Generative Anthropology as the One Big Discipline

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If the originary hypothesis entails that all human possibilities must be implicit in, and therefore traceable back to, the originary scene, then it follows that Generative Anthropology must be *the* human science. And if Generative Anthropology is *the* human science, it must be both incommensurable with and inclusive of all existing human sciences. This places thinkers within GA in a somewhat anomalous position: a tiny, at best barely noticed minority within the human sciences considering itself the practitioners of the only genuine science. This raises the question of what our relationship to the other human sciences should be. But before that question comes another one: what, exactly, counts as a human science, and what should a human science be doing? The notion that the human sciences should be modeled on the physical sciences, presupposing an objective, neutral observer, universally transparent categories and even mathematical methods, and the equivalent of the experimental method, has been discredited. The fact that human inquirers are part of the phenomena they are inquiring into makes the human sciences a qualitatively different enterprise. (I will leave aside the question of how unquestioned these assumptions are for the physical sciences themselves.)

We cannot establish any pre- or trans-historical starting point for the human sciences—we always begin within traditions of inquiry. All of these traditions have their origin in some break with one ritual or mythological order or another. Some kind of institution or practice that is unintelligible, and yet a source of sanctioned behavior and modes of activity within the existing order, must be what initiates the break and prompts attempts to understand it. Institutions such as money, markets, writing, and republican and democratic governments might all qualify, and, indeed, we see all of these in what, in the West at least, is the first human science, Greek philosophy. The question addressed by Plato in *The Republic* is still the question all human sciences, more or less directly, must be trying to ask: what is a good way for people to live together? Within a ritual order, such questions could not be asked: the way to live is the way we have always lived, as prescribed by the ritual order and explained by the mythological order. So, a recognition of some disordering element, and a consideration of how to return to a “good” order, is central to the human sciences.

Richard Seaford makes a very strong case for money being the disordering element at the origin of ancient Greek metaphysics. The universality, eternity, and convertibility of money all find their equivalents in metaphysics, and Seaford even provides a compelling reading of Greek tragedy, showing that money is recognized as the disordering element in the Greek polis. Furthermore, the various antinomies of metaphysics, such as between the material and the ideal, the individual and society, all find their equivalent in money as well. At the same time, metaphysics had to be written down, the effect of writing and the subsequent confusion over the meaning of words was systematically reflected upon in Plato's texts, and a parallel tradition represented by scholars like Eric Havelock, Walter Ong, and, more recently, David Olson, has, equally compellingly, identified the structure of writing with the form of post-mythical thought. These are overlapping and complementary analyses—I am just giving a reason why I am going to proceed to make sense of the development of the human sciences in terms of writing, while making the point that I would be more than happy to see the same set of questions pursued from the standpoint of the emergence of the full monetization Seaford locates in ancient Greece.

If the human sciences emerge out of the identification of an element that disorders the ritual/mythical order while creating at least the elements or possibility of a new order, we can further assume that some mythical form or content must remain within the new human science, and furthermore, that anything that we could take to be a genuine advance in the human sciences would be the elimination of some mythical element in the discourse or discipline in question, and its replacement with a concept generated within that discourse or discipline. That concept will be, further, a contribution to the distinction between the (dis)ordering element and the ritual/mythical order from which it breaks. It is under such conditions that we could speak of the emergence of a "discipline": to be within the discipline is to take as the center of your attention the de-mythicizing (dis)ordering institution or practice; to remain outside of the discipline is to indiscriminately mix mythical with post-mythical elements. So, we now have a preliminary way of talking about what would count as a genuine tradition of inquiry within the human sciences.

We also have a way of distinguishing between stronger and weaker contributions to any such tradition. Certainly one criterion would be, as I have just pointed out, identifying the break between the mythical and post-mythical, and tracing all the consequences of the break. But a more comprehensive criterion would be—since, after all, whatever enabled the break must have already been possible within the mythical—which discourse can conceptualize the break while simultaneously identifying the continuity from the one social order to the other. But if the new order has an origin in such a break, while nevertheless sharing with that earlier social order some previous origin, the human sciences must either address ("scientifically") or suppress ("mythically") the problem of origins. That means that the question regarding a "good" social order becomes the question: why is there a social/human order in the first place? The problem of origins is in its intrinsically paradoxical character, as was already noted by Plato at the origin of metaphysics: whatever

we see in the new form must have already been present, at least potentially, in the old form. How could a human science, then, hypothesize regarding the origin without simply projecting back into the previous form those features of the human that most define our current order, which, after all, is the most fully developed form of the human as such? This projection of current social relations back to earlier ones is the mythical form taken by the human sciences: it is equivalent to the explanation of ritual by myth. It is easy to see why speculation on origins, whether of humanity or even of a relatively trivial cultural form, is almost unanimously denounced. But such denunciations cannot prevent historical and cross-cultural inquiries from mythicizing in this way: only a genuinely post-mythical science of the originary can do so.

The originary hypothesis provides such a science. An account of the origins of the originary hypothesis will help us to understand how this can be the case. Eric Gans's account of his articulation of Rene Girard and Jacques Derrida points us in two extremely interesting directions. First, through Derrida, to the "linguistic turn" in 20th century thought, that not quite conclusive blow to traditional metaphysics, which imposed the recognition that every concept is constituted by the subordinate term to which it nevertheless claims priority; second, through Girard, back through a history of inquiries (including Freud and early 20th century anthropology) into constitutive violence, into what we might call *that in the archaic world which our modernity leaves us least prepared to see*. This yoking together of, not opposites but certainly "disparates," is a disciplinary origin we can always return to as ground. For Derrida, of course, his deconstruction of the speech/writing distinction is a decentering move, but the fact that this decentering can never be definitively accomplished seems to suggest a permanence to the "center" beyond whatever form of political oppression Derrida and his successors might like to attribute to it. In that case, the sign creates the center through deferral, and it is a center that could always be decentered—by another center. The fact that the sign can be repeated, or iterated, is the foundation of writing, but is "always already" to be found in speech or, for that matter, in the aborted gesture of appropriation the originary hypothesis takes to be at the origin of the human. And it is that iterated sign that makes it possible to account for why even the scapegoat scene Girard constructs could be memorable, and accrete new layers of ritual and myth; and if Girard's scapegoat scene requires the sign, then the generation of the sign no longer requires the scapegoating.

So, it is this relation between the iterability of the sign, the center that makes that iterability possible, and the participants on the margin who construct themselves through this relation to the center that provides for the continuity from the ritual/mythic to an order in which norms and mimetic models must refer explicitly to social, or desacralized relations. Derridean deconstruction pointed to mythical residues in the human sciences, and even to a ritual violence implicit in perpetual recentering, while in finding this violence to reside in language, he developed the victimary tendency in postmodern culture to its furthest extent. The problem of human origin becomes the problem of controlling violence as it becomes the

problem of the origin of language. Only the most stubborn mythical element of the human sciences, the belief that structures are enduring while events are mere effects of those structures, which is to say, that the declarative sentence represents reality comprehensively while the more restricted speech forms merely "implement" declarative statements, needs to be overcome. The originary hypothesis accomplishes this through the claim that only in a singular event could a sign both marginally and qualitatively different from a gesture of appropriation be the vehicle of the discovery that signs defer violence.

If myths explain rituals, the human sciences study practices that refer to some social center. The conceptual equipment of Greek philosophy may have been provided by the emergence of money and writing, but its explicit object of inquiry was the social order in the age of the "tyrant," that is, the post-sacral king who made visible, by exploiting it, the class differences of the post-ritual order. A good society was, in its initial formulation, a society without tyranny, and for the human sciences this has not changed. The terms of all human practices are set by a social center that may, or may not be, tyrannical—depending on what the human sciences tell us. Every event is therefore a judgment of the social center. But every event is also an event of language. The emergence of the post-sacral order in which "tyranny" becomes possible coincides with the emergence of alphabetic writing, itself a product, according to the scholar of literacy, David Olson, of the transformation of language itself into an object of inquiry, starting with the invention of the alphabet to represent speech, but ultimately focused on the problem of reproducing a speech situation in the new medium of writing. This leads to the need to distinguish, metalinguistically, between (using the terminology of analytical philosophy) "using" and "mentioning" words, with the latter referring to an inquiry into how language is used.

With writing, then, comes linguistic metalanguage: implicit, tacit norms of speech are made explicit, and therefore systematized. This means that language use can be assessed: words can be spelled correctly or incorrectly; words can be used properly (according to their agreed upon definition) or improperly; sentences can be grammatical or ungrammatical. With these distinctions come others, concerning clarity and logicality:

> The metalinguistic concept of a sentence brings these underlying structures into consciousness as objects with particular properties such as *clear* or *ambiguous*, *grammatical* or *ungrammatical*, and, importantly, as *implied* or *entailed*. Such inferences are justified by appeal to wording rather than belief. (116).

The question of implications and entailments are particularly important here because these concepts implicate the expectations we have of one another in a literate culture. The distinction between the "words on the page" and intended meaning is constitutive of a literate culture, and when someone is considered a "bad reader," what is usually meant is that he or she fails to make this distinction consistently. The metalanguage for representing speech acts in written discourse includes all of the concepts one is expected to use as a

“critical thinker”:

> The concept *sentence* is special in that it allows one to treat an expression as mentioned rather than used and to comment on it as grammatical, as a premise, as entailed by an earlier sentence and so on. This lexicon is greatly elaborated in literate discourse to include such concepts as *statement*, *claim*, *assertion*, *suggestion*, *inference*, or *conclusion*, concepts important for critical thought. (125)

Writing, then introduces a disciplinary structure into language, bringing into focus features of language that can then be used for purposes of inquiry and instruction. This also means, that while distinctions between written spoken language and persist, the capacities for thinking generated by literate metalanguage enter into and restructure spoken language as well: we certainly don’t need to write in order to be able to “infer” or “doubt.”

The implications of literate metalanguage go much further. Olson, in his earlier *The World on Paper*, had pointed out that the written sentence represents an entire speech act, but it must do so without the thick context that embeds speech carried out by members of a community, in a specific situation. For example, in an oral culture, if one person, in reporting another’s speech, wanted to communicate the uncertainty of that other person, she could simply repeat what that person said in a hesitant tone of voice. “Tone” is one of the many elements of the speech situation that is unavailable in writing, so, the uncertainty must be conveyed with words: it is possible, of course, to simply write, “he wasn’t sure,” but various other ways are developed to convey a wide range of tones: he “suggested,” “conjectured,” “believed,” and so on. Good writing, in this case, would be writing that sufficiently supplements what is lost in “translation” from spoken to written language.

Olson comes back to this question, in his recent *The Mind on Paper*, by addressing the norms of “prose,” by way of Mark Turner and Francis-Noel Thomas’s *Clear and Simple as the Truth: Writing Classic Prose*:

> The classical style takes for granted two of the features that modern, enlightened readers now find objectionable, the assumption that language is transparent to the reality it describes and, second, that it can reveal object [sic?] truths. Further, the Classical style even denies it is a style; it takes itself to be a naked, natural way of speaking… I shall regard the Classical style as the set of norms and standards for evaluating prose in a way similar to those norms that regulate the meaning of words and the logical properties of sentences. Thus prose is a critical, metalinguistic concept that articulates the norms and standards for much of written language and, subsequently, for careful speech. (142)

It is easy to see that the goal of classic prose is to recuperate the distinction between written and spoken language, or to simulate the assimilation of the former to the latter. The writer of classical prose effaces himself, simply pointing out something in reality that he,

along with his readers, look at. In other words, he constructs a scene that remains tacit, and invites a suspension of disbelief allowing the reader to inhabit that same scene, viewing the same object or event, as if converging lines united the two points of view on a single center. Classical prose is an almost perfect example of what Derrida called "presence," and the entire post-structuralist critique of "metaphysics" could perhaps be made much "clearer" if resituated as an argument over the extent to which we should accept what Olson calls the "conceits" of classical prose.

Where the critiques of metaphysics have been right in an extremely important way is in noting that what are in fact features of the metalanguage of literacy used to assess written discourse get retrojected as features of the human "mind" or "nature" that the categories of written metalanguage merely construct representationally. To define the human being as a "rational animal," for example, is to read a feature of written discourse back into the form of human being that produced that kind of discourse. To take "logic" as a natural way of representing how the mind works and building entire cognitive science empires out of it is to do the same. The metalanguage of literacy supplements the speech scene represented by writing: Olson focuses on mental and speech act verbs like "assume," "suppose," "contend," "assert," which supplement what Anna Wierzbicka shows to be universally shared primes like "think," "say," and "know," and are in turn nominalized into "suppositions," "assertions," and so on. Once we have these reifications, a disciplinary space focused on the relation, say, between "assumptions" and "statements" can be created.

To return to my opening discussion, I have been taking writing, as it has taken shape, through the metalanguage of literacy, studying the possibilities of iterating speech scenes as written (and read) texts in "classic prose" as the (dis)ordering social element that brings forth the kind of shared reflection and discourse ultimately institutionalized in the disciplines of the human sciences. All of the founding concepts of the human sciences, ancient and modern, like "society," "mind," "religion," "language," "intention" and so on are all supplemental "grounds" for the objects constructed within the disciplines. The point is not that the "entities" named by those words/concepts don't exist; rather, it's that they exist as products of inquiry within disciplines, within traditions of inquiry, which is to say that they have a provenance and can and often should be revised or replaced. By now it is a commonplace to point out that to use a word like "religion" to refer to all the various forms of Christianity, Judaism, Buddhism, Islam, Voodoo, tribal rituals, and so on is modeled on Protestantism, with its distinction between "individual faith," on the one hand, and either Church or State, on the other. To take the example of "intention," meanwhile, the problem of identifying another's "intention" is a post-literate one because it presupposes the possibility that the speaker's meaning might be different than the meaning of the words or sentences uttered by the speaker. To speak about "intention" is to direct attention to the former.

Since the distinction between the speaker's meaning and the meaning of words is central to

the problem posed to writing of representing speech in abstraction from presence on the scene of speech, we can see the word/concept of "meaning" at the center of the metalanguage of literacy and, therefore, of the disciplines. What we could see as the founding of the disciplines in Plato's *Republic* does place "meaning" at the center: for example, the meaning of the word "good." This is in fact an excellent example of the founding of the human sciences around some (dis)ordering, emergent social element. The word "good," which is unproblematic as an adjective modifying various ways of being and activities (a good baker, a good warrior, a good father, etc.), which all have their definition and evaluation implicit in the practices they are embedded in, becomes problematic when it becomes necessary to name, describe, and assess activities that don't fall into traditional categories. It is only then that it becomes possible to ask whether someone is a "good person," or a "good citizen," or, indeed, to inquire into nouns like "goodness" or "the Good." The human sciences have never moved beyond this inquiry into the meaning of words, and cannot do so, no matter how data-driven they become.

Here, Peirce's pragmatism, which is the first attempt to think disciplinarity I am familiar with, is especially helpful, because for Peirce, pragmatism is "merely a method of ascertaining the meaning of hard words and abstract concepts." And the method of doing this "is no other than that experimental method by which all the successful sciences . . . have reached the degrees of certainty that are severally proper to them today" ("Pragmatism in Retrospect: A Last Formulation," Buchler, 271). Pragmatism would then be a kind of metalanguage of disciplinarity, or perhaps an infralanguage, insofar as it need do no more than test the meaning of words on their own terms:

> The meaning of a proposition is itself a proposition. Indeed, it is no other than the very proposition of which it is the meaning: it is a translation of it. But of the myriads of forms into which a proposition may be translated, what is the one that is to be called its very meaning? It is, according to the pragmaticist, that form in which the proposition becomes applicable to human conduct, not in these or those special circumstances, not when one entertains this or that special design, but that form which is most directly applicable to self-control under every situation, and to every purpose. That is why he locates the meaning in future time, for future conduct is the only conduct that is subject to self-control. But in order that that form of the proposition which is to be taken as its meaning should be applicable to every situation and to every purpose upon which the proposition has any bearing, it must be the simply the general description of all the experimental phenomena which the assertion of the proposition virtually predicts. (261)

So, if we advance a scientific proposition, or, let's say, a claim about reality, the meaning of that proposition is to be found in the future conduct it predicts. That conduct will be shaped by "special circumstances" and "special designs," from which we must abstract the general form of conduct we have in mind. The forms of conduct which are then to be taken as tests

of the proposition will themselves be embedded in yet other special circumstances and special designs. One "situation," in which the conduct is set, must be distinguished from other situations. Peirce is laying the groundwork for conceptual distinctions that will have to be made by future inquirers, and those future inquirers will be among those whose conduct is being predicted. Those future inquirers, since they are above all interested in inquiry, and therefore truth, and therefore in separating the objects of their inquiry from those presuppositions and concerns which threaten to put an end to that inquiry, will also be especially interested in acquiring the self-control regarding their own habits that is the effect and secondary aim of inquiry. In the process of inquiry, the participants will generate as many translations of the proposition into other propositions, experiments, and forms of conduct as possible—otherwise, how could the discipline determine which is to be called its very meaning? Thus, "[e]very connected series of experiments constitutes a single collective experiment" (260). Pierce would restrict this all embracing mode of inquiry in which, as a later philosopher of science, Gaston Bachelard, would predict, "social interests will then be reversed once and for all: society will be made for school, not school for society" (*The Formation of the Scientific Mind*, 249) to "hard words" and "abstract concepts," but wouldn't the distinctions between "hard" and "easy" words, and "abstract" and "concrete" concepts, also have to made by some discipline—a discipline that might very well redraw these boundaries? With Pierce, then, we have a conception of disciplinarity as open-ended and aiming at discovering truths that will be universally acknowledged and taken into the formation of habit and conduct, while being at the same time dependent upon the collective conduct of those who will have to follow a proposition through its myriad translations, knowing that the final one will never be arrived at.

So, we have the discipline of writing, which generates the metalanguage of literacy, which in turn launches a whole fleet of what Marshall McLuhan might have called "sleepwalking" disciplines that essentially reiterate the terms of that metalanguage. This would include every single discipline in the human sciences. Trying to define or analyze an entity like "mind" is, then, an essentially mystified endeavor. This is where Eric Gans's definition of metaphysics as the assumption that the declarative sentence is the primary linguistic form takes on highly consequential implications. Metaphysics itself is just an inflation and concealment of the metalanguage of literacy which reduces language to its elements, which are in turn both real entities and parts of larger systems. To define a word is to treat it as convertible into declarative sentences, and to make it inextricable from its grammatical relations. Again, I am not quite saying that phenomena like "mind," "religion," "language" and so on don't exist—rather, I am saying that they exist as effects of disciplinary events that obscure the origins and therefore meanings of these words themselves. In working to turn originary thinking into one big discipline we uncover those origins or originary structures and thereby transform the objects.

Since writing is only possible because all signs are iterable, writing doesn't come from the outside and invade an innocent oral culture—writing and the metalanguage of literacy it

generates simply elicits, in a particular way, what is already internal to language. What I propose targeting in the metalanguage of literacy is that it conceals its own originary structure by treating signs as direct representations of "things," "ideas," "thoughts," and so on. The metalanguage of literacy creates a system of cross-referential nominalizations that purports to represent "reality." This is what renders it immune to originary hypothesizing, and the best way to address this immunity is to treat all human activity as originary hypothesizing. All questions of discourse and intellectual activity are therefore questions of what we might call the re-discovery of language rather than relations between language and something external, whether in the world or the mind (everything external is already in language). Originary thinking as the one big discipline is, therefore, to use a term taken from Bruno Latour, infralinguistic rather than metalinguistic:

> We have to resist pretending that actors have only a language while the analyst possesses the meta-language in which the first is 'embedded'. As I said earlier, analysts are allowed to possess only some infra-language whose role is simply to help them become attentive to the actors' own fully developed meta-language, a reflexive account of what they are saying. In most cases, social explanations are simply a superfluous addition that, instead of revealing the forces behind what is said, dissimulates what has been said, as Garfinkel has never tired of showing. (49)

Latour associates metalinguistic "explanations" that posit some hidden "real" "behind" the intentions of actors with the implication of the modern social sciences in social engineering. The implication is that the human sciences should help others, including other human scientists, to find the meaning of what they are saying, and in the process to develop new linguistic capacities to discover what we are saying. We might say than rather than generate the terms on which we identify, denounce, apologize for, constrain, or convert actual or budding "tyrants," the disciplines of the human sciences might help make explicit the ongoing negotiations between a given practice and the social center.

The founding gesture of a discipline is to turn a nominalization produced elsewhere within the literate order into one that can guide inquiry: for example, from "hooliganism" as a pattern named by the press to "anti-social behavior," with "causes." This conversion further entails identifying some scene and event, however abstract, upon which a collective or typical agent does something ("History" is the biggest scene of all). The agent in question might be an author or artist, a nation, state, ethnicity or class, a worshipper, a mind, a gendered subject, a citizen. The concepts and arguments within the discipline consist of differing ways of distinguishing between what the agent meant in doing whatever it does, and what it means that the agent meant that. Now, what it means to do that is to construct a relation between some margin and some center, a relation we can always locate in whatever distinction, implicit or explicit, the disciplinary language itself makes between unmarked and marked "doings" and "happenings." For the disciplines, the center is not a ritual center to which donations are given and from which benefits are expected to flow; it is a source of

authorized action that, if iterated, will convert resentments into sharing among those iterating it. We don't agree on which model of action fits this description, hence the discipline, but we can now identify what the agents acting within the discipline are attempting, and have always been attempting.

The infra and transdisciplinary inquiry into the discipline deploys the nominalizations generated by the discipline—"genre," "norm," "belief," "behavior," "mind," "subject," "text," and so on—to mark differences in the activity within the discipline itself. Everyone within the discipline becomes a bearer of its originary structure. The question introduced into the discipline, then, is what model of inquiry identifies and enacts the model of action that converts resentments into love. In this case, the model of action itself becomes a model of inquiry: the agents we study are also seeking the authorization of the center. Any nominalization can be used to initiate this inquiry, by turning the nominalization into a verb referring to the disciplinary activity trying to name the objects of its activity. In generating disciplinary events, the way of thinking predicated upon the event-al nature of the human can effect a continuous interference within the discipline. The meaning of this kind of interference is to make the question of meaning as centrality permanent across the disciplines—to make it so that those within the discipline cannot think about what they're doing outside of this question.

A transdisciplinary practice of GA, then, involves working within the disciplines, probing the meaning of their constitutive concepts whose origin has been occluded or forgotten. This involves a combination of attentiveness and respect, on the one hand, with complete irreverence, on the other. We should feel free to start from the assumption that any and all concepts might be arbitrary impositions, situated within historical, social and political settings that have provided them with values other than those of unfettered inquiry. Disciplines inquire into their own histories all the time, of course, and into the histories of their concepts, but what they can't do is simultaneously address the word and the referent—why is there this entity we call "society" or "mind," and why do we call it "society" or "mind"? It's possible, within the disciplines, to redefine one or the other—to say, "mind" should really mean y instead of x, or the concept of "society" is strictly limited to post-ritual orders. But the co-constitution of word and entity cannot be grasped, because that lies in the emergence of the human science disciplines from their (dis)ordering post-ritual/mythical elements, an emergence that I have identified with the creation of a literate order.

The meaning of a word, a sentence, a discourse is in its origin, but its origin is not simply a reference to something that happened, after which other things happened because of it. An origin is the creation of shared attention directed at something, and of those sharing that attention becoming who and what they are because of it. History is less a straight line and more a series of concentric circles, or perhaps vortices: each instant of shared attention includes the attention directed to the practice that created the previous such instant—it retrieves from that practice whatever will provide the increment of deferral needed to

ensure that shared attention is sustained. Origins are inscribed within any practice, and we can always locate at least a hypothetical version of them in our practices. A practice, in Alisdair MacIntyre's words, is

> Any coherent and complex form of socially established cooperative human activity through which goods internal to that form of activity are realized in the course of trying to achieve those standards of excellence which are appropriate to, and partially definitive of that form of activity, with the result that human powers to achieve excellence, and human conceptions to the ends and goods involved, are systematically extended. (187)

The power of MacIntyre's definition is that it avoids utilitarian reductionism, which would see a practice as something one does for some extrinsically defined purpose, while at the same time opening up internally constituted and coherent forms of activity and life to the transcendence they are always already constituted by. For MacIntyre's concepts like "goods" and "excellences," I would use terms indicating an enhanced relation to a center. A "good" or a form of "excellence" represents an increment of deferral, and an increment of deferral is the eliciting of more "information" from the center. On the originary scene, the central object "tells" the members on the margin to stay their hands, to commit no violence against it, and, in committing no violence against it, commit none against each other. Needless to say, the words for articulating this imperative were unavailable to those participants on the originary scene; they are available to us now because in subsequent scenes a mythological scene was constructed upon which the central object did perform certain acts, utter certain words, and interact with other figures; and, later, with the (dis)ordering impact of money, writing, and the decline of kingship, it became necessary to attribute more complex and also more abstract modes of ordering and distributing to the central entity.

The center, then, persists, and we can say nothing that is not a speaking of the center. The center persists materially, in the form of some kind of central authority, without which we have no record of any community sustaining itself. But at the same time it persists in the entirety of the ordering of our practices in such a way as will best ensure that this central authority, however placed there, does its duty. Out of the entirety of the ordering of our practices, we can, in further increments of deferral carried out in disciplinary spaces, abstract more minimal models of practice from which we can hypothesize the other elements within the "entirety" might spring. These minimal models of practice are what we take ourselves to be doing when we think about what we are doing, which is, most fundamentally, engaging in inquiry into the center. Disciplinary inquiry itself, then, models the practices into which it inquires, by treating those practices as modes of inquiry. Which means that originary inquirers are positioned so as to question participants in a given discipline regarding the meaning of their practices.

There are two possible paths toward one big disciplinarity. The most familiar one, attempted by virtually every "revolutionary" theory in the human sciences (historical materialism, psychoanalysis, even deconstruction in its way) is the establishment of a controlling meta-language. GA certainly has the materials for taking this path, in a set of "foundational" concepts (desire, resentment, deferral, center, scene, sign, etc.) defined precisely and contextually through a series of cultural, literary, and social analyses. A contest of meta-languages is the almost universal, indeed practically the only conceivable mode of contestation among competing theories. You put forward your concepts, and I put forward mine; we then look at various objects of analysis and each of us provides an "explanation," with the "better" or "stronger" one winning.

Of course, this is a big problem, since there is no theory-free criterion for distinguishing between "stronger" and "weaker" analyses. We also know that there is no level playing field on which these meta-theory contests might take place—rather, the process is historical, with the new theory taking aim at the dominant one. Post-structuralism hit North America in the 1980s with sophisticated analyses of the Romantic poets and canonical novelists like Melville, Hawthorne and Poe because it was through its readings of such figures that the established New Criticism controlled the field. Which theory prevails in the academy might depend far more upon which provides more opportunity for novel PhD theses, grant proposals, and tenure track positions, and what determines that?

I'm not reducing everything to power relations, and both New Criticism and Poststructuralism provided powerful and, in their time, innovative ways of reading texts; but it would be very hard to show that one theory displaced the other simply because it was "better." The Kuhnian theory of the replacement of one theory by another through the emergence of anomalies in the existing system that multiply and generate increasingly strained attempts at resolution within the existing system, ultimately to be resolved within a new paradigm including the previous one as a limit case, might describe what happens in the natural sciences (I have my doubts). But when it comes to the human sciences, there is no doubt that a far more complicated process, closer to the kinds of transformations described by Paul Feyerabend, in which economics, politics, and institutional imperatives weigh heavily, determines the outcome. We will never be able to market our wares in a free and open marketplace before informed "consumers," and it's hard to see even a younger, leaner and meaner generation of originary thinkers (were such to emerge) engaging in the kind of marketing and politicking and just sheer ganging up that would be required for a theory to prevail in the universities.

There's another reason to be skeptical about the grand field of meta-theoretical contest. Such struggles encourage polemics, and polemics encourage the hardening of lines, the fetishization of intellectual materials and the introduction of coercion into matters where it has no rightful place. It was not only Marxists who turned conceptual differences into life and death organizational struggles (and vice versa); psychoanalysis almost immediately split

into competing versions, with each singling out a particular element of Freud's analysis and anathematizing the others. It was not very different with Derridean, Lacanian, Deleuzean, etc., versions of poststructuralism. If there were to be an institutional stake in GA, enough to draw in "fresh blood," we would quickly see lines drawn over "orthodox" and "heretical" understandings of "resentment," the "moral model," and every other concept. Of course there need to be discussions and there will always be disagreements over any theory, GA certainly included, and disagreements, properly conducted, are generative for any discipline. But the struggle for institutional mastery doesn't provide the field in which those kinds of disagreements could take place. I would also add that the days of grand theoretical battles in the university, at least the American university, are probably over: between victimary inquisitions, budgetary shortfalls, and the business model imposed on universities, forcing English Departments as much as anyone else to explain how they will be providing students with the kind of "critical thinking skills" they need to get jobs leaves little zest for genuine theoretical battles.

The other path toward "owning" the transdisciplinary field has never, as far as I know, been tried. That path is learning to speak the theoretical languages we wish to supplant. This is more like body snatching than planet smashing. Let's take an example that has come up often lately, due to the importance of cognitive psychology to the recent GASC conference in Stockholm: the computer model of the mind. Obviously the computer model is an antagonist to the originary hypothesis, insofar as it takes a product of human thinking aimed at supplementing human thinking in certain areas and retrojects that product back as the model for human thinking itself. Saying that the mind is a computer is not really all that different from saying that our bodies are automobiles. It defines down the human essence to one of our tools, rather than engaging in inquiry into the human essence that enables us to create, use, and criticize computers and cars and to do many other things as well. But once we make our arguments, then what? The computer model of mind enables the inquirer to describe in interesting and complex ways all kinds of things. If I say that as a result of "experience" (refining an already existing "feedback mechanism") humans construct and continually revise "algorithms" for determining, automatically, specified responses to probable phenomena, can it really be asserted that nothing illuminating can emerge from such an approach? When I am faced with a "choice," I can, we might say, run some probability calculations, based on controlled scans of the field and subject to time constraints, so as to continually enhance the "effectiveness" of my choices. At the very least, the computer model is a source of provocative metaphors and ways of subverting various sentimentalisms.

We can certainly speak and think in these ways because the "computer model of mind" is a language, with its rules, idioms and tacit assumptions (to use a famous metaphor from Wittgenstein, it's one of those newer suburbs built, in a planned and grid-like manner, around the more eccentric, improvised old city—perhaps an industrial park!), and we are language-using beings. I find it irritating and exhausting to repeat the same arguments over

and over, which is what one has to do if one is determined to “refute” and “defeat” the “computer model of mind.” But we can speak to the computer model of mind by speaking within it. Asking an adherent to the computer model of mind to lay bare the algorithms he has followed in constructing an experiment so as to test the working of the computer model of mind in some experimental subjects might be more instructive than hectoring him with its contradictions and dehumanizing consequences. The computer model of mind, like any discourse, has its origin and its originary structure (the iteration of its origin in its ongoing operations), and the way to discover this is not just by going back to the records of that conference in 1944 or whenever (unsurprisingly, Ngram has the “computer model of mind” shooting upward in the mid-80s), but by noticing what kinds of things must be said within the discipline and what kinds of things must not be said: by entering it as if it was just emerging and its terms need to be learned by applying them to its emergence. By thus infiltrating the disciplines we might get them to speak their own truth, which (we must have faith in the power of our own discourse here) must both iterate and evade its originary structure.

How do we remember our own origins while thus undercover in the disciplines; how does One Big Discipline emerge from what appears to be dispersal? The real “proof” of GA as the “strongest” theoretical discourse will be that it can keep showing whatever disciplinary space it inhabits that it needs the way of thinking only originary thinking can provide to address the anomalies in its own discourse, anomalies which the originary disciplinary inquirer will have trained himself to detect. The proof, that is, is in the way we will have clarified in a collaborative manner whatever those in that discipline have devoted themselves to studying—not in how we distract them by pointing out mistakes that might not seem such, or seem relevant, to them. If we find ways to “represent” so as to defer resentments in the course of any inquiry, we exemplify an originary intellectual “ethic,” which can in turn become a compelling topic of conversation. “Our” language, in other words, can take its place within the disciplinary language, and that is where something like genuine intellectual competition takes place, through the framings and counter-framings of intellectual collaborators. We would have to have faith that one day all might wake up and find themselves speaking generative anthropology; of course, along the way something like a crisis would have to take place in each of the various disciplines, and a substantial part of what we are studying now are the elements of that possible crisis.

One pertinent example of a transdisciplinary project both allied with and serving as a useful model for GA is Anna Wierzbicka’s Natural Semantic Metalanguage. That Wierzbicka harbors such ambitions for her NSM is evident not just from her own references to Leibniz’s aspiration to create a “universal characteristic” as an inspiration, but from her use of the NSM to critique the limitations of other disciplines. So, for example, she points out that many evolutionary psychologists “attribute the human evolutionary success in large part to early humans’ superior capacity for ‘mindreading’” (*Imprisoned in English*, 156). Wierzbicka goes on to point out that

> "Mindreading" is a nice metaphor, but not a self-explanatory one, and like many other such metaphors popular among scientists, it is bound to English, because "mind" is an English word with no exact counterparts in most other languages of the world. In its present day meaning, *mind* focuses on thinking and knowing, to the exclusion of emotions and values, and is quite different in this respect from the main counterparts of BODY encoded in other languages…." (157)

In an instance particularly relevant to GA, in Chapter 13 of her *Imprisoned in English*, she addresses the work of evolutionary cognitive psychologists like Michael Tomasello, Derek Bickerton, Merlin Donald and others. She not only points out the limitations of their accounts of the emergence of the human due to their assumption of the universality of English words like "believe," "understand," "perception," and "goal," but rewrites in primes the successive cognitive revolutions hypothesized by these thinkers as having effected the transition from ape to human. She is able to conclude:

> From an NSM perspective, evidence reviewed in studies such as those mentioned above suggests that the "representational resources" of chimpanzees include conceptual primes KNOW, SEE, WANT, and DO, but do not include THINK, which we find in the human language of thought… Whether or not one accepts this conclusion, the methodological point still holds: here as elsewhere issues can be clarified if the debate is freed from the conceptual dependence on English and articulated in simple, stable, and cross-translatable words like *see*, *want*, *know* and *think* (and, as noted before, *say*). (171)

So, Wierzbicka sees her NSM as providing the basis for a transdisciplinary accounting for everything human. But her approach is so radical that it subverts the way I think we would be most likely to think about a grand transdisciplinary breakthrough—ordinarily, such a breakthrough would involve a new way of "explaining" everything, which is to say a reduction to a more abstract metalanguage. That wouldn't satisfy Wierzbicka, though, because any such unified field theory would be offering its explanations in a particular language, assuming the transparency of culturally specific terms, and therefore no explanations at all. For Wierzbicka, the transdiscipline must translate all of human thought and action into a single, minimal language shared by all languages. This would really involve a rejection of explanation as the purpose of the social sciences, because, once everything can be translated in those words that can themselves be translated no further because they are immediately intelligible, what is there to explain? Explanations just translate into a more abstract language what people would ordinarily discuss in more concrete ways, using everyday words—if the point is to translate into the most everyday of the everyday words, the purpose of inquiry is to contract rather than expand our vocabularies. (Since it seems to me that a condition of transdisciplinarity on the terms of the NSM would be to render one's own basic concepts and propositions into the primes, I'll take the initial step and translate "representation is the deferral of violence" as follows: "people say words because if people

want to do bad things to others people feel like saying: ‘we don’t want to do these bad things now’.”)

Indeed, what, exactly, gets “explained” or “proven” in the human sciences? “Prediction” is meaningless, because history does not take place in a controlled space where we can manipulate the variables. Anything we were to take as a confirmed prediction would depend upon an arbitrary delineation of the event in question. Did your theory predict that Donald Trump would win the 2016 presidential election? First of all, millions of other people, even if they were in the minority, also predicted this—do their theories also get confirmed? More important, “Donald Trump elected” represents a culmination of a whole series of events—did you predict the precise margin of victory in Michigan? If not, does someone who came closer than you therefore have a “better” theory? Why isolate this particular prediction, which is the kind made by pollsters and bookies, as the “test” of a particular theory? All such questions are unanswerable, no matter whether the event we choose is the “financial crisis of 2008,” or the Bolshevik Revolution or Napoleon’s defeat in Russia. These events are obviously not “isolated” in the way we would isolate “events” in a laboratory to test the results of a specific “input,” nor could they be (in a sense, the goal of “totalitarian” political movements is to make something like that possible, by making humans fit laboratory subjects—which means we should want events to be *less* predictable). You could certainly be better or worse at predicting things, but that would say more about your immediate knowledge of conditions on the ground (an officer in Napoleon’s army, a stockbroker on Wall Street, who sets aside his own desires and attempts to game the system, might do a good job of predicting such things), your wits and your experience than about the “strength” of your social theory. The same goes for attempting to test one social form against another: liberal democracy vs. monarchy vs. autocracy vs. religious rule, etc.

Can anyone really show that this feature of this kind of society, which we see manifested in this particular society of this type in this way, has produced these specific effects, and will continue to do so in all societies of this type (or this particular one, for that matter) regardless of the infinite possible changes in surrounding conditions in the meantime (some of those changes produced by the “cause” we are trying to “isolate”)? And, anyway, a social theory can only, in a circular manner, tell us something about those elements of the social order it has framed as worthy of note, and of necessity must ignore whatever does not enter its frame. It’s possible that one’s predictions might get better as one focused on smaller and more marginal events. And this is just as true for what is presumably the “hardest” of the human sciences, economics. We could say that a better test of the strength of one’s theory is whether it provides its adherents the power to refrain from making predictions in the hope of winning the theory sweepstakes, because it focuses on something more important. In short, prediction is simply another mythic element of the human sciences, the modernized version of divination.

What a human science is for is to help us see the meaning of events. GA should, I believe

share this purpose with Wierzbicka's NSM. We take (dis)ordering events, as they are registered by the most alert, thoughtful and/or symptomatic testimonies we can find, and we show the difference between what the speakers mean and what their words mean. This difference represents the speaker's (mis)recognition of what the center has to say. In this way, we can ask pointed questions of those foundational disciplinary concepts that are reiterations of the metalanguage of literacy, and show how those concepts rely upon retrojected nominalizations. The disciplines presuppose their break from the ritual/mythic world while finding it impossible to articulate or even name that break; and for the same reason they must obscure their continuity with that world. They are compelled to saturate the speech situation they are intent on reproducing, which means they cannot examine the difference between writing and speech—that difference being writing's constitutive "vocation" of studying the difference between speaker's meaning and word's meaning.

A word like "cognition," for example, is meant to establish a circumscribed mental "space" wherein certain measurable and replicable mental events can take place. It's easy enough to see that the concept wants to eliminate from thinking what is singular and unreplicable, whether for personal or historical reasons, and to exclude from consideration what is external to the "mind," such as the "body" or "language." So an originary thinker within psychology might be bound to introduce all of that into "cognition," with unpredictable effects upon the concept and the discipline organized around it. It is this forgetting of language, in particular, that we will find everywhere in the disciplines, the forgetting of the fact that concepts are words, with infralinguistic articulations and histories within traditions of inquiry; and this forgetting is required because of another forgetting, that it is precisely the disciplines that blind us to our (dis)continuity with the archaic scene, a (dis)continuity that lies at the origin of all the disciplines. To become one big discipline, it would be sufficient for GA to keep recalling that.

The best way to elicit meaning from a sign, meanwhile, is to iterate it. Any repetition is a difference, but experimentation with a range of iterations, situating the sign in question in different contexts, with different tones, different "issuers," and so on serves to reveal the difference between speaker's meaning and sentence's meaning. All the other possible meanings of the word can be brought to bear on hypothesizing possible differences between speaker's meanings and sentence meanings. This form of repetition displaces the kind of repetition that supplements and saturates a scene of speech. The problem with the metaphysical non-scene of classical prose is that in supplementing the scene of recorded speech the writer relies upon the very nominalizations that a disciplinary scene of writing would inquire into: not only do specific "suppositions," "ideas" and "implications" have histories and derive from traditions, but so do these very concepts themselves. Their historiality lies in their creation of a separate mental scene, unrelated to any center other than some anti-mythical self-creation. The speech scene is taken to be more originary than the writing that represents it, and so metaphysical-classical prose tries to efface the sign in its referent, while ultimately finding that referent to be nowhere but in its own self-creating

mind. In the end, that's the only way of erasing the inexplicable difference between speaker's meaning and sentence's meaning. In practicing the scene of writing and reading as just as originary as that of speech, meanwhile, one retrieves the originary gesture of signification.

Even more, this mode of theorizing brings the constitutive problem of the good society, or how we are to live together, to the forefront of all social thinking, within any discipline. If the purpose or telos of sign use is to repeat the sign in such a way as to defer the new threat of violence, in the post-ritual/mythical order this means ensuring commensurability between speaker's meaning and word's meaning. In other words, the ethical dimension of social thinking aims at enabling all of us as speakers or sign-users to bring the meanings we intend into accord with the historical accretions implicit in the signs we use. Our words, in other words, should not be at cross-purposes with our intentions, because when that is the case violence becomes a more likely way of settling mimetic rivalries.

In becoming one big discipline, GA first of all brings these two layers of meaning into accord within the disciplines themselves. The test, finally, of determining the commensurability of speaker meaning and sentence meaning in relation to the center is whether the disciplinary space can generate imperatives around whose fulfillment new spaces can emerge. David Olson advanced his inquiries into the cognitive effects of literacy by devising little experiments that enable us to see whether, say, a child of a particular age can distinguish between what someone says and what they mean. A GA transdiscipline, both immodest in its ambitions and humble in its respect for the accumulated wisdom of human practices, would do well to propose and devise such experiments, real and merely hypothetical, as frames for determining what mode of centrality a particular practice on the margin must be imagining as it works out the declarative language necessary for directing and reconciling the ostensive and imperative field in which it operates.

Olson tests children's ability to distinguish between speaker's meaning and word (or sentence) meaning by setting up scenarios in which children observe a scene in which one person provides another with information. The experimenter then contrives it so the child comes to know something that either the speaker, the listener, or both, do not know. The question then becomes whether the child can distinguish what she knows from what the participants on the scene know: if the child, for example, has seen the speaker move some object to the green box after telling the listener it was in the red box, where will the child think the listener thinks it is? Distinguishing between the two levels, or perhaps poles, of meaning, is a question of realizing that different people can interpret a sentence in different ways, based upon the prior assumptions they bring to the situation: this is an ability, Olson hypothesizes, that is part of the acquisition of literacy. So, what would be the equivalent in social life of the child who thinks the listener thinks the object is in the green box because the child knows it is there? What would be the experiment that would enable us to test this? And what would be the equivalent of the acquisition of literacy, which enables the child to

distinguish his own knowledge from another's?

We have recourse here to our founding concept of "deferral." It is deferral that creates the center of the originary scene, and that therefore enables us to jointly attend to any object on any scene; and it is the ability to jointly attend to an object that generates a broader field of actual and possible objects organized around the central one. So, our question can be, how differentiated is what one person says from another person? Still, we'd need to have a clear criterion for "differentiation"; also, we'd have to take into account the ways in which, say, a schizophrenic's or paranoid's speech might be highly differentiated in ways that would indicate something other than an "increment" of deferral. One has to be able to "point to" the object as others do, and further direct their attention to something in or about the object others don't notice. This "pointing to" would be, in the discourse employed by our "subject," an internal, potentially self-referential marking of the distinction between this discourse and others. The inquirers themselves would have to be implicated in what they would take as a possible inquiry initiated by the subject: the distinctive "marking" would be distinctive insofar as it points to the resolution of some "anomaly" in an at least preliminary new "paradigm." We inquirers could only notice the marking insofar as we could contribute to the further construction of the paradigm.

But in social life, the anomalies of a particular paradigm must be exhausted far more thoroughly than in the laboratory setting; one might say that even the most apparently discredited paradigms are never conclusively discarded, once and for all; indeed, one might even say they never should be. It may be that pointing out the anomalies, persistently and ruthlessly, and embodying the position of the one who bears the exposure of the anomalies, is a way, or the way, of sustaining the deferral that allows possible paradigms, or frames, of various uses, to come into view. In fact, insisting on the anomalous nature of all discourse is a way of enacting the paradoxicality of all linguistic usage. Putting forth a speaker's meaning that is the intent to inhabit both the "normal" and "revolutionary" positions within the "sentence's meaning" would be the necessarily qualitative test of a further increment of deferral.

So, provide someone with a discourse or, in doing "fieldwork," examine the discourse with which one has provided oneself. Ask, first, what they think "everyone else" would make of this. They will provide you with an answer that you could map somewhere from the extreme, on one side, of saying that what I make of it is what everyone will make of it (it just means X); to, on the other extreme, of taking you through the way different readers or listeners would make sense of this or that portion of the discourse and therefore the discourse as a whole, differently. In other words, the "subject" either assumes, according to the "conceit" of classical prose, that we are all, always, on the same scene; or the subject is to some extent capable of participating in the scenic character of knowing. At each point along the way, we could identify how the ability to hypothesize new possible readings indicates the ability to defer the individual's own imposition of his speaker's meaning on the text. The

farther along toward this latter pole the discourse moves, the more it becomes possible to ask, what would be the reading that would include them all, as an act of deferral that provides a model for a historically transformative mode of deferral: what we might call the originary-originating meaning. Of course, we inquirers would have to learn how to identify such a reading ourselves. In this way, the transdiscipline would itself be a mode of language learning by situating all language users, which is to say all language learners, within the field of contemporary language, which is to say, across the array of incremental deferrals and backslidings that constitute any cultural moment.

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