The Age of Sharing

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Introduction

In late 2015 an informal after-work event was held in Manhattan's Lower East Side for high-tech entrepreneurs in the sharing economy. One of the panelists was discussing different models of sharing. Some are based on sharing for free, she said, while others involve sharing for money. I waited for someone to raise their hand and challenge the speaker, but no one seemed put out by the sentence they had just heard. I had come across the idea of 'sharing for money' before. When I first encountered it I wondered whether it was not a simple contradiction in terms, like 'selling for free'. Or perhaps this was a classic example of ideology at work through language, where a word with positive associations is deployed in order to conceal the true exploitative order of things. But pointing to the misuse or even wilful abuse of the word 'sharing' is too easy and fails to contend with its shifting senses and multiple layers of meaning. The fact that someone could say 'sharing for money' and be understood by her audience, and the retort that the exchange of money negates the possibility of sharing, both require historical and cultural contextualization. The following pages are my efforts to do just that.

As a first step, we might observe how much sharing people seem to be doing these days. When we go online we share – photos, status updates, thoughts, memes, opinions, information. We are sharing offline too: witness the growth of the

sharing economy. Powered by apps, people are sharing their spare rooms, cars, power drills, free time, expertise, couches, workspaces, dinner leftovers and pets. We are also sharing when we talk about our emotions, which we do more often and in more situations than any previous generation. Some people are taught how to communicate this way from a very young age: American preschoolers, for instance, sit in 'sharing circles', where they talk about their unique experiences while their classmates listen, awaiting their turn to share.

At the same time, the use of the word 'sharing' to describe some of these activities is contested. For example, certain critics of the sharing economy say that 'it isn't really sharing, it's renting/selling/trading'. Similarly, one might observe that Facebook does not share data with advertisers (though that is the language Facebook uses); rather, they sell it. Before engaging with these critical claims, though, I suggest that the very fact they are being made is indicative that something is at stake: the concept of sharing itself.

This is the age of sharing, then, because 'sharing' stands for both the cutting edge of our digital media-saturated capitalist society and economy, including the way we interact online, and a critical position vis-à-vis this society and economy. Sharing is both supportive and subversive of hegemonic (digital) culture: supportive in that the more you share updates and pictures on social media, for instance, the wealthier those platforms become, and subversive in that the more you share actual stuff with others, the less everyone needs to buy. Moreover, some say that sharing – be that of the distributive or communicative kind – leads to true and deep human connections.

In this book I will not be taking a stand on when the word 'sharing' is being used properly. In fact, my inquiries into sharing show that, as with many words, its 'proper' meanings and uses have changed quite drastically over time. For those who think that sharing is timeless, this discovery can be both surprising and perhaps a little destabilizing. In the following pages I show how the idea that sharing is the basis for authentic human relationships dates back no further than the 1930s, when city life, and especially advertising, were raising profound questions about authentic personhood. Moreover, the altruistic sense of sharing, or 'sharing as caring', only really

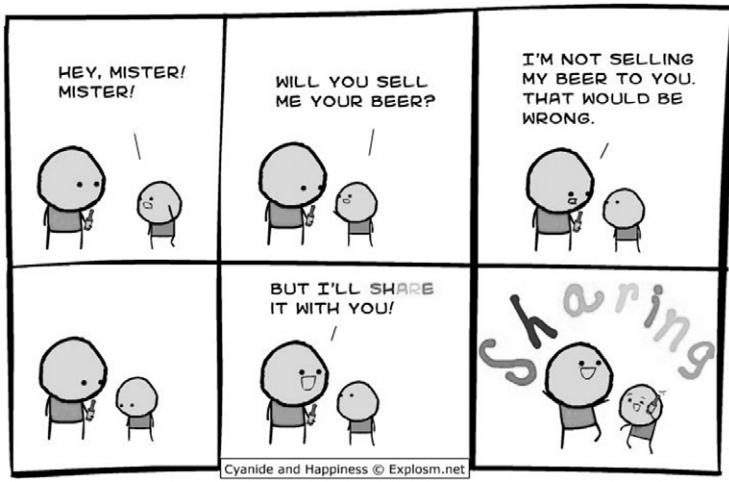

Figure 1.1 Sharing is caring; Cyanide and Happiness, © Explosm.net, <http://explosm.net/comics/2432>

took root from the 1970s. By tracing changes in the meanings of 'sharing' – and especially the entrenchment in the mid-2000s of its sense as what we do online – this book shows that the prevailing uses of the term today, and the criticisms of these uses, have common roots in a sense of self moulded by capitalism. Thus, while remaining agnostic as to the 'proper' way to use the word 'sharing', I am nonetheless alert both to the role played by powerful social media companies in disseminating one of its newer meanings, and to the interest these companies have in being associated with the concept's prosocial connotations.

Sharing is a very emotive concept: to start, it is deeply associated with childhood, and learning to 'share nicely' is one of the most basic skills preschoolers are expected to assimilate; second, and relatedly, sharing is always good – you cannot share non-nicely. Sharing, we are told, is caring, and, as such, has a warm glow around it. This warm glow also invites an ironic stance, as expressed in Figure 1.1: calling something sharing (in pretty colours to boot) can conceal its immorality; if we call it sharing, we might be able to get away with anything. This cartoon thus neatly captures

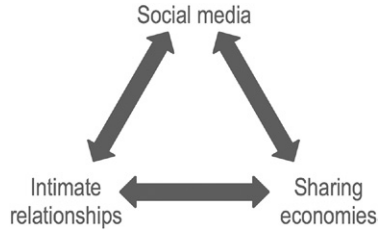

Figure 1.2 The spheres of sharing

a feature of sharing that is key to this book: it is both a practice or set of practices with ethical dimensions, and at the same time a word with ethical connotations. This book aims to explore them both.

Three spheres of sharing form the focal points of this book: sharing as the constitutive activity of social media; sharing as a model for economic behaviour; and sharing as a category of speech. In this way, the book has something to say about our technologically mediated social lives; about our economic lives as producers and consumers; and about our emotional, interpersonal lives. At first glance, these spheres are quite distinct, and there would not seem to be a prima facie reason for bringing them together. Is it enough that the word 'sharing' is associated with each of them? I argue that it is, because 'sharing' is an important part of how these practices are constructed and conceptualized; it is a metaphor in terms of which different spheres of sharing construct one another and themselves. This is represented graphically in Figure 1.2.

When we talk about sharing we implicitly or explicitly engage with a set of values. Later on, I shall demonstrate and elaborate on the ways that each of the three spheres of sharing discussed here enacts certain values. For now, suffice it to say that when we talk about sharing we are talking about purportedly prosocial behaviours that promote, or are claimed to promote, greater openness, trust and understanding between people. Hence, Mark Zuckerberg, founder and CEO of Facebook, can say that sharing (on Facebook) makes the world a more connected place; sharing economy evangelists promote sharing as a remedy for the ills of selfish and destructive hyper-capitalism (Botsman and Rogers, 2010); and Donal

Carbaugh defines the speech category of sharing as talk with a 'relational embrace' (Carbaugh, 1988).

It is the contention of this book that sharing, both as a broad category of social practices, and as the word used to describe a wide range of practices, is on the rise. Ours is the age of sharing.

What is Sharing?

There are many ways to answer this question. One is to inquire into the difference between sharing and other modes of resource management, such as buying (Belk, 2010) or lending (Larrimore, Li, Larrimore, Markowitz and Gorski, 2011). When answering the question this way we endeavour to isolate the characteristics of 'sharing-ness' in which acts of sharing partake. Then, equipped with these characteristics, we can decide whether or not to bestow the title of 'sharing' on different activities and argue with others over its aptness in different contexts. These arguments are played out in the field of file sharing, for instance, where we may hear comments such as 'It's not really sharing, it's online theft'. By talking of 'pseudo-sharing', Russell Belk engages in a somewhat similar strategy (Belk, 2014). But this is not what I mean when I ask what sharing is, and the objective of this book is not to demarcate its boundaries such that certain acts by definition fall beyond what may be considered as sharing. This is not to say that such an approach cannot be nuanced, and I recognize the complexities posed by borderline cases, but with that approach there is an intellectual push for a definition or conceptualization that can be used to categorize different practices and, as I have already intimated, that is not the direction in which I am pushing.

By contrast, the non-prescriptive approach adopted here starts by asking what kinds of things are called 'sharing' in practice. Indeed, my own interest in sharing began after noticing, at some point in 2010, that the word 'share' was all over the internet. This observation sparked my sociological imagination, and led me in search of other practices that are called 'sharing'. So if one way of understanding the question 'What

is sharing?' is to see it as asking what falls within a predefined category and what does not, when I ask what sharing is I am asking which social actions and phenomena we actually call 'sharing'. This is the difference between asking 'What practices should we call sharing?', which is prescriptivist, and 'What practices do we call sharing?', which is what linguists would call a pragmatic approach.

There are a number of good reasons for preferring the latter to the former, and one reason for nonetheless keeping the former in mind throughout. The first and main reason for inquiring into the practices that we call 'sharing' (rather than asking whether use of that term is justified or not in different contexts) is that whatever else it is, 'sharing' is a metaphor, and when dealing with metaphorical usage the question of whether 'x really is y' is moot (the performer did not really bring the roof down; my erudite friend is not really a walking dictionary). The fact that diverse practices are termed 'sharing' should be taken as an opportunity to explore how various spheres of life are constructed through the use of metaphors from other spheres. One answer to the question 'What is sharing?' might thus be: sharing is a metaphor we live by (G. Lakoff and Johnson, 1980).

This is not to say that the literal, non-metaphorical meaning of sharing should not interest us. It should, because it will help us unpack the subsequent metaphorical uses as well as leading to insights as to what might be implied by the notion of sharing. The original meaning of 'sharing' is given by the *Oxford English Dictionary* as dividing, or splitting. When understood this way, the linguistic proximity between 'shearing' and 'sharing' is suddenly obvious. Similarly, we thus realize that a 'ploughshare' is so called not because it was shared by all of the villagers, but because it shared, or rent asunder, the earth.[1] This sense of division is central to the early meaning of sharing, and also to our naive understanding of the concept: sharing is when you let others have some of what's yours. Sharing is thus about division and distribution, and as such raises questions about distributive justice. What, we frequently ask, is a fair share? This is an important question, because when sharing is about dividing and distributing resources, it is a zero-sum game; there's only so much to go round. If sharing is conceptualized as an ethical practice, it

is because of its original relation to the distribution of material resources.

As mentioned, today there is a wide range of practices that are referred to as 'sharing', including posting updates on social network sites, or more generally the digital transfer of information; certain ways of exchanging goods and services; and talking about our emotions, or conveying information, usually verbally, of affective import. Given this, perhaps one could extrapolate a set of core values that inhere in the practices we call 'sharing'. On the other hand, perhaps the polysemy of the word 'sharing' today is no more than homonymic: we use the same word but really it has quite different meanings in different contexts. One of the objectives of this book is to show that the different senses of sharing today are related. At the very least, when a practice is called 'sharing' a certain stance between the participants in that practice is posited; this stance might involve values such as openness, trust and maybe a sense of commonality.

However, because we are reflexive social actors, a second-order problem arises: we know which values are enacted when we talk about sharing (hence the cartoon in Figure 1.1), and so we may then want to describe certain practices as sharing in order to associate these values with those practices. Here, the word 'sharing' takes on a rhetorical force for the sake of which it is deployed or, indeed, avoided. For instance, Robin Chase, founder of Zipcar, explained how, during the company's early days, she forbade use of the term 'car-sharing', believing it to have negative connotations (Levine, 2009). Today, though, the term appears prominently on Zipcar's 'About' webpage (four times in the first four sentences, to be precise).[2] As already noted, the rhetorical force of calling a practice 'sharing' has been observed by critics of file sharing, who disapprove both of the practice and the name given to it. Moreover, bearing in mind the positive values usually associated with 'sharing', there is something jarring about reading the privacy policies of the Facebooks and Googles of the mediascape and learning what information they do or do not 'share' with advertisers or law-enforcement authorities. At this point we would seem to be swinging back towards the view that there are certain practices that are 'not really sharing': social network sites (SNSs) do not share information

with advertisers, we might want to say, they sell it, and this distinction would seem to be absolutely crucial to any understanding of the political economy of the internet and social media. This example encourages us to inquire into the usage of the word 'sharing' in this specific context (see Chapter 3, and also the case of 'file sharing' in Chapter 6), which leads us to the quite morally neutral deployment of the term in the context of computing from its earliest days in the 1950s, when time sharing was the mechanism for enabling access to computers by as many users as possible.[3]

It is my contention, then, that through an analysis of 'sharing' we gain insights into contemporary culture, and especially contemporary digital culture. In this regard, 'sharing' might be considered a keyword for the digital age (John, 2016). In Raymond Williams' canonical *Keywords* (1976), he showed special interest in 'the explicit but as often implicit connections which people were making, in what seemed to me, again and again, particular formations of meaning – ways not only of discussing but at another level of seeing many of our central experiences' (Williams, 1976: 15). This book examines these 'implicit connections' and pays particular attention to the word 'sharing' precisely because it pertains to 'many of our central experiences' today: our lives online; our lives as economic beings; and our lives as lived through our interpersonal relationships.[4]

Keywords tell us important things about the culture in which they operate. They do not encapsulate the entire culture – no one word or symbol could do that – but their analysis sheds light on enough aspects to make the effort worthwhile. When I call 'sharing' a keyword, and thereby make a claim as to the importance of paying attention to it, I mean that if we study 'sharing' and the social spheres in which it is a significant concept, we are able to learn something about how those spheres are related. But more than that, positing an age of sharing implies that this word, this metaphor, is itself fundamental to the ways those spheres are related.

So far I have pointed to the spheres of sharing that this book focuses on, and I have noted that the original, literal meaning of sharing is about the physical division of material resources. Before pressing on, I would like now to say more about the meanings of the word 'sharing'; conceptions of

sharing as the fundamental state of both individual people and humanity as a whole; sharing as straddling the nebulous public/private divide; and, in closing this introduction, something about the chapters that lie ahead.

The Meanings of Sharing

Although the belief that a dictionary will provide us with the meaning of a word may be misguided (Williams, 1976), it is sometimes a good place to start nonetheless. Starting with the dictionary definition of 'sharing' has already taught us that it referred – and still does refer – to the division, or distribution, of resources. Sharing as distribution is, of course, governed by cultural norms. These norms are the subject of Katriel's description of ritualized sharing and exchange among children (Katriel, 1987, 1988), as well as constituting one of the main focuses of the early anthropology of hunter-gatherer societies (see, for instance, Morgan, 1881; Stefansson, 1913). From these studies it is clear that sharing, whether it involves the distribution of either candies or prey, is constitutive of social relations. Indeed, Katriel, drawing on Mauss (1966 [1925]) and others, views the sharing of treats among children as 'a ritualized gesture that functions to express and regulate social relationships with the peer group' (Katriel, 1987: 307).

Another meaning of sharing is to have something in common with someone, where this thing may be concrete or abstract. For instance, when students share a dorm room, the room belongs to each person, and itself remains whole, despite being shared. This logic also applies to abstract shared objects which cannot be owned, such as interests, fate, beliefs or culture. Here too sharing is about distribution, but in an abstract and passive way, and in a way that is not a zero-sum game: the fact that a belief, for instance, is shared by two people does not preclude other people from coming to share that belief as well. Significantly, with this type of usage of 'sharing', there is no 'sharer'. We share this planet on which we live, but no one is actively sharing something with others; rather, the sense of sharing in this context is closer to

'partaking of'. Nonetheless, this sense of sharing still implies social bonds: people who share a fate are bound together by that fate; people who share a belief in a certain deity have that in common; and, some say, the people who share this planet are thus obliged to it and to one another.

In addition to being an act of distribution, sharing can also be an act of communication. This is the case when we talk about sharing our feelings or emotions. Unlike the two previous meanings of sharing, which the *OED* dates to the sixteenth century, this sense of sharing, as imparting one's inner state to others, would appear to be somewhat newer, but it has quickly become a central social practice. Indeed, the first citation provided by the *OED* for the meaning of 'sharing' as 'to impart to others one's spiritual experiences' only dates back to 1932 and is offered in the context of the Oxford Group, a Christian movement popular in the 1920s and 1930s (of which more in Chapters 2 and 5). In this regard, the *OED* quotes A. J. Russell, who wrote that the Oxford Group defined 'sharing' as meaning 'Confession and Witness' (Russell, 1932). To be sure, the Oxford Group attributed great importance to the practice of sharing: as described by Dick B. in his hefty volume on the spiritual roots of Alcoholics Anonymous (where, as with all support groups, sharing is the constitutive activity), 'Almost every Oxford Group book abounds with discussion of "Sharing" by confession. The emphasis was on sharing with God and with another' (B., 1997: 326). From here, it is but a short step to the notion of sharing one's feelings that is central to the formation and maintenance of intimate relations in contemporary western society.

Sharing and the Human Condition

The last few years have seen a glut of books in praise of humankind and its tendency for sharing, cooperation and generosity. At the same time, a psychological literature has emerged that looks at propensities to kindness and sharing at the individual level. My objective here is not to evaluate the scientific validity of this work, but rather to point to the

Figure 1.3 ecoSharing.net

narrative that it represents, which somewhat tritely can be put as follows: we (both humanity as a whole and individual human beings) have a natural tendency to share which is beaten out of us over time by the vagaries of capitalist culture. (Another version of this argument is that 'new' technologies, such as the internet in the 1990s and SNSs in the 2010s, are making us more cooperative. I shall come back to this point in my discussion of the construction of the sharing economy as a technological phenomenon in Chapter 4.)

At the individual level, pro-sharing texts present work carried out by developmental and evolutionary psychologists that show children to have sharing and cooperation hard-wired into their behaviour. For instance, a darling of the collaborative consumption community is Michael Tomasello, whose *Why We Cooperate* (Tomasello, 2009) is referenced by Rachel Botsman and Roo Rogers in their book *What's Mine is Yours* (2010), and is included in Shareable.net's fifteen best books for 2009. The message that Botsman and Rogers and the Shareable.net website take from the book is that 'preverbal children have a natural inclination to share and help others'[5] and that '[c]hildren are sociable and cooperative by nature' (Botsman and Rogers, 2010: 69). This can also account for the use of children in images on websites that enable people to share stuff they own. For instance, the now-defunct ecoSharing.net used a picture of two smiling girls, around six years old, in a park listening to an iPod together with one earphone each, above the text, 'Do you remember how much you enjoyed sharing what you owned?' (see Figure 1.3).[6] By adopting practices of sharing – here

understood as sharing stuff we own – we are returning to an earlier, more innocent and simple state of being.

The purported naturalness of sharing is also conveyed through representations of premodern, or even prehistoric, human societies, which are perceived as living in a more 'natural' way than our current lifestyle. For instance, on the 'What we believe' page of the On the Commons movement's website, it is claimed that '[t]o work on the commons is to work to enliven the deep and ancient memory we all hold of egalitarian and reciprocal relationship, of belonging, of authentic community, and of love, wonder, and respect for the natural world'.[7]

It is important to reiterate that I am not commenting here on the accuracy of this reading of the human psyche or of the development of humankind, but rather making the point that this is the narrative very often evoked in analyses of sharing. What makes the narrative so powerful is that it operates at both the individual and societal level: both individual humans and society as a whole start off cooperating and sharing; with time, though, they are corrupted by capitalism and hyper-consumerism. A return to sharing, according to its proponents, is thus both a return to a more natural state of being and morally superior. These are issues to which we shall return in greater depth in Chapter 4.

Research into 'Sharing'

This is not the first text to have been written on sharing. Nor, I am sure, will it be the last, as interest in sharing appears to be sharply rising, particularly in relation to online sharing and sharing as a consumer behaviour. Special issues of journals are being published on sharing,[8] and conferences and study days are being held.[9] There is a notable surge of interest in the academic community – and beyond – in the notion and practices of sharing.

Of particular interest are texts that explicitly engage with the concept of sharing itself. Thus, for instance, while fascinating, Bart Cammaerts' article on 'disruptive sharing' (Cammaerts, 2011) and David Brake's (2014) and Graham

Meikle's (2016) books on social media sharing teach us more about how the word 'sharing' is used in its 'natural environment' than about the contested meanings of the word itself and the role it plays in constituting digital culture; likewise, Alfred Hermida's bestseller, *Tell Everyone* (2014). The same is equally true of most of the anthropological literature about food sharing among hunter-gatherers (though for a notable exception, see Bird-David, 2005).

Some previous studies of sharing, however, do engage explicitly with sharing. Without a doubt, the influential writings of Russell Belk have given an enormous impetus to the study of sharing. Belk approaches sharing as 'a fundamental consumer behavior' and seeks to establish it as a category distinct from commodity exchange and gift-giving (Belk, 2010: 715). It is, he says, a 'third form of distribution' (Belk, 2007: 128). This approach also leads him to coin the neologism 'pseudo-sharing', referring to 'a business relationship masquerading as sharing' (Belk, 2014: 11; see also Eckhardt and Bardhi, 2015). In Chapter 4 on the sharing economy, we shall discuss at length the idea that there are practices called sharing that 'are not really' sharing. For now, let me just put on the record my divergence from this perspective. This is not because I think that lending your neighbour your drill is the same as renting your neighbour your drill, with a small cut going to the internet company that mediated the transaction. However, when the notion of the 'sharing economy' includes both of these practices, I propose that we stop to think critically about what this means in terms of sharing, rather than adjudicating which practices are 'true sharing' (Belk, 2014) and which are not. And, in any case, there is a similarity in that for both transactions a private possession of yours is handed over to a stranger for a limited period of time, suggesting there is more than just a 'sematic confusion' involved. Be that as it may, Belk's work, which is remarkable for its breadth, is clearly important, and has inspired a tranche of studies of sharing as a form of consumption (for a smattering, see Albinsson and Yasanthi Perera, 2012; Bardhi and Eckhardt, 2012; Harvey, Smith and Golightly, 2014; McArthur, 2015; Ozanne and Ballantine, 2010).

Sharing has also grabbed the attention of media and communication scholars. An early contribution in this regard

was made by Felix Stalder and Wolfgang Sützl, whose special journal issue on the ethics of sharing was extremely timely. In their introduction, they start by declaring that 'Sharing has emerged as one of the core cultural values native to the networked environment' (Stalder and Sützl, 2011: 2). And Andreas Wittel (2011), for instance, has engaged with the 'qualities of sharing and their transformations in the digital age'. The grist for Wittel's mill is the economic approach to sharing represented by Yochai Benkler (2006) and digital enthusiasts à la Leadbeater, Shirky, and Tapscott and Williams (Leadbeater, 2008; Shirky, 2010; Tapscott and Williams, 2006). In contrast to them, he looks at the 'social qualities of sharing', and the impact of digital technologies on them (Wittel, 2011: 5). Wittel makes the useful distinction between material and immaterial objects of sharing, noting, as I did above, that sharing immaterial objects entails no sacrifice. He also observes that the digital age is effecting changes to 'the notion of sharing itself' (Wittel, 2011: 6). However, like Belk and others, he also suggests that 'the term sharing is rather problematic, perhaps misleading, for digital objects'. He adds, 'It seems that sharing, like stealing, has entered the language of digital cultures due to mere ideological reasons' (p. 6). Like Wittel, I too am interested in the ideologies surrounding 'sharing', but for me its use is not 'problematic'. Viewing 'sharing' as a metaphor, and in line with the broadly pragmatic approach to word usage adopted throughout this book, the application of the term 'sharing' to new practices raises questions about online sociability, digitally mediated forms of communication, and conceptualizations of property that a close analysis of 'sharing' can help answer.

Another important contribution has been made by Jenny Kennedy. Like Belk and Wittel, she too is alert to the 'semantic richness' of sharing and observes that social media platforms are able to exploit 'its association to predated activities' in order to promote our use of them (Kennedy, 2013: 129; see also Kennedy, 2016). But rather than prescribing our use of the term by pointing to practices that 'are not really' sharing, Kennedy observes instead that the 'ubiquity and everydayness of the term sharing belies the diverse and complex social, cultural, economic, and political processes it is employed to describe' (p. 135). I am entirely sympathetic

to this stance. However, I go one step further, suggesting that the complexity of these processes inheres in the very term 'sharing' itself. One might argue this is what Raymond Williams meant when he said that 'some important social and historical processes occur within language' (Williams, 1976: 22).

Of current theorists of sharing, Kennedy's approach is the closest to mine. To start, unlike most commentators, she explicitly acknowledges that sharing is 'a distinct form of communication' and pays special attention to networked culture (Kennedy, 2014: i). She unpacks three main 'discursive threads' around sharing which are close – though not identical – to my three spheres of sharing (Kennedy, 2016: 5). She refers to 'sharing as an economy', 'sharing as scaled distribution' and 'sharing as social intensity', where she defines sharing in relation to 'disclosure and affect' (p. 468). My own focus on the 'sharing economy', on online sharing, and on sharing as the type of communication that sustains our therapeutic culture, clearly resonates with Kennedy's work. Furthermore, following Nick Couldry (2012), Kennedy adopts a practice approach, asking what 'people [are] doing in relation to media across a whole range of situations and contexts' (Couldry, 2012: 39; cited in Kennedy, 2016: 469). Indeed, the epigraph for Couldry's chapter, 'Media as Practice', reads: 'What media are needs to be interrogated, not presumed' (Larkin, 2008: 3; cited in Couldry, 2012: 33). Kennedy seems to take this as applying to sharing; I would wholeheartedly concur.

Additional texts about sharing will be encountered in the following pages. The scholars I have just mentioned, though, are particularly useful for me. Belk is a beacon, illuminating the paths we might wish to take, even if I do not accompany him all the way down the one he pursues; Wittel is among the first group of researchers to pay critical attention to the specifically digital qualities of sharing; and Kennedy's practice-theory approach to sharing is remarkably fruitful and sits extremely well with the non-prescriptivist approach to sharing presented here.

What this book adds to these discussions of sharing is not just its communicative aspect, but the insight that sharing is a type of communication that implies a certain style of

interpersonal relationship, one that is based on honesty, openness, mutuality, caring, equality, trust and fairness. These are the declared values of the sharing economy as well (see, for instance, Buczynski, 2013), and also form a part of the internet imaginary (Flichy, 2007). I already hinted at these values earlier, and they shall return throughout the book.

The Rest of the Book

The values just mentioned are part of the promise of sharing today. However, 'sharing' has not always been associated with them. In Chapter 2, I ask when sharing became caring and undertake a diachronic analysis of 'sharing'. The analysis is based on around 4,500 instances of the word 'sharing' in English-language texts spanning over two centuries and enables me to locate the gradual entrance into 'sharing' of the values associated with it today.

With Chapter 3, I start to engage with the first of the three spheres of sharing and discuss sharing in relation to the internet and social media. My objective here is not to ask why we share and what we share, but rather to critically examine the prominence of the word 'sharing' in this context. For instance, I show how the word 'sharing' has been applied retroactively to the early internet. Scholars and other commentators have written about the prosociality of the internet; some have said that the internet is, and has always been, about sharing. However, texts about the internet from the 1990s and early 2000s do not actually refer to 'sharing', suggesting that the explicit affiliation between sharing and the internet was made more recently. An analysis of the homepages of forty-four SNSs between the years 2000 and 2010 confirms this, showing the years 2005–7 as the time when 'sharing' became the *sine qua non* for online participation, pointing to the centrality of powerful media organizations in pushing the word to its current prominence. One exception to this is the field of hacking, where sharing has always been talked of as being a key value and practice. This, of course, reinforces the idea that sharing has specifically digital connotations today, a point that will recur throughout.

Chapter 4 is about sharing economies. As with online sharing, the focus here is on the work that the word 'sharing' does in this context. By talking about sharing economies I cast my net wider than what is known today as 'the sharing economy'. In particular, the chapter discusses sharing economies of production – as instantiated by Wikipedia and open source software, for instance – which is where the term was used before it was applied to acts of consumption. Drawing on an analysis of newspaper articles about collaborative consumption, I show how this part of the sharing economy has been discursively constructed as technological and digital. This is the field where we are perhaps most likely to hear people saying that 'it isn't really sharing' on the grounds that money is often involved. However, I do not add my voice to that particular chorus, preferring instead to inspect the argument quite closely (no one says, for instance, that shares (as in 'stocks and…') should not be termed thus because they involve money), and asking whether the adoption of the 'sharing' metaphor in this regard nonetheless teaches us something.

Following that, Chapter 5 offers an exploration of sharing as a category of talk. Here, I locate the emergence of sharing as a type of talk in the public confessional practices of the Oxford Group in the 1930s. The Oxford Group was a Christian movement that practised the confessing of sins in a group setting, terming this practice 'sharing'. The Oxford Group was the forerunner of Alcoholics Anonymous and as such, I argue, holds an important place in the emergence of our contemporary therapeutic culture. In this chapter, I track 'sharing' from the Oxford Group through reality TV to social media. In all of these cultural locales we find similar (but not necessarily identical) assumptions about the modern self, and especially assumptions concerning authenticity and the value of making our inner selves public, or at the very least known to another person. There is an important sense, then, in which sharing, as a type of communication, is constitutive of our intimate (and other) relationships in that it reflects and constructs expectations for honest and authentic communication between equals.

Chapter 6 is an exercise in implementing what the previous chapters tell us about sharing. The object of the exercise is

file sharing. The chapter opens with a discussion of the term 'file sharing' and the debates surrounding it ('it's not really sharing' makes another unsurprising appearance). This discussion is supplemented with an analysis of over 450 posts to file-sharing forum debates about the ethics of a certain form of file sharing known as 'torrenting'. I show how the presence of the metaphor of 'sharing' in the debates shapes some of the positions adopted in it. Or, put differently, I show how, for at least some of the file sharers engaged in interactions over the best (most ethical, most efficient) way to share files, 'sharing' really is a metaphor they live by.

Two Notes about Style

As the reader will no doubt already have noticed, the word 'sharing' sometimes appears in quotation marks, and sometimes it does not. Stefano Predelli (2003) discusses quotation marks, observing that they can serve to signal distance from the term enclosed within them. Sometimes, then, when people put 'sharing' in quotation marks what they mean is that what they are talking about is not actually sharing; in fact, they even suggest a degree of hostility and convey that although they are using this word, they do not think it is the appropriate one. In my reading about sharing, this is a use of quotation marks that I have come across very many times, and conveys a similar meaning to air quotes (the kind we make in the air with our fingers). However, when I put 'sharing' in quotation marks, it is usually to signify that I am talking about the word or term 'sharing', rather than practices of sharing. This explains why I can say that this book is about sharing and 'sharing'. However, I do not promise uncompromising consistency, and I trust the reader will understand whether the discussion is about sharing or 'sharing' from the context. If in doubt, it is probably 'sharing'.

The reader may also notice the use of the first-person plural ('our society is…', 'we understand that…' and the like). This 'we' is not intended to fetishize the experiences of people living in modern, western, media-saturated societies, though it does assume a certain commonality between them.

Where the use of 'we' may be exclusionary is in relation to non-English speakers. In particular, some languages have a different word for 'sharing' depending on whether what is being shared is 'your candy bar' or 'your emotions'. In other words, some languages have different words for the distributive and communicative logics of sharing. The coming together of these two types of meaning under a single word has implications for how the word is understood by English speakers. This is a crucial part of the arguments made throughout this book. Readers familiar with languages other than English will know better than I whether the arguments made here about 'sharing' apply equally to *teilen*, *partager*, *compartir* and more.

Notes

Chapter 1 Introduction

1 And see Samuel 13:20: 'But all the Israelites went down to the Philistines, to sharpen every man his share, and his coulter, and his axe, and his mattock.'
2 See: <http://www.zipcar.com/about>.
3 Even today, when I set up printer sharing on my home network, I do not experience any of the positive values usually associated with sharing, and it would be slightly strange if I did.
4 Williams, of course, was not the first to try and identify key cultural concepts. Sherry Ortner, for instance, cites social anthropologist E. E. Evans-Pritchard, who said that 'the most difficult task in social anthropological field work is to determine the meanings of a few key words, upon an understanding of which the success of the whole investigation depends' (Evans-Pritchard, 1962: 80; cited in Ortner, 1973: 1338). Ortner's interest as a cultural anthropologist is in what she calls 'key symbols' (Ortner, 1973), suggesting that a concern with key elements of a culture is not restricted to words, but that it extends also to symbols that might serve as a 'cultural focus of interest' (p. 1344).
5 See: <http://www.shareable.net/blog/the-15-best-shareable-books-of-2009>.
6 Picture downloaded 21.2.2011, available on the Wayback Machine at: <http://web.archive.org/web/20110210201533/http://www.ecosharing.net>.

7 See: <http://onthecommons.org/what-we-believe>.
8 I have guest edited one, with Wolfgang Sützl, for *Information, Communication & Society* (see John and Sützl, 2016, for the introduction); Linda Price and Russell Belk have compiled one for the *Journal of the Association for Consumer Research* (see Price and Belk, 2016, for their introduction), and Felix Stalder and Wolfgang Sützl edited one for the *International Review of Ethics* (Stalder and Sützl, 2011).
9 Such as the two-day conference on the ethics of sharing in Innsbruck, Austria in 2012; a pre-conference for the International Communication Association in Seattle in 2014; a conference on sharing and sociality in England in 2015; and the 2016 Kultursymposium in Weimar. And this does not include the plethora of conferences and colloquia devoted to the sharing economy.

Chapter 2 How Sharing Became Caring

1 Sherry Ortner (1973) reminds us that Mary Douglas (1966) points out how living organisms often provide the basis for metaphors.
2 1590 Spenser, *Faerie Queene* II.x.28: In his crowne he counted her no haire, But twixt the other twaine his kingdome whole did shaire.
1610 P. Holland, transl. W. Camden, Brit. i.641: He shared the Country among his companions.
*a*1616 Shakespeare, *Timon of Athens* (1623) IV.ii.23: Good Fellowes all, The latest of my wealth Ile share among'st you.
3 Belk (2014) and many others make an argument of this kind in relation to the contemporary 'sharing economy'. I shall tackle this argument at length in Chapter 4.
4 *COHA* 'contains texts from fiction, popular magazines, newspapers and non-fiction books, and is balanced by genre from decade to decade' (Davies, 2012a: 121). For more on the advantages of *COHA* compared to other historical corpora, see Davies (2012b).
5 These corpora are available at: <http://corpus.byu.edu>.
6 The outlier is from a 1935 book about religion in which reference is made to 'the method of caring and sharing' as 'the method of overcoming evil'. 'The method of love', we are told, 'depends upon changing hearts and wills by some one's caring enough for the enemy or culprit to suffer with him and for