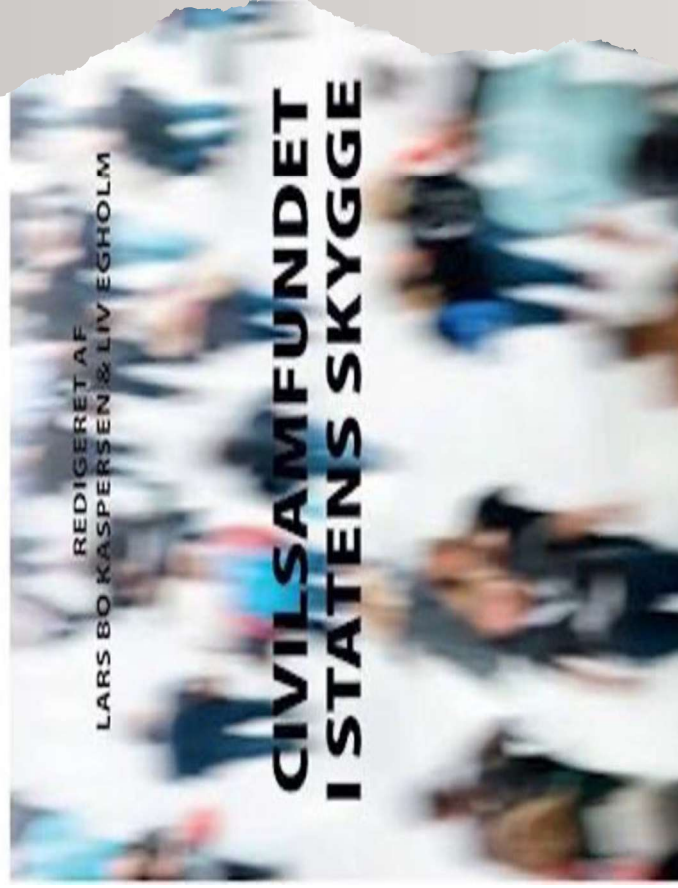




For the People, by the People? Philanthropy and the Common Good

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Contradiction & Core Question

- Philanthropy:
- Celebrated: innovation, agility, risk-taking, cohesion
- Criticized: power, inequality, bypassing democracy
- *“What role does philanthropy play in shaping the common good?”*



Research Lenses

- Gift-giving practices
- Power dynamics
- Philanthropy as interstitial institutions
- Translation practices



Egholm, L. 2026. "Styles of Societalization" in Eds. Alexander, J. & Lichterman, P., "Civil Action in the Civil Sphere". Stanford University Press. (forthcoming)

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Egholm, L. 2021. "Philanthropy as the co-creator of the welfare state" in Egholm, L. & Kaspersen, L.B *Civil society –between concepts and empirical grounds*. Routledge, pp. 112-128

Egholm, L 2021. "Practicing the common good: Philanthropic practices in 20th-century Denmark". *International Journal of Politics, Culture, and Society*, 34 pp. 237–252.

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Gift-Giving and the Common Good

- Appears free – never free
- Given → Received → Reciprocated

“

Much of our everyday morality is concerned with the question of obligation and spontaneity in the gift. It is our **good fortune** that all is not yet couched in terms of purchase and sale.

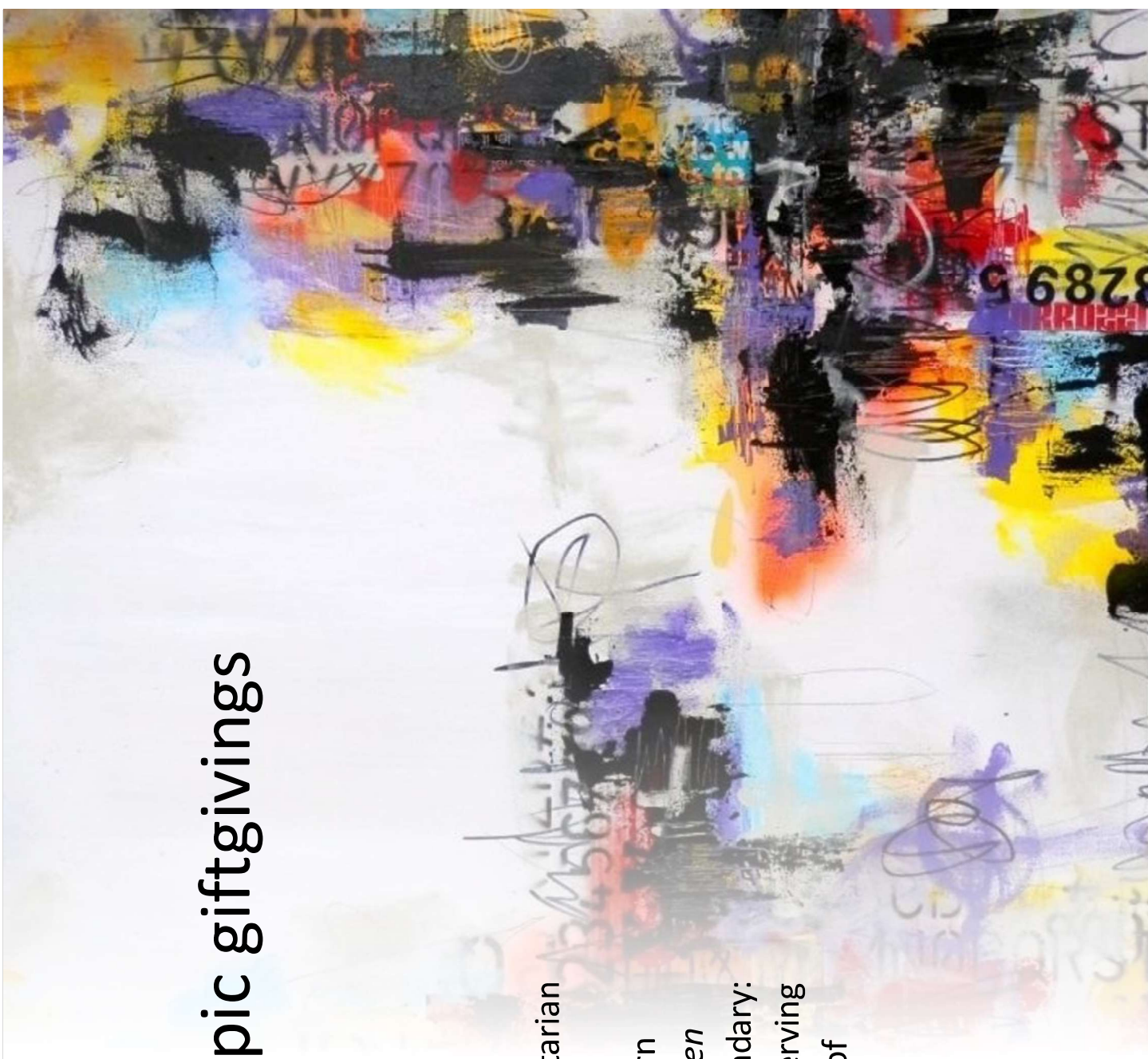
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— Marcel Mauss
The Gift



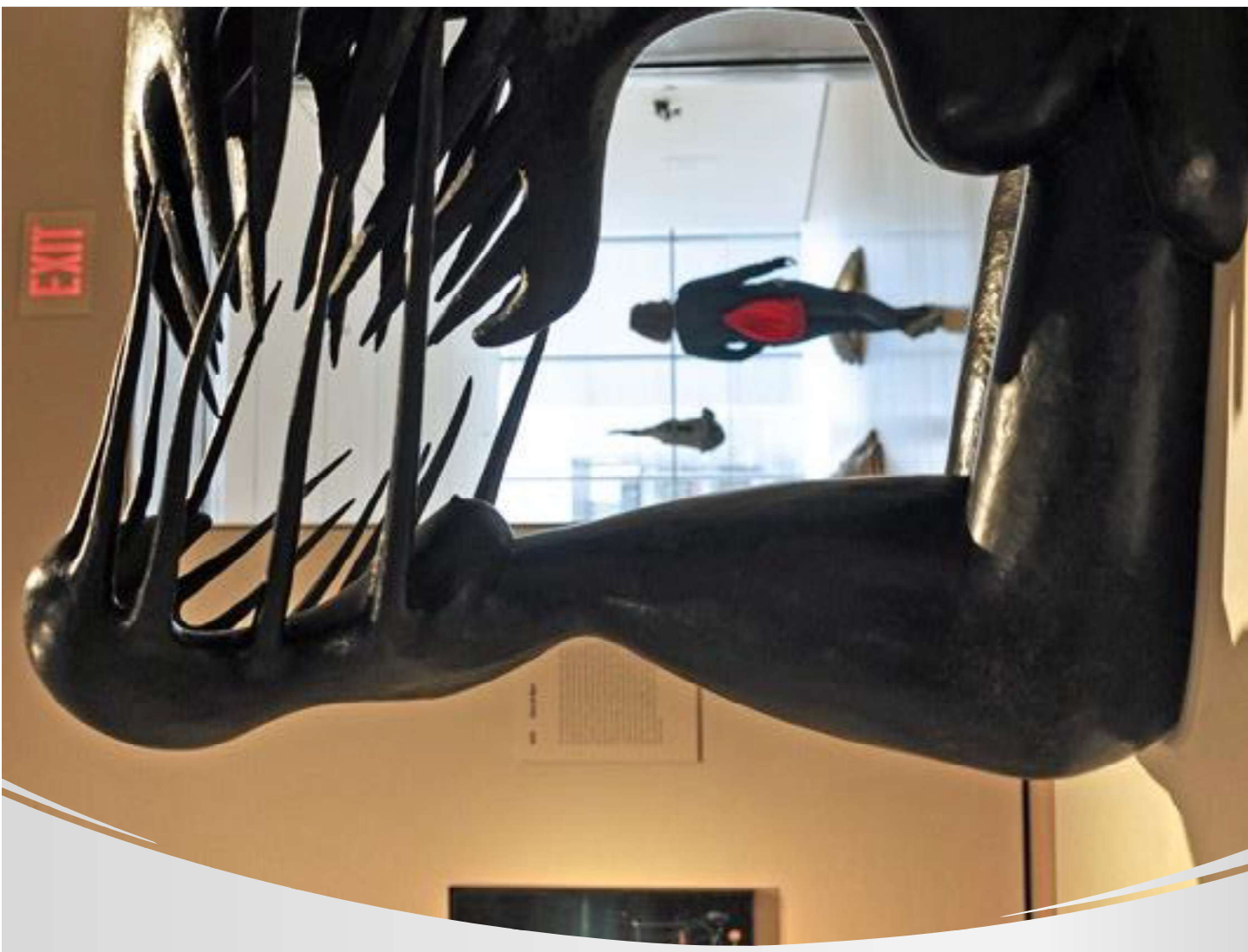
Philanthropic giftgivings

- Neither altruistic nor utilitarian
 - Not pure sacrifice
 - Not guaranteed return
 - Always *in-between*
- Oldest philanthropic boundary:
 - Deserving vs. Undeserving
- Who reciprocate the gift of philanthropy?



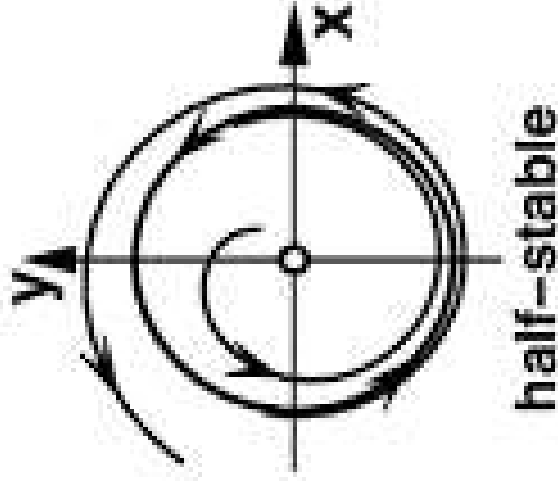
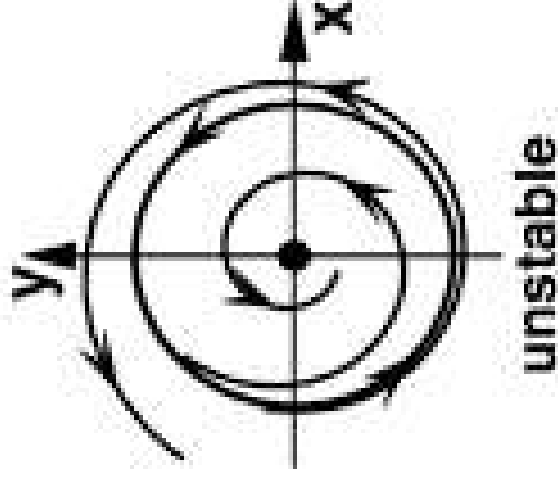
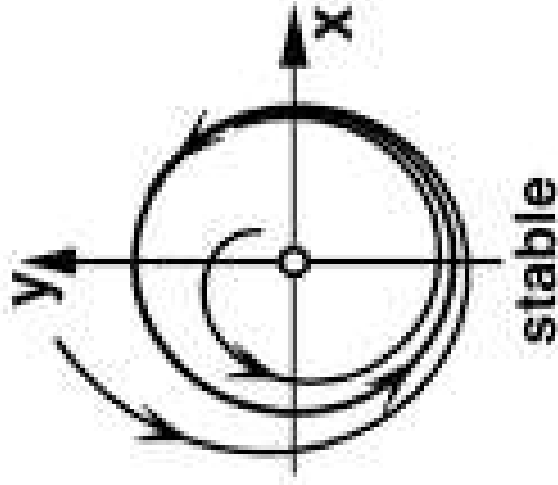
Power and the Common Good

- Always contested, never neutral
- Roles: corrective, partner, competitor
- 'First gift' sets rules of reciprocity → inclusion & exclusion



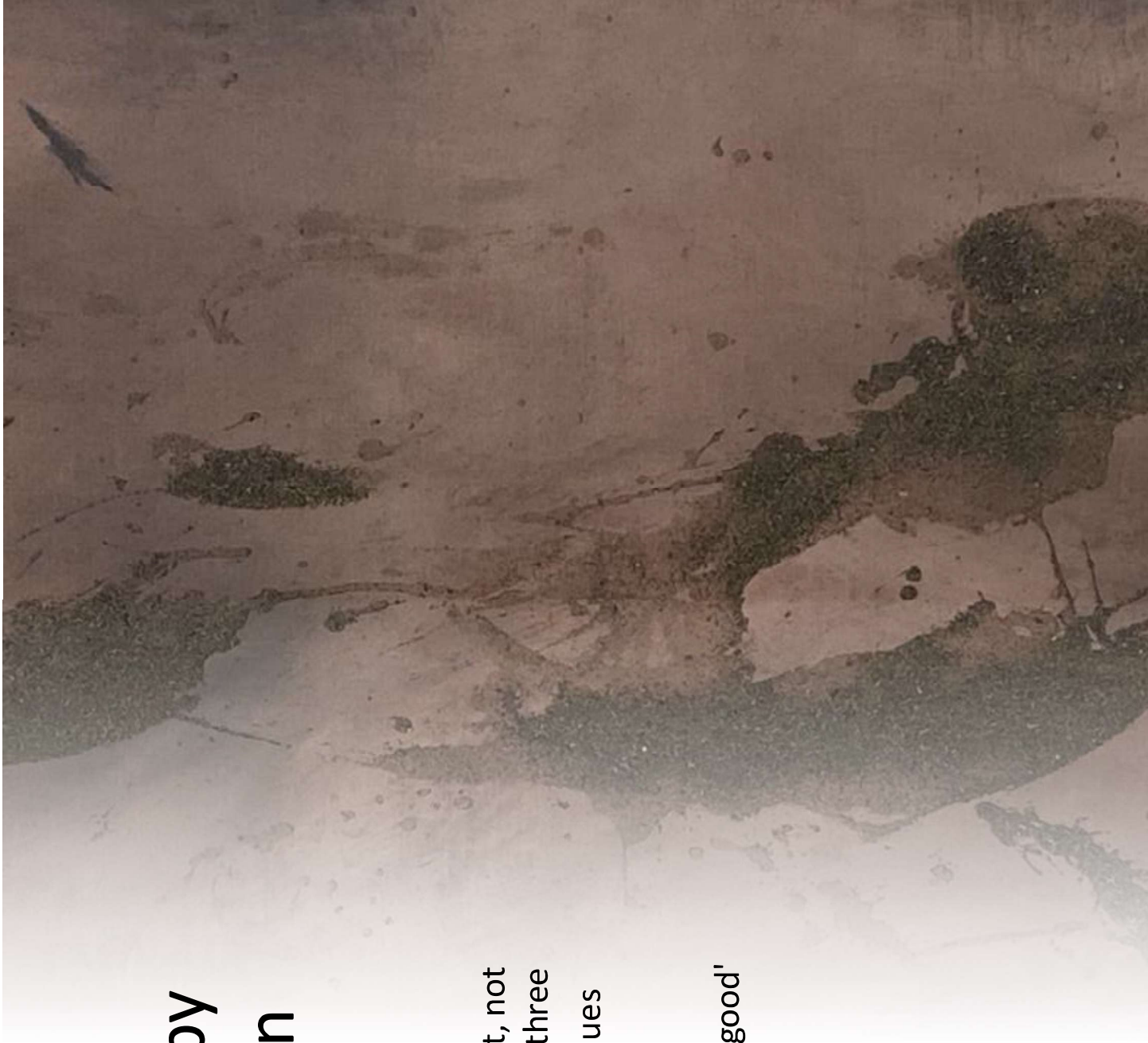
Cycles of Stabilization

- Philanthropy defines → State incorporates
- Philanthropy sidelined → Crises bring it back
- Today's echoes: climate, migration, inequality



Philanthropy In-Between

- Not state, not market, not civil society – but all three
- Translators: move values across spheres
- Locks: regulate what enters the 'common good'



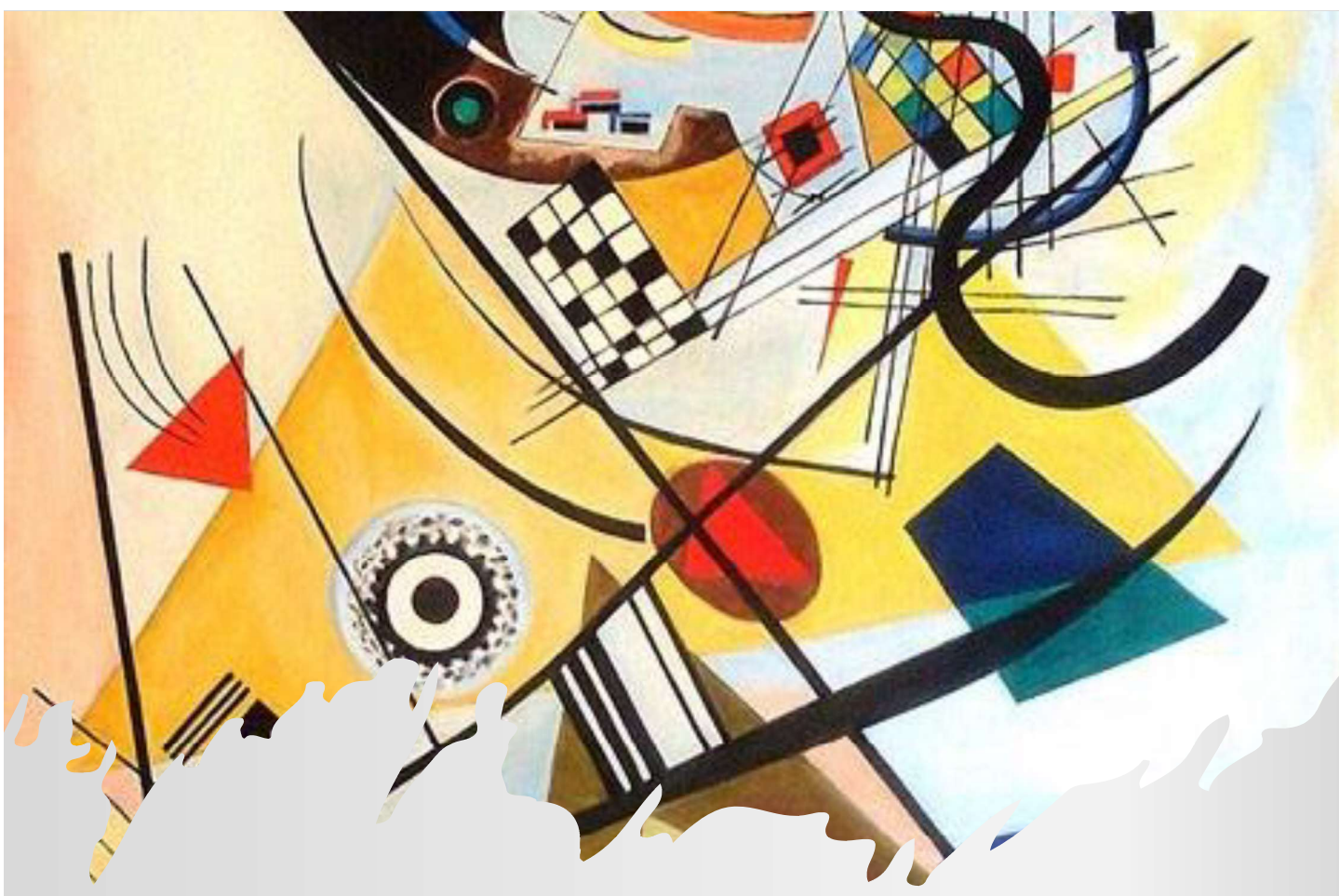
From Quiet Corrective → Visible Actor

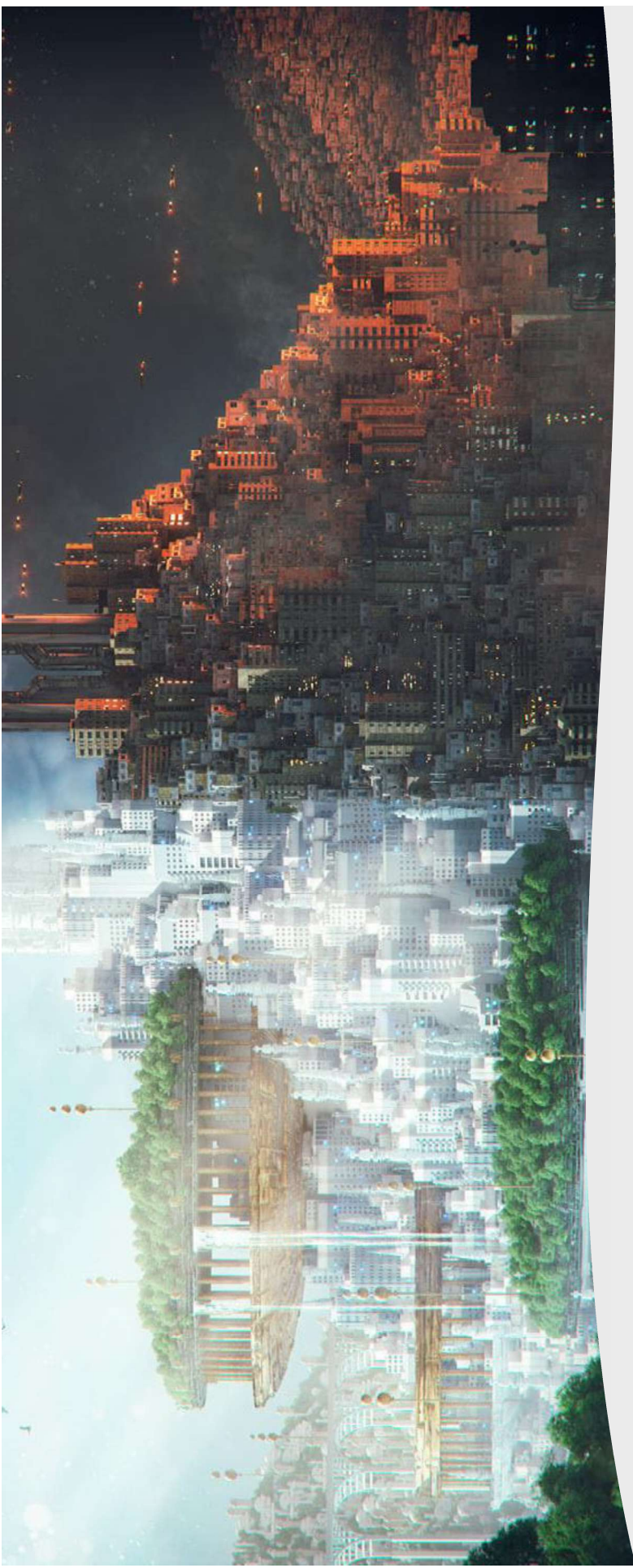
- Historically quiet, filling blind spots
- Today highly visible, scrutinized, debated
- Opportunities: bridge gaps, innovate
- Risks: bypass democracy, exclude voices, import market logics



Translation Practices

- Moves values & categories between spheres
- Always transformative, never neutral
- Everyday practices: boards, funding, partnerships
- Examples: Egmont, 'Help to self-help' → welfare law





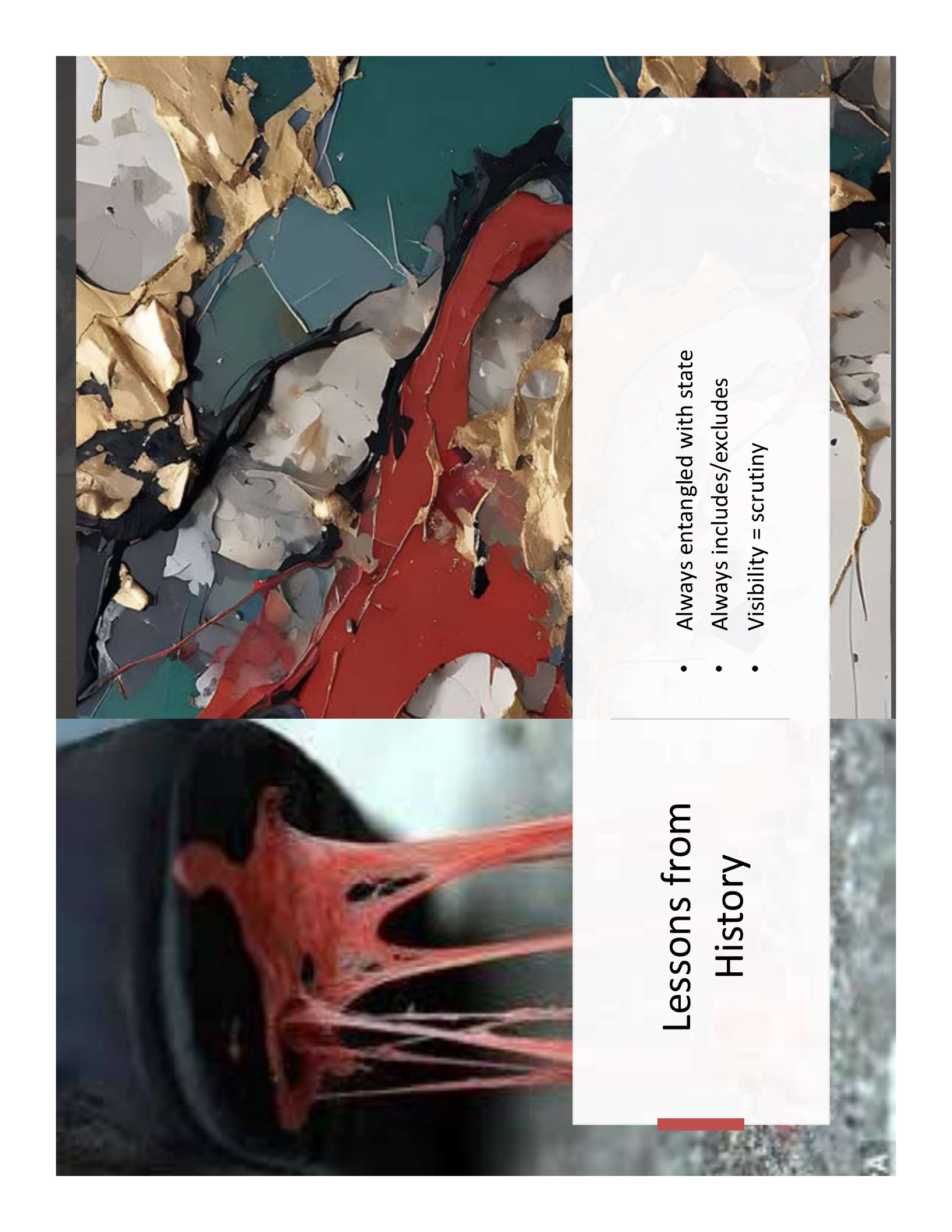
Inclusion & Exclusion

- Every translation includes & excludes
- Winners and losers
- Contemporary translations: innovation, sustainability

Three Historical Periods

- Entangled society
- Welfare state heyday
- Experimental welfare state





Lessons from History

- Always entangled with state
- Always includes/excludes
- Visibility = scrutiny

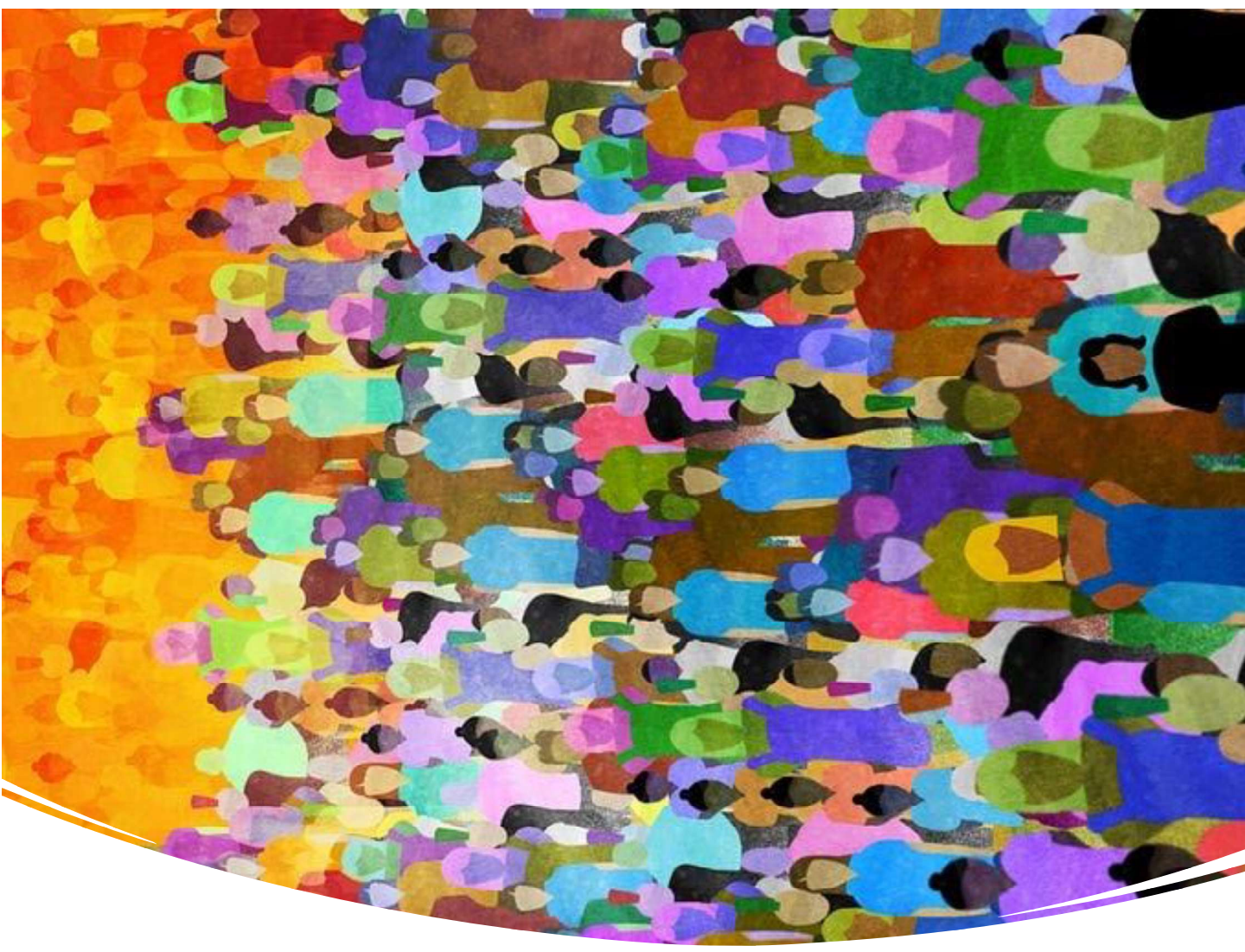
Contemporary Challenges

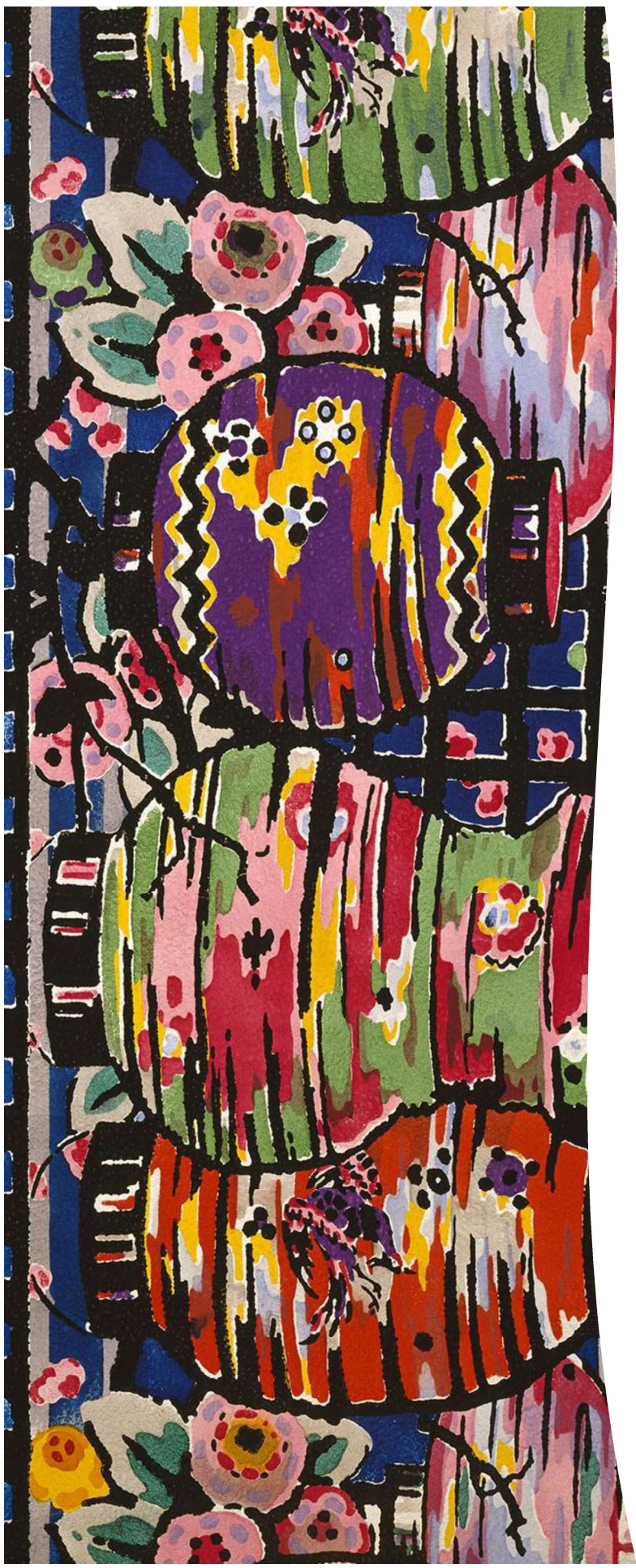
- Opportunities: agility, innovation, cohesion
- Risks: inequality, legitimacy gaps, market logics
- Obligation: reciprocity – transparency, inclusiveness, democracy



For the People, by the People?

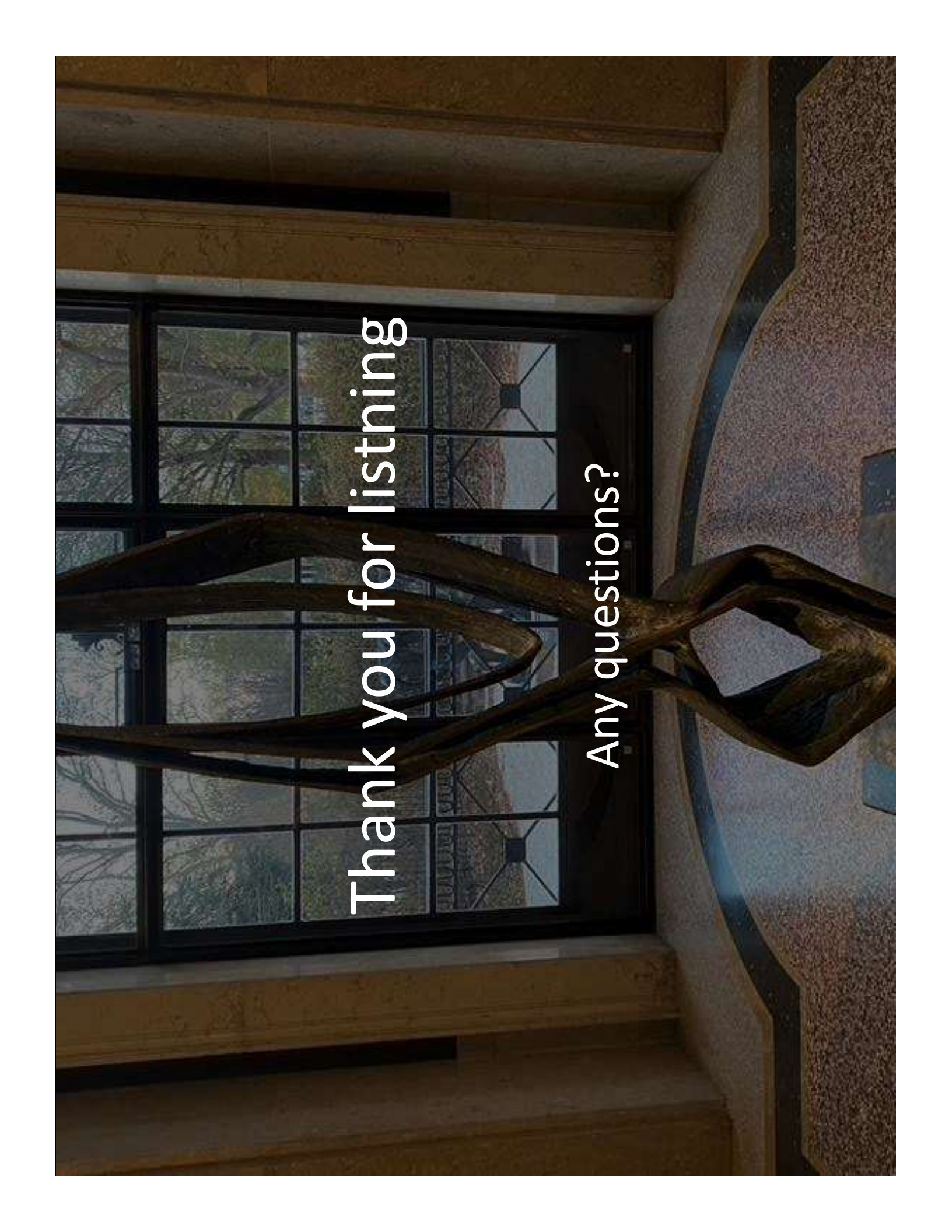
- It depends...
- Philanthropy must:
 - Share authorship of the common good
 - Reciprocate society's gift
 - Expand inclusion, not exclusion





Closing Thought

- Philanthropy is never just generosity
- It defines the common good
- Future written in alliances with states, markets, citizens



Thank you for listning

Any questions?

The keynote draw on earlier publish work

- **Egholm, L.** 2026. "Styles of Societalization" in Eds. Alexander, J. & Lichterman, P., "Civil Action in the Civil Sphere". Stanford University Press. (forthcoming)
- **Egholm L.** 2023. Gift-Giving and Foundation-Owned Business. In: Proff D.C., Michalos A.C. (eds) Encyclopedia of Business and Professional Ethics. Springer, Cham. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-23514-1_553-1
- **Egholm, L.** 2023. "Interstitial institutions" *Cultural Sociology*, 17(1), 96–114 <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/full/10.1177/17499755221123765>
- **Egholm, L.** 2021. "Philanthropy as the co-creator of the welfare state" in Egholm, L. & Kaspersen, L.B *Civil society –between concepts and empirical grounds*. Routledge, pp. 112-128 <https://www.routledge.com/Civil-Society-Between-Concepts-and-Empirical-Grounds/Egholm-Kaspersen/p/book/9780367340957>
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- **Egholm, L** 2021. "Practicing the common good: Philanthropic practices in 20th-century Denmark". *International Journal of Politics, Culture, and Society*, 34 pp. 237–252. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10767-020-09374-4>
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- **Egholm, L.** 2020 "Complicated translations. Philanthropic endeavours of pollution and purification in Denmark 1920-2014". in *Civil sphere and the Nordic countries*. Ed. Alexander, J., Voyer, A and Lund, A. Polity Press pp.64-94 <https://www.worldcat.org/isbn/9781509538836>
- **Egholm, L.,** Heyse, L., Mourey, D. 2019 "Civil Society Organizations: the Site of Legitimizing the Common Good" *Voluntas* 31, 1-18 (<https://doi.org/10.1007/s11266-019-00171-y>)