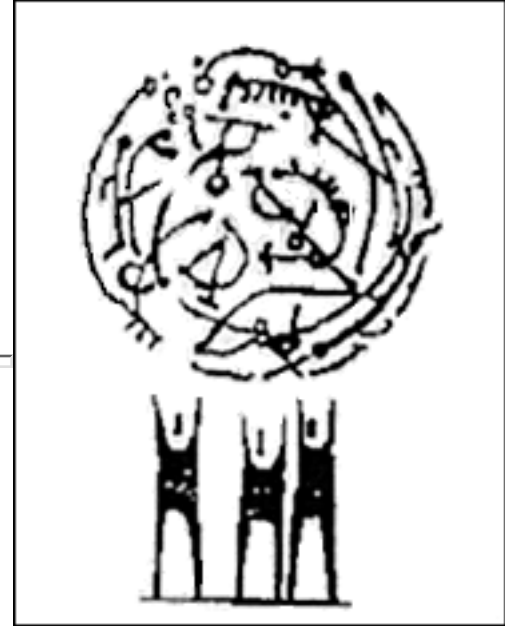


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*Last updated:*

**Anthropoetics 6, no. 2 (Fall 2000 / Winter 2001)**

# **Tragic Victims in Japanese Religion, Politics, and the Arts**

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The purpose of this article is to draw attention to the presence in Japan of a victimary discourse and a scapegoat mechanism which, beyond religion, helped shape Japanese politics, literature and the arts. This victimary discourse, which yet needs to be defined, has been so influential in pre-modern Japanese culture, that it became a national ideology. A thorough understanding of Japanese culture without realizing the religious, political and cultural importance of this ideology would at best be incomplete and superficial.

Historical evidence of a victimary discourse in Japan is as old as historiography and written literature. Entire portions of histories such as the *Nihongiryaku* and the *Fuso Ryakki*, and the *Gukansho* were based on the scapegoating ideology. An entire genre of Japanese literature – the tales of the failing heroes – including such great classics as the *Heike Monogatari*, and numerous dramatic as well as pictorial works such as the *Kitano Tenjin Engi Emaki*, a national treasure, draw from it. By sponsoring religious institutions and literary as well as artistic works around scapegoats, political leaders have drawn their legitimacy from this ideology.

The fear and worship of political victims occupies an important place in Japanese religion. Like ancestral and nature gods (*kami* in Japanese), political victims were deified and subject to worship from the lowest echelons of society to the very top. Let me discuss some concrete examples and try to define the kind of victim worship, which, in the course of history, has assumed such importance.

Perhaps we should begin with Japan's oldest and most revered anthology of poetry entitled the *Manyoshu*. Containing more than 4500 songs, some of which transmitted orally for generations, the first two books of the *Manyoshu* already existed by the middle of the eighth century. Given the craze for things Chinese at that time, the *Manyoshu* may have been a Japanese version of its great Chinese predecessor, the *Shih Ching*. Whereas the idea to compile such an anthology was certainly Chinese, the nature and content of the songs differs greatly, for *Manyoshu* songs are mainly ritual songs sung at such ritual occasions as travel, marriage, enthronement, funerals, etc., often it seems by important persons such as emperors, empresses, officials, and, perhaps most importantly, by official ritualistic poets.<sup>(1)</sup> Umehara Takashi suggested convincingly that the oldest, original books of the *Manyoshu* contain a disproportionate number of songs sung by political victims: Kakinomoto no Hitomaro, Otomo no Yakamochi, Prince Arima, Prince Otsu's sister and possibly more.<sup>(2)</sup> This was in the 1960's and 70's,

when Japanese scholars became acutely aware of the importance of scapegoats in their culture, Hitomaro died in obscure circumstance in exile. His ranks were posthumously restored, an effort to appease his spirit as we can tell from similar facts in later Japanese history. Yakamochi was executed, as a result of having been implicated in the assassination of Fujiwara no Tanetsugu in 785. This was between the Nara period (710-784) and the Heian period (794-1185) when, because of political instability, the emperor Kanmu decided to relocate his capital from Nara to Nagaoka (784-94) and then to what is now known as Kyoto. Princes Arima and Otsu were executed because of their involvement in imperial succession disputes. Was the original *Manyoshu* an attempt to publish the works of political victims to appease their spirits?

Before defining the "theology" of victims, let me briefly present another series of prominent victims, victimized by the political ascendancy of the Fujiwara clan. The Japanese history entitled *Shoku Nihongi*, records under the date of 20/5/863 (all dates henceforth will be in the order of day, lunar month, and year) a cult offered to a number of political victims at the imperial garden called Shinsen-en just south of Kyoto's imperial compound. The worshipped victims were as follows: 1. Prince Sawara (posth. Emperor Sudo, d. 785) who was accused of having plotted against the above Fujiwara no Tanetsugu and against the transfer of the capital from Nara to Nagaoka. Prince Sawara was exiled and died in mysterious circumstances without having ever been pardoned, aged 36. 2. Prince Iyo (executed in 807) and his mother Kisshi both victims of an imperial succession dispute in 807. 3. Fujiwara no Nakanari (executed in 810) responsible for the Kusuko Uprising. 4. Tachibana no Hayanari, involved in the Jowa Uprising and executed in 842. He had been in China with Saicho (posthumously Dengyo Daishi), the founder of the Japanese Tendai school of Buddhism. 5. Bunya no Miyatamaro was put to death the following year as a result of the same uprising. 6. Mononobe no Moriya who, with the rest of the Mononobe clan, was killed by the Soga clan in 587.[\(3\)](#)

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Later, two more prominent victims were added to the list. Kibi no Makibi (693-775), who had spent some years in China and is credited with the transfer to Japan of the Korean deity Gozu Tenno. According to the scroll entitled *Kibi Daijin Nitto Emaki* (Scroll of Minister Kibi's Journey to China now at the Boston Museum of Fine Arts) Kibi studied Chinese poetry, closed in a tower and engaged the Chinese in chess and, aided by the ghost of Abe no Nakamaro, was able to outdo other Chinese scholars in the interpretation of the *Shih Ching*.[\(4\)](#) They also added to the list Sugawara no Michizane (more on him below) to become the Eight Goryo, the Eight August Spirits, the most worshipped victims.

The 863 cult called *goryo-e* or "meeting with the august spirits" worshipped these victims in ways no different than many Japanese festivals today. They were offered a popular festival including a lecture on the sutras *Konkomyo-gyo* and *Hannayshin-gyo* followed by performances by the artists of the Bureau of Music of Chinese and Korean dances, *sangaku* performances, shooting arrows from horseback, sumo wrestling, and puppet plays. The purpose of the 863 *goryo-e* was to appease these spirits but not, as is the case in other cultures, to banish them from the human world. Rather than to banish them, the community tried to convert these victims into beneficent, tutelary deities. The nature of Japanese deities, whether nature, ancestral or scapegoat ones, has traditionally been ambivalent. Deities can be both good and evil; when 'good' the members try periodically to maintain that quality in their deities, because they believe that their agriculture and wellbeing depended on it. When bad for any reason, they try to convert the deity/deities back to good ones by offering them, often on an ad hoc basis, gay and elaborate festivals as tokens of community effort and sacrifice. One of the methods to appease these victims was to restore

their ranks or, as in the case of Emperor Sudo, bestow on them even higher ranks, which they then enjoy forever in the heavenly bureaucracy.

The 863 *goryo-e* was not the only rite held to appease these spirits. Such *goryo-e* were also held in the provinces. More was done to appease the spirit of Prince Sawara. After the premature death in 9/intercalary3/785 of his wife as a result of an epidemic, Emperor Kanmu declared a general amnesty and restored Prince Sawara to the rank of Crown Prince and offered the prince a proper burial. In 11/6/785, when the new crown prince fell ill, an oracle revealed that he was possessed by Prince Sawara's spirit. In 19/7 therefore, the Emperor gave the dead prince the title of Sudo Tenno (Emperor Sudo) and his grave was transferred to the Yamato region, the proper site for imperial burials. This is the only known case in which the title of emperor was given to a dead person. When this proved insufficient, the Emperor decided to relocate the capital and to move to present Kyoto.

Similar efforts had already been made concerning other members of the *goryo*. In 3/850 Emperor Ninmyo died followed two days later by his wife. In the belief that this was the work of Hayanari, in 5/850, the new emperor promoted Hayanari to Fifth Rank and his grave was transferred to his native province, thus ending, posthumously, Hayanari's demotion and exile. In 5/853, after an epidemic in the Third Month, the court awarded him the even higher Junior Fourth Rank.

From what we have learned so far, we can offer the following definition of Japanese victim/deities. Traditionally, many East Asian (Chinese, Korean and Japanese) religions are based on a parallelism of real and supernatural worlds. The real world is meant to reflect a supernatural one. An exact replica of the Chinese government, with all its offices and officials was believed to exist in the other world as well. Based on this parallelism, the Japanese believed that a victim will take its office, power, or that to which it felt entitled to, or that which was unjustly taken away from him, into the world of the dead. The power, which they enjoyed or were supposed to enjoy in life, is the same power from which they can exact their revenge and perpetrate evil upon their communities from the other world. Hence the name 'vengeful deities' some scholars have given to them.

By definition, these victims were people who died prematurely, in unnatural circumstances. These include: execution, exile, death during travel (*kykaushi*), suicide, death as a result of grudge, jealousy or any other strong emotion, death on the battlefield, death as a result of natural calamities such as epidemics, floods, earthquakes, fires, and starvation.

It is only logical therefore that the more powerful a victim has been during his or her life, the more it was feared. For if an emperor, an imperial prince or any other high government official is victimized, that spirit can effect a revenge on the living that is commensurate with the power it enjoyed or took as granted, when it were alive. Such victims were for the Japanese the very *raison d'être* of all natural disasters, social and political upheavals, epidemics, unusual natural phenomena (eclipses, snow in summer, etc) and provided them with an explanation of their volatile world and lives.

Once these victimary spirits are appeased by the efforts of those who were not directly involved in their deaths or by later leaders, they turn into good deities willing to protect the community. Many Japanese festivals, which actuate such victims, make them into scapegoats. Not only do they have the potential to cause harm to the community but also, as appeased deities, they become scapegoats who, absorbing the sins of the community, help to prevent the very harms they potentially perpetrate. Such is indeed the ambivalence of practically all Japanese deities.

That such a religious system could become the mainstay of the political system comes as no surprise. For those who have the political, social and economic power to build shrines for them and offer them elaborate worship, are also those who were believed to control these victims as well as the natural and human disasters they allegedly cause. Hence the fact that, as far back we can trace this religious phenomenon in historiography, the worship of political victims has been the prerogative of powerful people and families. Hence also the fact that the 863 *goryo-e* was sponsored by people who, at the start of the *sessho-kanpaku* system of government, had considerable political ambition. *Sessho* are the regents who served during the reign of infant emperors and *kanpaku* (e.g. prime minister) was the highest position in the imperial government. The combined *sessho-kanpaku* was equal to civil dictator. These titles have been traditionally given to leading members of the Fujiwara clan who controlled the imperial throne by marrying their daughters to the emperors (traditional imperial in-laws) and often by enthroning their infant grandsons. The fact that the *sessho-kanpaku* system developed at the same time as the first *goryo-e* is no coincidence. It was sponsored by Fujiwara no Mototsune (836-91), *kanpaku* in 887 (related to 3 emperors) and Fujiwara no Tsuneyuki. The *sessho* regent system has already begun under Fujiwara no Yoshifusa (804-72) Mototsune's father, in 866.

Such a cult did not appear suddenly and out-of-nowhere in 863. It had existed already before, sponsored by political outs to embarrass the leaders whenever natural disaster stroke. Natural disasters have traditionally been considered portents of heaven's displeasure with the current political leadership. Why was it that Fujiwara no Yoshifusa and his son Mototsune brought such 'out' cult into the political mainstream? Was it that Yoshifusa used this system to compete religiously against rivals within his own clan? Or was it that he needed to legitimize his newly acquired power by sponsoring this cult? We may never know the answer to all these questions without taking later development into account. It is well known, however, that Yoshifusa competed with many brothers (he had four) and competition among siblings was common in the Japanese clan system. This was true especially when, under Yoshifusa, the Fujiwara developed into a family system (Kajuji, Kan'in, Kujo, Nijo, Ichijo, Iwakura, Saionji, etc.) on the basis of hereditary rights to office.

In order to reply to these questions, we need to take into account the later developments of the cult of political victims and to discuss the details of Sugawara no Michizane's career. The above-mentioned Mototsune had four sons and four daughters. Under the Chinese political system the Japanese had adopted by the seventh century, women had no rights to political office, but a matrilineal and matrilocal system was still lingering on before it changed, beginning with the leading Fujiwara in the tenth century, into a patrilineal family system. Under Mototsune, political rivalry among brothers continued unabated. Mototsune's eldest son Tokihira ((871-909) took over the political authority from his father and his career began early when, in 14/2/899, Emperor Uda (r. 887-97), appointed him Sadaijin (Minister of the Left), the most powerful office under the Kanpaku. Uda whose mother was not a Fujiwara, however, was a strong-willed emperor intent on balancing Fujiwara power with other clans. He therefore appointed Sugawara no Michizane (845-903) Udaijin (Minister of the Right). Under the hereditary system developing at that time, the Sugawara had no rights to such high office and the Fujiwara under Tokihira profited from every chance to intrigue against Michizane. Michizane however was the descendent of a scholarly family. His father was an expert in Chinese studies and his expertise was particularly important when the imperial government needed information about Chinese precedent and a scholar-diplomat in its foreign relations. His grandfather had opened a school of Chinese learning and the precocious Michizane, able to compose Chinese poems at age 10, eventually became an expert in his own rights. In 874, he was

promoted to Fifth Rank, which gave him access to the court and opened the door to high government positions. In 880, at the death of his father, he took over his grandfather's college. As an expert in Chinese studies, he was charged in 883 and 7/5/895 with receiving the ambassadors of the kingdom of Parhae. After the death of Fujiwara no Mototsune, his first son Tokihira succeeded him. Emperor Uda appointed Michizane to head his private office. In 893, he became adjunct to the crown prince's (later Emperor Daigo) office headed by Tokihira. In 894, Michizane was appointed ambassador to China but, concerned about the decline of the T'ang dynasty and perhaps about his own political future, he advised the emperor to discontinue sending embassies to China for the time being. In 897, Emperor Uda abdicated in favor of Emperor Daigo. After the enthronement ceremonies, both Tokihira and Michizane were promoted to Third Rank and to the positions of Minister of the Left and Minister of the Right respectively. This promotion gave Michizane access to all correspondence. Three daughters of Michizane entered the court, one married Emperor Uda's second son. In 900, Miyoshi no Kiyoyuki, whom Michizane had once refused the doctorate, warns Michizane that a plot is being prepared against him at court.

Uda was able to keep the political rivalry between his two ministers under check but, as was customary by the time, he abdicated in favor of the younger Emperor Daigo (885-930). Soon after the Daigo's enthronement, Tokihira assembled such disgruntled politicians as Fujiwara no Kiyotsura (34), Minamoto no Hikaru (56), the son of Emperor Ninmyo (810-50), Fujiwara no Sadakuni (34) and Fujiwara no Sugane (45). Tokihira promised Hikaru the position of Uchuben (Secretary of the Right) if successful Sugane who served as Uchuben aspired to the position of Udaisho (General of the Right Guard). At first, Michizane promoted Sugane but, during a banquet, slapped him on grounds of insubordination. The marriage of Michizane's daughter to Prince Tokiyo, the maternal brother of Emperor Daigo, served as food for the plotters. They accused Michizane of promoting Tokiyo at the expense of Daigo, who at age seventeen was already too old for the emperorship. In 3/1/901, the credulous Daigo immediately decreed that Michizane should be stripped from his court rank and sent to the Dazaifu (Military Headquarters of the West) as a low-ranking official.<sup>(5)</sup> This amounted to nothing else but exile. His entire family was sent away from Kyoto under the harshest conditions. In 25/1/901, Michizane left Kyoto. Before leaving, he sent his Chinese poems to his friend Ki no Haseo. Intent on preventing Michizane's exile, Ex-emperor Toba tried to force his way into the palace but Minamoto no Sugane prevented him.<sup>(6)</sup> The Ex-emperor sat in the grass and waited until the end of the day without avail. That day, Minamoto no Hikaru was appointed Minister of the Right and took over Michizane's post. On 25/2/903, after having proclaimed his innocence, Michizane died unpardoned at the Dazaifu. He was sixty years old.

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It is worth our while to consult the two major histories which cover that time, not only to know what happened in the years immediately after Michizane's untimely death, but also to realize how the victimary ideology shaped contemporary historiography. Let me begin with the more detailed *Nihongiryaku* (a history compiled by an unknown person, covering from the age of the gods to Emperor Goichijo (reigned 1016-36) assuming the format of a diary from the reign of Emperor Uda). Then I will proceed to the *Fuso Ryakki* (Compiled by monk Koen (1119-69?), covering from Emperor Jinmu (first official emperor, dates unknown) till Emperor Horikawa (reigned 1079-1107)

25/12/902 the death of Michizane reported

7/7/903 Drought

8/7/903 Prayers for rain

7/intercalary3/904 Epidemic

1/4/904 Solar eclipse

7/4/904 Thunderstorm

23/6/904 Floods

1/10/904 Solar eclipse

1/4/905 Solar eclipse

15/4/905 Lunar eclipse

1/4/906 Solar eclipse

2/4/906 violent thunderstorm. Hail as big as eggs

3/7/906 Death of Fujiwara no Sadakuni

7/6/907 Death of Fujiwara no Atsuko, Emperor Daigo's wetnurse

1/9/907 Solar eclipse

7/11/907 Death of Fujiwara no Sugane, age 54

1/2/908 Solar eclipse

4/4/908 Death of Fujiwara no Tokihira, age 39

1/5/908 Epidemic

19/5/908 Floods

9/6/908 Thunderstorm

12/6/908 Prayer for the cessation of rain

1/7/908 Insurrection in Shimofusa Province

7/908 Epidemic

1/1/909 Abundant rain

22/4/909 Violent storms

5

23/4/909 Violent storms

14/5/909 Thunderstorm

1/7/909 Solar eclipse

1/1/910 Solar eclipse

1/6/910 Solar eclipse

6/910 Flood in the capital

1/12/910 Solar eclipse

8/4/911 Solar eclipse

10/4/911 Prayers for rain

5/5/911 Epidemic

1/interc.5/911 Solar eclipse

2/6/911 Prayers for rain

1/11/911 Solar eclipse

21/3/912 Minamoto no Hikaru dies age 68 during a hunt. His horse dragged him and his body disappeared in the mud

1/5/912 Solar eclipse

14/8/912 A kite dropped a mouse it had caught onto Fujiwara no Kiyotsura

1/11/912 Solar eclipse

7/11/912 Violent storms

1/4/913 Solar eclipse

2/5/913 Fire in the capital destroys 617 houses

1/10/913 Solar eclipse

1/3/914 Solar eclipse

1/9/914 Solar eclipse

10/15/914 Epidemic. Continues into the following year

1/3/916 Solar eclipse

3/5/916 Hail

7/5/916 Hail with violent winds

29/6/916 Earthquake

1/9/916 Solar eclipse

Disturbances in eastern Japan



1/3/917 Solar eclipse

7/917 Beginning of a famine

1/1/918 Solar eclipse

1/8/918 Solar eclipse

15/8/918 Violent storms

Such reports continue until 923. Below I select only the events related to the people who played a role in Michizane's exile and supported Fujiwara no Tokihira.

21/3/923 Death of Crown Prince Yasuakira. People cried as loud as thunder. He was possessed by Kan's (Michizane's) spirit.

20/4/923 Michizane restored to Minister of the Right, Second Rank

11/interc.4/923 Epidemic

26/6/930 The weather was clear. A black cloud moved in from Mt. Atago and quickly covered the sky. It thundered loudly and lightning struck the Seiryoden. The wall caught fire. Dainagon Fujiwara no Kiyotsura's dress caught fire, his breast split and he died instantly, age 64. Uchuben Taira no Mareyo suffered burns in his face. At the Shishinden: Hyoe-no-Suke Mibu Tadakane's hair caught fire and he died. Ki no Kagetsura's stomach split open and he lost consciousness. Azumi Munehito's knees sustained burns and he could no longer get up. The Emperor fell ill. An epidemic reigned.

15/9/930 The Emperor began to cough

29/9/930 The Emperor passed away.[\(7\)](#)

*Fuso Ryakki.*

20/4/903 Report of an oracle in which Michizane revealed that he turned into a god of thunder

10/2/904 Yasuakira (two years old) appointed crown prince

7/8/908 Minamoto no Sugane dies at age 54

14/1/909 Lunar eclipse.

909/ Spring and Summer Epidemic

4/4/909 Tokihira dies at age 39. During his illness, ten monks came to offer prayers but they were afraid of the evil spirit that was haunting Tokihira. In broad daylight, Michizane's spirit came out of Tokihira's ears as a blue dragon.

1/1/911 Solar eclipse

7/6/911 Floods

12/3/913 Minamoto no Hikaru dies at age 68. He dreamed of Michizane the year before

2/5/915 Fire destroys 617 houses in the capital

7

5/6/915 Floods

916 Autumn Epidemic

8/918 Floods

20/4/923 Michizane's rank restored after an oracle

11/intercalary 4/923 Epidemic

18/6/925 Crown Prince Yasuyori dies at age 5. His mother was Tokihira's daughter

925 Summer Drought

4-5/927 severe epidemic

1/6/927 Earthquake

11/7/927 Thunder storm. Lighting strikes pagoda of Saidai-ji Temple

3/929 Epidemic in Home Provinces. The deads fill the streets

16/6/929 Lunar eclipse

26/7/929 Typhoon and floods

8/929 Typhoon

930 Spring and Summer Epidemic

26/6/930 Lightning strikes Imperial Palace twice. Michizane caused the lightning.

Emperor Daigo dies at age 36.

The *Fuso Ryakki* includes an entire supplement on the lightning.

No only in the enumeration of natural calamities and the death of Michizane's rivals, in some cases, the histories specifically mention Michizane's spirit as the perpetrator. In its report of Minamoto no Hikaru's cruel death, the *Nihongiryaku* strongly suggests that it was Michizane who was behind it. The same can be said about the kite dropping a dead mouse onto Fujiwara no Kiyotsura's head. Furthermore, in its report of Crown Prince Yasuakira's death, it refers to Michizane as the cause. In the case of the lightning striking the private quarters of Emperor Daigo, and his consequent death, both histories make it unequivocally clear that the cause of the lightning was no other than the god of thunder, Michizane. The thirteenth-century scroll entitled *Kitano Tenjin Engi Emaki*, now a national treasure clearly represents the lightning as engendered by Sugawara no Michizane's vengeful spirit. Both histories were compiled at least partly according to a victimary discourse.

According to the *Okagami* (Great Mirror), a collection of stories about Fujiwara no Michinaga (966-1027) and his times claims that "People say Tokihira's descendents died out because of the terrible

sin he committed. No doubt they are right..." Tokihira's eldest son Yasutada died in 936, at age 47, a ghost haunting his deathbed. Tokihira's third son Atsusada died in 943 at the age of thirty-eight. Both daughters died prematurely. Only his second son Akitada was able to live over sixty and rose to the position of Minister of the Right, but as the *Okagami* points out, only because he lived simply and frugally. Yet his line died out too in the end allegedly because of Michizane's grudge.(8)

Under the year 941, the *Fuso Ryakki* reports that Priest Nichizo (905?-985?) had met Michizane in hell as the god of lightning (Karai Tenjin). Nichizo was undergoing austerities in Yoshino and went to hell and back.(9) Already in 905, Umasake Yasuyuki, an official who followed Michizane into exile, received an oracle instructing him to erect a shrine and to worship Michizane as the deity Tenman Daijissai Tenjin. This deity whose Sanskrit name is Mahesvara, was originally a Brahman deity ruling over the Great One Thousand Worlds and who is surrounded sixty protective deities and one hundred thousand heavenly deesses.(10) Upon receiving this oracle, he built the Anraku-ji (lit. Peace and Comfort Temple) at the Dazaifu.

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These histories make it absolutely clear that, in the context of Japanese religion at that time, Michizane's spirit needs to be placated and converted into a benevolent deity. Ironically perhaps, the person who started this task was no other than Tokihira's younger brother and political rival Fujiwara no Tadahira (880-949) and his descendents. Upon Minamoto no Hikaru's death, Tadahira managed to promote himself Minister of the Right and, when Michizane was posthumously reappointed Minister of the Right, Tadahira was given the position of Minister of the Left. He also profited from Tokihira's premature death to revive the regency and served as *sessho* under Emperor Suzaku (r. 930-46) and *kanpaku* (941-48) under Suzaku and Emperor Murakami.

In 919, Tadahira rebuilt the Anraku-ji at the Dazaifu and in 959, Tadahira's son Morosuke (908-60) sponsored a building in what was later to become the celebrated Kitano Shrine in Kyoto. The shrine goes back to a *miko*(11) called Ayako who received an oracle from Michizane instructing her to worship him at Ukon no Baba; a site in an area of Kyoto generally referred to as Kitano. Ukon no Baba had been a place of agricultural worship dedicated to the thunder and water gods and numerous prayers for rain or a good harvest were held there, some offered by Emperor Daigo and prominent politicians like Tokihira. Morosuke also offered treasures to the Kitano Shrine, which helped it, become a permanent institution with branches all over Japan.

The year 959 is significant. Morosuke rivaled Sugane's son Motokata (888-953). Motokata married his daughter to Emperor Murakami (r. 946-67) who bore him his first son. But Morosuke also managed to marry his daughters to the emperor and gave birth to two sons who became future emperors (Reizei r. 967-69 and Enyu r. 969-84) and succeeded in making his son crown prince. The building of the Kitano Shrine also coincided with Morosuke's efforts to establish his branch of the Fujiwara as a separate family called the Kujo. After his death in 960, the Tadahira-Morosuke's line became the most powerful faction at court. His elder brother revived the regency system under Emperor Reizei whereupon it became hereditary within the Kujo line. All subsequent Kujo leaders sponsored the Kitano Shrine: Kaneie (929-90) and Michinaga (966-1027). In 8/5/987, Kaneie had the Kitano shrine included among the Nineteen Great Shrines of the imperial family.(12) In 22/5/993, Michinaga, Kaneie's fifth son, *sessho* in 1015 and *kanpaku* in 1018, sent an emissary to the Dazaifu in Kyushu to promote Michizane to Minister of the Left, Senior First Rank. On the 22/interc.10/993, Michizane was promoted to Dajo Daijin (Chief

Minister). In 21/10/1004 he arranged for the first imperial visit to the shrine. The imperial visit coincided with Michinaga's rise to supreme power.(13)

By now, the Kitano Shrine dedicated to the spirit of Sugawara no Michizane had become the tutelary shrine of the Kujo Family. The Kujo also made an effort to restore the Sugawara family and eventually both the Anraku-ji and the Kitano shrine were placed under Michizane's descendents. The leading Fujiwara also sponsored the Sugawara to write Michizane's in-life and after-life biographies. The *Kitano Tenjin Goden*, written during the years 931 and 947 was written by a Sugawara and destined for a new history of Japan entitled *Shinkokushi*. (14) In 1106, a Sugawara Nobutsune compiled his *Kanke Godenki* (Biography of the Sugawara Family) about the Michizane's life and deification.(15) Sugawara Tamenaga (1158-1246) may have been the author he *Tenjin Ki* in which we learn for the first time that Michizane may have been an incarnation of the bodhisattva Kannon.(16)

In 12/994, Michizane revealed in an oracle that that he no longer holds any grudge and that he will henceforth protect the state.(17) This set the stage for Michizane's worship as a god of literature. Literature became an important part of the Kitano cult. It began with the readings of Michizane's poems from his private collection entitled *Kanke Koshu* within a Shinto/Buddhist ritual called *Tenjin Koshiki* offered to the Kitano shrine.(18) Beginning perhaps with Yoshishige no Yasutane (934?-97), poets with literary ambitions offered prayers at the shrine. When, in the year 986, Yasutane offered a series of Chinese poems to the shrine, he called Michizane "the father of literature."(19) The *Gonara Tenno Shinki* also considers Michizane as a god of poetry.(20) In 25/6/1012, Oe no Masahira called Michizane "a true master of poetry" when he visited the Kitano shrine.(21) Some compare Michizane with Confucius and the Buddha. These statements contributed to Michizane's deification as a god of literature and promoted the visits to the Kitano shrine of numerous poets throughout subsequent history.

Kujo Kanezane (1149-1207), sixth descendent of Michinaga, was behind the compilation of the *Kitano Tenjin Engi*, the history of the Kitano Shrine. Kanezane became regent at age 38 and in 1189, strongly supported by the first shogun Minamoto no Yoritomo, was appointed Chief Minister. The 1219 copy of the manuscript reveals that Priest Jien (1155-1225), Kanezane's younger brother was one of its authors. It also reveals that the history was probably written in the years 1190-99. This was a time of deep political and social changes in Japan when the old imperial government lost power to a military, shogunal government. It is therefore conceivable that the Kujo intended the work to sustain their new position as liaison between the imperial and shogunal governments.

The *Kitano Tenjin Engi* begins with Michizane's brilliant career. Then it gives an account of Tokihira's intrigue, Michizane's exile and tragic death. His soul turned into an evil deity who caused misfortunes at the court and upon his rivals. Then it tells the story of the Kitano shrine and extols the virtues of the Kujo. The history ends with an explanation of the virtues of the Kitano shrine and those of the deity Tenjin (Michizane) as a beneficent deity.(22)

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In 1219, Kujo Michiie (1191-1252), Kanezane's grandson offered an illustrated version of the history entitled *Kitano Tenjin Engi Emaki* (Illustrated Scroll of the History of the Kitano Shrine) and an enlarged version of the history to the Kitano shrine in 1223.(23) This was after the assassination in 1219 of third shogun Sanetomo and after Ex-emperor Gotoba's abortive attempt to topple the shogunate of 1121. He

perhaps intended this new version to placate the spirit of Michizane so that peace may prevail in the nation (of course under Kujo leadership). In 1226, Michizane managed to have his son Yoritsune appointed fourth shogun. Like before, Kujo sponsorship of building projects and literary and artistic works coincided with important political developments and cannot be said to be entirely selfless sacrifice.

Priest Jien contributed considerably to the cult of victims. Understandably so because he lived in a time of deep turmoil. In mid-twelfth century much of the political power of the imperial government shifted to the warriors (samurai). This was not because the warriors usurped imperial power by force, but rather because political factions in the imperial government increasingly used military force to press their demands. By the middle of the twelfth century, two prominent military clans, both originally from the Kanto area of present-day Tokyo emerged: the Taira (also Heike) and the Minamoto (also Genji). At first the Taira dominated but between 1180 and 1185, the Minamoto eliminated the Taira. During the last battle between the rivaling clans at Dannoura on the Western edge of Japan's main island Honshu, the child emperor Antoku (1178-85) whom the Taira had taken along with his mother and many court nobles perished. After the news of the battle reached the capital Kyoto, the earth shook violently. This was bad news for anyone believing in the power of dead victims.

Concerned about a victimized emperor and nobles, Jien wrote a private moral history entitled the *Gukansho*, petitioned the ex-emperor to build the temple Daisenpoin in Kyoto to appease the spirits and organized the *Heike Monogatari* (Tales of the Heike), one of Japan's great literary classic. As a member of the Kujo, Jien has a stake in promoting the cult of political victims and his activities were in tune with Kujo religious tradition. The *Gukansho* dates to the year 1219; the year Shogun Minamoto no Sanetomo was assassinated and two years before Ex-emperor Gotoba marched against the military government in Kamakura and coincides with the compilation of the *Kitano Tenjin Engi Emaki*. This was also a highly unstable time when the Kujo needed to consolidate their political future and sponsor the religious activities needed for that end. The *Gukansho* is a history in which the vengeful spirits are the main historical driving force. Here is what Jien had to say about vengeful spirits in his *Gukansho*:

Vengeful spirits are those which, when they were alive, felt an implacable hatred toward those who caused it. From the tiniest hermit huts to the end of the empire, they slog at their rivals in the traps they tend and seek to destroy them by slander and false accusations; this is how they cause disorder in the world and harm the people. When they cannot exact their revenge from the visible world, they do so from the world of the dead.[\(24\)](#)

Furthermore, Jien claims that it was the cult his ancestors offered that placated Michizane's spirit and allowed the Kujo to prosper. He claims that Michizane was an incarnation of the bodhisattva Kannon who sacrificed himself for the good politics of the Kujo.

In 12/1204, Jien presented to the emperor the following petition for the construction of the temple Daisenpoin:

Since the disturbances started in the Hogen [1154-59] and Genryaku [1184-85] eras, the warriors have made the people uneasy with their constant movements... Maleficent ministers and rebellious warriors have disturbed the nation and have caused wars and many have died far away from their families and have turned into demons. They are like the southern barbarians aspiring to high position, and eastern barbarians who have deviated from the way seeking

prosperity. We must safeguard the nation by overcoming the ills of our times and convert them into good.(25)

Jien wrote further that a person of virtue who has undergone Buddhist discipline must placate these spirits by the Buddhist means of *eko* (Skt. *parinamama*) and guide them to salvation. He also emphasizes the use of *raku* (*sukah*) to restore the spirits to normal condition.(26)

In this petition, Jien points out the dangers the victimary spirits present to the nation and urges the emperor to fund the building. Jien suggests that the temple be organized according to four categories of priests, the fourth of which are monks specializing in the recitation of the sutras (*sekkyo-shi*). Furthermore, he proposes that a group of blind monks with a good voice should be placed under the *Sekkyo-shi*.(27) One of the professions open to the blind in ancient Japan was to eulogize the dead in a lyrical recitation at the rhythm of a musical instrument called the *Biwa*. According to the *Moso Yurai* (Origin of the Blind Priests), Empress Genmei (661-712) ordered that blind monks placate the spirits who cause havoc.(28) The blind monks did so by reciting the sutra *Chijin-kyo* (Sutra of the God of the Earth) with their *biwa*.(29) It was believed that lyrical eulogy and the sympathy it engenders among the living will placate the dead and prevent them from causing calamities. Jien saw in the most talented among these blinds, potent instruments for the placation of the evil spirits. In presenting this proposal, Jien set the foundation for a recitative art called the *Heike-gatari* (Recitation of the Tales of the Heike) which survived until the present.(30) The *Daisenpoin* was built according to Jien's specifications, but it has not survived.

10

It is not until the *Tsurezuregusa* (Essays in Idleness) written between 1310 and 1331 that we learn more about how Jien organized the *Tales*.

During the reign of ex-Emperor Gotoba, Yukinaga, the Former Governor of Shinano [Province] was known for his learning but, summoned to discuss the poetry of Po Chu-I, but having forgotten two of Po Chu-I's poems about the Dance of the Seven Virtues, was given the nickname "Wearing the hat of the Five Virtues", which depressed him so much that he abandoned his studies and retired from the mundane world. When Priest Jichin [Jien] had difficulties in organizing monk-specialists of an art into a sub-category, he relied on this Lay-priest of Shinano.

This lay-priest created the *Heike Monogatari* and taught the blind monk Jobutsu how to recite it... Because he was from the East, Jobutsu wrote what the warriors told him about the battles. The *Biwa* priests of today continue to imitate the natural voice of Jobutsu.(31)

We do not know anything about the activities of these monks during the time the *Daisenpoin* stood, but, by the thirteenth century, these *Biwa* monks (*Biwa Hoshi*) as they were called were placed under the supervision of a family called the *Todoza*. To place a group of artists under the umbrella of an authoritative family was the norm in the Middle Ages. It was a means for the political sponsors to control the art and to prevent free-for-all creativity. Since these arts were so closely linked to politics, politicians had a major stake in 'correct' performance because any deviation from the sponsored norm could

potentially undermine political authority. It was also under the Todoza that an authoritative written text was established precisely to standardize the recitation.(32)

Some of these recitations were subject to a ritual protocol and calendar. On 16/2 every year, the blind monks gathered at a place to the northeast of Kyoto called Shinomiya Kawara to perform a ritual called *shakuto-e*.(33) They did this in honor of their tutelary deity, the fourth prince (Shinomiya) of the emperor Ninmyo (810-50) who was blind and a skilled Biwa performer. Shinomiya Kawara was a liminal area associated with the ten deities called *shiku* which were believed to control the so-called Kimon, the Gate of the Devils in the northeast, through which all evil was believed to pass into the city. According to ancient Japanese belief, Shinomiya Kawara was located in a particularly dangerous direction. On a rock called Biwa-ishi (Biwa Rock), the monks built a stone stupa and recited ten thousand times the sutra *Hannya Shingyo* also called the *Heart Sutra*. Whether they also recited parts of the *Tales* is unknown but likely.

The blind reciters also gathered on the 24/4 every year at the dry riverbed of the Kamo River at the height of Shijo street to worship Emperor Antoku (1178-85) at the anniversary of his tragic death. They did this in an area controlled by the deity of epidemics Gozu Tenno whose shrine, the Gion Shrine, was nearby. The highlight of the ritual was floating a sutra downriver (kyo-nagashi). Floating downriver effigies or other representative objects, was a widely used means to rid oneself of the evil spirits.

The Ashikaga shoguns sponsored public recitation of the *Heike Monogatari*. Called Kanjin Heike, they were also fund-raising events to benefit the building or rebuilding of temples. The 16/4/1466 Kanjin Heike attracted thousands of spectators.

Perhaps most importantly, it was the shoguns of the Kamakura (1185-1333) and Ashikaga (1336-1568) and the Tokugawa (1603-1868) Periods, who came to sponsor the victimary spirits the most. The Kamakura leaders sponsored Dengaku performances as means to appease the noxious spirits. The Ashikaga are on record for having sponsored Dengaku and Sarugaku (both precursors of the modern Noh) events in the dry Kamo riverbed. Under the names Dengaku or Sarugaku, Noh actors performed the evil spirits on a stage constructed in the dry riverbed or other liminal areas around Kyoto. There were numerous Sarugaku events the Ashikaga sponsored in liminal areas of the capital Kyoto: 11-13/7/1412 such an event took place for three days at the Imamiya shrine, on 12/5/1412 one took place in the Kamo dry riverbed at Shijo. The one of 10/7/1413 occurred not far from the shogunal headquarters. Thousands of Kyoto citizens came to see the lavish performances of the Sarugaku actor On'ami (?-1467). Zeami (1363-1443), a Sarugaku Noh actor of the subdued *yugen* style performed during seven days at Kitano shrine. By 1433, Zeami lost out to the ostentatious style of On'ami. Some of these events ended in fights and quarrels to the extent that the shogunal officials had to shortcut, even prohibit the performances. They had become popular events allowing people to vent their frustrations. But, such prohibitions were only temporary.

Among the many Noh plays staging evil spirits there is a particularly exemplary play. It is *Sanemori* written by the playwright and shogun-sponsored actor Zeami. Saito Sanemori (?-1183) was a warrior fighting on the side of the Taira. He proceeded to Shinohara (Kaga Province) in an effort to halt the advancing Minamoto troops. He was close to sixty, an age far too advanced to go into battle at that time and he was killed. His horse dragged him into the ricefields. Since that time, whenever the villagers faced a bad harvest, they attributed it to the vengeful spirit of Saito Sanemori and offered him a cult called Sanemori-okuri (Sending Off Sanemori) or Mushi-okuri (Sending Off [Noxious] Insects). On the

11/5/1414, according to the *Manzai Jugo Nikki*, a diary kept by the monk Manzai during the years 1411-35, an itinerant priest called Yugyo Shonin, happened to pass through the area, when the spirit of Sanemori appeared to him.<sup>(34)</sup> The villagers told him that the vision predicted a bad harvest. Yugyo Shonin therefore proceeded immediately to exorcise the spirit. Zeami wrote his *Sanemori* on the basis of this story. Evil spirits are usually exorcised on stage which is why the Noh theater became a kind of exorcist theater, the performance of which would safeguard the nation from the havoc these spirits can cause. Sanemore, however, also became a kind of scapegoat deity. In the Mushi-okuri festival which takes place each year, the people touch the puppet representing Sanemori as if to hand their impurities over to him and begin a new cycle free of sin. The floats in the Gion Festival of Kyoto (highlight, July 17 and 18), the modern version of the 836 *goryo-e*, a boy called *chigo* rides on the first Naginata float. The sword (naginata) on top of the float seems threatens the evil spirits into submission. The *chigo* is supposed to absorb all impurities that had accumulated over the years in the community. This is why he has to undergo extensive purification at the end of the festival in order to be readmitted into society.

11

## Conclusion

One plausible reason why political leaders such as the Kujo and later the shoguns sacrificed so much to appease political victims is that this system could be used to explain the world and to maintain the political status quo at the same time. The way this worked should be clear from the above examples. Natural calamities do occur, but they always subside eventually. To attribute them to political victims, that is, giving them a human cause, ultimately places these calamities under human, political control. Practically all natural calamities in pre-modern Japan were believed to have a had a human cause. Before modern science, this allowed the political and religious leaders to identify the cause of natural calamities and to direct their placatory efforts to an identifiable human entity. Natural disaster does strike from time to time but rather than to leave them unexplained and incomprehensible in the minds of the people, the political leaders used them to legitimize their authority. By offering elaborate cult to the political victims, the leaders claimed that evil spirits caused by their predecessors, but they made it clear that it was thanks to their efforts to pacify these spirits that brought about a return of normal conditions. It allows political leaders to claim that, when the calamities subside, it was thanks to their good offices and benevolent, pious government. These deified victims became the mainstay of society and the center of religion. Victimary deities were believed to maintain their presence and to have a strong stake in the state. This is why state affairs could not be conducted without offering them cult. Because of this 'presence', these victimary deities were also revered as oracle-delivering deities, and used to predict the future. Like in Delphi, Japanese political leaders manipulated such oracles to benefit the state.

These deified victims also functioned as scapegoats. They were highly ambivalent. They are both devils and deities, able to cause, but also to abate and prevent calamities. These were the deities on whom the community would hand their sins and on whom they would rely to overcome their calamities. This system balances the forces of good and evil and creates structure and anti-structure. Sympathy with failing heroes, making heroes out of political rivals, villains and rebels, became a cult in which ironically even the victors had to participate.

Perhaps because of the dominant Confucian philosophy, the Chinese have not made heroes out of the defeated, at least not at the national level. Defeat was a divine judgment rather than a human feat. Confucianists tended to make it the "victim's fault." Also, the Chinese did not need to explain natural



calamities in terms of the *goryo*. Natural calamities were caused by a "heaven" dissatisfied with official conduct "under heaven" and not by victims seeking justice or revenge. In Japan, however, the *goryo*, like other deities, were placed beyond the morality of good and evil. They were heroes despite the dominant socio-political ideology and regardless of whether or not they were wrong or unjust. In China, a Sugawara no Michizane would probably never have been deified as he was in Japan, on a national level, even though, according to popular opinion, he was wronged.

In Japan, political victims are the anti-heroes religion and the arts engendered. Seeing a play or hearing a story or reading about these victims was believed not only to prevent calamities and perpetuate the order but, psychologically, to defer resentment, revenge and violence. Literary and theatrical heroes are also proxies. They stand for any victim that may threaten the stability of the state. Rather than sacrificing some living human or animal for the good of the rest, as was practiced in many other cultures, this is a system whereby already dead victims are called to play the role of scapegoats. The tragic heroes in literature and the theater are not living but substitute scapegoats.

Thus the Japanese have used their victims to explain uncontrollable natural forces and human fate. The fear of evil spirits tended to curb unlimited violence. One can kill an enemy, but then one has to worship him. It is conceivable that, emphasizing the power of political victims, Jien intended just that, namely, to curb violence in an age dominated by the warriors. But, at the same time, he wanted to contribute to the political fate of his family. Such dual purpose is a common feature in pre-modern Japanese religion. It is an attempt to divert violence into the metaphysical realm and convert it into an instrument of peace and stability.

12

## Notes

1. See on this Herbert Plutschow, *Chaos and Cosmos – Ritual in early and medieval Japanese literature* (Leiden, 1990)([back](#))
2. "Suitei no uta," *Subaru*, vol 12 (1973) pp. 270-324. See also Masuda Katsumi, "Nagasarebito Hitomaro," *Kokubungaku* (Kaishaku to Kyozaï no Kenkyu) vol. 21, no. 5, pp. 82-84 and Ohama Itsuhiko, "Chinkon no shi," *Bungaku*, vol. 39, no. 9, pp. 1005-15.([back](#))
3. *Kokushi Taikei*, vol. 4 (Tokyo, 1934) pp. 112-13.([back](#))
4. Abe no Nakamaro (701-70) went to China with Kibi but failed to return and died in China. The scroll was probably painted to appease Kibi's spirit. ([back](#))
5. The Dazaifu was established as an office of the *ritsuryo* government in mid-seventh century to guard the northern coast of Kyushu, the nearest point between Japan and the Asiatic continent.([back](#))
6. The Minamoto surname was given to imperial princes not eligible to become crown princes.([back](#))
7. *Nihongiryaku* (Shintei Zoho-)Kokushi Taikei, vol. 11 (Tokyo, 1929) pp. 8-42.([back](#))
8. *Nihon Koten Bungaku Taikei*, vol. 21 (Tokyo, 1970) p. 79.([back](#))
9. *Kokushi Taikei*, vol. 6 (Tokyo, 1907) pp. 708-12.([back](#))
10. On Umasake Yasuyuki's shrine, see *Tenmangu Anrakuji Soso Nikki*, Shinto Taikei, Jinja-hen, vol. 48 "Dazaifu" (Tokyo, 1991) p. 4. On the oracle, see *Tenmangu Takusen Ki*, Gunsho Ruiju, vol. 2 Jingi-bu (Tokyo, 1932) p. 130 and

*Tenjin Koshiki*, Zoku Gunsho Ruiju, vol. 3, part 1, Jingi-bu, p. 34.[\(back\)](#)

11. *Miko* are shaman-type vergins serving the deities at their shrines. They were believed to become possessed by the deities they represent and deliver oracles.[\(back\)](#)

12. According to the *Dainihon Shiryo* under 24/6/Shoryaku 2. Later, in 3/1039, more shrines were added to the Nineteen. On this, see *Nijunisha Chushiki*, Gunsho Ruiju, vol. 2, Jingi-bu (Tokyo, 1932) p. 209ff.[\(back\)](#)

13. See on this Francine Herail, *Notes Journalieres de Fujiwara no Michinaga – Ministre a la Court de Heian 993-1018 – Traduction du Midokanpakuki*, vol. 3 (Geneve, 1991) pp. 444-45.[\(back\)](#)

14. Compiled during the years 936 and 969.[\(back\)](#)

15. This is included in the Shinto Taikei, vol. 11, Jinja-hen, pp. 83-90. [\(back\)](#)

16. This is included in Shinto Taikei, vol. 11, Jinja-hen, pp. 103-29. The original *Tenjin Ki* is lost. The earliest copy dates to the year 1194.[\(back\)](#)

17. This is recorded in the *Kitano Tenjin Goden*, Shinto Taikei, vol. 11, Jinja-hen, "Kitano", pp. 14-15. [\(back\)](#)

18. For an example, see Zoku Gunsho Ruiju, vol. 3, part 1, Jingi-bu, pp. 42-43. The *Kanke Koshu* poems are the ones Michizane sent to his friend Ki no Haseo before going into exile. They are included in the Nihon Koten Bungaku Taikei, vol. 72 (Tokyo, 1966). See also note about poem no. 514 (p. 524).[\(back\)](#)

19. See on this Josef Kyburz, pp. 349-50 and Sakamoto Taro, *Sugawara Michizane*, Jinbutsu Sosho, vol. 100 (Tokyo, 1966) pp. 161-62.[\(back\)](#)

20. See on this Sakamoto Taro, *op. Cit.*, pp. 163-64.[\(back\)](#)

21. Shin Nihon Koten Bungaku Taikei, vol. 27 (Tokyo, 1992) p. 347.[\(back\)](#)

22. Gunsho Ruiju, vol 2, Jingi-bu, p. 147.[\(back\)](#)

23. *Shinshui*-)Nihon Emakimono Zenshu[\(back\)](#)

24. Nihon Koten Bungaku Taikei, vol. 86 (Tokyo, 1965) p. 339.[\(back\)](#)

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25. Reprinted in Fukuda Akira, "Kataribon no seiritsu," *Nihon Bungaku* (June, 1990) p. 58. For a discussion of this document, see Akamatsu Toshihide, *Kamakura Bukkyo no Kenkyu* (Tokyo, 1959) pp. 276-79 and *Zoku Kamakura Bukkyo no Kenkyu* (Tokyo, 1966) pp. 384-87.[\(back\)](#)

26. *Dainihon Shiryo*, vol. 4, 10, pp. 279-80 "Daisenpoin no koto".[\(back\)](#)

27. *Dainihon Shiryo*, vol. 4, 10, p. 266.[\(back\)](#)

28. *Nihon Shomin Seikatsu Shiryo Shusei*, vol. 17, p. 247. [\(back\)](#)

29. The text entitled *Chijin Moso Engi* explains the history of this practice. See *Nihon Shomin Seikatsu Shiryo Shusei*, vol. 17, pp. 225-27. Yanagita Kunio reports that blind monks were summoned to pray against floods and droughts because they were supposed to control the dragon. See on this (*Teihon*-)Yanagita Kunio *Shu*, vol. 8 (Tokyo, 1962) pp. 309-11.[\(back\)](#)

30. *The Tales of the Heike* (Heike Monogatari) the story of the downfall of the Heike (Taira) clan between 1156 and 1185 told according to the Buddhist law of cause and effect. The oldest manuscript dates to the years between 1219-1243. There are various versions. [\(back\)](#)

31. Nihon Koten Bungaku Taikei, vol. 30 (Tokyo, 1957) pp. 271-72.[\(back\)](#)
32. See *Todoyoshu*, Nihon Shomin Seikatsu Shiryo Shusei, vol. 17 (Tokyo, 1972) p. 230.[\(back\)](#)
33. On this ritual, see *Honcho Seiki*, (Shintei Zoho-)Kokushi Taikei, vol. 9 (Tokyo, 1933) p. 12.[\(back\)](#)
34. Zoku Gunsho Ruiju, suppl. Vol. 1 (Tokyo, 1924) p. 46.[\(back\)](#)

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# **The Origin of Language in Chinese Thought**

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Pursuing questions of Generative Anthropology in the Chinese context presents both practical and ontological problems. In this paper I give examples to show where direct parallels to question of the origin of language may be found in the Chinese context. After briefly pointing to problems one such example raises, I then outline the more general problems to which pursuing questions in this form may lead. By drawing inferences from these problems, I hope to point to alternate research avenues that may prove more fruitful. Searching for such avenues is an informative endeavor in itself, since the very reasons that make it difficult to translate GA questions directly into the Chinese context have important implications for our understanding of Chinese language, ontology and society.

## **Developing a Research Question**

An obvious initial step in an investigation of how Generative Anthropology might be fruitfully applied in various fields of sinology might be to pose the question, "How have Chinese philosophers dealt with the question of the origin of language?"

Even this simple initial step mires one in several complex ontological puzzles. Translation of both "origin" and "language" entails a number of difficult choices, each with significant implications for the scope and nature of research which would follow. To a speaker of modern Chinese, the "question of the origin of language" might be paraphrased as *yuyan qiyan wenti*, since *yuyan* means language, *qiyan* means origin and *wenti* means question or problem.

The question in nearly these terms (*yuyan yuanyi*) is in fact found in late Qing works examining language, such as Zhang Binglin's *Guogu Lunheng (Discussion and Evaluation of China's Intrinsic Culture)*.<sup>(1)</sup> Zhang (1868-1936; also known as Zhang Tai Yan) wrote the work between 1906-10 while in Japan and actively involved in nationalist, anti-Manchu politics. Before he fled to Japan, Zhang's views as editor of the newspaper *The People* had landed him in jail under the Qing. When he undertook the *Guogu* project, Zhang had joined the T'ung Meng Hui, a party comprised of anti-government exiles (one of the most famous of whom was Sun Yatsen) and was ardently seeking both cultural and political regeneration for China.<sup>(2)</sup> In a period of intense political turmoil and involvement, Zhang persisted in his linguistic pursuits. He worked on the commission convened by the new Nationalist government's Ministry of Education in 1913 to establish a national language and helped develop the Chinese phonetic symbol system still used today in Taiwan, among other places.<sup>(3)</sup> The political background of Zhang's

investigation resonates with Western Enlightenment thinkers who have taken up the similar questions in different cultural contexts. It is difficult to tell, however, whether language became linked with politics for Zhang through his own perception of the Chinese situation, or whether that linkage was suggested by materials he encountered in Japan. As Zhu Xing points out, Zhang may have been influenced by Hu Yilu or Shen Buzhou, students of Zhang's who studied at the Japanese Imperial University and who very likely came into contact with translations of Western works on linguistics in the course of their studies.<sup>(4)</sup>

Whether or not Zhang's phraseology derived from Western sources he or his students became familiar with in Japan, the fact remains that this terminology is not common in earlier Chinese philosophical discussions of language, symbol, or the sacred. These earlier debates offer nothing so directly analogous to the terms of GA. One practical reason for this is simply the development and usage of the Chinese language. Before the twentieth century, Chinese philosophical writings were almost entirely in *wenyanwen*, or a classical Chinese, which utilizes a spare monosyllabic style. Compound words such as *yuyan* are only rarely if ever used in *wenyanwen*. Zhang Binglin, though not an advocate of the vernacular himself--he was, in fact, a master of classical poetry and prose--wrote in a period of radical linguistic change. In the era leading up to the 1919 May 4<sup>th</sup> Movement, in response to both exogenous and endogenous forces, the vernacular, or *baihua*, overtook *wenyanwen*. Though this does not address whether *yuyan* was a common term in the vernacular (and perhaps the topic of lively oral debates) prior to this century, it nevertheless curtails our ability to pursue a direct translation of the "question of the origin of language" in Chinese philosophical texts.

2

Instead, we are faced with a confusing array of less exact translations employing various terms which were used in *wenyanwen* but whose connotations differ from that of the modern term *yuyan* and therefore complicate the issue we are attempting to delineate. Examining these terms may prove a valuable means of refining our research question and mapping the ontological terrain of Chinese philosophy in the fields we will investigate. Wang Feng Yang's analysis in *Gu Ci Bian (Differentiation of Ancient Terms)* is useful in this regard. Wang analyzes nineteen classical works, including the *Shi Jing (Book of Odes)*, *Shang Shu (Book of Documents)*, *Zhou Yi (Zhou Book of Changes)*, *Lun Yu (Analects of Confucius)*, *Mengzi (Works of Mencius)*, *Mozi (Works of Mozi)*, *Zhuangzi (Works of Zhuangzi)*, *Xunzi (Works of Xunzi)*, *ChunQiu Jingzhuan (Spring and Autumn Annals)*, and the *Li Ji (Book of Rites)*, to develop a concordance of the most commonly used classical terms and their meanings.<sup>(5)</sup>

As mentioned above, *yuyan* is a compound word. Wang discusses its constituent elements *yu* and *yan*, as well as several other related terms under his entry for *yan*, a verb. Of the first two words, he says:

Today, "*yanyu*" and "*yuyan*" are each one word; in ancient times, "*yu*" and "*yan*" had different meanings. As a verb, "*yan*" meant to express oneself or state one's opinion; "*yu*" meant to discuss with someone or tell someone something.

Wang quotes a passage in the *Shi Jing* which says "*Zhi yan yue yan, lun nan yue yu*" or "Straightforward speaking is called *yan*, discussing difficult (matters) is called *yu*." Similarly, a passage from the *Zhou Li* draws this distinction, saying "*Fa duan yue yan, da shu yue yu*," (Giving an evaluation is called "*yan*";

responding to a narrative is called "yu"); and another passage from the *Li Ji* states, "*San nian zhi sang, yan er bu yu, dui er bu da*" (In the three years of mourning, [he] speaks without talking to anyone, in conversing [he] does not reply [or possibly, replies but does not express an opinion]. In the notes, the text goes on to point out that "*Yan, yan ziji shi ye, wei ren shuo wei yu.*" (*Yan* is speaking of one's own matters, while *yu* is saying things for others.) A passage from the *Fa Yan* says, "*Yan, xin sheng ye.*" (6) (*Yan* is the sound of the heart-mind(7)).

These passages may seem far removed from our original question but they illustrate facets of language that are crucial to GA. First, there are distinct elements of both public and private in the compound that comprises language, *yuyan*. The private element is an expression of self through speech (*yan*); the public element (*yu*) is communication with others and, more precisely, a negotiating of meaning that takes place when "difficult matters" are discussed. These are key elements of the "aborted gesture of appropriation" as well: mimetic desire spurs an initial grasping for the object (an expression of self), while aborting the grasp calls for a negotiated understanding of how the object will be distributed among members of the group.

These two words have clearly differentiated meanings in ancient Chinese philosophy, as is underscored by the nature of the grammatical constructions in which they are used. As a verb, *yan* can take as an object only a thing, not a person. It is content, not conversation between people that is emphasized in verbal constructions using *yan*. *Yu*, on the other hand, not only takes people as objects but, even if it stands alone and a matter discussed is appended with a prepositional particle, the implication is that this matter was discussed *with someone*.(8)

Though these grammatical distinctions have interesting implications for the underlying ontological structures of Chinese language, pursuing *yan* and *yu* in ancient texts to understand the Chinese view of the origin of language would lead one down a blind alley. Classical Chinese philosophers neither employed these contrasts in key debates nor explored their ramifications at length in philosophic treatises. Nevertheless, keeping these distinctions in mind while examining some of the debates that *did* take place may provide a useful perspective, and one relevant to our goals.

### Some Ontological Issues

Before proceeding from our original translation to an examination of relevant debates and the terms employed in them, one more stumbling block remains. This is a more subtle and unexpected difficulty, since the translation of origin as *qiyuan* seems straightforward enough. Like *yuyan*, this compound is not frequently used in literary Chinese, but unlike *yan* and *yu* the individual words joined in the compound *qiyuan*, *qi* or "to arise" and *yuan* or "source, origin," are often found as key terms in philosophic arguments. In fact, under *yuan* in the *Gu Hanyu Changyong Zi Zidian*, (Dictionary of Frequently Used Classical Chinese Characters), a particular meaning of *yuan* is given as "*Shi wu de kaishi, qiyuan*" (Something's beginning or origin) and this is illustrated with a quote from the *Han Fei Zi*, a work attributed to the legalist philosopher Han Fei (d. 233 BC) "*Zhi wanwu zhi yuan*" (9) or "Knowing the origin of the 10,000 things," a renowned statement of what understanding the origin of the universe entails.

3

However, the prevalence of these terms bodes less well for finding a Chinese depiction of the origin of language than one might hope. Even a cursory familiarity with the classics in which this or other similar

quotes are found (Laozi's *Dao De Jing* [Daoist Classic],[\(10\)](#) for instance) shows that the heart of the arguments in which such statements are made lies in concepts of mutual contingency and causality, particularly the inarticulable problem of the identity, yet difference, of existence and non-existence. Exploring these issues lies well outside the scope of this paper. The relevant point is that looking for an origin or beginning of something in Chinese philosophy is complicated because *qiyuan* also entails "arising from a source or *cause*," "cause" being another meaning of *yuan*, so when *yuan* appears in a philosophic text, it is often in the context of discussing causal linkages and chains of contingency. This complication cannot be avoided by simply substituting a translation with less baggage. There are less loaded terms for "start" or "beginning," for example, *shi* and *chu*, but though these words are indeed used in classical Chinese philosophic texts[\(11\)](#) and even occasionally used to question origins in endeavors analogous to the aims of GA,[\(12\)](#) more commonly, they occur incidentally in narrative histories and texts of moral instruction, not as the centerpiece of a philosophic investigation. In short, it is not that we have picked the wrong terms, instead, the *kind* of argument we are looking for simply does not figure prominently in classical debates. Looking for the beginnings of things in the sense of an originary scene simply isn't the endeavor of choice for most Chinese philosophers. Instead, mainstream thinkers leave this minefield of intertwined concepts to cryptic works such as the *Dao De Jing*, and focus instead upon how one thing leads to another for good or ill. Thus, originary scenes are hard to come by in classical Chinese philosophy and instead, linked causalities predominate.

If we wish to apply Generative Anthropology to Chinese texts, another relevant ontological issue to consider is how mimesis figures in the Chinese schema. This topic has been addressed by Pauline Yu with regard to poetic imagery. As Yu says in her discussion of the story of Fu Xi.

Mimesis is predicated on a fundamental disjunction between two realms of being, one of which is replicated in the verbal product, regarded by Plato, for example, as but a pale shadow of some timeless truth. In contrast, implicit in the Great Commentary [*Hsi-tz'u chuan*] (*Xizi Zhuan*), as in the Great Preface to the *Classic of Poetry*, is the assumption of a seamless connection if not virtual identity between an object, its perception, and its representation, aided by the semantic multivalence of the term *hsiang* (*xiang*) [image].[\(13\)](#)

Yu's discussion of differences between Chinese and Western philosophical premises suggests that a searching examination of the assumptions on which we ground our understanding of the mimetic is necessary before we embark on an endeavor based on such concepts in the Chinese context. Further, Yu's argument supports the claim I have made that depicting origins, insofar as this entails the assumption of a disjunction between the prior and subsequent conditions described, is not the habitual purview of Chinese philosophy. I would suggest that the "semantic multivalence" Yu describes is found, not only in the term *xiang*, but throughout classical Chinese and is indicative of an underlying ontological structure which does not predicate change upon disjunction.

A practical consequence of this ontology is that philosophers are not apt to establish the sort of scenic, narrative framework of beginning-event-progression that an originary scene entails, even when illustrating how one set of conditions gives way to or engenders another. Further, they do not necessarily

write in terms of the diachronic progression through which Western conceptions of causality are often expressed. Instead, classical Chinese ontology builds logical edifices that function in the parallel or wind with Escher-like complexity upon themselves, rather than delineating a "beginning" or "end." This is not to say that there is no sense of progression in classical Chinese philosophy. The famous passage on good government in the *Da Xue* (Great Learning), a Confucian classic traditionally dated to the fifth century BC,[\(14\)](#) illustrates both such a progression and the use of the terms *shi* (beginning) and *zhong* (end):

What the Great Learning teaches, is--to illustrate illustrious virtue; to renovate the people; and to rest in the highest excellence. The point where to rest being known, the object of pursuit is then determined; and, that being determined, a calm unperturbedness may be attained to. To that calmness will then succeed a tranquil repose. In that repose there may be careful deliberation, and that deliberation will be followed by the attainment of the desired end.

Things have their root and their branches. Affairs have their end and their beginning. To know what is first and what is last will lead near to what is taught in the Great Learning. The Ancients who wished to illustrate illustrious virtue throughout the kingdom first ordered well their own States. Wishing to order well their States, they first regulated their families. Wishing to regulate their families, they first cultivated their persons. Wishing to cultivate their persons, they first rectified their hearts. Wishing to rectify their hearts, they first sought to be sincere in their thoughts. Wishing to be sincere in their thoughts, they first extended to the utmost their knowledge. Such extension of knowledge lay in the investigation of things. Things being investigated, knowledge became complete. Their knowledge being complete, their thoughts were sincere. Their thoughts being sincere, their hearts were then rectified. Their hearts being rectified, their persons were cultivated. Their persons being cultivated, their families were regulated. Their families being regulated, their States were rightly governed. Their States being rightly governed, the whole kingdom was made tranquil and happy.

From the Son of Heaven (Emperor) down to the mass of the people, all must consider the cultivation of the person the root of everything besides. It cannot be, when the root is neglected, that what should spring from it will be well ordered. It has never been the



case that what was of great importance has been slightly cared for and at the same time that what was of slight importance has been greatly cared for.[\(15\)](#)

4

I quote the passage in its entirety because it illustrates a sense of progression and concepts of beginnings and ends, yet is *not* comprised of a teleological progression from beginning to end, either in narrative form or content. Brought in as we are *post factum* and drawn backward through the string of linked causalities which already brought about good government by the ancients, the implication is that we are being instructed *after* a cycle has elapsed and good government has decayed. We are intended to travel back toward the condition of the past to recover it in the future. On a parallel plane, the conditions which make this movement possible exist timelessly and universally: *all* things have roots and branches; knowing the resting points which bring calm and deliberation is the essential base from which to reach for *any* desired end. Yet, as the "root and branch" analogy indicates, beginnings and ends are conceived of simultaneously and in connection with each other, thus "progress" toward an "end" involves an understanding of the whole of which it is inherently a part.

### **The Political in the Context of Chinese Philosophy and the Origin of Language**

The other notable point about the *Da Xue* is its overtly political nature. This is the rule, not the exception in Chinese philosophy. The Warring States Period (403-221 BC), during which the *Da Xue* is believed to have been written,[\(16\)](#) was a period of division and continuous strife in the area that later would be unified into the Chinese empire. Amazingly, this was also a period of unprecedented and perhaps unmatched philosophical achievement. The myriad of schools and scholars who traveled from state to state seeking patronage were, not surprisingly, overwhelmingly concerned with political issues. The tendency of philosophy to overtly address political issues, often explicitly marking rulers as members of the intended audience, if not actually structuring the narrative as dialogues between rulers and scholars as many pre-Han texts do, persisted long after unification. Given the linkage of the literati to the government through the state-run examination system (through which scholars attained recognition and status which conferred tax and *corvée* exemptions, among other benefits, and by which they obtained official posts and related emoluments), their preoccupation with the political is no more surprising than that of their Warring States era antecedents.

The linkage of the political and philosophical is of particular interest when approaching the Chinese corpus from the context of Western philosophic debates on the origin of language. Even when overtly non-political, many of the Western texts of interest to GA for their origin of language theories arose out of fervent political debates as well. The question of what language is and where it came from is inextricably intertwined with the issues of what is human, and thus, what is a valid social contract or form of social organization. This is relevant not only to texts such as Hobbes's and Rousseau's, but also to those of the post-Darwinian period, since the nature of the human, as differentiated from the animal, is a critical question in an era when massive social reorganization was taking place as a consequence of radical changes in labor relations. On a more basic level, the combination of private and public elements of self-expression and negotiation of meaning of which "language" is comprised make it inevitably political. As we will see below, this point will be a valuable first step toward broadening our scope of exploration to encompass those avenues most likely to yield information relevant to GA.

### **After *Yuyan*: Regrouping and Redirecting Research Efforts**

An eye for the political may open doors for GA, but how will we structure our inquiry to address the ontological issues outlined above? Peter Bol's argument in taking up the issue of mimesis addressed by Yu, is instructive:

In this regard some scholars of Chinese literary thought have made a point of signal importance to the understanding of medieval culture: that culture rested on the assumption that there is no necessary disjunction between the human realm and the realm of heaven-and-earth; the pattern of human cultural creations can thus be identical to the patterns of the cosmos. In contrast, traditional Western theories see literature in terms of mimesis, as an always imperfect attempt to represent and imitate the truths of a separate realm. Greek views of literature thus begin from a conviction that it is fiction. T'ang (and earlier) attempts to understand the nature of *wen* begin from the assumption that it is veracious.[\(17\)](#)

Bol's analysis not only clarifies the ontological issues raised above, he also provides a way out of the impasse that we come to if our search for philosophical material on language focuses on *yan* and *yu*. As this passage suggests, seeking out debates centered around terms such as *wen* which have a conglomerate of cultural, political, and linguistic meanings will yield much that illuminates not only Chinese views of the origin of language, but Chinese conceptions of what language is. But which terms and in which texts will we find them?

5

There are a plethora of Chinese terms related to speech, word, writing, and language. The organization of Zhu's and others' twentieth century works on linguistics provides a useful mapping of language-related topics found in earlier Chinese texts and may help narrow the investigative field. While my examination of these sources has been cursory, I would suggest the following categories as a preliminary breakdown of language related topics:

1) Philosophy of language and culture: a rough generalization for debates such as those Bol addresses, key terms being those such as *wen* (culture, writing, pattern) and *ming* (name), and, as will be discussed below, those encompassing linguistic and cultural elements, such as *li* (ritual).

2) Study of philology: examining, verifying, and correcting ancient texts involved intensive, close readings and comparisons of linguistic forms. An area of study throughout Chinese history, this field becomes a major focus of literati attention in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries during the *kaozheng*, or evidentiary research movement;

3) Study of rhyme: the effort to facilitate understanding of ancient texts (and music) by investigating and recreating their original rhyme schemes or to create references (such as the *Pei Wen Yun Fu*) which would allow one to write new

rhymes in accordance with older patterns even when these patterns were no longer reflected in vernacular speech has been a well-developed research field throughout Chinese history, though diminishing significantly in the Qing. While a somewhat clumsy grouping, I will lump the study of tone and thus music here, because several key texts in the history of this field deal with both poetry and songs.[\(18\)](#)

4) Study of words[\(19\)](#): investigation of either current or ancient vocabulary's etymology and semantics was a field in which scholars could often garner imperial patronage. The results were often compendiums of enormous scope, such as the *Kangxi Zidian* (the Kangxi Emperor's Dictionary).

5) Study of dialects: A far more ancient branch of Chinese language studies than one might suppose; during the Qin Dynasty (221-206 BC), the emperor is said to have requested a survey of dialects of the regions of his empire in order to understand what the people were saying about his rule. A key work in this area, and one which apparently also involved actual field work phonetically recording speech of different regions, was Yang Xiong's (53-18 BC) *Fang Yan* (Dialects), written during the Han Dynasty (206 BC - 219 AD). This was a fairly unique text in the corpus of dialectical study before the late Qing, however, in that the author's purpose seems to have been understanding existing language rather than elucidating ancient texts[\(20\)](#) (written or influenced by present or past dialects differing from mainstream *wenyanwen*).[\(21\)](#)

6) Linguistics: As previously mentioned, a field of study self-consciously focused upon language (as distinct from texts) and comprising a range of topics somewhat analogous to those found in Western linguistics was not discernable in China until at least the late Qing. By that point, studies such as Zhang Binglin's employed terminology and approaches which appear to be patterned after Western works to which he or his students were exposed while in Japan. Interestingly, rather than simply conforming to the scope and limits of the field as delineated by Western scholars, Chinese scholars who adopted the label "linguistics" for their endeavors nevertheless expanded and redefined the field to encompass many traditional branches of investigation. Thus we find, for instance, that the September 1969 volume of the *Zhongguo Yuyanxue Shi Hua* (Journal of Chinese Historical Linguistics) includes four out of ten articles on ancient rhyme studies and one on an explication of classical texts. This is not simply symptomatic of Cultural Revolutionary fervor for developing uniquely Chinese science and rejecting all things Western.[\(22\)](#) Zhu's work also includes studies of rhyme, philology, classical exegesis and the like as valid areas of linguistic study. He presents a cogent argument against the anti-textual bias of Western linguistics, as well as incisive commentary on the tendency of Western linguists to investigate obscure dialects rather than more mainstream language groups.

## Wen, Ming, and Orinary Scenes

Looking at texts which fall under the first of the categories listed above, and sorting specifically for works which offer something in the way of an orinary scene, we find that these scenes center around the terms *wen* or "writing," "pattern," "culture"; and, *ming*, "name" or "to name." Attempts to link language to a primal cry or to a system of calls, so frequently encountered Western works, are relatively rare in Chinese discussions of language origins. Why do *wen* and *ming*, writing and categorical sorting, rather than, for instance, *yan* and *yu*, appear as primary components in the Chinese conception of language, in many texts preceding or supplanting any discussion of what is intuitively more "orinary" to the Western mind: the utterance? While we will see below in Dong Zhong Shu's work an example in which the utterance is depicted as the initial human cognitive interaction with nature, the fact that this sort of scenario is not frequently explored shows that other concerns supercede the need to investigate verbal communication.

6

One practical observation is that in a community of diverse and mutually unintelligible dialects, where the medium of communication is a shared writing system, privileging the written, particularly in texts which comprise the orthodoxy *and upon which both the political and educational systems are based* is a necessity. Any focus upon oral communication as the most basic link of human beings in such a context would be a potential source of explosive political divisiveness. The fact that less mainstream or non-Confucian texts (for example, Daoist works such as the *Zhuangzi* or Buddhist scriptures such as the *Writings of the Boddhisattva*([23](#))) often deride the ability of the word to convey meaning may lend support to this interpretation, though other more complex ontological factors certainly underlie the privileging of the written. Even amongst some neo-Daoist thinkers, we find acceptance of the written word as conveying meaning. Wang Bi (226-249) in his *Zhou Yi Lueli* writes:

Symbols serve to express ideas. Words serve to explain symbols. For the complete expression of ideas, there is nothing like symbols, and for the complete explanation of symbols there is nothing like words. The words are intended for the symbols. Hence by examining the words, one may perceive the symbols. The symbols are intended for the ideas. Hence, by examining the words one may perceive the ideas. The ideas are completely expressed by the symbols and the symbols are explained by words. Therefore the purpose of words is to explain the symbols, but once the symbols have been grasped, the words may be forgotten. The purpose of symbols is to preserve ideas, but once the ideas have been grasped the symbols may be forgotten . . . in keeping with the category, the symbol thereof may be made; in agreement with the concept, the graph thereof may be made. . .([24](#))

Besides a surprising acceptance of the written, Wang's work reveals a complex and sophisticated

understanding of processes of signification, showing that, even in ancient China, privileging the written did not imply lack of perception of or glossing over the problems any system of signification entails. Ou Yangjian's (d. 300) writings on this topic, though no longer extant, are well known. He believed that without words, humans could not express themselves and that an objective knowledge of things could not be developed without names or categories with which to differentiate them.<sup>(25)</sup> Liu Xun summarized Ou's ideas on this topic as follows:

Principles are apprehended by the mind, but without words they cannot be communicated. Things hold their relation to other (things), but without names they cannot be distinguished. Names shift in accordance with things, and words change in accordance with principles. (In neither case) can they be dual (i.e., be divorced from the things and principles to which they pertain<sup>(26)</sup>) If this duality be avoided, there will be no case in which words do not completely express (the meaning).<sup>(27)</sup>

Though not addressing the essential moment in which words express the principles held in the mind, this passage testifies to the complex understanding of symbolic communication already prevalent in Chinese philosophy by the Jin Dynasty and bears striking resemblances to Terrence Deacon's indexical/symbolic system as presented in *The Symbolic Species* (Norton, 1997). It is interesting, though, that Ou implies that the naming process is essential to the cognitive, not just the communicative, process. This is not a step Deacon explicitly takes.

Wang Bi, in an originary scene of sorts, takes the importance of naming a step further, in his commentary on the *Daode Jing*:

All being originates from nonbeing. Therefore, the time before there were physical shapes and names is the beginning of the myriad things. When shapes and names are there, [the Tao (Dao)] raises them, educates them, adjusts them, and causes their end. It serves as their mother. The text (i.e., the text of the *Daode Jing*)<sup>(28)</sup> means that the Tao (Dao) produces and completes beings on the basis of the formless and the nameless.

Returning to the more orthodox texts of the Confucian mainstream, we find the concepts of naming linked in the most primal moment with the authority to rule, even in works by thinkers who emphasized accountability of the ruler to the people, such as Dong Zhong Shu (179-104 BC). A "dominant figure among Confucians of the Western Han"<sup>(29)</sup> Dynasty (206 BC – 8 AD), in his *Chun Qiu Fan Lu* (*Luxuriant Dew of the Spring and Autumn Annals*) Dong depicts an originary scene in which we find all of these elements.

Ordering well, the state commences with rectifying names. The standard of correctness for names and

[other] appellations is found in heaven and earth; heaven and earth provide the ultimate rightness for names and appellations. When the sages of old uttered cries to correspond to [elements observed in] heaven and earth, those utterances are what we call appellations [*hao*]; when they called out in giving designations, those are what we call names. . . . 'Name' and 'appellation' differ in sound but share the same basis, for both are cries and calls made to express [the sages' awareness of] heaven's intent. Heaven does not speak, but causes men to express its intent; it does not act, but causes men to carry out its principles. Names thus are that by which the sages expressed heaven's intent, and therefore must be profoundly scrutinized. . . . Inasmuch as names and appellations are the expression of heaven's intent, the rectification of names in fact is no different from the taking of heaven as a model. That, then, is precisely the reason why [the rectification of names] is where the Way of governing commences.[\(30\)](#)

7

Here, we see both the primacy of naming to cognitive function and the linking of language to the authority to rule mentioned above, as well as the linked concepts of patterning (*wen*) of principle (*li*) made manifest in earth by heaven (*tian*) as identically replicated in the application of correct names.

This mapping of  $tian \Rightarrow li \Rightarrow wen \Rightarrow ming$ , is a basic ontological structure underlying the conceptions of language found in Chinese philosophy and one which links the ontological issues raised in the previous section together into a coherent system. Peter Bol's discussion of these issues is particularly illuminating, and, without recounting his entire argument here, his selection and translation of an originary passage from one of the earliest classics, the *Zhou Li* (*Zhou Book of Rites*) may serve to illustrate how these concepts fit together: "The two forces [i.e., *yin* and *yang*] were fixed, and the sun and moon flashed with light; the pattern [*wen*] of heaven was manifested. The eight trigrams were set forth and written records were created; the pattern [*wen*] of man was detailed." As Bol comments, "Writing began with the schematic representation of the interaction of natural forces." He notes describes how this process is said to have taken place, through the actions of the mythical Fu Xi, creator of the trigrams: "Fu Xi, contemplating the images [*xiang*] of heaven and their parallels on earth, observing the tracks [*wen*] left by birds and beasts, and drawing on his body and on things, created the eight trigrams 'to bring into circulation [*tong*] the power of spirit illumination and categorize the actualities of the ten thousand things.'" Bol aptly summarizes the relations of these elements, noting that "whether *wen* was a human artifact or simply presented itself to human notice in a mysterious way, both versions suppose that *wen* manifested patterns of heaven-and-earth and things as an order that existed before human society."[\(31\)](#) Bol's insightful discussion may go a long way to show how our conception of what language is, of what it is comprised, and how it relates to human existence must be expanded in order to see the ways in which an originary approach can be most fruitfully applied to sinological research.

In light of Bol's argument, the scope of the possible research categories listed above expands to include other than strictly language-related media. The concept of *wen* as both human creation and schematically manifesting human experience in the world suggests that, apart from the categories listed above, ritual will be a productive medium through which to explore concepts of the origin of language in the Chinese context. A full exploration of this issue is outside of the scope of this paper, but a brief sketch of two possible areas where examining ritual in relation to the origin of language should suffice to demonstrate that this would be a fruitful area for further research.

## Archaeology & Ritual Wares

During the Shang, bronze work reached a height of technological sophistication and productive specialization that is indicative of a significant allotment of social resources. As such, these wares are crucial clues to early Chinese social forms. This fact has never been lost on Chinese scholars. Shang bronze wares have been a focus of collection and study in China since at least the Han Dynasty and, as early as 1092, they were catalogued and subdivided according to style in the *Kao Gu Tu* [Folio of Antiquities] by Lu Da Lin. Inscription played a key role in differentiating Shang from Zhou bronzes.<sup>(32)</sup> Two facets of these inscriptions are initially striking. First, in those with inscriptions (only a small portion of the known bronzes) the system of relationship indicated demonstrates a linkage of the demarcation of time, interpersonal relation, and ritual relation which is very suggestive for the questions of deferral of violence through ritual and symbolic communication. Second, the wares that do not have any characters and those that have only what Chang refers to as "emblem" or pictographic representations of clan or lineage significance give a unique insight into how symbolic representation developed in Shang society. A striking example of this, which seems to manifest in a concrete medium exactly the multi-faceted nature of *wen* Bol describes, is the development of decorative relief in the bronze wares over a five-stage period described by Max Loehr. As Loehr explains this progression, the early Style I wares have "thin relief lines," the Style II wares have "relief ribbons" with an "incised appearance," the Style III wares have "dense, fluent, more curvilinear figurations," the Style IV wares have the "first separation of motifs proper from spirals," which then become "small and function as ground pattern. Motifs and spirals are flush" in this style. And finally, in Style V wares, there is the "first appearance of motifs in relief; the motifs rise above the ground spirals, which may be eliminated altogether."<sup>(33)</sup> Other wares with inscribed passages offer fascinating insight into social relationships and ritual maintenance thereof through symbolic representation; later Chinese scholarship on these inscriptions offers further insights into the nature of the Chinese understanding of these concepts. But even these uninscribed bronzes present a striking visual representation of symbolic development and a fascinating manifestation of the very concept the character *wen* embodies.

## Literature

8

Finally, the trove of Chinese literature offers unexpected insights into Chinese perspectives on GA questions. Marston Anderson has masterfully demonstrated how Wu Jingzi's (1701-54) Qing era novel *Rulin Waishi* (The Scholars) uses a unique combination of subjective temporal scheme, contrasting thematic structures, and "flavorless" narrative style to portray the desperate yearning of Qing literati for a perfect ritual reenactment in times of social decay. Anderson finds in Wu's work an interest in and manifestation of Xunzi's (298-238 BC) ideas of ritual. As Anderson reads Wu, Wu is using the tools of his literary trade to portray the psychological effect Xunzi attributed to ritual. Xunzi believed that "the

rites were designed above all to mediate the natural human emotions of desire and memory"[\(34\)](#) and this is exactly what Wu, writing in a period of intensely conflicted feelings amongst the literati, suggests through his portrayal that their unnamed, unspoken, but driving desire for ritual reenactment derives from. Though only briefly suggested here, Chinese archaeological evidence and literature clearly have much to offer the intrepid GA investigator.

## Notes

1. Zhu Xing, *Zhongguo Yuyanxue Shi*, Taipei, Taiwan, Hongye Wenhua Shiye Limited Company, 1995, p. 647.[\(back\)](#)
2. Sun, Warren, *Chang Ping-lin and His Political Thought*, Papers from Eastern History No. 32, Sept. 1985, p. 57-69; For a more detailed study of Zhang, see also Young-tsu Wang, *The Search for Modern Nationalism: Zhang Binglin and Revolutionary China* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989).[\(back\)](#)
3. See (also a good general introduction to the Chinese language) <http://acc6.its.brooklyn.cuny.edu/phalsall/texts/chinIng2.html>; and Thomas Metzger, "Modern Chinese Utopianism," Proceedings of the Conference on the Theory of Statecraft in Modern China, Taipei; Institute of Modern History, Academia Sinica, 1984.[\(back\)](#)
4. Zhu, 647-48.[\(back\)](#)
5. Wang Feng Yang, *Houji* (Afterword) in *Gu Ci Bian*, Changchun, Guilin Cultural and Historical Publishing Company, 1993, pp. 1043-44.[\(back\)](#)
6. Wang, p. 753.[\(back\)](#)
7. Because *xin* may be translated as "heart" or "mind," translators sometimes use a compound of both in order to preserve the meaning of the original. I reluctantly use this awkward phrase to avoid giving the impression that there is a dualism in which the heart or emotion is voiced by *yan* and the mind or reason by *yu* or vice versa. Chinese ontology does not support such a conclusion. Instead, the contrast between these two words seems to arise from their respective emphases on self-expression versus social interaction.[\(back\)](#)
8. Wang, p. 754.[\(back\)](#)
9. *Shangwu Yinshuguan* (Commercial Press), *Gu Hanyu Chang Yong Zi Zidian*, (Dictionary of Frequently Used Classical Chinese Characters) Beijing, 1995, p. 353.[\(back\)](#)
10. Dating and attribution of this Daoist classic is unreliable. In pre-Qing studies and commentaries, the work was said to precede the Analects of Confucius, i.e., sometime before 479 BC. The author is variously said to be Lao Tan or Li Er. Since the late Qing when Zui Shu attributed the work to the later Warring States period, roughly contemporaneous to the *Zhuangzi*, i.e., around 375-290 BC, this dating has been accepted by many Chinese scholars. For discussions of the dating and attribution of the *Dao De Jing* from differing points of view in English see Yu-lan Fung, Bodde, trans., *A History of Chinese Philosophy*, Vol. I, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1983), pp. 170-73; Wing-tsit Chan, *A Source Book in Chinese Philosophy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1973), pp. 136-40.[\(back\)](#)
11. As in "qianli zhi xing shi yu zuxia," "a thousand mile journey begins with a footfall." *Dao De Jing*.[\(back\)](#)
12. e.g., "Tiandi guozhen wuchu?" [Is there really no beginning to heaven and earth?], from Liu Zong Yuan (773-819), a Tang dynasty philosopher in his *Discussion of Feudalism*. It is interesting to note that Liu's questioning of the originary comes in the context of his investigation of political organization. Liu investigated the sources of power of the earliest dynasties and asserted that the Shang and Zhou achieved supreme power by relying on feudal lords, but after attaining power couldn't overcome the nobles they had relied upon; thus the feudal system of power sharing came about. See Hsiao Kung-chuan, trans. F.W. Mote, *A History of Chinese Political Thought*, vol. 1, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1979), p.28 n.[\(back\)](#)



13. Yu, Pauline, *The Reading of Imagery in the Chinese Poetic Tradition*, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1987, pp. 39-40; cited in Peter K. Bol, *This Culture of Ours: Intellectual Transitions in T'ang and Sung China*, Stanford, Stanford University Press, 1992, p. 95. Yu transliterates Chinese using the Wade-Giles system. I have added the Pinyin transliterations, given in parentheses, for the sake of continuity and ease of reference, as I have used Pinyin throughout this paper.[\(back\)](#)

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14. The *Da Xue* was originally part of the *Li Ji* or Book of Rites and was not recognized as a separate classic until Zhu Xi (1130-1200) a highly influential Sung Neo-Confucian scholar, culled it from the *Li Ji*, edited and annotated it, and made it one of the "Four Books" or required classics and therefore the basis for both civil service exams and basic Chinese cultural literacy. Some controversy remains over the dating of the original to the 5<sup>th</sup>-3<sup>rd</sup> century BC. See Chan, p. 85, n.5 and note 16, *infra* regarding Zhu Xi's "contribution" to the text.[\(back\)](#)

15. Legge, James, trans. *The Chinese Classics*, Volume I, Taipei, 1991 (reprint of 1893 edition), pp. 356-357.[\(back\)](#)

16. Authorship and dating of this text are uncertain. Two later scholars who would take up the issues in the text in a philosophic debate of signal importance were Zhu Xi (1130-1200) and Wang Bo (1197-1274). Zhu Xi attributed the text to Zeng Zi, while Wang Bo claimed it was written by Zi Si, the grandson of Confucius. In any case, following the Sung era when the *Da Xue* became one of the classical Compendium of the *Four Books* and received more critical attention, Chinese scholars have generally attributed the original work to the Warring States era. For a discussion in English of this attribution see Derek Bodde (trans.) Fung Yu-lan, *A History of Chinese Philosophy*, Volume I, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1983, pp. 361-362. Volume II of the same work details the Sung-Ming Neo-Confucianism debates between Zhu Xi's and Cheng Yi's schools on one side, and Wang Shou-ren's, on the other. See, pp. 478-629.[\(back\)](#)

17. Bol, p. 95, italics added for clarity and consistency with previous Chinese language references.[\(back\)](#)

18. Often, music is also dealt with in key texts which discuss the nature *wen* and *ming*, mentioned in no. 1, above. In these cases, it is usually linked to issues of ritual and sacrificial propriety. Though considerations of time and space prevent me from undertaking a detailed analysis of this linkage, such an investigation would no doubt be a fruitful endeavor in a generative-anthropological approach to Chinese philosophy, particularly in light of linkages on the Western side, such as Rousseau's overriding interest in music at the time he wrote on the origin of language. It may also be of interest to note that forms of traditional Chinese musical notation used characters (i.e., ones which are also used for writing texts), rather than a separate notational system. Thus, certain characters in particular contexts may simultaneously have both literary and musical connotations.[\(back\)](#)

19. I refrain from employing the term "morphology" here to avoid implying that these projects involved analyses of tense, number, case and similar changes which comprise an important portion of the morphological investigations of Western languages but are not applicable to the study of Chinese words.[\(back\)](#)

20. Zhu, pp. 60-78.[\(back\)](#)

21. *Ibid.*, pp. 599-600.[\(back\)](#)

22. Zhongguo Yuwenxue Shi (Chinese Language Society), eds., *Zhongguo Yuyanxue Shi Hua*, Beijing, September 1969.[\(back\)](#)

23. Attributed to Kumarajiva (344-413 AD).[\(back\)](#)

24. Bodde, trans., Fung, p. 185.[\(back\)](#)

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25. *Zhixue Baikeshu*, Beijing, 1992.[\(back\)](#)

26. I have included Bodde's note on his translation in the body of the quote for ease of reference.[\(back\)](#)
27. Bodde, trans., Fung, p. 185.[\(back\)](#)
28. Chapter 1, paragraph 1, Wang Bi's *Commentary*, [information and transliterations in parentheses added for ease of reference]; cited in translation in Lyvia Kohn, *Early Chinese Mysticism*, p. 61.[\(back\)](#)
29. Hsiao, Kung-chuan, (Frederick A. Mote, trans.) *A History of Chinese Political Thought, Volume I: From the Beginnings to the Sixth Century A.D.*, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1979, p. 487.[\(back\)](#)
30. Ibid, p. 500-501.[\(back\)](#)
31. Bol, p. 94.[\(back\)](#)
32. Chang, Kwang-chih, *Shang Civilization*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1980), pp. 31, 20. [\(back\)](#)
33. Ibid, p. 29-30.[\(back\)](#)
34. Anderson, Marston, "The Scorpion in the Scholar's Cap: Ritual, Memory, and Desire in Rulin Waishi," in *Culture & State in Chinese History*, Theodore Hutners, et al., eds, (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1997, p. 269.[\(back\)](#)

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# **Performatism, or the End of Postmodernism**

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For the subject, postmodernism presents a mighty, seemingly inescapable trap.<sup>(1)</sup> Any attempt it makes to find itself through a search for meaning is bound to go awry, for every sign promising some sort of originary knowledge is embedded in further contexts whose explication requires the setting of even more signs. Attempting to find itself through meaning, the subject drowns in a flood of ever expanding cross-references. Yet even if the subject clings to form it fares no better. For postmodernism sees in form not an antidote to meaning, but rather a trace leading back to already existing, semantically loaded contexts. Every fixation of meaning is dispersed through cross-connected forms; every use of form links up with already existing meanings; every approach to an origin leads back to an alien sign. Searching for itself, the subject quickly ends where it began: in the endlessly expanding field of the postmodern.

The way out of postmodernism does therefore not lead through the intensified search for meaning, through the introduction of new, surprising forms or through the return to an authentic origin. Instead, it must take place through a mechanism completely impervious to postmodernism's modes of dispersal, deconstruction and proliferation. This mechanism, which has been making itself felt with increasing strength in the cultural events of the last few years, can be best understood using the notion of *performance*. Performance in itself is, of course, not a phenomenon new or unknown. In Austin's speech-act theory it refers to a language act that does what it promises ("I now pronounce you man and wife"). In the sense of an artistic event in the modernist avant-garde, a performance foregrounds or "makes strange" the border between life and art; in the happenings and performance art of postmodernism it integrates the human body or subject into an artistic context. The concept of performance I am suggesting here is, however, a different one. The new notion of performativity serves neither to foreground nor contextualize the subject, but rather to preserve it: the subject is presented (or presents itself) as a holistic, irreducible unit that makes a binding impression on a reader or observer. This holistic incarnation of the subject can, however, only succeed when the subject does not offer a semantically differentiated surface that can be absorbed and dispersed in the surrounding context. For this reason the new subject always appears to the observer as reduced and "solid," as single- or simple-minded and in a certain sense identical with the things it stands for. This closed, simple whole acquires a potency that can almost only be defined in theological terms. For with it is created a refuge in which all those things are brought together that postmodernism and poststructuralism thought definitively dissolved: the *telos*, the author, belief, love, dogma and much, much more.

The first models of a reduced, holistic subject seem not to have been formulated by writers or artists, but

rather by literary critics reacting with antitheoretical or minimalist arguments to poststructuralism. Thus Knapp and Michaels, in their groundbreaking article "Against Theory" (Mitchell 1985, orig. 1982), call for the unity or "fundamental inseparability" (1985, 12) of the three basic conditions of interpretation: authorial intention, text, and reader. To this unity they oppose "theory." According to Knapp and Michaels, theory privileges the one or the other part of the whole interpretation process while ignoring or playing down the others (the hermeneutical critic plays up authorial intention, the deconstructivist the sign, the relativist the reader, and so on; compare the discussion in Mitchell 1985, 13-24). In Knapp and Michaels' view "theory" does not refine or improve interpretative practice, but rather represents an unacceptable attempt to take a position outside of it: "[Theory] is the name for all the ways people have tried to stand outside practice in order to govern practice from without. Our thesis has been that no one can reach a position outside practice, that theorists should stop trying, and that the theoretical enterprise should therefore come to an end" (1985, 30). This insistence on the absolute unity of author, sign, and reader has indirect, but nonetheless far-reaching consequences for recreating the subject. Interpretation no longer takes place through floating, proliferating semiotic acts continually eluding their progenitors, but rather through the competition between individual, holistic statements made by discrete subjects. The subject expresses itself in holistic performances in which it believes; other, competing subjects question these acts of belief (cf. Mitchell 1985, 28). Antitheoretical subjects are opaque (they have no set qualities), but they are always present; the reader always has practical access to them on the basis of a discrete interpretative performance. In a similar sense Michaels, in a later book (1995), argues against searching for cultural identity in the past, in race or in foreign roots. Cultural identity is given in the way people live their lives at a given time; it is unproductive, and in fact impossible, to establish identity outside of that empirical frame. Both "theory" and the ideology of cultural pluralism work by disarticulating a part from a whole (the signifier from the interpretative act, race from culture) and making that part into a continually receding, unattainable other (cf. 1995, 15-16 and 128-129).

2

Roughly at the same time as Knapp and Michael conceived their antitheory the American Romanist Eric Gans formulated his "Generative Anthropology," which is also based on a holistic, performatively conceived sign and a reduced subject. (2) Generative Anthropology may be described briefly as a minimalist theory of language origin inspired by the victimization theory of René Girard. Central to Generative Anthropology is the assumption of an originary situation--a "mimetic crisis"--in which competing members of a small, prelinguistic group for the first time employ a linguistic ("ostensive") sign to designate an object of contention directly before them. The use of the ostensive sign defuses and defers the conflict: the previously existing, animalistic social order is transformed into a specifically human one based on semiotic representation rather than on physical imitation ("mimesis"). Analogous to Girard's "founding murder" of an innocent victim, the first use of the sign acquires a considerable sacral potency: the collective experiences the semiotically mediated act of pacification as something holy. This pacification, however, is merely a deferral of the originary, object-related conflict: although the ostensive sign represents an object it cannot be put to direct use. Representation therefore always gives rise to resentment, which continually threatens to expand into violence; only the renewed employment of the sign can once more defer this threat. Gans--quite consciously--ontologizes and sacralizes Derridian *différance*. Semiosis is ironic deferral, but this deferral serves not the play of traces and linguistic paradoxes, but rather a "holy" goal, namely the preservation of the subject in the semiotic collective. The ostensive sign always contains an element of paradox, since the sign pretends to be something that it cannot be (a usable thing). The sign brings about reconciliation on one hand and resentment on the other

because it represents things without placing them entirely at the disposal of the subject. This paradox has direct consequences for the subject's search for identity. Instead of continually failing to find itself in a tangle of semiotic traces, the subject constitutes itself through a dialectic of "love and resentment" rooted in the holistic, object-bound sign; this dialectic continually asserts itself anew in cultural life. With this in mind, Gans has begun shifting his interest from a critique of theory to a far-ranging description of contemporary culture; his *Chronicles of Love and Resentment* (see bibliography), which appear regularly on his internet site, have recently been addressing what Gans calls "post-millennial," that is, post-postmodern, culture. All in all, however, neither Knapp and Michaels' much-discussed antitheory nor Generative Anthropology have found a broad base of adherents in American academia: their minimalist, antitheoretical critiques are unsettling not only to poststructuralism, but to hermeneutics and traditional literary criticism as well.(3)

Less radical, but perhaps more influential, versions of performatism can be found in what is generally called New Historicism. A case in point is Stephen Greenblatt's approach to self-fashioning, which may be thought of as a quasi-transcendent act aimed at reviving still earlier subject-creating performances--one need only think of the enigmatic opening line of his *Shakespearean Negotiations*: "I began with the desire to speak with the dead" (Greenblatt 1988, 1). Just how much performatist practices have come to inform literary scholarship and criticism since the 1980s is a question that cannot be treated here in detail. Further below, however, I will touch on two recent essays deeply marked by performatism: Jedediah Purdy's *For Common Things* (1999) and *Unter Verdacht* [Under suspicion] (2000) by the Russo-German critic Boris Groys.

In literature and particularly in cinema, the performatist sign and a holistic, reduced subject begin to appear in the mid-to-late 1990s. In Russian literature the best examples seem to me to be Viktor Pelevin's short stories as well as his novel *Chapaev i Pustota* [*Buddha's Little Finger*] (orig. 1996, English translation 1999). However, performatism can also be found in the popular, conventionally narrated realism of Liudmila Ulitskaia, as, for example, in her novella *Vesëlie pokhorony* [A happy funeral] or the short story "Genele-sumochnitsa" [Genele the purse lady] (both in Ulitskaia 1998).(4) In German literature a good recent example would be Ingo Schulze's much-acclaimed novel *Simple Storys* [Simple stories] (1999). In Western movies I would single out Sam Mendes's Oscar-crowned *American Beauty* (1999), Jim Jarmusch's *Ghost Dog* (2000), the Danish Dogma film *The Idiots* by Lars von Trier (1998), and Tom Tykwer's *Run Lola Run* (German orig.: *Lola rennt*, 1998); as a Slavist with a Bohemian specialization I've also been struck by the Czech films *Návrat idiota* [Return of the idiot] (1999) and *Samotáři* [Loners] (2000). In spite of vastly different cultural backgrounds, themes, and genre traditions all the above-named works derive their strength from the authorially guided apotheosis of reduced, whole subjects and from the performative use of object-bound, holistic signs. Subjectivity and semiosis are no longer treated as context-dependent, continually failing gestures but rather form closed, performatively realized wholes that resist dispersal in surrounding contexts. Around these subjects there develop plots often dealing with a character transcending the context around him or her. The performative principle, which at first applies only to the individual, is carried over to the whole or at least to other subjects close to the central character.

3

The new, performatist concept of the subject expresses itself most clearly in films like *American Beauty*, *The Idiots*, *Return of the Idiot* and *Loners*, in which dumb or dumber heroes play a central role. In *American Beauty* the hero consciously reverts to a state of a puberty; in *The Idiots* the commune

members intentionally act like mentally retarded persons; in *Return of the Idiot* the simple-minded protagonist owes his naivete to a long stay in a psychiatric institution; in *Loners* the pothead Jakub is continually forgetting salient details of daily life (for example, how the Czech national anthem sounds, that he's driving through Prague and not Dubrovnik, and that he has a girlfriend gone off on a two-week visit to her aunt). These subjects present themselves (or are presented) as self-sufficient wholes impervious to the demands or responsibilities emanating from the social context around them. Out of these self-presentations arise new freedoms which in all four cases serve to renew human relationships through love. Lester Burnham, the hero of *American Beauty*, becomes obsessed with a teenage object of desire but holds back from seducing her precisely when he is in a position to do so; in *The Idiots* the homely Karen, who professes love for all the commune members, overcomes her own bourgeois background through an atavistic performance ("spassing"); because he loves everyone, Frantisek in *Return of the Idiot* can act amidst an unhappy four-way relationship as an advisor, confidante, scapegoat and finally as a loved one who breaks through the cycle of false desire. In Pelevin's programmatic short story with the characteristic title "Ontologiiia detstva" [Ontology of childhood], the narrator states: "In general, the life of a grown person is self-sufficient and--how should I put it--doesn't have empty spaces that could hold experience not directly related to his immediate surroundings" (Pelevin 1998, 222). The "empty spaces," which can be psychological or ritualistic in nature, create room for a holistic perspective allowing characters to transcend their own immediate situations: compare, for example, the apotheosis of Lester Burnham in *American Beauty*; Chapaev's and Anka's passage to Nirvana in *Buddha's Little Finger*; Karen's break with bourgeois family life in *The Idiots*; the complete assimilation and application of samurai teachings by the contract killer in Jim Jarmusch's *Ghost Dog*.<sup>(5)</sup> Even in Liudmila Ulitskaia's realistically narrated short stories one can find this leap from almost total reduction to a dynamic, context-transcending performance. In *A Happy Funeral* the ecumenical testament of the paralyzed artist Alik is a taped message which is played unexpectedly after his death and admonishes his friends to revel spontaneously in daily life; in "Genele the Purse Lady" the vocabulary of the dying Jewish heroine is reduced after a stroke to the word "purse," in which a valuable legacy may or may not be hidden (her way of bequeathing value is evidently intended as an allegory of how secular, deritualized Judaism continues to renew itself).

This retrograde self-fashioning of the subject has something profoundly sacral about it, for every successful act of establishing selfhood implies a transcending, context-disrupting act of sacrifice which can exhaust or destroy the subject. The naive Frantisek in *Return of the Idiot* suffers from stigmata-like nosebleeds; after a particularly intensive act of "spassing" the naked, exhausted leader of *The Idiots* lies like Christ in the Pietà; Lester Burnham is killed when Colonel Fitts misinterprets his self-emancipatory message; the contract killer in *Ghost Dog*--in accordance with the samurai code--allows himself to be killed by his master. The performative subject, who delineates a whole, closed space within a certain context, must reckon with the entire resentment of the context being directed against the foreign body in its midst. At the same time the subject's "message" can spread when other subjects are infected by its example and create new free spaces of their own.

This messianic moment emanating from performative signs is expressly treated in *American Beauty* in conjunction with the character of Ricky Fitts. Ricky at first seems to be a voyeur who films everything passing by his camera lens. As it turns out, making digital movies--representing things in media--is only a means for him to temporarily participate in holistic processes like death and beauty. When asked whether he knows someone who had in the meantime died, he says: "[No, but] I did see this homeless woman who froze to death once. Just laying there on the sidewalk. She looked really sad" (Bell 1999,

57). And when asked why he filmed her, he says: "When you see something like that, it's like God is looking right at you, just for a second. And if you're careful, you can look right back" (1999, 57). Through his camera-mediated observations of things Ricky participates in the divine order as a whole, he constitutes himself in such moments as the performative likeness of God.<sup>(6)</sup> It is not only the sight of death that gives Ricky this chance, but also the performative beauty of the things themselves. As Ricky says, the most beautiful thing he ever saw was a white plastic bag that danced before him in the wind: "And this bag was just dancing with me. Like a little kid, begging me to play with it. For fifteen minutes. That's the day I realized that there was this entire life behind things, and this incredibly benevolent force that wanted me to know there was no reason to be afraid. Ever" (1999, 60). This theistic insight is not shaken by Lester's violent death, which Ricky reacts to not with horror or voyeuristic curiosity, but rather with sacral sympathy (the script speaks of "awe," 1999, 97). Inert materiality (including death) is no longer a threat. Instead, it is part of a holistic, benevolent order which can be observed and confirmed by experiencing how actions and their designations come together in a performance. Just as postmodernism institutionalized evil--continuous boundary transgression--the new epoch institutionalizes the good--the one-time, firm drawing of borders. Accordingly, there is a strong tendency among performative works of art to justify divine creation, to turn to theodicy. Lester Burnham's murderer, Colonel Fitts, is not evil; he is simply a rejected lover who has deformed himself by denying his own "fit" or frame of being (his homosexuality); the result is a "fit" or single act of violent rage. He himself possesses only a trace of evil--a plate with a swastika on the back which he keeps under lock and key. A similar downplaying and limiting of evil can also be found in Pelevin--this in stark contrast to the brutal, endless border transgressions typical of postmodernists like Iurii Mamleev and Vladimir Sorokin in Russia or Brett Easton Ellis in America. Thus the Nazi period in "Oruzhie vozmezdiia" [Weapon of vengeance] is laconically described with the words "a certain Michel<sup>(7)</sup> had acted up" (1998, 308). The reduction of Nazism to banal objects or to boisterous actions is not a result of historical revisionism but rather of the need to uphold the "good" performative order. Evil, which is really misunderstood or ill-fitting goodness, is relegated to a small, insignificant space within this order.

4

The performative drawing of boundaries expresses itself most clearly in terms of plot. Postmodernism, as is well known, allows no time or space for causal ties to develop. Chronotopes arise and disperse almost simultaneously (as can be seen in Derridian modes like *différance* or undecidability, which cannot be fixed in temporal, spatial or causal terms). In contrast, in the new, performatist epoch there is a tendency to create chronotopes allowing a choice between possibilities or even repeated choices between possibilities. Contingency is now the prerogative of the subject and not of signs: the point is to preserve the integrity of the subject even under the most unfavorable conditions. The most obvious example of this is Tom Tykwer's *Run Lola Run*. The movie's heroine gets the chance to repeat a botched money transfer three times until she and the hero finally get things right. Each of the three plot sequences appears as a discrete chronotope, each starting respectively with a few split seconds' difference. Each chronotope correlates formally with every other one, yet because of the slight difference in time each results in a completely different performance. Time and space are in other words adjusted until a holistic solution favoring the subject is found, until wish and wish-fulfillment coincide. The actions of the subject are no longer determined by the aleatory, ultimately uncontrollable equivalences among signs, but rather through the manipulation of the transcendental frame by a subject endowed with authorial powers. Instead of unfolding as a freewheeling postmodern game, Lola's actions serve a single, self-confirming goal: they preserve a subject running for her and another's life. Rather than being justified in

epistemological or argumentative terms this manipulation is simply performed: it is presented to the viewer as a narrative fact that must either be disbelieved or believed. In this way fiction becomes religion, belief becomes an unavoidable result of any semiotic or secular act. It is no accident in this regard that Gans especially emphasizes the sacral function of the market and consumption in capitalist societies (see *Chronicle* 124, *The Market Model: Three Points*, 31 January 1998); it is no accident that the exemplary Jewish heroine in Ulitskaia's "Genele the Purse-Lady" always gets the optimal price in her dealings with the market vendors (see Ulitskaia 1998, 162-164).

Since the positively acting subject should be preserved at all costs, we find in performatist works a tendency to invest characters with far-ranging authorial prerogatives. Accordingly, characters are endowed with the ability to manipulate time, space, and causality for their own benefit. The fact that Lola is allowed to take off on her run three times is not just the decision of an anonymous authorial narrator but also of Lola herself. A similar moment can be found in the narrative structure of *American Beauty*. At the film's beginning we see the bird's-eye view of a small town and hear a detached, almost meditative voice saying: "My name is Lester Burnham. This is my neighborhood. This is my street. This . . . is my life. I'm forty-two years old. In less than a year I'll be dead." As the first scene of the film appears, Lester's voice adds: "Of course, I don't know that yet" (Bell 1999, 1). Lester's tranquility is made possible by the holism of the narrative framework, which is oblivious to the ontological difference between implicit author and character--and hence to death itself. In this way even the evacuation or destruction of characters serves to strengthen the whole; after his murder by Colonel Fitts, Lester returns to the authorial frame, from which he reintroduces the story from a personal perspective. The act of narrating becomes an act of belief that cannot be made the object of a metaphysical critique or deconstruction. The film is constructed in such a way that the viewer has no choice other than to transcend his or her own disbelief and accept the performance represented by the film. This transformation of the viewing process into an involuntary act of belief stands in direct contrast to the postmodern mode of the virtual, where the observer can't believe *anything* because ontological parameters like author, narrator and character have been dissolved in an impenetrable web of paradoxical citations and cross-references (the best example of this is the unenviable fate of the private detective in Paul Auster's *New York Trilogy*).

Even Frantisek, the hero of the conventionally filmed *Return of the Idiot* has a striking authorial power: he has the curious ability to get on or off departing trains already well in motion. This ability, which departs annoyingly from the realistic context of the rest of the film, is decisive for the outcome of the plot. In the beginning, it enables the hero to get to know the older sister and, at the end, it enables him to return to the younger one who apparently loves him. Once more, this is a case of contingency being foregrounded and at the same time suspended in the interest of the subject. The temporary suspension of "mere" mimesis is not a throwaway semiotic effect but rather serves the welfare of the subject in its personal guise. This sort of authorially self-empowered subject can also be found in Ulitskaia, who adheres consistently to 19<sup>th</sup>-century norms of realistic representation. By allowing a "dialogical" tape to be played after his death Alik, in *A Happy Funeral*, appears to his friends and relatives--literally--as a *deus ex machina* speaking authoritatively from the hereafter.

An authorially empowered character also plays a crucial role in the Dogma film *The Idiots*, which otherwise (in accordance with the "Dogma-95" oath) foregoes the use of all external authorial manipulations. The only person unable to "spass-out" in the commune's group actions proves to be the only one who dares to do so in the context of her own family life: her drooling and slobbering at her stiff, emotionally cold family's midtime coffee is not just a superficial provocation but materially equates her with her baby who had died two weeks before. In this way she alone realizes the missionary message of



the domineering, egocentric leader of the "idiots" (who characteristically does not act like an idiot when dealing with his own bourgeois relative). Dogmatic authoriality must always first prove itself in a spontaneous personal guise (this happens, for example, in *Buddha's Little Finger* when the New Russian gangsters involuntarily experience a Buddhist illumination). That the principle of the personally empowered implicit author can be transferred to the level of the real-life author can be seen in the "Dogma 95" code formulated by Lars von Trier and Thomas Vinterberg. The self-imposed authorial dictate that the director should only use natural light and sounds and not bring in extra props establishes a semantically unmarked frame that frees by confining. The result is not an obsessive adherence to rules, but rather the holistic unification of authorial rigor and personal spontaneity:

5

[...] you can practise the technique--the Dogma technique or the idiot technique--from now to kingdom come without anything coming out of it unless you have a profound, passionate desire and need to do so. Karen discovers that she needs the technique and therefore it changes her life. Idiocy is like hypnosis or ejaculation: if you want it, you can't have it, and if you don't want it, you can.(8)

A successful performance depends on the unforced will of an authorially framed subject and not on the author himself. The programmatic, indeed almost Old Testamentary restriction against crediting the director in Dogma movies pays tribute to this principle: divinity expresses itself neither in an authorial dictate, nor in personal will, nor in pure ritual, but rather in the fortuitous convergence of all three. In spite of very different religious sources (theism in *American Beauty*, Buddhism in Pelevin, Judaism in Ulitskaia, cult in *The Idiots*) all performatistic authors share an identical cultural-theological perspective: namely that Godliness is everywhere where wholes are created by individual subjects.(9)

How persons can be authorially empowered with architectonic means can be experienced, incidentally, in the newly renovated Reichstag in Berlin.(10) Whereas postmodern architecture disorients the subject by causing spatial coordinates to appear equivalent and interchangeable, the glass dome of the Reichstag presents a transparent, unmarked frame which allows the visitor to experience his or her own apotheosis by slowly ascending the spiral-shaped walkway curling around the dome; at the end of the climb the visitor, now completely surrounded by blue sky, "thrones" over the members of the Bundestag deliberating directly below.

In terms of media, the performative reduction and drawing of boundaries aims neither one-sidedly at the authentic reproduction of the real nor at the effortless, endless reproduction of signs in virtual, secondary reality. Rather, it performs a paradoxical unification of both moments in a cinematic frame which, precisely because it is constructed by an author and not by an interplay of signs, is marked by personal and technical "mistakes." In *The Idiots* Lars von Trier realizes this paradoxality in the most varied ways. Although "Dogma 95" rigorously restricts the technical possibilities of camera technique, sound effects, and lighting in *The Idiots*, the montage employed is comparatively dynamic and professional--that is, without the unbearably long, monotonous takes suggesting the absence of authorially scripted dramaturgy. At the same time, von Trier intentionally allowed easily removable mistakes to remain, as, for example, back-and-forth-focussing in poor light and footage of a badly set-up second cameraman. This intentional juxtaposition of professionalism and dilettantism causes the medium of film to appear as a real thing employed by a personally responsible authorial subject and not as a virtual, self-perpetuating process à la Baudrillard or McLuhan. The medium is the messenger, and no longer the message: it is the

extension of a paradoxical authorial subject pointing out his (or her) own materiality and fallibility.

How messages are now linked to a specifically human medium can be seen in an especially vivid way on the walls of the new Reichstag, where Sir Norman Foster simply allowed much of the (in part obscene) graffiti left by Russian soldiers to stand as it was. Within the framework of the newly renovated building the banal messages scribbled on the walls by real people no longer have a semantic meaning; instead, they represent the violent intrusion of a history borne by human subjects into the massive, static space of German state power.<sup>(11)</sup> The graffiti on the Reichstag walls are not citations, they are *real*; rather than producing a nostalgic, simulatory effect, they demonstrate the materiality, subjectivity and fracturedness of history within a holistic, intentionally constructed framework. Precisely this performative, authorial framing of historical statements enables their renewal and keeps them from being degraded to mere quotes. On the other hand, though, performatism does not return to authenticity. The force of the original signs asserts itself only after they have been framed in another medium which is necessarily always artificial.<sup>(12)</sup>

The paradoxical relationship between the medium as a conveyor of "true" physical facts and an authorially manipulated, virtual frame is expressed most vividly in *The Idiots* in the depiction of sexuality. There, the sexual act is presented as an indubitable physical performance: the film shows both erections as well as vaginal penetration. The depiction of these real physical acts, which would normally violate the intimate sphere of actors, characters and viewers alike, nonetheless does not appear degrading, dehumanizing or mechanical in the context of the film. This is apparently only possible because the subjectively undifferentiated, faceless sexuality of the commune members--group sex creates a unified field of action in which sublime, subject-fixated narrative and primitive, object-fixated lust converge in a congenial way. Performed idiocy, which at least temporarily levels out the difference between object and subject, creates a discrete space in which nothing human appears alien. This free space for performing faceless physical acts is itself however not the goal. Rather, it is a means for creating a new individual subjectivity residing beyond the confines of the free space itself. In a scene directly following the shots of group sex, where two individuals approach one another erotically, the camera behaves conventionally and chastely: it turns away just before the sexual act takes place, thus returning a sense of privacy to characters, actors and viewers. Lars von Trier's messianistic performatism (and Pelevin's as well) makes frequent use of such dramaturgical shifts, which the viewer is made to perceive and assimilate involuntarily. In general, performatism encourages self-therapy, it suggests we can transcend the force of rampant, oppressive contexts by repeatedly asserting our own selfhood (compare in this regard *Run Lola Run*, Pelevin's search for Nirvana or Michaels' critique of the pluralist dispersion of selfhood in *Our America*).

6

Performatism also has a political dimension. In his carefully honed essay *For Common Things*, Jedediah Purdy (2000, orig. 1999) argues against the postmodern attitude of ironic indifference and for the acceptance of individual political responsibility in a postideological age. But how is the individual to work towards a political goal in the absence of any clear ideological guidelines? Purdy exemplifies this dilemma using two seemingly disparate examples: that of the ruinous strip mining in his home state of West Virginia and that of the turn to democracy in Poland, the Czech Republic and Hungary. Destructive strip mining in West Virginia cannot, to paraphrase Purdy in my terms, be averted solely by imposing a strict governmental frame (a "carbon tax") or by performing acts of individual resistance. Rather, both need to coincide in a typically circular fashion whose alpha and omega is a non-ironic, "attentive"

subject:

Reform through law is only effective if it joins with lives that realize some of the principles that law declares and tries to enforce. If we do not become the sort of people--more reflective in our demands, more modest in our needs, more attentive in our actions--who could inhabit a responsible economy, such an economy will not come to us by law or government. Because it will not come without law and government, changing ourselves is all the more important. We are the beginning as well as the end of a decent economy's possibility, because we are the sole site of responsibility. Responsibility begins in attentiveness, because only that can help us to discern the conditions of hope. (2000, 159-160)

By contrast, Eastern Europe's turn to democracy is for Purdy a successful act of political transcendence and a victory of democratic, revolutionary ideals: upright, courageous dissidents like Adam Michnik or Václav Havel not only promulgated these ideals publicly but also lived by them personally (see 2000, 113 ff.). As Purdy points out, though, the successful political performances in Eastern Europe have led to a paradoxical result. The heroic victory of democratic ideals has once more allowed the creation of a free private realm; this private realm is at the same time concerned mainly with banal, personal matters and continually threatens to fall back into political lethargy and social indifference. For Purdy, heroic, self-sacrificing political performances of the type cited above never deliver absolute ideological legitimacy. Rather, they create a frame in which we may actively overcome our own indifference and develop an interest in "common things"--that is, things which are in many respects banal but which are also objects of publically shared concern (2000, 127-128). Attentive individuals must act in the private, banal sphere in order to transcend it temporarily and reach shared (but never ideologically binding) goals. This corresponds in practical political terms to the fictionally mediated creation of a frame and the transcending of that frame by a naive or simple-minded individual subject. "Realist" performatism (Purdy, Gans, Ulitskaia etc.) confirms this mechanism but allows for continual relapses into irony or paradox; "fantastic" performatism (Pelevin) holds forth the possibility of total transcendence.

Finally, the unifying intention of performatism is closely tied to the return of the phallus as a positive enabling force in culture.<sup>(13)</sup> Contrary to the poststructuralist assumption that the phallus functions only by muzzling, suppressing, or penetrating the female, the performative phallus creates a positive, gender-transcending unity through a process of more-or-less voluntary self-sacrifice. The centrifugal, attention-grabbing fusion of corporality and semioticity which the act of self-sacrifice entails leaves behind an empty space which is not seldom filled out by female characters. The phallic order thus annihilates itself (Far Eastern tradition--*Buddha's Little Finger* and *Ghost Dog*), practices continence (Christian tradition--Lester in *American Beauty*) or leaves behind a codex or testament (Jewish tradition--Alik's tape in *A Happy Funeral*). To this can be added an element of cult: in *The Idiots* the erect penis of a faceless "idiot" in a mixed public shower acts as a cult object engendering nervous, "understanding" giggles rather than a sexual threat. In view of this active presentation and retraction of the phallus (not castration!) the female characters themselves receive the opportunity to act in a phallic--which is to say active and unifying--way. The resulting gender mixes cannot, however, be reduced to any single pattern; often they are treated ironically. In *American Beauty* and *Ghost Dog* women pick up phallic weapons with mixed results. In the case of Carolyn in *American Beauty* the outcome is ludicrous; in the case of the little girl in *Ghost Dog*, who shoots an unloaded gun at Ghost Dog's killer and master, the suspension of violence emanating from Ghost Dog is suggested (but also the failure of the annihilating performance by

the child, who has in the meantime has become the bearer of Ghost Dog's samurai teachings). In *The Idiots* it is ultimately not the sexually charged cult leader who transcends his life situation by "spassing out" but the shy and meek Karen. Finally, Michel Houellebecq's anti-postmodern novel *The Elementary Particles* (orig. 1998, Engl. 2000) and the Czech comedy *Loners* attempt to create entirely new genders: the hero in *The Elementary Particles* engineers a new, rational, non-aggressive and sensual gender (possessing, incidentally, mainly female traits); in *Loners* the character Vesna believes that there is a race of aliens who need seven different sexes in order to consummate intercourse (a number corresponding directly to the number of comically intertwined heroes in the movie). In general, the above-named works tend to encourage reconciliatory performances enabling both sexes to frame or complement one another; in performatist theory (Gans and his adherents) one finds regular criticism of Lacanian psychoanalysis, which from the point of view of Generative Anthropology overloads the basic interhuman dialectic of love and resentment with convoluted symbolic explanations.

Indeed, in the world of performatism the symbolic order of language and the chain of signifiers with its distracting puns play little or no role. The sign and/or language acts as a massive instrument in the service of the subject; decisive for the performatist work is the holistic, object-oriented force of the utterance and not the *glissement* of signifiers. As Knapp and Michaels vividly demonstrate with their poem magically appearing in the sand, highly complex combinations of signifiers cannot be considered a language at all when there is no subject behind them (Mitchell 1985, 15-16); conversely, the inarticulate grunting of the "idiots" in the eponymous movie and Gans's theory of the ostensive show that even the simplest combinations of sounds can be a highly effective language in themselves. As the Russian graffiti in the Reichstag and the harmonious communication between the English-speaking Ghost Dog and the French-speaking ice cream vendor in *Ghost Dog* show, performative language is not dependent on semantics or even on a common code to function: decisive is the frame which has been placed around addressant and addressee (or to which addressant and addressee have submitted) and which serves to bridge their differences.

7

\* \* \*

Performatism's break with postmodernism did not take place cleanly and in one stroke. Performatism--as with every other new epoch--borrows in many instances from the old epoch while breaking with it sharply in other, decisive regards. The main difference vis-à-vis postmodernism asserts itself in this case in the use of a holistic, discrete subject and sign. This is logically and practically incompatible with postmodernism's notion of subject and sign as unstable side effects of a constantly shifting textual context. At present, however, the use of classical devices of postmodernism to create closed signs and subjects is almost unavoidable: the new epoch is still dependent on the instruments of the old. Critics of performatism will no doubt be quick to claim that works like *Buddha's Little Finger* or *Run Lola Run* are postmodern because they operate with virtual realities. It is important not to forget, though, that the function of virtual reality in such cases is completely different: it serves goals--the absolute reconciliation of the subject with its context in Pelevin, the unconditional preservation of the loving subject in *Run Lola Run*--which postmodernism dismisses as banal, metaphysical expressions of belief. If one chooses to ignore the annoying pretension of these works to achieving fictional transcendence, then there is no reason not to go on endlessly misreading them as postmodern.

An essayistic example of the gradual transition between postmodernism and performatism is Boris

Groys's recent *Unter Verdacht. Eine Phänomenologie der Medien* [Under suspicion. A phenomenology of the media] (Groys 2000).<sup>(14)</sup> Groys, one could say, "rediscovered" the holistic sign, ontology and performance but, in keeping with the pessimistic metaphysics of the postmodern, still continues to conceive of them as evil and threatening. The main goal of Groys's essay is to explain the way aesthetic value is created in (post-)modern media culture. Groys assumes that aesthetic value arises when a thing is enshrined in a cultural archive, that is, in an authoritative space guaranteeing (at least for a time) the aesthetic object's effectiveness. Groys argues that the conditions for admission to the archive can be defined neither in terms of content nor material, otherwise such conditions could be predicted and reproduced at will (getting a urinal placed in a museum does not, for example, depend on the archive's secret preference for toilet fixtures or porcelain). For Groys, the specific conditions for admission to the archive can also not be purely semiotic, for they cannot be determined--as poststructuralism assumes--by the interplay of freely flowing, subject- and objectless signs. Rather, the key to the archive lies for Groys in the hidden, direct, unpredictable relation between the sign and its material substrate. This relation, in turn, can only come about when a subject causes a sign and its substrate to enter into a unified, binding relation vis-à-vis an observer. Consequently, the aesthetic effectiveness of the artistic artifact is for Groys an *ontological* and not a semiotic or semantic problem. Groys, however, chooses to address this problem in phenomenological rather than ontological terms. The defining feature of artistic success is hence not any specific, as yet unrevealed essence, but rather our suspicion that "someone or other" behind the scenes is manipulating things to get them into the archive. This "ontological suspicion," which is necessarily directed against an alien, manipulating subject, is not, in Groys's view, adequately accounted for in deconstructivism's critique of metaphysics, which sees culture as an endless sea of signs which the observer can bask in safely and comfortably (see 2000, 37). Much more convincing for Groys is way the subject is represented in popular culture (as, for example, in films like *Terminator*, *Alien* or *Independence Day*): there the alien subject appears as a merciless killer destroying everyone who crosses his path (2000, 75). This suspicion of the alien subject's intrinsically evil nature can, however, be used to help gain entrance to the archive, namely by employing what Groys calls the "sincerity effect" [Effekt der Aufrichtigkeit]. Basically, this amounts to what psychologists call paradoxical intervention: you achieve best results by advocating the opposite of what is normally expected of you. Hence the liberal politician appears most sincere when he favors conservative positions, the conservative politician sincere when he propounds liberal ones (2000, 72). Also, according to Groys, whoever publicly reveals his or her own badness is usually regarded as sincere. This works not because such behavior is revelatory *per se*, but because it confirms our suspicion that, beneath the surface, the alien subject is always somehow evil (2000, 78-79). In Groys's view, the only protection against the alien, malicious subject is to be malicious oneself, that is, to appear "sincere" before others in the paradoxical way described above (2000, 79).

Groys's thinking, though ironic and cynical in Purdy's sense, is undoubtedly already performatist. The subject mysteriously engineering the admission of a work of media art into the archive carries out a holistic performance in which a subject, a thing-based sign, and a communicative partner are successfully united. Groys, however, remains obligated to the negative concept of subject prevailing in postmodernism, which insinuates that the subject striving for whole knowledge is either narcissistic (Lacan), reactionary (Foucault) or generally evil (Baudrillard), and he remains obligated to postmodern epistemology, which sees metaphysical fraud in every attempt to link signs with things (Derrida). In contrast to Groys, I believe that in the new epoch it is not the "evil" principle of continued, random border transgression that is dominant, but rather the benevolent principle of *drawing* borders to create a quasi-sacral space in which an existing state can under certain circumstances be transcended. Groys grasps this situation correctly when he notes that "the phenomenon of sincerity arises . . . in a

combination of contextually defined innovation and reduction" (2000, 73). This reduction and innovation, however, takes place in performatism in a way that is much more radical and positive than Groys imagines. Under optimal conditions, the performative subject is reduced so much through its massive denseness that it no longer poses a threat to others.<sup>(15)</sup> Similarly, the performatist subject's utter simplicity tends to defuse any suspicion that it is simulating or insincere (even in the case of simulated idiocy in *The Idiots* none of the "victims" guesses its fraudulent nature; the guiding criterion is not authenticity, but rather the degree to which the performance is assimilated by the observer to form a working whole). In contrast to Groys I would also suggest that it is not evil which determines the post-postmodern condition (even if evil is still active and present as a residual phenomenon), but rather love, for love, as *the* optimal condition of innovation, enables *any* subject to be loved--that is, to enter with another, alien subject into a whole, salvational space or frame. This perspective, which is that of a sacralizing metaphysical optimism, means the end of postmodernism and not its continuation by other means.

8

Another example of mixed performatism and postmodernism can be found in *Les particules élémentaires* (1998), Michel Houellebecq's acid novel of postmodern manners. There, Houellebecq exposes the increasingly virulent dualism of postmodern culture by creating two characters completely incapable of love: one is guided entirely by the mind, the other by sex. Over the course of nearly 340 pages Houellebecq unfolds scenes of psychological indifference and coarseness, mechanical copulation and incredible brutality that are meant to document the utter emptiness of his heroes. It is only in the last ten or so pages that he begins to develop the utopian notion of a genetically engineered, peaceful, and selfless new gender. Houellebecq's novel is performatistic inasmuch as it fictionally transcends the postmodern image of humankind. At the same time, he remains for the most part obligated to pessimistic postmodern metaphysics, whose only point of orientation is death and its unsavory proxies (at one point a mouthpiece for Houellebecq states: "in the end, life breaks your heart after all. . . . And then nobody laughs. . . . All that's left is loneliness, cold and silence. All that's left is death"<sup>(16)</sup>). Houellebecq is a postmodern revolted by his own postmodernity so much that he seeks salvation through the genetic transformation of the old, evil, masculine subject; the author himself however evidently has problems developing an autonomous story line out of the new, cloned gender.

The problem of separating performatism from postmodernism--in this case from Russian conceptualism--is expressly treated by Viktor Pelevin in his short story "Vstroennyi napominatel'" [The built-in warning signal] (1998, 381-384). The story concerns a fictive artistic movement called vibrationalism which assumes that "we live in an oscillating world and ourselves represent a collection of oscillations" (1998, 381). The conceptualist, according to Pelevin's "vibrationalist," makes the mistake of trying to fixate the concept: "the pure fixation of ideas leads us back onto the well-tread path of conceptualism" (1998, 381). Vibrationalism, by contrast, which intensifies the oscillations with artistic means and directs them back at itself, causes "its own boundaries to appear fuzzy and so to speak non-existent. For that reason the task of the vibrationalist artist is to leap between the Scylla of conceptualism and the Charybdis of ex-post-facto theoretizing" (1998, 381). Pelevin's critique of conceptualism is patently unfair. Conceptualism isn't static; it oscillates between contexts, or between subject and context, just as "vibrationalism" does. But is "vibrationalism" identical with conceptualism because of that? Crucial to "vibrationalism" as well as to Pelevin's work in general is that sign and subject overcome the dualism of subject and object, of thing and sign in a reductionistic performance.

The successful suspension of this dualism can be achieved in various ways. It can be experienced in a mystical performance; it can be described using paradoxical Buddhist jargon; or it can be performed in a fictional frame that is accessible to everyone and that can always be invested with a certain degree of self-irony (in this case vibrationalism doesn't work because the artist doesn't heed his own instructions).<sup>(17)</sup> Because precisely this sort of ironic failure plays a major role in Pelevin's plot lines these are often confused with the ironic devices of postmodernism, whose own dysfunctionality and failure is a foregone conclusion. While a *formal* identity is undeniable, postmodernism differs from Pelevin by not recognizing that a unified, transcendent perspective can be temporarily instituted or performed within a fictional frame. In performatism the set is always toward transcending irony; in postmodernism it is toward generating irony *ad infinitum*. The crowning achievement of postmodernism is in any case hardly going to consist in enthroning precisely those things--the subject, belief, transcendence, presence...--which it has up to now relentlessly scattered to the winds.

\* \* \*

I can make out five basic features of performatism:

1. No more endless citing and no authenticity, but rather the framing of things already existing in order to transcend or radically renew them; use of ritual, dogma or similarly inhibiting frames in order to transform or transcend existing states of being; return of history in the guise of an empirically framed subject (for example, Greenblatt's history of self-fashioning, Michaels' neopragmatism). In narrative, return of authoriality, of a binding authorial frame, marked by different ways of stylizing transcendence: vertically (passage to a higher level); horizontally (sidestepping to a different frame); holistically (getting the right fit between subject and frame).
  2. Instead of an order of floating, unstable relations between parts of signs the holistic subject-sign-thing-relation becomes the basis of all communication and all social interaction; the use of a sign is an (involuntary) act of belief instead of a semiotic or semantic blunder. The subject appears to solid or opaque; it can be dumb, naive, dazed, simple-minded, simple, earnest and heroic but not endlessly cynical or ironic.
  3. The switch from a mode of endless temporal deferral (*différance*, process) to the one-time or finite joining of opposites in the present (paradoxical performance, Gans's ostensivity).
  4. Transition from metaphysical pessimism to metaphysical optimism; the metaphysical point of orientation is no longer death and its proxies (emptiness, kenosis, absence, dysfunctionality) but rather psychologically experienced or fictionally framed states of transcendence (resurrection, passage to Nirvana, love, catharsis, fulfillment or plerosis, deification etc.).
- 9
5. Return and rehabilitation of the phallus as an active, unifying agent of performativity; simultaneous ironization or retraction of its desire and pretensions to power for the benefit of the feminine; the phallus as positive frame for the vagina and vice versa (male characters act empty or vaginal; female ones act phallic, that is, active and goal-oriented). In general, a tendency towards desexualization; love, or the unifying quality of desire, whether masculine, feminine, hetero- or homosexual, is more important than endlessly playing out one's otherness.

Finally, an excerpt from Ingo Schulze's *Simple Storys* (1998, Engl. trans. 2000), in which the massive

opacity of his "simple" characters asserts itself with exemplary force:

"Something happened to me once at the movies," said Edgar. "We came late, the only place to sit was in the front row. The movie started off with a bird's-eye view, a flight over a jungle. I closed my eyes so I wouldn't get dizzy. Then off to my right I heard a deep chuckling sound, a wonderful laugh. . . . And somehow it was always in places where nobody else was laughing. She had her legs crossed and was jiggling her right foot up and down, it was like an invitation. I touched her elbow with mine, she didn't even notice. I thought I'd only have to put my arm around her and she'd lean against me like it was completely natural, like it just had to be. And at the same time I wanted to stroke her calf. I had to really hold myself back, really, we were sitting so close together. . . . My God, is she beautiful, I kept thinking all the time. After each chuckle I wanted to kiss her."

"And--did you?"

"I couldn't tell who was sitting next to her. A man--yeah, but I couldn't tell whether or not he was with her."

"She wasn't alone?" asked Jenny.

"No," said Edgar. "She wasn't alone. She was there with a whole group." He paused.

"What then?"

Edgar shook his head. "I couldn't have seen it. She was retarded, the whole group was retarded."

"Oh shit," said Jenny.

"I'd fallen in love with an idiot."

"Unbelievable."

"Yeah," he said. "The worst thing was, I wanted her anyway."

"Huh?"

"I'd fallen in love, it was too late."

Schulze 1998, 257-258; my translation

In a way, we are in the same situation as Edgar: we feel the presence of an epoch whose contours are just barely visible and in which we can perceive only simplicity or simple-mindedness.

The main thing, though, is to already be in love with it.



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### Filmography

*American Beauty*. America/England 1999. Directed by Sam Mendes; screenplay by Alan Ball; director of photography, Conrad L. Hall; edited by Tariq Anwar and Chris Greenbury; music by Thomas Newman. With: Kevin Spacey, Annette Bening, Thora Birch, Wes Bentley, Mena Suvari, Peter Gallagher, Allison Janney, Scott Bakula, Sam Robards, Chris Cooper.

*Idioterne [The Idiots]*. Denmark 1998. Written and directed by Lars von Trier; sound by Design Per Streit; edited by Molly Malene Stengaard. With: Bodil Jorgensen, Jens Albinus, Anne Louise Hassing, Troels Lyby, Nikolaj Lie Kaas and others.

*Lola rennt*. [Released in America as *Run Lola Run*] Germany 1999. Written and directed by Tom

Tykwer; camera, Frank Friebe; edited by Matthilde Bonnefoy; music by Tom Tykwer, Johnny Klimek and Reinhold Heil. With: Franka Potente, Moritz Bleibtreu, Herbert Knaup, Nina Petri, Armin Rohde and others.

*Návrat idiota* [Return of the idiot], Czech Republic 1999. Written and directed by Sasa Gedeon; camera, Stepan Kucera; edited by Petr Turyna; music by Vladimír Godár. With: Pavel Liska, Anna Geislerová, Tatiana Vilhelmová, Jirí Langmeier and others.

*Ghost Dog*. America 2000. Written and directed by Jim Jarmusch; director of photography, Robby Muller; edited by Jay Rabinowitz; music by the RZA; produced by Richard Guay; released by Artisan Entertainment. With: Forest Whitaker (Ghost Dog), John Tormey (Louie), Camille Winbush (Pearline), Cliff Gorman (Sonny Valerio), Frank Minucci (Big Angie), Isaach de Bankole (Raymond), Victor Argo (Vinny) and Damon Whitaker (Young Ghost Dog).

*Samotáři* [Loners], Czech Republic 2000. Directed by David Ondříček; written by Petr Zelenka; camera, Richard Rericha; music by Jan P. Muchow. With: Jitka Schneiderová, Sasa Raasilov, Labina Mitevská, Ivan Trojan and others.

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## Notes

1. The following article was originally written in German and will probably appear in that language sometime in the year 2001. The translation is my own. ([back](#))

2. Gans's concept of language was first set forth in *The Origin of Language*, Berkeley 1981. After that follow: *The End of Culture*, Berkeley 1985; *Science and Faith*, Savage, Md. 1990; *Originary Thinking*, Stanford 1993; *Signs of Paradox, Irony, Resentment, and Other Mimetic Structures*, Stanford 1997. My resume follows *Signs of Paradox*, especially Chapter One, "Mimetic Paradox and the Event of Human Origin," 13-35. ([back](#))

3. For more on this see Gans's humorous lament in *Chronicle* 188, "Adorers of Literature Scared of Criticism," 20 November 1999 as well as Knapp and Michaels' critique of E.D. Hirsch in Mitchell 1985, 19-20. ([back](#))

4. For the references to Ulitskaia's stories I am indebted to Anita Becker of Weimar, Germany. ([back](#))

5. The figure of the simpleton transcending his own lifeworld can incidentally also be found in the mass media. An example of this is Zlatko, a popular participant in the German version of the "Big-Brother" show, which itself can be understood in performatist terms as a closed, holistic frame propagating the growth of subjectivity under conditions of total representation. The show is, of course, cynical and voyeuristic, since it assumes that the artificially induced socialization of the participants will go awry. Zlatko, who was ejected fairly quickly from the communal container dwelling, showed himself to be the real winner of the game. As a true simpleton (among other things, he didn't know who Shakespeare was!) he remained at least for a time inaccessible to the greedy, voyeuristic gaze of the viewers. ([back](#))

6. This may be contrasted to Derrida's well-known distrust of representation and visual evidence and Lacan's attempt in *Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis* to separate the merely mechanical eye of the subject from the omnipotent gaze of the Other. Lacan's and Derrida's attitude toward vision and

representation are gnostic: they prefer tracing a multitude of arcane, fleeting signs emanating from a dual origin to Christian witnessing, which is based on the ability of a viewer to reproduce a single, exemplary act of self-sacrifice. Ricky's theology, which is only latently christological, seems to suggest that *all* death is a form of self-sacrifice and that *anyone* or *anything* can act as a divine mediator. The incarnation of this theology is, of course, Lester: he winds up sacrificing himself for the others and becoming divine without really wanting to do so. In general, one could say that the performatism in *American Beauty* gives the aleatory world of postmodernism a chance at redemption by introducing into it a sacral, sacrificial, vestigially christological moment. [\(back\)](#)

7. Michel, a benign figure in nightgown and sleeping cap, is the German version of Uncle Sam. [\(back\)](#)

8. From an Internet interview "The Man Who Would Give Up Control" with Peter Ovig Knudsen (see bibliography). [\(back\)](#)

9. For theological, Girardian treatments of von Trier's Dogma films, Tarkovskij's *Offret* and other recent movies see Karrer 2000. [\(back\)](#)

10. Readers unfamiliar with the building in situ should refer to the documentation in Foster and Jenkins 2000. [\(back\)](#)

11. These are incidentally what Gans calls ostensive signs, i.e., simple signs referring to an object or situation that is directly present (Fire! Man overboard!). In the case of the Reichstag many of the scribblings are examples of ostensive self-naming, which in this case acts as a kind of self-referential historical performance: "My name is x and I'm here (as a Russian soldier at Hitler's seat of power)!" [\(back\)](#)

12. This "framing" must not be confused with Derrida's frame or parergon. Performatist framing serves to relate a lower state to a higher one, to stylize the possibility of transcendence. By contrast, the parergon is a spatially indeterminate line highlighting the endless problem of conditionality and not resulting in any sort of performative change (except, perhaps, further, temporally and spatially deferred reflexion on the nature of conditionality itself). More relevant than the parergon in this regard seems to me to be Gregory Bateson's concept of framing (Bateson 1972), which emphasizes not just the paradoxical nature of the frame but also its relation to psychological mechanisms prior to the linguistic sign; pertinent is also the sociological frame theory developed by Erving Goffman (1974), which offers, among other things, a typology of of frames as they appear in social reality. [\(back\)](#)

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13. The feminist, poststructuralist notion of gender as subjectless (preferably non-heterosexual, non-phallic) performance is expressed programmatically in Judith Butler's *Gender Trouble* (1990, 25), where she states that "gender is always a doing, though not a doing by a subject who might be said to preexist the deed." By contrast, performatism implies that what is important is finding a "fit" between fixed biological givens like male and female genitalia and the smorgasbord of psychosocial attributes comprising gender. Although subjectivity in performatism is not preset--there is always an interplay between subject and context--the goal of this interplay is to set an identity frame within the context rather than to flow along with it. [\(back\)](#)

14. The Russian-born Groys (b. 1947) is an art critic, philosopher and essayist; until his emigration to

Germany in 1981 he was a leading member of the Moscow conceptualist circle. His *Total Art of Stalinism* (Princeton 1992, German orig. *Gesamtkunstwerk Stalin*, 1988) is a seminal analysis of Russian culture from the conceptualist point of view. ([back](#))

15. This aspect of performatism--as with all others--can be presented ironically. For example, in *The Idiots* the commune's curvaceous blonde entices several men in a public pool to make a pass at her so that they can be driven away by a grunting, waddling cohort pretending to be her husband. The men are driven away not by a physical threat, but rather, as it would appear, by the shock of competing with an idiot for an erotic object of desire. ([back](#))

16. My translation from the German (Houellebecq 1999, 328). ([back](#))

17. It would be a serious mistake to claim that performatism is postmodernism simply because it contains irony. In performatism, irony results when transcendent ideals are realized imperfectly; in practical terms it is an unavoidable fact of life (the presumably steadfast anti-ironicist Purdy notes this expressly in the Afterword of *For Common Things*, 2000, 212-214). The intrinsic irony of all human cultural activity is also confirmed by Gans, who sees paradox and irony as an unavoidable and necessary result of having a sign but not complete control over the thing it designates (cf. 1997, Chapter 3, "The Necessity of Paradox," 37ff.). ([back](#))

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# **Speed and Violence: Sacrifice in Virilio, Derrida, and Girard**

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## **Abstract**

*Speed and Violence* considers Paul Virilio's theory of the accident and seeks to excavate his "originary scene," the moment that produced the technology / accident economy discussed in his works *The Museum of Accidents* (1989), *Politics of the Very Worst* (1999), and *The Information Bomb* (2000a). In consideration of the possibility that Virilio's thesis denies the idea of the originary position, I relate his technology / accident economy to Derrida's deconstruction. In particular the essay examines how Virilio's theory refers to the notion of *différance*. Beyond this examination of Virilio's possible atemporalism, my analysis shifts towards a consideration of the effects of speed. Through a reading that grounds the technology / accident bind in time, the essay looks towards the Girardian concept of the victim in order to suggest that the anthropology implicit in Virilio's dromology (theory of speed) affirms the centrality of the victimary position.

## **I**

Paul Virilio's theory of the accident suggests that when one creates technology one also engineers the faults and mistakes that plague the machine. Virilio shows how technology and the accident are caught in a dynamic relationship, akin to Descartes' (O'Neill, 2000) manic quest to exorcise doubt; the more complex the technology one develops the more evasive the faults that cause the machine to malfunction become. Thus, the invention of new technology represents the attempt to order the disorder of the system and drive out the chaotic influence of the accident. Regarding this technology / accident economy, Virilio writes:

The accident is an inverted miracle, a secular miracle, a revelation. When you invent the ship, you also invent the shipwreck; when you invent the plane you also invent the plane crash; and when you invent electricity, you invent electrocution...Every technology carries its own negativity, which is

invented at the same time as technical progress (1999: 89).

Here, Virilio's attempt to see technology as totality explains the idea of the accident as negative invention. Later in the same interview, *Politics of the Very Worst*, he expands his position in order to show how the machine combats error through technological innovation:

...the development of technologies can only happen through the analysis and surpassing of these accidents. When the European railroads were introduced, the traffic was poorly regulated and accidents multiplied. The railroad engineers convened in Brussels in 1880 and invented the famous block system. It was a way to effectively regulate traffic so as to avoid the devastating effects of progress, train wrecks. The sinking of the *Titanic* is a similar example. After this tragedy, SOS was developed, a way of calling for help by radio. The explosion of the *Challenger* space shuttle is a considerable event that reveals the original accident of the engine in the same way as the shipwreck of the first ocean liner (1999: 89).

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Virilio's reference to the *Challenger* space shuttle as the "original accident of the engine" allows one to understand the moment of the machine's error from a theoretical point of view. It shows how the radical over-determination of the mechanical structure is represented by the accidental event and invites us to see how the crash is constitutive of the violent expenditure of an excessive "supplement," that the crash occurs because the machine has been designed to work at speeds that leave absolutely no room for error. Thus Virilio explains how the excessive pace of progressive technology is limited by the faults the accident exposes. The essential function of the destructive event is to consume the excessive energy of the superabundant machine and prolong the productivity of the technological model. According to this realization it is clear that the destructive accident is also the source of the machine's renewal; its destructive consumption allows for the endless re-invention of the ordered system.

At the synchronic level, we can see how Virilio's theory of technological progress is located within a contextual framework. It is apparent that there is always a technical structure available for the exploration of the accidental event. However, beyond this analysis of the dynamic technology / accident bind, a theory that can be compared to Bataille's (1991) thesis of excess and consumption, the narrativity of Virilio's account *appears* to follow Derrida's theory of *différance* into the groundless sphere of textuality. Put another way, because Virilio's reasoning suggests that each technological form emerges from the noise and chaos of the accident, while every accident issues from the excessive pace of technology, one seems unable to derive any originary, causal understanding from Virilio's text. For instance, in the *Challenger* example, Virilio's theory implies that the invention of the space shuttle was provoked by the failure of some earlier form of space technology, while its crash led to the invention of later, more complex, designs aimed at driving out the errors that led the space shuttle to malfunction.

Although this analysis of the *Challenger* episode grounds the thesis of the accident at the synchronic level, it is difficult to locate any foundational crash or invention at the level of diachronic analysis. In other words, the temptation is to suggest that Virilio fails to excavate the "originary event": did technology predate the accident or should we see the accident as the disordered chaos that provoked the invention of the ordered machine?

In response to this apparent relativism, which has led many to regard Virilio as a post-modern thinker, the aim of this article is to show how we may ground his theory of speed (dromology) in the originary morality of a victimary position. I want to suggest that Virilio's theory of the functional accident as the recuperated negativity that allows for the progress of the non-human machine defines a form of radical subjectivism that can be the locus of a reorganized moral economy in opposition to the anonymity of post-modern machine culture. My article draws on the work of Girard and Derrida as counter-points that may allow one to understand the centrality of this moral dimension to books like *The Information Bomb* (2000a) and *Polar Inertia* (2000b).

In the first instance, the parallels between Virilio and Derrida are clear. Like Derrida's deconstruction, one may suggest that Virilio's technology / accident system appears to refer to a representational game, the oscillation between the free-play of difference and metaphysical presence which Derrida describes through the notion of *différance*. Akin to *différance*, the word that encapsulates the relationship between metaphysical presence and difference through the undecidability of the silent *a*, it is apparent that Virilio's idea of technology incubates the disorder of the accident, the free-play of chaotic energy that threatens to destroy the metaphysical structures of the machine whenever it is unleashed. Moreover, according to Bandera's (1982) reading of Derrida, the silent *a* that stands at the core of *différance* represents the tombstone, the trace of disorder and chaos that metaphysical structures attempt to drive out. Like Virilio's concept of technology, this analysis illustrates deconstruction's understanding of metaphysics as a disciplinary form of universality. As Derrida's (1981) exploration of Plato's "pharmacy" suggests, the persistence of the absence of meaning, as described by the figure of the tombstone, should serve as a reminder that certainty and presence have never existed apart from such attempts to fix deterministic structure to our thinking about the world. Here, Derrida renounces the vain search for God, the quest for centrality and origin, and reverses the Platonic mission by emphasizing the traces of disorder. Akin to Virilio's theory of the technology / accident relation, such a position is keen to show how the outside is intrinsically linked to the inside. By opposing the aim of Plato's pharmacy, the drive to separate the cure from the poison, Derrida wants to explain how good and bad medicine are always mixed. This is perhaps deconstruction's key discovery: the realization that this mixture, the binding that relates presence and absence, furnishes a place for the maintenance of disorder.

From this comparison we can see that, as with Virilio's thesis of the technology / accident machine, Derrida recognizes that one cannot take absence away from presence because both are part of the same representational game. However, my suggestion is that where Virilio and Derrida separate is on their recognition of *speed*. In contrast to Derrida's sphere of timeless textuality, Virilio's synchronic theory of the accident is driven by a temporal dimension. Girard's thesis on the acceleration of mimetic relations allows us to see how Virilio's concept of speed leads the technology / accident oscillation towards an apocalyptic crash, the critical moment of un-differentiation. By contrast, as Bandera explains, Derrida neglects the theory of speed in his textual analysis. His deconstructive play of *différance* represents a sphere of endless deferral:

The point is that, as the game accelerates there will be more and more differences in less and less time. And since their reciprocal differentiation depends on the duration of their deferring, the shorter this duration becomes the less distinctly different they will be from one another. Which means that, beyond a certain time threshold *la différance* begins to work in reverse, against itself, actively promoting a state of general undifferentiation, for there will be a diminishing number of differences capable of making any difference whatsoever. Beyond such a point, *la différance* turns into *l'indifférance*. In other words, the game that Derrida has uncovered in his deconstruction of metaphysics, cannot be postulated as endless--not because there is anything external to it that would stop it or destroy it, but because it can generate its own destruction *in time* (1982: 322).

In much the same way that Bandera uncovers the destructive potential of *l'indifférance* by subjecting the theory of endless deferral to a critique which shows how distance / time = velocity, Virilio's notion of the technology / accident cycle's apocalyptic conclusion sums up the mimetic crisis that threatens to collapse all technological structures:

...one thing that must be considered here is the preponderant role of the speed of the accident, thus the limitation of speed and the penalties for "exceeding the speed limit" . . . With the current world-wide revolution in communication and telematics, acceleration has reached its physical limit, the speed of electromagnetic waves. So there is the risk not of a local accident in a particular location, but rather of a global accident that would affect if not the entire planet, then at least the majority of people concerned by these technologies (1999: 92-93).

I want to argue that Virilio's theory of the speed limit mirrors Bandera's analysis of the temporality of *différance*. However, apart from serving as a contextual critique that highlights the limitations of Derrida's textual project, Virilio's dromology also allows one to understand how the theory of the technology / accident relation is able to move beyond the synchronic plane towards the depth of diachronic analysis. That is, whereas Bandera's critique of Derrida shows how deconstruction's theory of timeless textuality must reach the speed of critical mass at some point in time, at a deeper level such an examination subjects the theory of endless deferral to another theoretical inquiry. It is the excavation of this point which allows one to ground Virilio's dromology in the diachronic sphere, the level of analysis that leads towards the anthropology of the originary scene.



Grounding deconstruction in time through reference to the notion of speed, Bandera reads Derrida's project in the light of Girard's anthropology (1986). On this basis, he argues that Derrida's textual system scapegoats metaphysics in order to secure its own textual integrity. In other words, it offsets its own violent demise through the expulsion of the sacrificial object. Here, Bandera explains that, following Derrida's exposure of metaphysical error, deconstruction's endless assault on the remains of presence begins to resemble the collective violence of Girard's scapegoat mechanism. Although the sacrificial object is never consciously consumed, the mechanism that enacts the violence of the destructive event is far from accidental. The scapegoat is the sign of channeled violence, the consumption of the excessive supplement that averts the descent into the originary violence of the war of all against all. Like Derrida's deconstruction, the project that in Bandera's view both theorizes and repeats the sacrificial performance, Virilio's technology / accident spiral renews the stability of the technocratic collective sphere by expending the excessive energy of the superabundant machine; localized accidents act as conduits that channel the excessive energy of progressive technology away from the possibility of a technological apocalypse. In this perspective, one is led to question whether Virilio's accident is actually constitutive of an accidental *event*. Although the descriptions of the failures of technology in *Politics of the Very Worst* (1999) and *The Information Bomb* (2000a) allow one to see how the accident is not a ritual performance in the Girardian / Gansian sense, it is still unclear whether the structural functionalism of the technological crash allows it to be categorized as accidental.

Perhaps the answer to the question of the predictability of Virilio's accident is grounded in issues of perspective. On the synchronic level, the destruction of the technological structure could be seen as accidental, while from a diachronic perspective, where speed becomes apparent, such violence would appear clearly governed by the deterministic nature of the scapegoat mechanism implicit in the technology / accident economy. Herein lies the fundamental irony of Virilio's bind: the accidental event acts as the critique of the technological mechanism that creates it, the very same system that its expenditure stabilizes in the progressive mechanism of technology. Virilio's notion of the accident is paradoxical; his use of the term suggests that he regards the errors that destroy technology as strategic contingencies that reaffirm the disciplinary nature of the mechanical model rather than as emancipatory openings which can allow for the birth of experimental political movements, technological explorations of future possibilities for human / machine interaction. This suggests that Virilio's use of the notion of the accident reflects an awareness of a diachronic perspective even though the everyday sense of the term "accident" may lead one to understand his theory as a synchronic system. My claim is that Virilio is well aware of this ironic bind. He knows that accidents *will* happen and it is this recognition that allows him to avoid miming the systematic violence of the technology / accident economy at the level of his own texts.

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In essence this is the accusation that Bandera levels at Derrida--that deconstruction repeats the violence its author aims to critique--when he argues that deconstruction's assault on metaphysics secures the integrity of the textual sphere, which in turn re-orders the turbulence of the creaking collective. For Bandera, Derrida's victimization of metaphysics defines deconstruction as both scapegoat mechanism and scapegoat mythology. On the one hand, the destruction of metaphysics allows for the survival of endless textuality, while, on the other hand, endless textuality obscures the violence of the sacrificial scapegoat mechanism by advancing a theory of openness and difference. Following such a realization it quickly becomes a question of whether deconstruction should be seen as a response to the violence of metaphysics' expulsion of writing, or whether deconstruction is itself constitutive of the sacrificial machine, the system that projects the sacrificial object's originary crime back towards the level of

causality. For Gans (1997) this question of cause and effect, the argument over which violence came first, ignores the role of mimesis in generating conflictual relations. According to Gans's generative anthropology it is precisely this tension, the bind that exists between the two poles, that is constitutive of the originary scene. Like the debate between deconstruction and metaphysics, Virilio's technology / accident relation can be formulated in terms of Gans's thesis. This diachronic (historical) analysis does not refer to either "technology" or "the accident" as the originary event but rather considers the scene generated by the tension that exists between the two poles.

Gans follows Girard's (1986) thesis of the scapegoat mechanism; both writers share an explicit condemnation of the mimetic violence that over-flows the social at times of excessive speed. However, I want to argue that what separates Girard from Gans is the former's emphasis on the moral position occupied by the victim. Although generative anthropology views the *representation* of the non-human sacrificial object as the guiding principle for a new political ethic, Agamben's study, *Homo Sacer* (1998), allows one to see how the logic employed by the Gansian notion of signification, which acts as a device for the separation of humanity and animality, takes the form of a ban that repeats the founding gestures of those discursive forms that secure the sphere of political discourse through the exclusion of "bare life" (pre-discursive existence, or, in Lacanian terms, the Real). Agamben refers to the figure of the wolf-man, the human / animal hybrid of Germanic myth, in order to show how the space of modern politics is sustained by what he calls inclusive-exclusion. According to this idea, the liminal state occupied by the wolf-man allows it to constitute both an inclusion, by virtue of being half-human, and an exclusion, because of its animal nature. Like Girard's foundational victim, who is able to stand as the inclusive-exclusion by retrospectively referring to both heroism and villainy, Agamben's wolf-man represents the expulsion which grounds the collective order through its embodiment of *homo sacer*, the person "who may be killed yet not sacrificed" (1998: 8).

From this point of view, Gans's commitment to the level of political discourse may reproduce the sado-masochistic machine which excludes / alienates otherness in order to constitute a sphere for textual contestation. His use of the sign as a marker for the division of humanity and animality threatens to confirm the role of the wolf-man / *homo sacer* as one of inclusive-exclusion by advancing a position which allows it to be at once included in the sphere of humanity, which means that it can serve as a foundational victim for the social order, yet excluded from the level of political signification because of its designated animality. It is this non-human element that prevents *homo sacer*'s entry into the city, the domain of law and order, which would allow its victimary position to be understood in terms of divine / judicial sacrifice, and abandons it to the amorality of the state of nature. Conversely, Girard's theory, which regards Christ as the exemplary scapegoat, is closer to Agamben's notion of inclusive-exclusion because it moves away from the sphere of symbolic articulation and advocates a thesis based on a consideration of the foundational violence of the collective order. Here, Girard's reading of biblical scripture makes use of Hegel's master / slave dialectic in order to show how the victim represents the independent position, the subjective pole that secures the integrity of the objective social sphere (O'Neill, 1996).

Following Girard's reading of the crucifixion and Agamben's notion of inclusive-exclusion, my suggestion is that it is also possible to ground Virilio's technology / accident spiral in the morality attached to the victimary position. Indeed, McKenna's comparison of Girard and Derrida, *Violence and Difference* (1992), shows how the victim's relation to violence is governed by the effects of speed. As the scapegoat mechanism accelerates, more victims are required to tranquilize the mimetic crisis that threatens to engulf the collective order. Here, Virilio's dystopic total accident reflects at the level of

quantity what Girard's exemplary scapegoat, Christ, illustrates on that of quality. Both examples recall the morality of the originary scene, an anthropological discovery that Derrida's timeless textuality prohibits.

## II

Derrida's tombstones of presence hide nothing; one is urged to focus on the hole itself rather than anything that metaphysics suggests lay behind it. In contrast, Virilio's accidents commemorate the demise of the victim. As the threat of the total accident deepens, Virilio grounds the technology / accident bind on what we may call an ethic of radical subjectivity. The crash victim's experience of "absolute" victimary subjectivity opens Virilio's relation to originary centrality. Indeed, as if to compare the phenomenological reality of his own position with the mechanical objectivity / textuality advanced by deconstruction, Virilio refers to the endless fractality of quantum physics, the sign system that seems to exemplify the work of Derrida's *différance*:

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In trying to reconstitute this cosmological jigsaw in which the doubling of time causes the doubling of infinity, we observe a strange "conception of the world" where the macrocosm is finite and the microcosm has no end, where macroscopic space-time is perceptible not in spite of its size but thanks to its very gigantism, while microscopic space-speed is imperceptible for the opposite reason. On the one hand, we observe an *extensive time* of the infinitely large of duration (space-time), which is calculated in billions of years. On the other hand, an *intensive time* of the infinitely small of time (space-speed) is counted in billionths of a second, and here the theological question of Genesis...is in danger of losing its meaning, at least as far as the "beginning of time" is concerned.

For if there really is an infinitely small of time as there is one of space (as the theory of relativity requires), the first minute of the universe is infinite and a beginning of time has to be sought deep inside the absolute intensity of the instant (2000b: 42).

In this extract from *Polar Inertia*, Virilio notes that although contemporary cosmology has relinquished a narrative Genesis in favor of the infinitely dense play of fractality at a non-scenic origin, he finds an infinite concentration of human time concealed in the detemporalized model of quantum theory in much the same way that Bandera observes the scapegoat mechanism at work in deconstruction. Following Girard's example of the subterranean influence of biblical scripture, Virilio argues that Derrida must rediscover the victim buried beneath the tombstone.

In contrast to this position, writers such as Richard Beardsworth (2000) and Colin Davies (2000) may be

seen to exemplify the contemporary ideology that seeks to privilege mechanical objectivity over radical subjectivity. In a recent issue of *Cultural Values*, both these authors defended deconstruction's commitment to textuality by arguing that recourse to theories of victimization, such as those expressed by Girard and Virilio, eliminate difference by excluding the polysemy of symbolic articulation in favor of designated truth claims. Ironically mirroring Bandera's critique of Derrida, Beardsworth suggests that Girard's theory of the foundational murder violates the relationship between primitive society and modernity by claiming that the New Testament's non-violent God stands apart from the violent Gods of primitive society. He argues that by scapegoating non-modern society Girard performs the ritualistic violence his own theories critique:

Girard's thesis of nonviolence inverts into violence by becoming itself violent in order to ensure its own nonviolence (Beardsworth, 2000: 150).

For Beardsworth, Girard's exclusion of violence in order to secure the truth claims advanced by non-violence is itself an act of violence. Beardsworth argues that, in thus *deciding* (from the Latin word "decidere," to cut the throat of the victim), Girard sacrifices otherness and reduces difference in favor of the moral position occupied by the scapegoat; Girard fixes the role of the victim and, by making the indeterminate a negative category of the determinate, denies the free-play of multiplicity. In sympathy with this position, Davies' article "Fathers, Others: The Sacrificial Victim in Freud, Girard, and Levinas" (2000) suggests that Girard's empiricism limits his project in relation to those of Freud and Levinas. He argues that whereas both Freud, in *Totem and Taboo* (1985), and Levinas, in *Totality and Infinity* (1979), assert the potential fictionality, and thus the indeterminacy, of their theories of violence, Girard's fetishizes the reality / mythology dichotomy in his claim to have discovered the empirical truth of the scapegoat mechanism, the satanic system that hides the truth of the violent nature of social organization. Throughout his essay, Davies suggests that Girard's commitment to the single truth of victimization leads him to become entangled in his own scapegoat theory. Davies argues that, in contrast to the "nominalistic" model-construction of both Freud and Levinas, Girard's assertion of the reality of a transcendental position makes him see himself as the prophet of truth who, when his singular truth-claim is not accepted by all, becomes the victim of his own scapegoat mechanism:

This goes together with a sense in Girard's writing, particularly evident in *Le Bouc émissaire*, that he himself, as voice of truth, is the victim of a malicious, wicked attack and misunderstanding tantamount to persecution by his contemporaries (Davies, 2000: 202).

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Both Beardsworth and Davies explain a process whereby Girard performs his own theory. For Beardsworth, Girard scapegoats alternative truths in order to secure the closure of his own theoretical model, whereas Davies suggests that the rigidity of the Girardian concept of truth leads its author to become caught up in the violent drama of his own scapegoat mechanism. However, both these writers fail to recognize how absolute subjectivity inverts into absolute objectivity and vice-versa. They fail to understand the logic of reversibility according to which the Derridean search for difference leads to a state of undifferentiation, from which emerges deconstruction as a non-human technology that must

respect all difference and therefore discern no difference at all. In essence, this ironic reversal follows the Lacanian logic, exemplified by Holbein's painting *The Ambassadors*, which suggests that when one searches for a specific meaning, as with Derrida's quest for difference, the abyssal nature of the Real will cause that meaning to remain absolutely obscure. Against this eternal obscurity, Lacanian psychoanalysis argues that the only way to comprehend the meaning of the Real, as the viewer of Holbein's skull is well aware, is by focusing beyond the object of desire. This paradoxical strategy of evasion as comprehension, which is summed up by the title of Zizek's book *Looking Awry* (1992), allows one to argue that the strength of the Girardian victimary position lies in the very "weak point" that Beardsworth and Davies are so keen to attack. Girard's empirical truth-claims, the objectivity that Beardsworth and Davies critique, re-establish a moral victimary position, what we may call an ethics of the Real (Zupancic, 1999), by grounding the other's experience within an objective category. Although this strategy appears to follow the logic of Derrida's notion of *différance*, my assertion is that deconstruction's attempt to contain the void of subjectivity is far too deliberate. As opposed to Girard, whose objectivity opens a space for subjectivity by preserving the integrity of the kernel of the Lacanian Real (Girard saves the privilege of the victim's phenomenological experience by looking beyond its place in the symbolic order), Derrida's attempt to "look awry" misses the groundless nature of the subject and, overstating the role of the politics of difference, reinvents a state of mechanical objectivity that recodes individual freedom as an antiseptic category alienated from the subjective kernel of the Real.

This is precisely what Richard Kearney suggests in his article "Aliens and Others: Between Girard and Derrida" (1999), which illuminates an underdeveloped strand of Bandera's critique of Derrida's *différance*. Starting his inquiry from a slightly different angle than Bandera, Kearney argues that the openness to difference Derrida foregrounds in his *Politics of Friendship* (1997) feeds back into the Girardian notions of undifferentiation and disorder by advancing a state of radical disorganization. Stating that politics requires the critical judgment offered by Girard's Hegelian dichotomy in order to offset the violence that accompanies the collapse of social organization, Kearney suggests that deconstruction's hospitality is dangerously open:

If all reading is reading in the dark how can we discern between holy and unholy spirits, how can we distinguish between deities of peace and justice and demonic deities of horror and destruction? In sum, deconstructive non-judgmentalism requires to be supplemented with an ethical hermeneutics capable of discerning between good and evil (Kearney, 1999: 261).

While Kearney's essay allows one to understand how deconstruction advocates a condition of radical undifferentiation, Bandera's article makes it clear that deconstruction is well aware of the logic that underpins its structural functionalism. In order to make its own voice heard amongst the many available opinions, deconstruction prioritizes its own message over that of others. As Bandera's article points out, critiques such as those of Beardsworth and Davies set out to scapegoat metaphysics in order to secure deconstruction's own centrality. Far from advancing the open system Beardsworth suggests in his article, "Logics of Violence: Religion and the Practice of Philosophy," deconstruction has become the dominant orthodoxy against which others are judged. As Jameson's (2000) work on inclusive / exclusive social formations suggests, violent utopianism is the inevitable fate of the anti-utopian political order:

. . . enough has been said to justify the conclusion that any active or operative political anti-Utopianism . . . must sooner or later reveal itself as a vibrant form of Utopianism in its own right (2000: 392).

In this sense, the Girardian complaint that scapegoat theory is undervalued may be justifiable. Akin to recent critiques of the dominant ideology thesis, such as Abercrombie, Hill, and Turner (1986), which seek to impose an ideological position by foregrounding a non-position, deconstruction's program of absolute hospitality to the Other opens the way for otherness at the cost of critical opposition. One is allowed entrance to deconstruction's space of difference only so long as all subjective particularities (such as Agamben's notion of "bare life") are jettisoned in favor of the mechanical objectivity of the politics of the Cartesian subject / alienated human (Zizek, 1992). For both Girard and Virilio this is an apocalyptic condition. As *The Information Bomb* (2000a) illustrates, the accident stands at the end of the human subjectivity of the self / other binary, the very form of particularity which deconstruction attempts to collapse through the invention of a category of absolute neutrality or total openness.

7

Virilio's example of the Philip Nitschke / Bob Dent case acts as a critique of the dangers of an unquestioning acceptance of the technological / textual colonization of the human body by allowing us to understand how the human / non-human relation reaches critical mass and feeds into the technology / accident machine. For Virilio, the Nitschke / Dent episode (Bob Dent, a terminal cancer patient, consented to computer-aided euthanasia by taking advantage of a remote-suicide machine developed by his doctor Philip Nitschke) shows how technology collapses the man / machine bind and achieves total mastery over humanity through the sacrificial accident. Writing on the conclusion to this zero-sum game, Virilio claims that the Nitschke / Dent episode suggests comparisons with "Kasparov, the world chess champion, playing a game against a computer specially designed to defeat him" (2000a: 5); both events illuminate the onset of techno-domination, the condition that allows the objective machine to progress at the expense of subjective humanity.

Following Oughourlian's (1991) theory of mimetic desire, masters and slaves, and the construction of the monadic self, one can see how at this terminal point the machine possesses man. Here the accident, the collision between self and other, renders humanity expendable and seals the fate of the victim. According to Virilio this condition is caused by the over-reliance on technology, a situation which is itself predicated on the ostensibly democratic nature of machine culture. As the Nitschke / Dent case illustrates, the empty form of the technology leads one to assume its neutrality. As we have seen with Derrida and the advocates of deconstruction (such as Beardsworth and Davies), to whom we may add the critics of the dominant ideology thesis (such as Abercrombie, Hill, and Turner), this position ignores the most powerful form of bias: the ideological prejudice hidden deep within the complex structure of the technological / textual form (Zizek, 1994). To extend this equation of technology / textual form and ideology, just as Virilio's theory of progressive technology illuminates a mechanism that advances the ideological program of late capitalism through the accident and its subsequent consumption of victims, Derrida's concept of *différance* mimes in the textual realm the post-industrial system's program of techno-scientific frontierism / exploration. Foregrounding this relation between Virilio's theory of technology and Derrida's deconstruction makes clear that the ideological prejudice that is hidden within technology is also present within the form of progressive textuality.

The effect of the ideological misrecognition present at the formal level of technological / textual fundamentalism is two-fold. First, the ideology of the monadic self is inflated as humanity attempts to assert its own position in the face of the increasing dominance of technology / text. However, because this self-augmentation is sought through technology / text itself, the ideological process simply compounds the original problem of over-reliance on non-human forms. In other words, because the components of the ideology of the monadic self are embedded in the structures of technology / text, the attempt to raise the value of humanity in relation to machines through non-human forms of articulation is denied by the circular reasoning employed. Second, the dominance of technology / text as a machine for the extension of the monadic self leads to both a loss of historical memory and the end of political morality. With regard to the loss of memory, Virilio refers to the concept of motion sickness or "kinetosis" to show how the mimetic bind between humanity and technology leads to dizzying speeds that cause the self to become disoriented and decentered. The disregard for political morality, which Virilio identifies as another category of the crisis of technological high modernity, is an effect of this radical disorientation of the monadic self. For Virilio this condition, caused by the excessive speed of technology, leads to further investment in non-human augmentation and consequently the increased popularity of the political ideologies of the monadic self and the possessive individual. To illustrate this process at work, Virilio considers how technology is able to both cripple and augment the body:

Those disabled in war or injured in serious road or work accidents, victims of terrorism and people who have lost arms, legs, their mobility, sight, speech or virility are all afflicted at the same time by a forgetting, a paramnesia. On the one hand, they more or less consciously repress the unbearable images of the accident which violently deprived them of their able-bodied state; on the other hand, new visions force themselves upon their minds, in sleep or in half-sleep, as a compensation for the motor and sensory privations that now afflict them (2000a: 39-40).

Here we can see how the technological accident leads to the destruction of the body and its subsequent re-formation through non-human augmentation. Virilio shows how, when we are crippled in the world, the technological form re-presents an image of our former mobility. It becomes a symbolic form which at once sustains a deterministic world system and structures humanity's relationship with progressive technology. This theory of cybernetic tranquilization is similarly relevant at the level of textuality. Bandera's critique of deconstruction shows how, in much the same way that Girard's notion of the scapegoat explains how the anesthetization of the social system is secured by the death of the sacrificial victim, Derrida's space of difference and indeterminacy is achieved at the expense of dissenting voices, which are dismissed as totalitarian others.

8

At the level of technology, Virilio provides several examples of this dichotomous condition. In *The Information Bomb* he relates the story of the Inuit boy who discovered that a skeleton on display in the New York Natural History Museum was that of his father. Noting how the appropriation's of the father's skeleton by Columbia University's anthropology department should be seen as emblematic of the

opinion that saw peripheral people as lower forms of humanity, he concludes that one should understand such an episode as an illustration of the "transfer of the West's expansionist drives from the exhausted geography of the terrestrial to the human body" (2000a: 55). From the perspective of techno-science, it is clear that this example of the technological colonization of the body mirrors the earlier critique of deconstruction as the textual colonization of human subjectivity. In this instance, techno-science advances its own goals at the cost of human concerns and empowers those with access to the cybernetic sphere. Virilio finds an analogy between the inflation of technology / text at the expense of corporeality and slapstick cinema, where the attraction of verticality is bound up with its ability to create the illusion that one can survive accidents and emerge unscathed:

Just before the carnage of 1914, American cinema of the Mack Sennett type offered it up for our consumption as comedy, with those short slapstick films in which hosts of vehicles of different kinds (trains, cars, planes and ships) collided, crashed, smashed, exploded and were quickly repaired in a collection of catastrophes from which the heroes emerged without pain and strangely unharmed (2000a: 90).

By extending the comparison of the effects of real accidents with those of textual crashes, Virilio illuminates the ideological misrecognition that occupies a central role in both technological fundamentalism and deconstruction. The failure to understand that techno-textual acceleration, which allows the center to imagine undifferentiation as the onset of a political age without accidents, is predicated on the systematic exclusion of those who are unable to perform at high speed. Both technology and deconstruction hide the savage nature of speed behind the cartoon violence of ideological textuality. At this level of articulation, Virilio's concepts of the accident, absolute speed, and inertia do not signify violent undifferentiation in the Girardian sense of the crisis of degree, but problematize the textual notions of absence and openness we find in Derrida and deconstruction.

### III

My thesis is that Virilio's theories of the total accident, the end of modernity, and inertia explain the importance for him of the victimary position. Virilio is resistant to the effects of speed and committed to the cause of those who fail to keep pace with the technological world system. Conversely, he is highly critical of forms of articulation that embrace speed and collapse content in order to organize faster structures. Virilio suggests that this empty form of organization, what he calls the "tendency," is emblematic of the onset of total technology and the emergence of an uncritical appreciation of machines that overstates the neutrality of form. One of Virilio's recent interviews illustrates his association of uncritical technological fundamentalism with political theories of knowledge relativism. He notes, relating an episode which concerned Lyotard:

My friend asked: "Well, Lyotard, what do you have to say about that grand narrative called justice? Is that too a grand narrative belonging to the past?" A fine point indeed! Needless to say, Lyotard was at a loss for an answer. And indeed, to me, even if I accept the



demise of the grand historical narrative and ideological narratives in favor of the small narratives, the narrative of justice is beyond deconstruction. . . Justice cannot be divided up, be fractalized on pain of descent into barbarism. We have reached the limit there. (Virilio in Armitage, 2000: 39)

In sympathy with Kearney's critique of Derrida's "alienology" (absolute hospitality towards aliens), Virilio shows how the openness of Lyotard's postmodernism introduces difference at the sacrifice of the recognition of structural power relations. Indeed, his reference to the fractalization of justice leading to the descent into savage undifferentiation appears to support the Girardian thesis advanced by Bandera, suggesting that theories of difference such as Derrida's deconstruction and Lyotard's postmodernism introduce freedom through the consumption of otherness. Those who fail to keep pace with difference become scapegoats, they are dismissed by a discursive construction which hides its "every man for himself" political agenda behind the mask of democratic meritocracy. In essence it is an appreciation of this ideological misrecognition that causes Bandera to see theories such as deconstruction and postmodernism as sacrificial myths.

9

In contrast to the subterranean bias which drives these narratives, Virilio's theory of technology introduces a consideration of structural power relations through a dromological thesis that shows how technology empowers the dominant center at the expense of otherness. The dichotomous notion of techno-stratification (stratification of the technocratic social order into techno-rich / techno-poor) is made clear by texts such as *The Information Bomb* (2000a), which enact the continual separation of the virtual and the actual. Within this binary structure, the virtual is the sphere of high velocity which concerns the center, while the actual remains the province of the low-speed periphery. Indeed, for Virilio it is precisely because the continued success of the former is dependent on the exclusion of the latter that politics should argue against the fascism of speed. Opposing Derrida, whose article on the aporia of speed, "No Apocalypse, Not Now" (1984) suggests that criticism must speed-up in order to keep pace with the movements of the world system, Virilio advises against the pursuit of high velocity. Akin to Girard's *Things Hidden Since the Foundation of the World* (1987), Virilio views the technological apocalypse as a cataclysmic horizon. As Crogan (2000) points out, although the speed of Virilio's work allows one to see how he writes from within the confines of the tendency, the attempt to save critical content from the savage effects of speeding structure remains central to his dromological project.

While Virilio tries to slow the pace of the world system from within the confines of the "tendency," Derrida embraces speed and violence as signs of unrealized potential. In "No Apocalypse, Not Now" he explains how the value of the aporia of speed may lie in its destructive function, its ability to destabilize existing structures and suggest the emergence of new forms of political organization. According to the theories advanced by both Virilio and Girard, such a commitment illuminates deconstruction's relation to the structures of technological fundamentalism and the machine-like process that allows form to overwhelm the warnings advanced by critical content. Like the work of Deleuze and Guattari (1988) and Manuel De Landa (1991), this theory documents the progress of the technological war-machine. Both Virilio, in his book *Pure War* (1997), and Girard, whose *Theatre of Envy* (2000) compares Hamlet's desire for revenge to the Cold War nuclear stand-off, show how the military model infects all areas of human experience. Similarly, both thinkers warn against the dangers of embracing high speed by

suggesting that we look towards the memorialization of victimary groups for cautionary evidence. While Girard views the New Testament as the "excessive supplement" that has the potential to over-code further episodes of scapegoat violence, Virilio advocates the creation of a *Museum of Accidents* (1989) to allow future generations to remember the horrors of high-modern speed.

Against Virilio's museum of accidents, which commemorates the victims of technological speed, Derrida's victimary sign is represented by the spectrality of timeless textuality. The notion of difference detemporalizes the condition monumentalized in the Hiroshima War Museum; Derrida's spectral signs, ghosts that haunt the dream of verticality, fetishize the fleshy remains of the Keloids, the deformed mutations that populate the Hiroshima archive. Thus Derrida buries the bodies Virilio remembers and chooses the antiseptic level of textuality over the anthropology of foundational violence. Following the Nietzschean realization of the death of God, the thesis that marks the end of humanity's originary position, Derrida looks to the tombstone, the undecidability of the pyramidal *a*, for security. However, this fetishization of the outside-inside does violence to the victims of the technological war-machine. As Bandera notes, deconstruction erases the victim who generated the pyramidal *a* of *différance* in order to secure the integrity of the textual sphere. Against this process, a repetition of Girard's theory of the scapegoat mechanism, Virilio's thesis of the destructive violence of the accident memorializes the victims of the progressive technological system and remembers the dead who lie beneath the tombstones of ideological textuality.

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# Anthropoetics VI, 2 Benchmarks

This issue contains two articles on East Asian culture. **Herbert Plutschow's** article, his third for *Anthropoetics*, is based on his ongoing historical research into the sacrificial aspect of Japanese culture. His striking confirmation of Girard's victim->deity model may surprise those of us who function within the Western monotheistic paradigm. **Cecily Hurst's** article is an elaboration of her paper for last Spring's GA seminar, which discusses, again as a culture shock to Westerners, an intricate vision of language based on an anthropology that lacks a "state of nature."

**Raoul Eshelman's** article offers a friendly challenge to the notion of the "post-millennial" that also identifies a kindred spirit in GA and the dynamic of post-postmodern art. **Mark Featherstone's** article, based on a graduate seminar paper, suggests an interesting rapprochement between Paul Virilio's work and that of René Girard.

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**Herbert Plutschow** was born in Zurich, Switzerland and was educated in Switzerland, England, Spain, France and the U.S.A. He received his PhD in Japanese Literature from Columbia University and teaches in the Department of East Asian Languages & Cultures at UCLA. His major publications are *Chaos and Cosmos - Ritual in Early and Medieval Japanese Literature* (1990); *Japan's Name Culture* (1995); *Matsuri - The Festivals of Japan* (1996); *Portraits of Japanologists* (2000, in Japanese). Another book, *The Tea Master*, is scheduled for 2001.

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