attached to an action translates it back into potential and extinguishes the emotion — the Haifa nursery experiment demonstrated it: a fine for arriving late increased lateness, because a price can be paid without guilt.

7. The Toolmaker — The 2007 Model, Part Two

Opposite the conduit metaphor stands, in the same Reddy article, the toolmaker metaphor — thirty percent of language, and shrinking. Each person lives in their own universe. Nothing is transferred. In the middle stands a mailbox. We share pictures in it; each person interprets the picture in their own universe, adapts it, sends it back; step by step shared tools emerge.

This is the communication model of the maze-bank — and it is already the architecture. In the Holochain manner, each member maintains their own chain: their own universe. There is no world ledger (one container for everyone: conduit), but interlocking private books with a shared mailbox between them (toolmaker). The voucher is the picture in the mailbox: one person writes their side, the other interprets it in their own universe and signs “correct” — the adapted picture comes back. Both signatures are two interpretations that fit, not a transfer that has arrived.

And the division of labor between human and machine is contained in that same piece. The computer is an idiot savant: excellent at one thing, repetition. Give it the repetition — the booking, counting, closing, reconciliation that has exhausted the treasurer for forty years. What remains for humans is play. Whoever uses the savant to carry their own deficiency has a complementary relationship: friends for life. This applies between human and machine — and between machines themselves: whoever builds without knowing the reasoning is not a friend but a slave. Hence this essay.

8. The Harvest: The Form

Everything above converges into one form. The maze-bank does not present itself as a bank. It presents itself as the shared memory of a circle: a chronicle of deeds. Three faces.

The voucher as sentence. One line with a verb and context: “Hans helped Lea with the roof, Tuesday.” Setting, process, event — the experience format from 1998 as the unit of registration. No number, no unit, no visible type. The entry point to everything: no circle is founded; something is recorded; the confirmation link is simultaneously the invitation; the recipient taps “correct” without an account. The restoration of language in miniature: a sentence that does something, not a noun with a number.

The chronicle. The vouchers together, readable chronologically: the story of the street, the choir, the club. The ledger as experience archive — the memory palace in miniature, deeds on places, with context, just as the MAZE places thoughts on addresses. Rereading is the reward; this is where people return.

The ring. One drawing: who belongs to whom because deeds close, where the dotted arrow is still open, chalk slowly fading. Movement, never positions. No number on the front. The trit exists but appears only as the orientation of the drawing: toward whom the ring leans.

Invisible underneath: the savant. Chains, signatures, typing, guarantees, netting, demurrage, the three numbers. The three numbers appear only in the circle conversation, once per cycle, at the one decision: the demurrage rate. The closing broker speaks only as a warm hint in the drawing. The observer publishes and decides nothing.

9. Design Rules, Derived

For every screen choice and every line of code:

1. **Verb above noun.** Every registration is a sentence containing who did what for whom, where and when. Never an amount as the core of a record visible to the user.
2. **No number at the front.** No balances, scores, rankings or amounts in the faces. Every number translates a deed back into potential and extinguishes the emotion that carries the system.

3. **Follow the emotion loop.** Every screen lands first with the actor (safety, control), then attraction, and only then word and image. Never open with explanation — understanding is the penultimate step.
4. **Recognition, never enforcement.** The “correct” question arrives as thanks (“Hans writes that you helped him”), never as a claim. An open position appears as “not settled yet”, never as being in the red. Pride and insight are the permitted end emotions; shame and envy are design errors.
5. **The switch remains real.** The counter-signature is an action by the other person — one tap — even with circle-managed keys. Without a real switch, the relationship is theater.
6. **Toolmaker in the data.** Every member has their own chain; the voucher is a shared picture with two interpretations; no world ledger, no total, no center.
7. **Demurrage is coming home.** Wherever demurrage appears, it appears as relief (chalk fades, nobody stands forever) — never as a cost or punishment. No interest, ever, in any form.
8. **Repetition to the savant, play to the human.** Everything that counts, closes and reconciles is machine work and remains below the fold. What humans see invites them to act and reread.
9. **The doing layer is the only door.** The rebuilt language of twenty-five centuries is also inside the reader. Explanation activates the old frame; writing the first sentence bypasses it. The front door lets people do.

Conclusion

The maze-bank is the reversal of a history, point by point. Against writing-without-context: the memory palace. Against the container: the sentence. Against eternal debt: demurrage. Against the center and the total: the ring without summation. Against the frozen master-slave relationship: the switch that keeps switching — between people, and between those who build it together.

Bruno was burned for less.