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Benchmarks
"Revolution!" – The Rhetoric of Exclamation

Chris Fleming and John O’Carroll

School of Humanities
University of Western Sydney
Penrith South DC NSW 1797
Australia
c.fleming@uws.edu.au

School of Social Science and Liberal Studies,
Charles Sturt University
Bathurst NSW
Australia
jocarroll@csu.edu.au

Excitement and Exclamation!

Revolution! Something is happening – but what? Castro pounds the table. Then silence. He looks up, furrows his brow, and declaims:

The advantages of socialism are truly tremendous if one wants to take advantage of them. [Pounds on table.] I think that some of these programs that we have been mentioning – interest circles, schools, agromarkets, central markets [Mercadoconcentrado], terminals – are all inconceivable in capitalism. If socialism has all these advantages, then why not take advantage of them? (Castro 1989)

Even with the repeated table pounding, that’s not terribly exciting. So whence the excitement and on what is it founded? What is its nature? Is it real, the excitement of wonder, the affect of change, the burning shock of spilt coffee, even the "Argh!" we shriek when someone is punching us – or is it some other kind of thing, perhaps something that uses the furniture of exclamation to infiltrate our awareness by simulating excitement – or by promising it? Perhaps excitement here eventually shrinks down to the banality of linguistic categories, even punctuation. The revolutionary utterance characteristically deploys the exclamation mark, and with it, the imperative. "Workers of the world – unite!" is perhaps the best known example, but there are many others, including paradoxical formulations such as the 1968 slogan, "Soyez réalistes – demandez l'impossible!" [Be realistic, demand the impossible] – a request, of course, that one may make, albeit with a rather limited expectation of success. (1)

In the case of the revolutionary, the exclamation mark indicates a particular cultural metaphysics, whereby the tunes of sacred messianism and culthood are sung in a secular key. Secularity itself invokes – as John Milbank(2) has pointed out – a certain conception of time: the revolutionary date-stamps himself with the modern; yet the sacrality of the secular also reminds us – or should – that despite all disavowals of religio, the revolutionary cult is to be bonded together not just in common cause (religare, to bind together), but also, in secular worship of an idol. This is an important point. The North Korean reaction to Kim Jong Il’s demise reveals a overarchingly religious, rather than political, hermeneutic at work. And this is not a recent thing. The French Revolution’s self-marketing as atheistic shouldn’t put us off. Its putative overthrow of religion involved the formation of the so-called "Culte de la Raison" [Cult of Reason], which had an annual "Fête de la Raison" [Festival of Reason], where a young woman was chosen to lead the procession as the proxy of the Goddess of Reason. While mass was outlawed, Churches were transformed into Temples of Reason; revolutionary martyrs were substituted for Christian martyrs. At one level the French Revolution...
was explicitly anti-religious – but we don’t understand it properly if we fail to see the religious elements in it. In this respect, the revolution is not at all as it seems – it seems to be (in this case) social and political; and many interpreters of these historical moments and movements have been complicit in extending their self-advertising. Yet in fact, if these had effects on the planes of the social and the political, their primary field of operation is rhetorical and figural.

This essay explores the rise of a new rhetoric of modernity, the revolution, as well as the figure who advocates it, the revolutionary. While this rhetoric and this figure are not confined to the political sphere, our essay confines itself to this domain. Perforce the inquiry has a number of stages, and yields the structure of this essay. We begin with establishing that there is such a thing as a rhetoric of modernity, and of revolution. Then we look at its figuration, the self-styled revolutionary, borrowing to be sure from older hagiographic and victimary traditions, but by degrees novel nonetheless after 1789. The figural aspect of the revolutionary points to a scene of activity; its rhetorical dimensions suggest a role in relation to violence (its fervour perhaps, but also, at times, its deferral), and therefore, the final two sections of the essay explore on the one hand the ultimate and yet empty metaphysics of revolutionary content today, and on the other, the relationship of the scene of the revolutionary to Generative Anthropology.

Revolution as Modern Phenomenon

Unlike “religions,” revolutions have not always existed, at least in the modern sense of that term. Revolutions are not "natural" to humanity – or, at least what we think of as revolutions are not natural to humanity. Of course, if the idea of revolution is taken at the face value of large-scale social or political change – the overturning of a situation – then revolutions have been taking place since the days of the pharaohs. These clearly are not to be confused with the dimension of revolution we seek to describe. What we seek to explore is the gap between a large revolutionary claim and its reality – the modern revolution, and the modern revolutionary, and the textual forms and formats that define them.

Many feel that revolutions – like nation states – have existed forever. In the modern world, the genesis of revolution lies in its links both to the fact and status of innovation. René Girard has pointed out that the rise of a rhetoric of innovation did not suddenly mean that the people beforehand were somehow deficient, but rather, that there was a theological shift before such that, in many instances, innovation was synonymous with heresy ("Innovation and Repetition" 7). He goes on to cite Thomas Hobbes who, as late as the seventeenth century could remark that there are those "who supposing themselves wiser than others, endeavour to innovate" (7). Girard also cites Montaigne to the same effect (8). The scathing tone in Hobbes’ remark, however, shows the philosopher’s view of the practice in a forcible way. Girard discusses (and dismisses) challenges to his own view of the late eighteenth century as the moment when the dichotomous valuations of innovation and tradition were inverted, rejecting the idea that the Reformation, for instance, was an attempt at revolution (8). We do not ourselves hold to such a strong view of this period as Girard does (and we are hesitant when he proposes such a strong form epistemic rupture as this), but we do agree with him that by the late eighteenth century, tradition had come to be seen as stale and innovation as an inherent good (8-9). For him indeed, the year 1789, serves as a marker – though he does not himself make this year significant. We obviously do see the significance of this date. The French Revolution is a deeply significant date for modernity; it helps us to understand aspects of modernity, its rhetoric, its figures, its paradoxes. The new version of revolution is coeval with the shift Girard describes in value ascribed to innovation. The revolution sweeps away the old, and replaces it with the new. It stands for a flattening of the polity so that anyone can innovate – and anyone, indeed, can make a claim to being a revolutionary, irrespective of the basis of such a claim.

Revolutions frequently take place against the backdrop of the nation state (many Communist revolutionaries also take on nationalistic roles). In our view, this is no coincidence: modern revolutionhood is often imagined in ways analogous to the way modern nation states are imagined. In this respect, Benedict Anderson went rather further than we do when he contended that nations – through the mechanisms of modern media – are imagined as part of a narrative, with the nation itself as a hero, with enemies, space, a people, and sometimes, a standardised language. This narrative structure lends the nation-story événementialité, and of course, a scene (which in most people’s minds is conflated with the imagined physical space of the national borders) (cf. Derrida 119). Anderson goes so far as to contend that in the
imagined community, the nations themselves are characters, with personalities. Writing of the newspaper (which he saw as the daily novel in which the characters play their various roles), he remarks that if "Mali" disappears

from the pages of the *New York Times* after two days of famine reportage, for months on end, readers do not for a moment imagine that Mali has disappeared or that famine has wiped out all its citizens. The novelistic format of the newspaper assures them that somewhere out there the "character" Mali moves along quietly, awaiting its next reappearance in the plot. (33)

Clearly following weakform versions of the theses of Marshall McLuhan and Walter Ong, Anderson suggests these transformations were to some extent enabled by the rise of print culture. McLuhan's strong-form thesis was that the Gutenberg presses gave rise to nations and vernaculars, and indeed, to modern democracies: his chapter headings give the idea: "Print, in turning the vernaculars into mass media, or closed systems, created the uniform, centralizing forces of modern nationalism" (199). Anderson rightly weakens the thesis to allow him to claim that the modern nation state arose later, and not in Europe, but in Europe's colonies, in the form of settler cultures finding distinctness – and a need to express it – from their metropolitan overlords. As we have noted in earlier essays, in words that accord well with generative anthropological analysis, the revolution – and the nation – is founded in bloodshed (Fleming and O'Carroll "Understanding Anti-Americanism").

Anderson's analysis helps us to understand the difference between two modern "revolutions" that define our terrain. First, the US war of independence is so called because it was *not* a revolutionary movement in the sense that we seek to define. It was, rather, an act of resistance to paying taxation to an expropriating foreign authority. It was an act of resistance against a group that were *defined* as foreign, albeit haltingly, and in the process of – sometimes genial and sometimes militarily aggressive – scapegoating of the "tea drinking" British (hence, legend has it, the American love of coffee). In the French Revolution, on the other hand, the violence was turned on the aristocracy, whose foreignness had to do with ideas of class – and the fact of course that they were above the particularities of the people they governed.

We leave till later the exploration of the anthropetic dimensions of ostension and paradox. Suffice now to point to this obvious contradiction: on the one hand, innovation emphasised heightened individualism and – as its other paradoxical facet – innovation in the form of revolution offered fantasies of a combined social and political system which could be planned and organised, with everyone flattened out to have the same status.(4) In this respect, the Marxist revolutionary is especially significant because of his(5) success in claiming, even after mass murder, a kind of absolute ethical priority over other revolutionary leadership models, such as that proposed by, say, Adolf Hitler. In addition, more than the fascist revolutions of the early twentieth century, the Marxist has managed to operate within an historical backdrop extending from the mid eighteenth century to 1989, and often even beyond, to the present. This backdrop provides a rich seam of source material for analysis, enabling the identification of key processes and tendencies in the philosophical and rhetorical mantra of the modern revolutionary mode.

Revolutions may be marked with a distinctive rhetoric of modernity, but they are not all alike.(6) We should not, if we are interested in massive change (as Jacques Barzun is) mistake the scale of murder for the scale of change (3). Indeed, there have been other, quieter, kinds of changes, frequently with profounder effects than the noisy revolution. These changes include political transformations, of course, such as the American War of Independence (which shares in some, but not all, of the rhetoric of revolution), or the industrial revolution (which has no intentional dimension but is important as an order of change), the so-called "knowledge revolution" (part of a wider process of transformation in media and mediation), the "Green revolution" (a continuation of aspects of the industrial revolution), and so on. These are large scale transformations, but are not directly part of this inquiry into the rhetoric of political revolution.

As for the original revolutionary in this pantheon, there are also gaps between reality and the revolutionary's literary flourish. The project Marx pursued, he said in one of his greatest flourishes, was not to understand history but to change it. For us, though, the point is also to see that it was Marx himself who first noticed this and thereby changed history merely by *writing* it (the writing in this case is in "Theses on Feuerbach" 620), something that leads, as we shall trace later, to the possibility of a metaphysical layer to the rhetoric of the revolution, and the revolutionary). Further in so doing, he assigned his version of
socialism centre stage, much as Hitler is lead dramaturge and, ostensibly, exemplary victim in the meanderings of his *Mein Kampf*.

### The Figure of the Revolutionary

In his interesting reflection on modernity, Jacques Barzun points out that the rhetoric of revolution is **personalised**. He contends that revolutions "give culture a new face" (3). The next part of our inquiry involves seeing how that cultural "refacing" works as a rhetoric that is attractive, even today. Even superficially (and is not the hermeneutics of the face a kind of cypher available for coding?), the **face** of the present revolutionary is at once social and individualistic. The faces of Che Guevara, or of Lenin, or indeed of the many images whose faces are equated with revolution itself have been coded and recoded for generations. At stake here is an affirming value assigned to the revolution, and as synecdoche, to the **revolutionary**. This rhetorical pattern involves creating something that makes the audience into participants in a wider cultic movement for change, but a movement which is led **by** someone, a **figure** whose self-appointed task is to express a phantasmatic "general will," and to embody that will.

So the revolutionary's face is important, as we all know.(7) Yet in terms of generative anthropology, to put one's face forward (or for others to do so on one's own account), is a risky affair. It restores a centre, and risks resentment of central authority by those it seeks to enthuse – something that is rather an issue when, as with Castro above, he **becomes** the central authority. These exclamatory utterances do reflect real history, and indeed, if we may put it thus, they give society an idealisation or image with which to work. They also give the image of life and of the priority of the live speech. (8) The exclamation mark in our title summons the excited, narcissistic, driven and driving figure of this particular kind of speech-work. The punctuation points to fragmented forms of ungrammatical thought ("As if I'd do that!"), as well as excitement, at least on the part of the utterer. As mark, it indicates also a relationship to immediacy, to orality, to priority over the written word. This priority is marked in the speeches of the revolutionary, even though it is almost always partially stage-managed, from notes, from a speech pre-prepared, its exclamation marks indicated in advance, perhaps rolled out intermittently to offset the sheer volume of verbiage.

A staging and scenic sense is always at work in revolutionary discourses. The revolutionary is a hero on "his" own stage. Such staging suggests an agonistics, a theatricality of idiom. In its victimary orientation (whether by the saintly and self-sacrificing figure of the wan revolutionary or the putatively misunderstood Hitler), the cast of the stage is profoundly Romantic. The scenes of mimesis and desire structure the appeal of the revolutionary in terms that Nietzsche called **resentiment**, but which in terms of generative anthropology are at once victimary and modern (1.10; 472). The revolutionary figure is at once a sacralised and yet also emphatically secular figure – and it is one whose "end" has been announced from the very outset in the eighteenth century – but one which is still very much with us today, albeit as a postmodern figure of nostalgia. We may not want to live in Cuba, but they still produce **excellent** T-shirts. Yet whether nostalgically recalled or Romantically construed, the figure has always been, strictly speaking, **impossible**. Either the revolutionary must die young – before the ossification and complexity of reality fatally compromises the purity of promise – or else, the figure is corrupted, and one by one the believers fall away, disillusioned by the deception and alternately amused and fatigued by the ongoing self-aggrandisement. (9)

The figure is of course an absurd delusion, and at times an outright lie. After all, it is **hard** to be a messiah. If Buddha, Mohammed, and Jesus were able to live up to the expectations they raised, quite the opposite is true of the revolutionaries who "succeeded." Robespierre was a more **brutal** killer than Danton, but Danton too was a mass murderer. So were Lenin, Hitler, Stalin, and Castro; in a world system of Marxist legacy, so too were Mao and Pol Pot (between whom there is more a quantitative than qualitative difference). The premise and promise of the messiah is ascetic; yet even the ascetic revolutionary, however, found a need to slake a thirst for blood. And most revolutionaries who found themselves in charge of nation states were not in the least ascetic.

Many have characterised the massive social upheavals of the "Arab spring" as "revolutions." If we look at the leading **figures** (and figurations of these figures), there is a wide variety both in what "the revolution"
sought to overturn and in what its leading figures proposed themselves as standing for. Some have participated in stock-standard Romantic revolutionary rhetoric, showing at least partially a revolt against authoritarian oppression of a thoroughly modern and postmodern kind (embedded in the nation-state histories of which each took part). There were differences, too between the situations in Tunisia (the "successful" uprising led to democratisation), Syria and Libya (a descent into internecine warfare), Iran (where it was crushed), and so on. These were sometimes communal, sometimes religious, and sometimes national uprisings, revolutions of a kind to be sure and at times via charismatic leaders, sharing in that rhetoric – with all its attendant risks. Calling all this "the Arab Spring" is not a generalisation that tempts the authors of this essay, for all these reasons.

Unlike the central figures of the American war of independence, Washington and Jefferson, most other revolutions found their gravitational centre in more determinedly cultic leaders. After the Jacobin heroes, for instance – Robespierre, Danton et al. – there came the others: Cabet and Blanqui from France, but of course, Marx and Engels, who raised the stakes above nation-states to the identification of an entire class of people, based on what they took for the future, but which actually reflected, sometimes poorly, sometimes well, the past. In that characteristic 19th century move, Marx and Engels simply created a negative epistemology in which all who were praised previously now were to be overturned. That they claimed all were equal is without doubt; that they saw their version of communism and their own roles as its custodians as essential is also at stake here. By their own hand, and that of the disciples who followed them, the figures of Marx and Engels were at once secular and sacralised. This certainly did not pass unobserved (and the Gaullist, Régis Debray is perhaps only the best of many commentators who have remarked upon this religiosity) (see for instance, and he writes often of it, Debray 155).(10) Whether we are religious or otherwise, the secularity and sacrality of the leader is essential. The trouble is that the political revolutionary is ill-prepared to be a saint. Those that are (be it the Mahatma or Nelson Mandela) grew to live increasingly ascetically, and hence, perhaps, elude the title of revolutionary, for both, in their ways at once effected massive social change, yet both did so in an evolutionary rather than revolutionary way.

Rhetorical Figures

Having suggested that revolutions are modern and circumscribed by modernity, and then that they are themselves typified by a personalised figure-as-emblem who is imagined as embodying the movement or cause, we now turn to the textual formations that allow this scene to unfold, and to give sense to the self-styled leader at its centre. We take this in three steps. First, we look at examples of revolutionary discourse themselves. These reveal extraordinary paradoxes and contradictions, some of which are actually punlike, but some of which are simply breathtakingly foolish. Second we examine the metaphysics of revolutionary "cool" to see the relationship of this kind of discourse to realities today. Finally, we turn to the language-aspect of revolutionary language, what it defers, what it enables, and how it plays a role in social anthropoetics.

The rhetoric of revolution is filled with so many verbal plays that we have to proceed in summary form. To start with, there is a tendency to increasing simplification. Slogans, of course, have to be striking. They therefore use puns and paradox to create certain effects and, ostensibly, to make them memorable. The trouble is that the effects seem to travel in the same direction – towards a refusal of rational sense, towards absurdity. The ideals of revolutionaries are rarely merely incoherent in terms of socio-political realities. They are also – it seems exigently – paradoxical and often illogical in nature. This is one of the formal features of revolutionary discourse, both theoretical and "applied." We can see this simply by revisiting some of the slogans written as graffiti on the lecture hall walls of places like UP, Nanterre and the Sorbonne in 1968(11): "Le rêve est réalité [Dream is reality]"; "Crier la mort c'est crier la vie [to cry for death is to cry for life]"; "Pas de liberté aux ennemis de la liberté [No liberty for the enemies of liberty]"; and "La révolution est incroyable parce que vraie [the revolution is unbelievable because it is true]." If the first of these is not a million miles from a possible Microsoft slogan,(12) each of them seems at once absurd and yet appealing. Slogans of this kind operate in a number of ways, sometimes simultaneously. Without exhausting their resources, we can point to at least two aspects of their operation: they use logical ellipsis and are often paradoxical. Let us trace each of these slogans for a moment.
Take the common slogan, "Property is theft," a case of **logical ellipsis**. This expression can be analyzed in a number of ways, but if we want to say anything more than the fact it is not a syntactically sensible equation (that is, theft is neither the logical complement, nor is it an obvious attribute of property), we need also to concede that we know perfectly well what is intended. We can proceed by tracing it as a syllogism whose key premises have simply been omitted:

1. Property is a form of private ownership;
2. Private ownership is a less fair form of economic practice than public ownership;
3. Societies which enable less fair forms of economic practice deprive some members of their society of their birthright;
4. Deprivation of one’s birthright is a form of theft;

Therefore, property is a form of theft.

Doubtless the case could be made in other ways, all of them requiring the supply of missing premises. The problem is, without the revolutionary going to the trouble of supplying all those complicated premises in order to construct a valid syllogism, we cannot see the weakness of its evidence, which, at every turn is not only questionable, but invariably tendentious and transparently self-serving. (13)

Moreover, and most important of all, at the site of any revolution that bears serious scrutiny, **paradox** is also involved. "Domptez par la terreur les ennemis de la liberté" [Tame liberty's enemies by terror], Robespierre orders, "et vous aurez raison comme fondateurs de la république" [and you will be right, as founders of the Republic]. And what, for Robespierre, is such a republic’s government? "Le gouvernement de la révolution est le despotisme de la liberté contre la tyrannie" [The government of the revolution is the despotism of liberty against tyranny.] (Robespierre, "Sur les principes de morale politique"). Landing here, are we now so very far from Rousseau (a man, we should remember, Robespierre dubbed "the divine man"), who in **The Social Contract** states that "[W]hoever refuses to obey the General Will be constrained there by everyone: which means nothing other than one will be forced to be free" (14) (Part I, Ch. 7)? In all these contentions, as we now know all too well, these are not figures of speech – even if we pay a different kind of attention to Robespierre’s enforcement from the arguments of Rousseau. That is, he was one of the most murderous people of history to that point in time.

Like the drawings of Escher, of course, **logical** paradox is only a property of discourse, not the world, and the oscillations involved in these discursive creations have to be resolved in one way or another as they are forced into the social realm. Still, discourse is itself powerful and persuasive, and it is important to understand how this form of paradox works. Roger Scruton points out that beyond its formal features as a speech act, paradox sets out to both excite and destabilize; it is simultaneously an undermining force and a demand for commitment: "There is something in the human psyche which, faced with an unbelievable proposition, rushes forward to embrace it, to say 'yes, it must be so!', and to rejoice in the ruin of common sense that follows. A paradox may therefore be an act of defiance, in which the world of ordinary things is set at a distance and ridiculed" (Scruton 398). Of course, this is a risky mimetic game and the act of ridicule itself may end up looking far more ridiculous than its target, especially when seen with the benefit of historical distance.

It could of course be argued that the slogans of the street are not to be confused with the more complex realities of the master texts. Few who read the texts of the revolutionaries can maintain this impression for long, however. Indeed, the brevity of slogans have at least the merit of memorability and context. Take Frederick Engels at the grave of Marx, where he stated what he saw as Marx’s achievement in these bold terms:

> Just as Darwin discovered the law of development or organic nature, so Marx discovered the law of development of human history: the simple fact, hitherto concealed by an overgrowth of ideology, that mankind must first of all eat, drink, have shelter and clothing, before it can pursue politics, science, art, religion, etc.; that therefore the production of the immediate material means, and consequently the degree of economic development attained by a given people or during a given epoch, form the foundation upon which the state institutions, the legal conceptions, art, and even the ideas on religion, of the people concerned have been evolved,
The problem is that any kind of materialist monism – like the one Engels is here advocating – in doing away with human intention (and mentation), or figuring this as simply as epiphenomenon of more basic casual factors, has to now somehow explain why someone **should** accept such an account (given that "should" seems no longer to have an ontological place). As the Australian philosopher David Stove once remarked, along similar lines: "Feuerbach, though he said that man **is** what he eats, was also obliged to admit that meals do not eat meals" (125. cf. 207).

We have until this point proceeded as if there were an actual argument that might, in another theatre, need to be debunked. Mostly it is not like this. Marx, in fact, is not even usually artfully paradoxical – he is much more clearly self-contradictory. The idea that base determines superstructure makes Marx's thought **itself** a mere epiphenomenon of more basic material realities; if thought supervenes on history in this radical sense, then it seems difficult to agree with the theory – not on the basis of its incoherence, but because the very notion of an act of mentation called "agreement" becomes inconceivable, given Marx's materialist ontology. Hence, materialism itself is a dubious basis on which to seek to erect any kind of argument. Criticisms of materialism – and the kinds of determinism which it invariably implies – have been launched from bases too numerous to list here, although the crux of the argument can be stated roughly as follows: whether the acceptance of the thoughts and theories which appear to consciousness can be wholly accounted for in terms of the firing of neurons or class consciousness doesn't matter epistemically – in either case, we will need to give up the idea that we accept the materialist's thesis for good reasons for the simple reason that "good reasons" cannot be causally relevant to the adoption of belief. (15)

One of Marx's rhetorical skills lay in the way he oscillated between an explanatory monism which he is forced to rescind as soon as he actually carries out historical analysis, analysis which is necessarily pluralistic – partly because it **has to be**. Marx simply has to admit that consciousness – or ideas – contribute to human existence and history, but on the other hand, he **cannot** admit it in theory because if he does, this whole basis of the *Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy* as both his "guiding principle" and "general conclusion" evaporates. (16) The ideological **is** an economy. (17) We might put it thus: Marx makes his own theory of history, but perhaps even he does not make it as he pleases. The reason he seemed able to bring off the impossible effect lies in rhetoric, as have seen, and is how – as we shall see – establishes the impossible metaphysical vanishing points of revolutionary change itself.

**The Metaphysical Apotheosis of Communism: The Revolutionary Advertising Icon**

"No one has any intention of erecting a wall!" (Honecker 1961) (18)

So said Erich Honecker, the leader of East Germany – as the wall was being built...the phrase was later spray-painted onto the Western half of the wall as a sign of the standing lie.

**Berlin Epiphany, 2014:** a kid, not more than twenty years old with a touchscreen and earbuds, sports a red t-shirt. Red, primordial colour, signifier of revolution, faces etched in black: faces of men known intimately as Fidel and Che. Tomorrow, the t-shirt will be a different colour, an Andy Warhol print of Marilyn perhaps, or James Dean, followed, again, on Thursday, with a Coca-Cola image. We may be in Berlin, but this is Berlin after Steve Jobs, after Facebook. The wall – or rather its pitiful fragment – is a tourist destination, and the East is a stop on a tour-bus itinerary; and the East (as in Eastern Europe), in other words, is a signifier, and perhaps it always was. The revolution has, so to speak, become metaphysical. And nowhere, now, is it more metaphysical than the Berlin wall.

In the Berlin wall, we find a strange and repeating destiny of communism. (19) Aside perhaps from the Wailing Wall in Jerusalem, few walls have so symbolised the fate and tragedies – and perhaps farces – of modern politics as well as has the Berlin Wall. Separating West Berlin from East Germany, it was officially referred to by so-called German Democratic Republic authorities as the *Antifaschistischer Schutzwall* [Anti-Fascist Rampart], an act of naming which implied that West Germany had somehow not been fully
de-Nazified. Its fall on the 9th of November, 1989, ended twenty-eight years, but not the imaginary space of communism, and of the left which lingers uncertainly even today. It is estimated that around 5000 such "fascists" managed to escape to West Germany during these years. Few ever tried to "escape" in the other direction.

At one level, far from representing the death of communism, the fall of the Berlin Wall signalled its political apotheosis, its final victory. At this moment, revolutionaries the world over were finally relieved of having to reconcile their ideology with the world, to relate Marx's *Capital* to all inconvenient concrete political realities, to have to continue the exhausting effort of apologising for its manifestations or showing how these were "not really communist" after all. Revolutionary rhetoric was finally able to attain the transcendental status which it had always sought, as Pure Idea. If, at the end of this process, Marx was not left standing and Hegel was not fully turned right side up, the fall of the wall did show just how comfortable the former could be standing on his head.

Other barriers are less concrete. They are discursive – but no less paradoxical. The journal *boundary 2* – whose radical credentials were no doubt signaled to those of sufficient textual sensitivity in its subversive deployment of the unicase *b* – announced the following change in editorial policy:

The editors of *boundary 2* announce that they no longer intend to publish in the standard professional areas, but only materials that identify and analyze the tyrannies of thought and action spreading around the world and that suggest alternatives to these emerging configurations of power. To this end, we wish to inform our readers that, until further notice, the journal will not accept unsolicited manuscripts.

The editors have taken it upon themselves to provide what intellectuals – and, by some odd extension, the world itself – needs for the next few years, rather than relying on the vagaries of exchange. We would suspect – or at least hope – that we are not the only people to perceive a kind of unwitting comedy here, in the editorial policy. Part of it is surely related to a declared opposition to "tyrannies of thought and action" pursued via an *a priori* exclusion of points of view that don't already comport to the editors' conceptions of tyranny. It's at least a little like the joke about the vigilante so appalled by the actions of serial killers that he announces that he has taken it upon himself to systematically, one-by-one, do away with them all. We are in the realm, once again, of paradox, this time also in the domain of the grand claim that has no effect whatsoever.

Revolution reaches its highest point once it is completely free of referents. (20) Perhaps the only person who had the panache to suggest this was Roland Barthes, who in his dazzling tour de force, *S/Z*, suggested blithely that denotation is only the last of a series of connotations (16). His own encounter with poststructuralism allowed this kind of literary play to hold sway briefly in the Anglo-American university English department, yet we suspect a Marxist of the day would be surprised to learn that for Barthes, the pure revolution has no referent whatsoever. Instead, all we have is a sign-series which recalls a past of reference. Rather like Baudrillard's strange astrology (196) in which the signs of the Zodiac are used as analogies to capture the precession of orders of sign all the way back from an economy in which pumpkins were swapped for tomatoes, through gold, through promissories, until finally it breaks free, the sign of the origin of revolution is there on the kid's t-shirt as she stands there somewhere on the Unter den Linden wondering what on earth all the fuss was about, how anyone could have died for this. Metaphysical plenitude of this kind, however, raises questions of another kind: the social role of the imagined revolution, the structure of the self-contradictory exclamations we have traced, and the key issue of whether this really is harmless rhetoric, or whether perhaps it either defers – or even incites – appropriative violence.

**Deferring/ Inciting Violence: Exclamatory Paradox and Slippage**

In considering revolution, we would be foolhardy intellectuals indeed were we not to take seriously even now that its pronouncements, howsoever absurd or self-contradictory, are directed apparently at effecting real social change, real violence. In "his" self-account in other words, the revolutionary is seeking not to defer violence, but to incite it. In order to tease this out further, we return to the structure of exclamation
itself, and discover there more nuances than are at first evident.

In one of Eric Gans’ earlier works on forms of language, *The Origin of Language*, the case of exclamation is raised in the following way:

If in hurting myself in the presence of another I say “Ouch!” I am not merely expressing pain but encouraging my interlocutor to observe the source of my pain – say, for example, having struck my thumb with a hammer. A mere cry of pain would not have this effect – and we might note that “Ouch” is not used unless the source of pain is clearly external….the use of the ostensive in the mutual presence of the interlocutors and the referent establishes, as the examples clearly show, the same relationships as in the original event, where the presence of the “sacred” object to the community-as-locutees was as essential as its presence to the community-as-locutors. (76-77)

If a sign says, "Revolution now!" or "Liberty or Death!" this has hidden in it this ostensive structure. Entirely consistent with this is the hidden imperative, or the appeal, or even the promise structure. In a book that seems to address itself to many of the paradoxes that confront such utterance-structures, Gans’ *Signs of Paradox* suggests – perhaps paradoxically itself – that paradox itself is "anterior to truth" (54), and that paradox is the "problem that truth resolves" (54). This, in the case of revolution, does not seem to have ready application until we look a little further: paradox also allows us to see how language does not only avert the engagement with the desired appropriative object, but also, allows us to desire it, but on what he calls a provisional transcendental plane (54). If the revolution did only ever take place in this non-real world plane of language, then it does little harm indeed. And indeed, some of the more absurd recent cases we have taken are examples of revolutions that will take place purely rhetorically, and never take place referentially.

Gans, however, draws on work in all his previous thought to suggest that the ostensive sometimes also implies the imperative. Now the ostensive – or even where it becomes sufficiently articulate, the declarative – entails interlocutors who can bear witness to one another’s wondrous revolutionary credentials, all on the plane of rhetorical and linguistic transcendence. But, as Gans suggests, sometimes the brute fact of the world is bluntly to the contrary, and the sign itself appears, for all its vehemence of articulation to be simply false. In such a situation, where no revolution appears likely, the imperative mood can make its appearance, a situation that (since the *Origin of Language*) Gans has counted as a moment of emergence from the ostensive mode. As he puts it in *Signs of Paradox*,

This imagination corresponds to no perceptual reality: the sign is "false." Only its connection with its referent remains true in the imagination. This is the context of emergence of the imperative, which seeks to abolish the paradoxical oscillation between the falsity and the truth of the "inappropriate" ostensive. The paradox forces the thematization of the distinction between absence and presence, with the result that instead of mere imitation of the ostensive sign, the acceptable response to the imperative is the making-present (the transformation into presence) of its referent. (55)

But there is a problem. If the revolution is not at hand, it is not going to manifest and happen "now" and people in shops trying to choose between "apples or bananas?" will find that a more meaningful bifurcation than the T-junction of "liberty or death!" Mere rhetoric on this occasion does not miraculate a revolution into being.

The problem has not gone unnoticed of course. The deconstructive approach has yielded some useful fruit in this respect. Jacques Derrida’s meditation on the title of a conference, "Whither Marx?" is both wittingly and unwittingly apposite. How, Derrida seems to be asking, does an event actually happen? His word for the problematisation of the event – *événementialité* – captures the issue (119), but his example, aptly enough concerns the title of a conference. Derrida repeatedly asks what this can mean, and does so with recourse to Shakespeare’s *Hamlet* and the ghost which creates events simply by "appearing" (30-32). The appearance of a ghost is at once spectral (to use his word) and for that reason, both an event, and a non-event. The same air of unreality, he notes pervades the way Marxism manifests in ghostly fashion, and does so as something we *inherit* (46). In a world where Marx emphasised the materiality of things, it seems
strange that Derrida was able to stage an entire problematisation of his life, work, and legacy in terms of what he rightly calls a “hantologie” (31).

Derrida’s commentary on Marx and his spectres is powerful enough – as far as it goes. The trouble is, he never posits in any positive sense, the risks of this spectrality. Instead, a little bravely, a little Quixotically, he proposes his own theses on the kinds of analysis needed (134-42), as well as two "interpretations" of what he contends (142-44). There is no revolutionary appeal structure in this, despite the content of the injustices he protests – this is analytic provocation, not an appeal to arms. We feel this before we know it, and we feel it because of the absence of revolutionary rhetorical exclamation.

Gans, by contrast, does not even need to say what happens if violence is not only not deferred, but incited. An incitement to violence may be, nearly always is, rhetorical. It may indeed, as he says, remain tied to the transcendental plane of language. The plane, however, is as he also says, provisional. There is nothing other than an absence of referential correspondence to prevent the mimetic fury that revolutionary rhetoric (be it of first-half of the twentieth century fascist, or of communist, rhetoric) spilling into the domain of conflict that language in an originary sense defers. The violence is deferred by the cry of the first utterance: it is indeed possible for that cry to become the cry of the mob in full fury.

**Revolution now?**

The revolution appeared, we have suggested, as part of modernity, and is no more an ancient thing than the modern nation state. It appeared, at times, to address massive social injustice and suffering. It gave shape in the form of mimetic resentments that were shared in the emerging mass society of the eighteenth century. Yet even the early anti-metropolitan battles for independence were not of this kind: the abstract rhetoric of revolution did not emerge fully then, just as it did not emerge fully in the theologies of Levellers and democrats in Oliver Cromwell’s army. These, however, were important precedents for any actual revolt. The rhetoric of revolution in Paris, 1789, really was new, and even though Girard did not state it as such, we do indeed see this as a signal moment in the history of revolutionary rhetoric. Since then, however, there have been many transformations, especially in the aftermath of "successful" revolutions, such as in the Soviet Union in 1917, and in Berlin less than twenty years later. One might think that after such precedents, that the rhetoric of revolution would have been tarnished. Yet it has not been.

In this essay, therefore, we have sought to confront the puzzle of how the ostensibly alienated and outcast have now become not merely a version of "the cornerstone which the builders rejected," but signifiers of cool. Not only is there mimetic behaviour at the level of a new, anthropoetically conceived political economy (there never was any other kind), but that the resentments of the original revolutionaries have yielded to another currency in which the sign of protest is actually a sign-in-denial of subscription to the mainstream order. Now, we have reached an apparently impossible situation where the revolutionary is exactly isomorphic with the radical, Randian capitalist. Both have rendered real things abstract. Neither values the person *per se*, in the Kantian sense of for him or herself – rather, "ideas" of the person (or whatever) take their place. In all this, of course, the prospect of any real revolution seems increasingly unlikely.

In the mimetic instability of violent warfare, modern technology has enabled not only the purveying of revolutionary discourse and the face of the revolutionary icon to far parts of the nation state (in the nineteenth century) and the world (in the twentieth), but enabled slaughter of an almost hitherto unimaginable kind. If the revolutionary, like Benedict Anderson’s modern nation-state, is steeped in blood, we might be thankful that the dreamscape and apotheosis of the revolutionary in the contemporary world is one in which the revolution is so pure that it hardly takes place at all. But this may only be a temporary state of affairs.

We have dwelt on the case of Marx (and of Marxism) because this is the most long-lasting legacy, as Derrida suggests. Something in this rhetorical body, be it the allusion to material realities or the abstruseness of terminology, holds strong appeal, even today. His books are usually long, and littered with code words and phrases like surplus capital, political economy, the dictatorship of the proletariat and so on, so there is a need for explanation. At their rhetorical finest, as in parts of the *German Ideology* or the
Communist Manifesto, we see pure resentment at work: they are splenetic tracts directed very often not at the capitalists, but at those most proximate socialist movements Marx correctly discerned as his true enemies. And the "spectres" of Marx (to use that Derridean phrase to describe that legacy) are indeed suggestive of the dangers of descent into resentment even now. In response to the failures of the master-text, the disciples became increasingly ingenious. There is pathos of a kind in the brilliance of some of the contortions in their works. Louis Althusser’s homage in the title, Lenin and Philosophy, still close to the fantasy, but in his essay in that volume, "Base and Superstructure in Marxist theory," he deferred, almost indefinitely, the arrival of any material impact on culture whatsoever. Citing Marx (not least the German Ideology), but in a very selective way, Althusser was able to find a new terrain in the space that deferral opened up. Indeed, in place of class struggle over wages, the revolution becomes virtual, with him now seeing "ideology as the universal element of historical existence" – and that class struggle itself somehow takes place in ideology (Althusser 141). That this is "Marxist" can only be countenanced if one accepts that it is symmetrical to his view but inverted; ideology is now the generative principle rather than an epiphenomenon. This "Marxism" is, of course, a very comforting view for academic revolutionaries whose stock in trade is ideology and its debunking.

The Romantic revolutionary figure still stages "himself" anew, be it nostalgically as Derrida suggests in his subtitle ("mourning") or as part of the answer to the economic circumstances of the new Europe, or again, most commonly in an internet advertisement for the last revolutionary new consumer item: in this case, we see that a new metaphysical quality has overtaken the revolution, and it seems to suit Facebook somewhat better than the posters of the nineteenth century. It seems that in the movement to mass society the revolution became possible. After that, though, when the revolution became pointless, all that is left is a futile gesture – an abstract metaphysics of cool.

In this essay, we have taken our analysis of the rhetoric of revolution through a series of stages: we began with examples from the recent past, we traced the links of revolutions to religiosity and the binding of peoples together into a group. This however led us to consider the hagiography of revolution: the figure of the revolutionary-as-Romantic leader. For all its accuracy in capturing a caricature of the image of the revolution, however, the problem then became one of the way language forms and discourses create these master-figures. On the one hand, we sought to show how the revolutionary discourse could be both self-contradictory and also then empty of denotative content (though not of connotative sense). These paradoxes, however supplied a clue to seeking the anthropoetic paradoxes that signal the appropriative nature of revolutionary rhetoric, and enabled the tracing of whether (as we suspected) at present most revolutionary discourse operates to defer violence, but has always the potential for its incitations to take hold.

References


Notes

1. We might, parenthetically, how close this archetypically revolutionary slogan now sounds to the language of personal development; Be Realistic, Demand the Impossible could easily be the title of a book written by Anthony Robbins or Dr. Phil. Castro - rhetorically at least - isn't a very long way from either. (back)

2. See John Milbank 9-25. (back)

3. If revolution has a contemporary date, the idea itself is based on a very old word. It comes to us from Latin, whence the earliest sense of "a revolution" or turning back. Part of our inquiry does concern the origin of revolution in ancient politics. Yet revolution is also a distinctly modern word, and this is also, equally, a point of origin. It appears first in English in the political sense of "a revolution" in connexion with the overthrow of King James II in 1689 ("Revolution"). Before this, it had already gained its modern sense in France, where the idea of a Révolution d'état had gained currency in 1636 (Petit Robert 1711). (back)

4. This kind of uneasy shuttling between the valorisation of the individual and the collective is seen very clearly in the work Jean-Paul Sartre, whose Being and Nothingness on the one hand, and Critique of Dialectical Reason on the other, clearly encapsulate this uneasy valorisation of both the individual (as standing by himself or herself, independent of the group) and the valorisation of the group (standing by itself, incorporating the individual in the name of a greater cause). (back)

5. And it almost invariably was a he. (back)

6. In this respect, a useful commentator on modernity is Jacques Barzun, who writes that "[w]e have got into the habit of calling too many things revolutions" (3). He nominates just four key revolutions, or "quakes" as he calls them: those in the sixteenth century (religious); the seventeenth century (monarchical); the eighteenth century (French individualist); and the twentieth century (social) (3). Barzun indicates on the one hand, the need to categorise the sites of actual change (society, politics, culture, language, food and so on), and on the other to pay separate attention to the rhetorical dimensions of
revolution that have as much to do with Romantic conceptions of the outsider-self as they do with this or that social change.  

7. Cf. O'Carroll the "Cultural Studies intellectual" is a similar kind of figure, riven by similar hypocrisies and compromises (176-77).  

8. It is this supposed ontological priority and authenticity of the oral that Derrida took issue with in Of Grammatology.  

9. In this essay we confine our comments mostly to left wing revolutionaries, mainly because their claims are presented as being in the interests of others, appropriating the garb of piety. The comments apply also to revolutionaries of the right, especially in 1930s Europe.  

10. René Girard and Debray have had a strange and discontinuously hostile series of exchanges. Perhaps the best place to gain a sense of these is in the actual conclusion to Les Origines de la Culture where Girard devotes the entire chapter to evaluating aspects of Debray's work on religion (249-78).  

11. All quotations of this kind have been sourced from "Des slogans de Mai 68" http://users.skynet.be/ddz/mai68/slogans-68.html.  

12. We should remember that Apple's last international slogan was "Think Different" and AT&T's very successful phone advertisement instructed us to "Reach out and touch someone."  

13. Perhaps, though, the revolutionary is only kidding. After all, property is not really theft. Perhaps these kinds of formulations are puns, requiring intellectual work on the part of the passer-by. 

14. "Quiconque refusera d'obéir à la volonté générale y sera contraint par tout le corps : ce qui ne signifie autre chose sinon qu'on le forcera d'être libre."  


16. This is how Marx states it after introducing it in this way:  

In the social production of their life, men enter into definite relations that are indispensable and independent of their will, relations of production which correspond to a definite stage of development of their material productive forces. The sum total of these relations of production constitutes the economic structure of society, the real foundation, on which rises a legal and political superstructure and to which correspond definite forms of social consciousness. The mode of production of material life conditions the social, political and intellectual life process in general. It is not the consciousness of men that determines their being, but, on the contrary, their social being that determines their consciousness. Preface of A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy. http://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1859/critique-pol-economy/preface-abs.htm  

17. A similar point has been made before, although not in quite the same terms, by Phillips 132-7 and Eddy 29-30.  

back
18. “Ich verstehe ihre Frage so daß es in West-Deutschland menschen gibt, die wünschen, daß wir die Bauarbeiter der Haupstadt der DDR da zu mobilisieren elene Mauer aufzurichten ja?....Niemand hat die absicht eine Mauer zu errichten!” [I understand from your question that there are people in West Germany who’d like to see us mobilise the builders of the GDR capital to erect a wall…No one intends to erect a wall!" (http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YjgKKQoVRx4 accessed 16 February 2014; text partially supplied by postcard, Echte Photo, Kunst und Bild 1 Berlin; based in turn on a Neues Deutschland news-story cited as 15 June 1961; Trans. Assistance, Ton Schaad). (back)

19. Here we can count, among others, Hadrian’s Wall, The Great Wall of China, the Moroccan Walls, and the Wall of Troy. (back)

20. It is somewhat akin to those rock bands whose poverty and "street cred" orients their lyrics – an orientation which can no longer be drawn on, at least believably, when they are multi-millionaires, living in affluent suburbs. (back)
In Chapter 8 of *Originary Thinking*, entitled "High Art and the Classical Esthetic," Eric Gans notes the importance of classical Greek art in the formation of fully differentiated secular—humanly self-referential—culture:

The creation of independent esthetic institutions reflects the emergence of the esthetic as a discovery procedure for human self-understanding. The classical is the first historical esthetic because it opens the history of art as an independent vehicle of anthropological knowledge. (132)

Esthetic institutions do not, of course, emerge *sui generis*, but out of the context of pre-classical ritual culture, with its intricate interweaving of military, religious, political, and economic institutions. The question of the place of esthetic practices and institutions within the Greek *polis* becomes a contested issue in Plato and Aristotle, one that is recognized in their work as raising fundamental questions for political and ethical life. What is more, art practices and traditions occupy cultural territory within which the practice of philosophy must define and articulate itself as a form, at least in part, of esthetic practice in its generic function as reflection. That a dedicated discourse of reflection is needed is one of the most persistent themes of Plato's work, from the earliest to the latest dialogues. That this discourse of dedicated reflection and inquiry should receive the name philosophy, the love of wisdom, rather than simply *sophia*, wisdom itself, is frequently touched on, for instance, at the conclusion of *Phaedrus*:

Now you go and tell Lysias that we came to the spring which is sacred to the Nymphs and heard words charging us to deliver a message to Lysias and anyone else who composes speeches, as well as to Homer and anyone else who has composed poetry either spoken or sung, and third, to Solon and anyone else who writes political documents that he calls laws: If any one of you has composed these things with a knowledge of the truth, if you can defend your writing when you are challenged, and if you can yourself make the argument that your writing is of little worth, then you must be called by the name derived not from these writings but rather from those you are seriously pursuing. . . . To call them wise, Phaedrus, seems to me too much, and proper only for a god. To call him wisdom's lover—a philosopher—or something similar would fit him better and be more seemly. (278b-d)

Philosophy shares with esthetic practice the act of reflection, but at the same time it has a distance, a greater degree of independence, than does poetry or drama from the older hieratic and ritual context of sacrificial
religious practices, and also a proximity to the practical milieu of the institutions of legal and political life within which decisions and judgements about the conduct of civic life take effect.\(^{(1)}\) The central role played in Plato's *Republic* by the argument against the poets and by the question of poetic *mimēsis*—as disproportionate in the context of political theory as it seems from a modern perspective—speaks to the scenic domain of culture that is in contention between philosophy and poetry, to what Socrates refers to in Book X as "an ancient quarrel between [poetry] and philosophy" (607b). Since the quarrel is by no means ancient in the *historical* sense for Socrates or Plato, and since poetry clearly holds the ground as a primordial institution in Greek life, for the Socrates of the *Republic* the contest between philosophy and poetry is clearly one for discursive rather than historical primacy. The argument in the *Republic* for the centrality of philosophy and of philosophical training for the ruler of the ideal *polis* is an assertion not so much of the specifically political importance of philosophy as for the importance of philosophy to the conduct of the good life as such, in all its communal dimensions. The rationale for banishment of the poets from the city in *Republic* is that the poets nourish the conflictive, rather than the contemplative and peacemaking, emotions. As Plato has Socrates observe in a central passage in Book VI: "[A] man who has his understanding truly turned toward the things that are has no desire to look down toward the affairs of human beings and to be filled with envy and ill will as a result of fighting with them" (500b-c).

In other words, for Plato the ideal values of the philosophical city are at the same time practical and ostensibly effectual in ensuring the safety and peace of the community. In this sense, Plato reflects the concern in Generative Anthropology to ground the understanding of human culture in its practical intentionality: the avoidance of the violence that pits members against one another in non-cooperative hierarchies based on threats and demonstrations of violence, violence that continues no less to threaten and determine the presence or absence of well-being for communities in our own, as much as in Plato's time. If Generative Anthropology shares this theoretical common cause with the vocation of philosophy at its Platonic inception, it remains in conversation with the philosophical tradition in its own generation. Questions of what is specific to human intentionality, and what makes for its qualities as specifically human, remain at the core of philosophical and cultural preoccupations in the 20th as much as the 5th century BCE. In exploring in what follows the role of *mimesis* in Plato's argument in *Republic*, I will engage with Heidegger's way of reading Plato in recent times, so as to reflect on one aspect in which Generative Anthropology takes up its theoretical place in cultural debate.

With respect to the fight for discursive pre-eminence in the Greek city-state, a striking shift, very nearly an about-face, occurs in the way poetry is addressed in the work of Aristotle. It receives a single treatise, one of Aristotle's shortest, though a text incisive enough to provide poetics a theoretical foundation that will underwrite close on 2000 years of poetic theory, persisting until the late 18th century Romantic estheticians awaken poetics from its dogmatic slumbers, abandoning Platonic and Aristotellean mimeticism for theories of the creative imagination that constitute an original amalgam of Platonist and Aristotelian traditions of art theory. Early in the *Poetics*, in direct contrast to Plato, Aristotle approves the root poetic function of *mimēsis* not only as a distinguishing feature of human nature and intelligence, but the source of a crucial human advantage over animal species. Human beings learn first by means of *mimēsis*, and they also find it natural "to delight in works of imitation" (1448h 9-10), quite apart from the content of those mimetic representations. Later in the *Poetics*, in apparently deliberate contrast to Plato's "ancient quarrel," Aristotle asserts kinship between philosophy and poetry, affirming affinity between them greater than that, for instance, with historical discourse in being occupied not with the particularities of life as they have actually occurred, but with the universalities of the possible and probable imaginative forms that Aristotle had earlier defined as serving to purge and heal the aversive and attractive passions of fear and sympathy. Later in the chapter in *Originary Thinking* cited above, Gans notes this paradigmatic opposition in the status of the properly esthetic realm.
Throughout history, Plato’s qualms about the subversive nature of art alternate with the cathartic claims of Aristotle. . . . The relative importance of the Platonic and Aristotelian attitudes depends upon the balance of centrality and decentralization within a given society. . . . But the degree of subversion on the one hand or catharsis on the other cannot be fixed a priori; the controversy is undecidable because the action of deferral is itself undecidable. To defer violence now is to render possible greater violence later; the blame to be cast on one deferral or another is indeterminate. (136).

This character of indeterminacy and undecidability of purpose attaches to all aspects and all levels of the esthetic domain. Indeed, the function of the esthetic realm is to create such an in-between dimension of culture, a space for reflection and the play of the imagination. The question of the purpose or value of that liminal realm will depend on the way it is understood, configured, and actively pursued within a given set of social, political, and historical—and indeed intellectual—circumstances. The esthetic domain is essential to culture not in its content but in its function, as a domain withdrawn from action in order to explore language as such, its character as difference, deferral, and re-presentation, a relatively safe zone of questioning as to how the community should configure and conduct itself in its social, political, and economic institutions. The earliest forms of esthetic practices are strongly implicated in religious interpretations of the world and of the community’s relations, broadly speaking, to the state of nature. But these religious implications of esthetic experience are clearly in crisis for Plato, along with the social and pedagogical formations of the more specifically esthetic traditions of epic poetry and tragic drama. In order to extend the reflective space of esthetics so as to create room for the more deliberate and pointed inquiry of philosophy, the whole network of cultural traditions must come under scrutiny in order to create appropriate discursive space for the practice of philosophy. The *polis* itself must be re-examined from the ground up, thus the definitive place in Plato’s work held by the *Republic*.

The paradigmatic opposition in Plato and Aristotle in the ways in which the reflective and mimetic function characteristic of the esthetic realm should be understood in relation to social praxis configures the tensions and contradictions embodied in the paradoxical nature of the originary scene of representation as Gans illuminates it. For Gans, the mimetic function of the originary scene establishes a pivotal and inherently tension-ridden difference between the object as appetitively consumed and the object as represented. That act of differentiation creates the space of a human culture, an interval that enables a specifically human form of distribution of resources and also, most practically, a deferral of conflict and competition over them. How necessarily scant resources should be valued arises directly from the founding question of how they can be safely apportioned. Beyond the basic needs of survival and persistence, what precisely is the value of the object of representation—the value of the referent and of the act of signifying—as thing possessed or as thing that in our need for it captivates us? An engagement with this question of language, enabled by the act of representation and deferral of an action, requires that both the object and the act of representing it be considered, weighed, and agreed upon by the community if the ostensible—and ostensive—purpose of representation, the deferral of violence, is to succeed.

For Plato, the mimetic character of the act of representation, in its pleasurable indulgence of the passions, must be constrained to its primary purpose of deferral of action, the purpose that finds its full expression not in the temporal, temporary pleasures of the reception of poetic representations (encapsulated by Aristotle in poetic *catharsis*), but in the form of a searching inquiry into the significance of what they represent characteristic of the emerging discourses of science and philosophy. In the *Republic*, Plato has Socrates argue...
that the purpose of esthetic deferral cannot be properly achieved by the traditionally dominant Athenian cultural and pedagogical traditions of epic and tragic poetry, with their pleasing portrayal of the contradictory behavior of gods and heroes, but rather by the more disciplined philosophical search for a conception of the good life that in its formal consistency can sustain the *polis* into the future, on the basis of a stable and unchanging knowledge of value, a common understanding of and approach to the idea, and thence to a practical distribution of, justice. For Aristotle, the goal of the generically esthetical act of deliberation on the good life is conceived rather differently than in Plato. For Plato the standard of knowledge is understood not to reside primarily in *noēsis*, pure intellection, but rather in the application of that knowledge in practice that is characteristic of *phronēsis*, that is to say, in practical rather than purely theoretical wisdom. In Book X of the *Republic*, true knowledge of things is possessed neither by the artistic imitator nor by the actual craftsman, but by the expert user, the one who knows how to apply the object effectively to the purpose for which it is intended. As Socrates argues: "Therefore, a maker [or craftsman, whether of real or artistic artifacts]—through associating with and having to listen to the one who knows—has right *opinion* about whether something he makes is fine or bad, . . . [but] *the one who knows is the user*" (602a; my emphasis). For Aristotle, in the *Nicomachean Ethics*, on the other hand, the goal of knowledge is not found in *praxis* but in the pure contemplation of the real that alone resides with *sophia* and *theōria*. As Aristotle observes in the final chapter of the *Ethics*:

> So if among virtuous actions political and military actions are distinguished by nobility and greatness, and these are uneasily and aim at an end and are not desirable for their own sake, but the activity of reason, which is contemplative, seems both to be superior in serious worth and to aim at no end beyond itself, and to have pleasure proper to itself (and this augments the activity), and the self-sufficiency, leisureliness, unweariedness (so far as this is possible for man), and all the other attributes ascribed to the supremely happy man are evidently those connected with this [contemplative] activity, it follows that this [the exercise of contemplative reason] will be the complete happiness of man. (1177b 16-26)

On the basis of such a clear hierarchical differentiation between the active and contemplative lives, it is comparatively easy, then, for Aristotle to affirm the positive value of poetry in its relative proximity to the exercise of philosophical reason, since, while the reception of the art work is contemplative in its disengagement from ethical action, the superior rational object of philosophical contemplation holds poetic *mimēsis* firmly in subordination to the exercise of pure reason. None of the perplexities of *phronēsis* in its attempt to apply the fruits of poetic reception to worldly ethical *praxīs* disturb Aristotelian poetics. Contemplative *catharsis*, in restoring the relative health and balance of emotions leaves the audience of the artwork freed of troubling passions. While, unlike the discourse of history, poetry entertains universal ideas, fully rational, theoretical contemplation—and therefore true knowledge of being—is never represented by Aristotle as the goal or purpose of poetical works. For Plato, however, the goal of philosophy is not pure contemplative impassivity but the task of integrating philosophical insight, in *phronēsis*, into effective social *praxīs*.

In banishing the poets from the ideal *polis* in the *Republic*, Socrates views the poets as similar to the Sophists, in that the poets do not strive for a consistent understanding of virtue or justice, but are content with the kind of passionate identification on the part of their audiences that Aristotle views as cathartic, but which Socrates sees as feeding and nurturing, rather than cleansing, the passions that make disinterested rational inquiry into justice impossible. On the basis of a philosophical training lasting well into middle age, and crowned by a transcendental conception of justice rooted in the ideal vision of the Form of the Good, the philosophically trained ruler only later in life begins active leadership of the community, at around the age of 50. An all-
important phase of the training of the philosopher-ruler had previously followed on the foundational vision of
the good. After the experience of noetic illumination by the Form of the Good has been absorbed into his/her
view, the philosopher-trainee is then expected to re-enter and re-connect with everyday life and to adapt his
or her philosophical vision to the murky cave-like conditions that prevail in the everyday world. To truly know
the justice to which the philosopher has been introduced, he or she must demonstrate understanding of how
that vision of ideal and absolute justice can find expression in the day-to-day exercise of actual political
leadership and responsibility. Justice is only truly known and understood, in the Republic, in the real-world
context of phronēsis, that is to say, of practical wisdom that applies the ideal of justice in the midst of the
tensions, contradictions, and accommodations of worldly affairs. In order to create room for such a
philosophically-trained leadership, Socrates exiles the poets, making their admittance to the ideal republic
conditional on the conduct of a reasoned argument for their right to inclusion. Socrates reasons:

Therefore, isn’t it just that such poetry should return from exile when it has successfully defended
itself, whether in lyric or any other meter? . . . Then we’ll allow its defenders . . . to speak in prose
on its behalf and to show that it not only gives pleasure but is beneficial both to constitutions and to
human life. Indeed, we’ll listen to them graciously, for we’d certainly profit if poetry were shown to
be not only pleasant but also beneficial. (607d; my emphasis)

The poets and their defenders, then, must accept the discipline of reasoned argument in defense of the
political and social benefit that poetic mimēsis has to offer the community.

Mimēsis figures as a central construct in Plato’s subsequent twin dialogues, the Sophist and the Statesman.
Further light is thrown by these dialogues on the overall range of mimēsis as a construct in Plato’s work and on
the ways in which his view of it has been appropriated by the tradition. Both of these later dialogues feature a
visiting philosopher from Elea, who never receives a name but is simply referred to as the Eleatic Visitor or the
Stranger. Falling apparently close on after the public denunciation of Socrates for impiety and corruption of
youth, Socrates is portrayed in these two dialogues as preferring to quietly listen, but with a sharp ear tuned
for material that will help him answer in court to the trumped up but highly dangerous accusations leveled
against him by his fellow citizen, Meletus. This sobered and preoccupied Socrates is present in these dialogues,
making only a brief appearance in the preliminary discussion of each, and his comments to the Eleatic Stranger
provide clear indications of his interest in the proceedings. In the Sophist, Socrates sets the topic for discussion
that stretches over the two dialogues, and asks the Stranger to identify his preferences for the kind of
discourse he prefers to undertake, whether dialogic, as is the custom in Athens, or rather in a long monologic
speech after the manner of debate common in Elea. In deference to his Athenian hosts, the Stranger rather
reluctantly chooses to speak in dialogue with an interlocutor, on condition that he can choose someone
compliant and cooperative, rather than challenging and assertive. Socrates himself would clearly not fit that
bill, and the young student Theaetetus is chosen as the Stranger’s partner in dialogue. The question for
discussion is set by Socrates, namely, whether there are differences of role and identity for three key figures of
public life: the sophist, the statesman, and the philosopher, with the focus of the Sophist on the distinction
between sophist and philosopher, and of the Statesman devoted to that between statesman and philosopher.

In his response to Socrates’ interest in the way the roles of the sophist, the statesman, and the philosopher are
understood in Elea, the Stranger uses a method of inquiry that lends itself better to monologue than to
dialogue, the so-called method of division (diairesis) in which distinctions are made between qualities shared
and not shared by a given category of beings. At the conclusion of a long, painstaking, and at times dry
exposition, the key division between the sophist and the philosopher falls on the ways in which each employs
the function of mimēsis: that is to say, whether the object of imitation is chosen on the basis of belief and
opinion or on the basis of genuine knowledge. As the Stranger puts it:

Some imitators know what they're imitating and some don't. And what division is more important than the one between ignorance and knowledge? . . . What about the character of justice and all of virtue taken together? Don't many people who are ignorant of it, but have some beliefs about it, try hard to cause what they believe it is to appear to be present in them. . . . I think we have to say that this person, who doesn't know, is a very different imitator from the previous one, who does . . . . Let's distinguish them by calling imitation accompanied by belief "belief-mimicry" and imitation accompanied by knowledge "informed mimicry." . . . . Then we need to use the former term [for the sophist], since the sophist isn't one of the people who know but is one of the people who imitate. (267b-e)

Two things are instructive in this passage regarding the use of mimēsis as a means to establish a clear distinction between the sophist and the philosopher: first, both philosopher and sophist, as he on the one hand who knows and on the other who relies on mere opinion, are held to be practitioners of mimēsis; second, the concluding observation in this passage, that "the sophist isn't one of the people who know but is one of the people who imitate," reverts from a bivalent and undecidably positive and/or negative denotation of the function of mimēsis to a singularly negative and monovalent distinction between knowledge and mimēsis. The sophist who does not know is deemed the one who imitates when in fact the distinction has already been established to be between a knowing mimēsis and a mimēsis of mere opinion. This tendency to foreclose on the more positive significations of mimēsis is also observable in the Republic, where it is argued that philosophical understanding, in its search for knowledge of the transcendent forms, draws—similarly to artistic representation—on mimetic relations between knower and known, but, in like fashion to what we observe here in the Sophist, in Book X of the Republic the term mimēsis is restricted to the less than rational imitation of outward and changeable forms on the part of the artist. Mimēsis is clearly, then, a type of pharmakon, capable of functioning as both medicine and poison, knowledge and mere opinion, reasoned representation of the good or mere rhetorical manipulation designed to persuade in the absence of reasoned argument. We are reminded here of the way in which this instability of signs as such is a key element of the model of human culture in Generative Anthropology. In illuminating this foundationally paradoxical, bivalent character inherent to signs, Generative Anthropology provides in the minimal model of the originary scene a clear demonstration of the paradoxical structure and ethos of human community, of the complex utility and instability of signs, and consequently of the political and legal institutions which they enable.

To recoup the thread of my argument: I began with Gans' observation that classical art as "the first historical esthetic . . . opens the history of art as independent vehicle of anthropological knowledge" (1997 132), and further that the esthetics of Plato and Aristotle point to an inherent indeterminacy in the way we integrate the esthetic domain into our social structures and our understanding. Gans points to a dialectic of Platonic concern with mimetic subversion and Aristotelian embrace of mimetic catharsis. I have argued that the indeterminacy and inevitable alternation between these strategies of control and inclusion contains potential weaknesses in their tendency to foreclose on, rather to probe more deeply into, richly suggestive, and ultimately unavoidable indeterminacies. In holding art close to philosophy, Aristotle renders it firmly subordinate and external to the discourse of reason and knowledge, thereby weakening its potential contribution to our understanding of the complex ways in which questions of value are configured in the context of everyday personal, social, and political decision and policy. Plato, on the other hand, in his concern over the inherently pleasurable, distracting, and rhetorically and ideologically obfuscating powers of artistic representation, tends to foreclose on the deeper potential partnership that is inherent to the mimetic character of all signification, shared equally and in complex fashion by rational and by artistic modes of reflection and representation.
To conclude, I would like to refer to an example of the way in which Aristotelian affirmation of *mimēsis* and concomitant instrumentalization of artistic catharsis can contribute to lines of interpretation and models of culture that reflect current concerns with questions of the human, the humane, and of the place of the humanities. I return to Plato’s *Sophist* and bring to bear the interpretation of this text by Martin Heidegger in the only work of his that treats at length with a Platonic dialogue, the reconstruction of his 1924-25 lecture course that forms Vol. 19 of the collected works, translated into English in 1997 under the title *Plato’s Sophist*. This text runs to 500 pages of close-grained analysis. For that reason and for the perspective it brings to Heidegger’s strategies in his reading of Plato, I draw for my purposes here on the 1997 article by the Plato scholar Francisco J. Gonzalez entitled "On the Way to *Sophia*: Heidegger’s Dialectic, Ethics, and *Sophist*."

The most widely read text by Heidegger on Plato is his essay-length study "Plato’s Doctrine of Truth," published in 1947 in a volume containing his "Letter on Humanism" (see Heidegger, *Pathmarks* 380-381). The association of the essay "Plato’s Doctrine of Truth" with his topical "Letter on Humanism" indicates the key position statement that Heidegger considered himself to be making in his reading, in the former, of Plato’s cave analogy. The essay is one of Heidegger’s most concise explications of his overall critique of metaphysics as the "forgetting of being" and of the ontological difference between being and beings. The juxtaposition of this key position statement in criticism of Plato with his critique of a humanist interpretation of existential phenomenology is a major progenitor of later poststructuralist and current posthumanist theoretical positions.

Gonzalez’ analysis of Heidegger’s study of *Sophist* explores the deeper roots of Heidegger’s reading of Plato and the comparative rôle played by Aristotle’s criticism of his teacher in Heidegger’s interpretation and in his work generally, especially in the formative period leading up to *Being and Time* in 1927. One of the key issues in Plato scholarship regarding the interpretation of the *Sophist* and the *Statesman* is what to make of the reduced rôle played by Socrates in these late dialogues. Does it signify a change in Plato’s thinking, reflected in a changed view of his relationship to the figure of Socrates in Plato’s later work? Gonzalez argues, that several assumptions implicit in Heidegger’s interpretation of the *Sophist* reveal themselves in his valuation of the argument of the Eleatic Stranger and his method of division (*diairesis*). Heidegger fails to notice that Socrates, in his brief appearance at the beginning of the *Statesman*, makes a veiled but highly significant criticism of the Stranger’s use of that method in his previous attempt to clearly distinguish between the sophist and the philosopher in the *Sophist*. Gonzalez argues that Heidegger’s view is that Plato moves significantly away from concern about the good in his later philosophy. Heidegger sees evidence for this in the *Sophist* and the *Statesman*, where he identifies the Stranger and the method of division with the authorial intentions of Plato.

The inability of the method of division to make differentiations regarding value and worth is evidence for Heidegger of Plato’s turn away from questions of value toward distinctions of being. Gonzalez argues that Heidegger ignores the weight of Socrates’ criticism in the *Statesman* of the Stranger’s argument in the *Sophist*, and its failure to make distinctions of value between the three identities of sophist, statesman, and philosopher. Socrates reproaches the Stranger’s host, the mathematician Theodorus, in the opening lines of the *Statesman*: "[Y]ou assumed that each of the three were to be assigned equal worth, when in fact they differ in value by more than can be expressed in terms of mathematical proportion" (257b). In a long and detailed argumentation that I can only summarize, Gonzalez contends that Heidegger, throughout his reading of the *Sophist*, displays a strong alignment with Aristotle’s criticism of Platonic dialectic and the latter’s privileging of ethics over ontology. In a representative passage, Gonzalez argues:

Heidegger sees the Stranger’s method as approximating, though still falling short of, the level of Aristotelian ontology, an ontology uncontaminated by any practical conception of the good or by the unclarity and tentativeness of Socratic dialectic. But it is only with the question of why Aristotle is made the standard here that we arrive at the crucial point: Heidegger finds in both Aristotle and
the Stranger, and not in Socrates or the earlier Plato, his own conception of what philosophy should be. The reason why he defends, without argument and even at the cost of inconsistency, the view that Plato in the later dialogues abandoned the idea of the good along with the ethical orientation of Socratic dialectic is his belief that this is what Plato should have done. (47).

Gonzalez finds in Heidegger's clear alignment with an Aristotelian reading of Plato the source of Heidegger's rejection of all questions of ethics in relation to his phenomenological ontology. The seminal influence of the Heideggerian critique of humanist concern with questions of value, I suggest, carries with it Heidegger’s strong preference for an Aristotelian disjunction between questions of value and questions of being, between phronesis and théoria, and a structural bias toward a conception of theory as ontological science, abstracted from questions of ethical value.

To speak emblematically, in conclusion, the perplexing and disturbing course of Heidegger’s own political alignments should give us serious pause regarding the potential implications of such an aggressively non-ethical theoretical orientation. While the complexities, paradoxes, and indeterminacies of ethical reflection may have the potential to subvert confidence in our clear grasp of truths and decisiveness about issues, there is no real refuge from the social, political, and indeed personal process of ethical debate and pursuit of a constitutively elusive consensus regarding values. Generative Anthropology situates itself in this uneasy tension—explicit from the beginning of the theoretical tradition, and still exemplary of it—between theoretical analysis and the questioning of values. GA’s preoccupation with the practical rootedness of theory and of value in the avoidance of violence and the task of community situates it in conversation with its philosophical tradition.

Works Cited


**Notes**

1. On the significance of the break on the part of philosophy with mythic thought and integral relation to the emergence of the legal and political institutions of the *polis*, see Jean-Pierre Vernant, *The Origins of Greek Thought*: "The desacralization of knowledge, the advent of a kind of thought foreign to religion—these were not isolated and incomprehensible phenomena. In its form, philosophy is directly linked to the spiritual realm that we have seen give order to the city, and which was so distinctly characterized by the secularization and rationalization of social life. But philosophy's dependence on the institutions of the *polis* is no less marked in its content" (107-108). [back]

2. "Letter on Humanism" is a response to a number of questions addressed to Heidegger by Jean Beaufret, provoking a rare engagement of Heidegger with the work of another contemporary philosopher. Both Beaufret's questions and Heidegger's response refer to Jean-Paul Sartre's, *Existentialism Is a Humanism* (Paris: Nagel, 1946). [back]
What propels narratives forward? Narrative as Janus

Marina Ludwigs

In Ann Beattie’s short story entitled "Janus," the protagonist, Andrea, is a real estate agent who has a mysterious relationship with an enigmatic white bowl. The bowl is both an object d’art and a lucky charm that she totes around with her as part of her home staging strategies before the sale. The bowl, which is "not at all ostentatious," (454) has, however, "real presence" (453)—it is "both subtle and noticeable a paradox of a bowl" (453). By creating an unobtrusive point of interest, the bowl is supposed to make the house look more presentable, inviting, and homey. Andrea resorts to it as part of her repertoire of "tricks used to convince a buyer that the house is quite special" (453). It is used along with a pet toy, a flower arrangement on the kitchen counter, and a "drop of scent vaporizing from a light bulb" (453). But, at the same time, it is more significant to her than those other home-staging props. To begin with, Andrea believes that the bowl brings her luck since "bids were often put in on houses where she had displayed the bowl" (454). Also, as the story develops, the reader becomes aware that there is something irregular about Andrea’s strange attachment to the bowl. For example, she becomes obsessed about forgetting it at a client’s house or breaking it. She also gets up at night to check that it is still there, or lies sleepless, observing it. Her behaviour makes no sense until the very conclusion of the story, when it is casually mentioned, almost as an afterthought, that the bowl was a present from Andrea’s lover. The lover wanted her to leave her husband for him, but as Andrea couldn’t make up her mind, he said to her that "she was always too slow to know what she really loved"(456). "'Why be two-faced,' he asked her" before leaving (456). The word "two-faced" is the only Janus reference in the story. The Roman god Janus is the God of beginnings, endings, gateways, passages, and transitions. He is depicted as having two faces—each facing away from the other: one looking into the future, another into the past. The expression "Janus-faced" may refer to duplicity or deception—hence the lover’s invocation of the idea of two-facedness in reference to Andrea’s indecision, her desire to keep both her lover and her husband. But there is also another reference to the idea of time’s directionality, which Janus symbolizes. One head’s orientation towards the past is alluded to in the lover’s comment, "she was always too slow to know what she really loved," implying that our insights often are of a retrospective nature, ambushing us when it is too late to fix things. It is only after it is too late—only after the lover leaves Andrea—that she realizes what he has meant for her. And in this sense, we can interpret the bowl as a symbolic receptacle of her suppressed regret. But apart from this thematic connection, there is yet another idea connected to Janus: a metanarrative one. Janus symbolizes the narrativity of narratives. When the readers learn at the very last moment that the bowl has a special history, they are urged to go back to the beginning of the story and re-think and re-assign accents and meanings.

This retroactive action on the part of the reader—the shuttling back and forth between the past and the future—is built into the very process of reading a narrative, which is a literary form that possesses an intrinsic doubleness because the story that is narrated (in the past, usually) has already happened: it is a canny, not a naive genre. In addition, it is a dialogical genre involving the narrator and the narratee. According to David Herman, storytellers and interpreters collaborate on "the process of co-creating narrative worlds, or ‘storyworlds’" (15). He and other narratologists suggest that the reader has an active role in the way a story is "performed," which involves continual, "real time," scanning and re-interpretation. The readers project their expectations of possible endings towards the future since the effect of the plot depends to a large extent on our familiarity with the typology of possible plots. Roland Barthes names this phenomenon "déjà-lu," or "already-read," talking about the very possibility of recognizable cultural codes in the context of intertextuality: "Whoever reads the text amasses certain data under some generic titles for actions" (19) that are absorbed as cultural codes. The reader vis-a-vis the text "is not an innocent subject that is anterior to texts... The I that approaches the text is itself already a plurality of other texts" (10). But
as we scan forwards in an expectant attitude toward a projected closure, we also scan backwards, trying to bridge textual gaps and reconcile competing interpretation, as has been pointed out by Meir Sternberg.

Sternberg’s so-called functionalist model, which resembles most closely the reader response model, is attuned to the doubleness of narratives mentioned above. Sternberg, who says claims that “narrative is a construct of our minds” (“Reconceptualizing Narratology” 48), mentions three master strategies of reading or three reading interests: suspense, surprise, and curiosity. The moment of surprise, which I will put aside in this article, is a pregnant moment of misrecognition followed by recognition. I will concentrate instead on the forward or proleptic movement of suspense and the backward or retrospective movement of curiosity. According to Sternberg, "Suspense derives from a lack of desired information concerning the outcome of a conflict that is to take place in the narrative future, a lack that involves a clash of hope and fear, whereas curiosity is produced by a lack of information that relates to the narrative past, a time when struggles have already been resolved, and as such, it often involves an interest in the information for its own sake" (Expositional Modes 65). Both curiosity and suspense are active states of mind. Sternberg points out that "suspense [emphasis in original] arises from rival scenarios about the future"("Narrativity Makes a Difference" 117) and thus involves projecting ahead various plot possibilities and gradually ruling them out. Curiosity also involves the revision of various possibilities, in this case, the past-oriented inference of gapped antecedents, answering questions such as "what is this character’s secret?" or "what was his motivation in doing so and so?" Another thing that must be added here is that Sternberg’s insight about the retrospective orientation of narrative interests dovetails nicely with the views of other narratologists, among them Gerald Prince, who observed that teleological thinking is applicable to narratives. For example, instead of saying that John and Mary got married and then got divorced, we could say that John and Mary got married in order to get a divorce (so that a story could be developed around their situation).

In the Janus story by Beattie, the reader’s trajectory of suspense is a symmetrical reflection of the protagonist’s sense of anxiety. The importance of the bowl appears to grow: the more prosperous she becomes as a real estate agent, the more she begins to invest the bowl with supernatural powers, attributing to it the success of her career, as if it were a magic object. As Andrea’s obsession with the bowl becomes more intense and her actions regarding its placement and removal more secretive and ritualistic, she begins to dread that the bowl would break and wonder “what her life would be without the bowl.” It is interesting that the reader’s reading of this story parallels the protagonist’s reading of her own story. Both the reader and the focalized consciousness (which, in this case, coincides with the narrating perspective) are oriented towards the ending and are conscious of the looming moment of the inevitable resolution. It is with growing dread that Andrea is anticipating the final calamity—the bowl’s destruction or disappearance—and the reader is also awaiting the ending, but in the mood of suspense, rather than anxiety. Will Andrea’s bowl break or be lost? And if so, how? Under what circumstances? But instead of culminating in an event, the narrative resolves itself by divulging the key piece of information about the history of the bowl: now the reader knows about the lover. At this point, the reader’s focus shifts to the past in an attitude of curiosity that pursues information for information’s sake. Re-read through the lens of new knowledge, some details acquire different, additional layers of meaning. For example, when the protagonist says that losing the bowl would be like losing a lover, we know that she is not just speaking abstractly but with a real lover in mind, and that her feeling of foreboding towards the eventual loss of the bowl is sparked off by the earlier loss of the lover. Thus the retrospective movement of curiosity, which, according to Sternberg, consists in going back and manipulating the past by bridging the gaps in the story, supplements the future-oriented movement of suspense. The two narrative orientations work in concert, creating a convoluted, oscillatory, see-saw motion, which takes us on an aesthetic and interpretative journey.

As already mentioned, one interesting and important point that Sternberg makes is that narration is not a structure (or not just a structure) but a construct of our minds: it is a phenomenon located in the realm of consciousness. A narration is what we do, what unfolds in our minds, what we perform on an imaginary scene of representation (as I would re-frame it in Gansian terms), and not just an object of study vis-à-vis the human subject. Sternberg’s main argument is with academics working in the field of structural analysis who seek structural explanations to narrative’s dynamic and temporal characteristics, such as cataloguing different types of plot or charting chronologies of various subplots. Sternberg’s functionalist model, as I have already said, is not dissimilar to the reader response approach. The main difference, as I understand it, is that he tries to keep the language more objective and free from psychological connotations. Thus, the three narrative interests is something that is inherent in narrative itself rather than reflective of the reader’s
subjective and psychological state of mind. I would like to suggest that the tension between the structural and functionalist approaches to narratology can perhaps be seen as a literary analogy of a similar conflict in musicology—the chasm between the structural analysis of Heinrich Schenker, which lays emphasis on form and hierarchy, and the phenomenological analysis of Leonard Meyer, which is interested in the dynamics of perception, expectation, and emotions. The first approach has greater explanatory power, insofar as it allows us to see the structure at a glance, while the second approach, in paying attention to tension and release, is capable of accounting for the temporal experience of narrative, which is, after all, a temporal genre. But could we have a theory that does both, combining the strengths of both approaches?

It seems to me that the next stepping stone is Peter Brooks's "narrative desire." Brooks’s contention is that we cannot fully understand narrative without taking cognizance of the engine of desire that drives it. The notion of desire is functionally similar to Sternberg’s suspense. In fact, in describing suspense, Sternberg uses the language of desire, as in the quote above, when he talks about suspense as "a clash of hope and fear" (Expositional Modes 65)—the terms of personal investment—as opposed to the indifferent interest of curiosity, which is seeking information for information’s sake. Even though we desire satisfaction when in the mood of suspense, the phenomenon of desire cannot be reduced to expectation and resolution. Brooks connects desire to the notion of energy (a more explanatory model, as I will show), borrowing from Freud’s psychoanalysis and writing that "since psychoanalysis presents a dynamic model of psychic processes, it offers the hope of a model pertinent to the dynamics of texts" (36) Freud’s intuition about the way the human psyche works is couched in terms reminiscent of thermodynamic theory. We can, for the moment, put aside the question of primacy, that is to say, of whether thermodynamic theory can be seen as a metaphor for the operations of the psyche or whether science itself used phenomenological insights as a metaphor in order to create its operational abstractions. Instead, we can, by acknowledging analogies, extract productive and useful similarities. Thus, to reiterate the title question of this paper: what drives a narrative forward? As per Brooks, it is driven forward and onward by the force of narrative desire. "Desire as Eros," writes Brooks, "appears ... central to our experience of reading narrative" (37), and in fact, "Desire is always there at the start of a narrative, often in the state of initial arousal, often having reached a state of intensity such that movement must be created, action undertaken, change begun" (37-38).

But in comparing desire to a drive or force, we do not yet place it in the domain of thermodynamics. What completes the thermodynamic analogy is Freud’s economy of drives. Drives may either exist in the balance of homeostasis or the state of dissipation. The homeostatic model is that of a perpetual motion machine, which works without a loss of energy when it is transferred from one state to another. Its thermodynamic profile is that of eternal circulation of energy according to the principle of declining from equilibrium and then recharging and returning to the zero point. In limited contexts, it is possible to conceptualize narrative desire in terms of the homeostatic model, for example as the Freytag pyramid of dramatic structure, where the swell of rising action to the point of the climax has to be counteracted by the subsiding effect of the falling action. Once the energy has been restored, the process of rise and fall can start anew. But as both Freud and Brooks suggest, there can be no recuperation of expended energy: something is inevitably lost. What in Freud is the death drive (originally, the nirvana principle), which is an urge on the part of organic life to return to the inorganic state (that is to say, the state of complete relaxation and release, of zero tension), is interpreted by Brooks within the domain of narrativity through the ideas of consummation and consumption, which defines the paradox of the narrative plot.

On the one hand, we want the narrated events to restore their balance and the storyline to reach its conclusion (consumption). But on the other hand, we don’t want the narrative reach its end, because when it comes to the end, we will have consumed the narrative we are reading, thus extinguishing our reading existence, metaphorically speaking. "If the motor of narrative is desire," says Brooks, "totalizing, building ever-larger units of meaning, the ultimate determinants of meaning lie at the end, and narrative desire is ultimately, inexorably, desire for the end" (52). The ambiguity of narrative desire amounts to a tugging in two directions, insofar as we both desire and resist the ending. Brooks’s explanation of this doubleness on a deeper level is the doubleness of language itself, its "dialogic dynamic": "The narrative act discovers, and makes use of, the intersubjective nature of language itself, medium for the exchange of narrative understanding" (60). He illuminates this perspective with the One-thousand-and-one Nights frame narrative, that of Shahrazad and the Sultan. The two characters’ desires are at cross-purposes: while the Sultan wants to come to the end of the story, Shahrazad wants to prolong the story-telling moment because she knows that she will be killed when the story is over. In this very apt illustration, the former
comes to embody the desire of consummation, while the latter personifies the resistance to being consumed.

The ambivalence of narrative desire encompasses both a psychological awareness of contradiction, of simultaneous attraction and repulsion, as well as the phenomenological systole-diastole experience of effort and resistance. This complexity captures something essential about the essence of energy as it manifests itself in real-life situations, subject to the Second Law of Thermodynamics, which says that it is impossible to do any kind of work without loss. I propose that we can apply the idea of a dissipative thermodynamic system as a helpful metaphor when thinking about narrativity. Narrative desire is dissipative in the sense that it dissipates its store of energy in an irreversible process that is measured by the abstract quantity called entropy. The more energy is dissipated, the higher the rise in entropy. Because the loss of energy is irreversible, the rise in entropy is associated with the arrow of time. To take some concrete examples, we can imagine the burning of a match or a dissolution of salt in water—both are processes that cannot be re-launched in the opposite direction. Entropy, however, is also associated with the notion of information in information theory as a measure of disorder or uncertainty. While the underlying physical principle, on which the connection between the energetic notion of entropy and informational entropy is based, is not yet fully understood, the commonsensical connection between the loss of energy and the loss of information could be intuited from the following classic example is of mixing two quantities of the same gas at two different temperatures, cold and hot. As the resulting mixture becomes lukewarm, the original distinction between the hot and the cold spot is lost. What does this imply? Since the act of registering a difference between something and something else amounts to gleaning some information, we can say that differentiation can encode a bit of information. But now that the difference is erased, we can see the fact of erasure as loss of information.

If we were then to apply these energist terms to narrative desire, we would say that what is lost is the narrative in the act of its consumption. Just as we cannot un-carbonize a burned match, we cannot unread a book. As the clock is ticking, and we are engrossed in our reading, advancing further and further through the story, we can see more and more of the text being consumed. But the opposite process, which is taking place at the same time, is also true: the story gradually enters our consciousness, and the total amount of information at our disposal is growing and growing. As we consume the narrative, we learn more and more, become more and more savvy, and are incapable of blotting out what we have just found out unless we suffer from some cognitive disorder. From the perspective of consciousness or information, our knowledge keeps increasing in size and complexity, and the entropy measuring information keeps decreasing (keeping with the definition that connects high entropy to disorder). One way this increase could be interpreted, I would like to claim, is as the opposite stream of time (insofar as the arrow of time is inextricably linked to the growth of entropy). Entropy on the decrease means the same thing as time flowing in the opposite direction.

I thus present a claim that a full understanding of narrativity means understanding it as a process or performance that has two currents of time going in different directions, from the past to the future, and from the future to the past. The movement from the past toward the future occurs within the energist paradigm, in the world of activity, work, consumption, effort and resistance, and leads to loss—the loss of innocence, which accompanies the reading experience, and the attrition of future possibilities, as we eliminate rival scenarios in our suspenseful projection of a resolution. The opposite direction of time takes place in the realm of knowledge, consciousness, or information. It is the direction of gain. What is gained is experience, wisdom, hindsight, and the accrual of the database of memory.

The idea of the two opposing streams of time receives a playful treatment in the 1966 Soviet science fiction novel *Monday Begins on Saturday* by Arkadi and Boris Strugatski—a cult Soviet-era book that satirizes scientific research and university politics. The story is set in a fictional research institute of magic and spellcraft. Alexander, the protagonist, together with his friends and colleagues is trying to solve the mystery of the Institute Director, called Janus, who exists in two persons, Janus-A and Janus-U. Janus-A is the administrator. He is cold, business-like, and youngish-looking. Janus-U, the scientist, is warm, friendly, and seems somewhat older than his counterpart. While Janus-A is bland and completely normal, Janus-U is known for certain oddities in his behavior. He always asks people he meets whether they met yesterday and, if so, what they talked about. He has an uncanny ability to foresee the future, and he always disappears at midnight into his room, and when he comes out, he never remembers what took place.
Ludwigs - Narrative as Janus

Earlier, while the protagonist of the novel is new to the world of magic, his friends are experienced magicians and are not easily stumped by the supernatural. However, even for them, there is a limit to what they can accept. Some basic laws of nature should not be broken, such as the law of cause and effect. What prompts their investigation is a string of strange occurrences. One day, one of the characters finds a green feather in the laboratory furnace. The next day, he finds a dead green parrot in the Petri dish. Later, Janus-U walks into the lab, finds the parrot, and cremates it in the furnace. The day after, the same green parrot hobbles into the room, flies up awkwardly, alights on the Petri dish, and dies. And finally, on the third day, the same parrot flies into the room, looking quite healthy and vigorous, and starts talking about futuristic topics, where he mentions upcoming future events concerning the people who are witnessing the scene, including future deaths. This time, as well, Janus-U walks into the room and behaves matter-of-factly, as if he expects everyone to be familiar with the parrot. After Janus leaves, a long discussion ensues between the scientists, and the solution to the riddle, proposed by the protagonist, is that Janus-U and his bird have discovered the secret of counter-motion—the movement back in time. The reason Janus and the parrot are not walking, flying, and talking in a funny back-to-front way is because their counter-motion is discrete, not continuous: when the clock strikes midnight, they transit forty-eight hours back in time. As Janus-U is sliding backward, Janus-A is moving forward in time, co-existing in parallel and not crossing the paths with his counter-moving copy. When the characters finally solve the mystery of one Janus in two copies, they begin to feel sorry for the U copy, because his consciousness exists in the state of perpetual belatedness: he can never enjoy the fruit of his scientific labor; neither can he correct the mistakes of the others and influence their behavior, the (sometimes disastrous) results of which he has seen in his own past.

Besides being an interesting and clever twist, the story of two Januses looking in opposite directions possesses a metanarrative significance. The administrative Janus, who moves forward into the future together with the protagonists, represents the efficacy and power of the narrative engine, which drives narrative desire toward closure. The scientific Janus, who moves from the future into the past, represents, on the other hand, the reversed direction of narrative knowledge, which flips the natural causal order on its head and views the future outcome as the final cause of current circumstances, a sad and ultimately pessimistic outlook, albeit controverted by Janus-U himself in his parting words to Alexander: "try to understand...that a single future does not exist for everyone. They are many, and each one of your actions creates one of them" (214). (Janus's area of research, incidentally, is alternative universes).

Now I will finally connect my argument to the derivation of narrative in Generative Anthropology. Both Sternberg's important insights about the forward and backward directions of narrative interests, as well as Brooks's valuable description of narrative desire in energist terms do not provide a fully satisfactory explanatory derivation of these narrative features. We need to go further or "dig deeper" toward the origin of language in order to understand narrative's Janus-like structure. The doubleness of narrative strikes me as central not only to its aesthetic effect but also to the meaning of meaning. It captures the originary doubleness that springs into existence with the origin of the sign, the double consciousness that designates the central object while retaining the prelinguistic memory of its appetitive value. The doubleness of the sign is expressed in the idea of oscillation, which I find very poignant and richly explanatory of various paradoxical symbolic configurations. The oscillation between sign and referent is expressive of the ambivalent relationship of the sign-emitter to the object of mimetic desire: one moment it is a real object waiting to be consumed, another, it is a prohibited sacred object. As Eric Gans explains in Signs of Paradox, "the subject attempting to forget the sign's reminder of triangular mediation in order to possess the thing in itself is continually thrown back upon this mediation when the thing-in-itself vanishes before his eyes. The object can be appropriated imaginarily only through the sign; this is the origin of the specifically human imagination" (140). The element of the originary hypothesis that I want to emphasize is the idea that the embryonic projective-retrospective narrative movement is born with the sign. The sign already contains within itself the two minimal temporal potentialities, the forward one, which is described in energist and active terms, and the backward, passive one that carries information. The future orientation is inherent in the gesture of appropriation that is generated by the triangular mimetic configuration. It is the attraction that pulls the participants on the scene of representation forward, toward the appetitive object that is just on the verge of becoming an interdicted object. The past orientation is manifested through deterrence that the original mimetic crisis creates when "in violation of the dominance hierarchy, all hands reach out for the object; but at the same time each is deterred from appropriating by the sight of all the others reaching in the same direction. The 'fearful symmetry' of the situation makes it impossible for any one participant to
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defy the others and pursue the gesture to its conclusion" (Gans, *Originary Thinking* 8). What is the source of this fearful symmetry if not some vestige of retroactive wisdom, some information carried from the future and "implanted" into the minds of the participants of the originary scene regarding the way such conflictual situations usually resolve themselves, the knowledge that translates into the repelling force of fear and awe that the sacred center inspires in sign users?

From these minimal temporal potentialities, the originary narrative is born as the temporalization of the sign. "The sign," as Gans puts it in the article "Originary Narrative," "tells the story of its own emergence," at the same time as "originary narrative tells the story of the sign's constitution and deconstitution, of its constitution as separate from its original object and of the worldly consequence of this separation at the moment of deconstitution for the resented object itself." The essence of this story is the "generation of transcendence from immanence." What this implies is the origin of meaning: "The deferral of appropriation gives the object meaning, and this meaning in turn 'gives meaning' to the original gesture, which sought the assimilation of the object and, with it, the abolition of its meaningful identity. What is meaningful is what resists assimilation and causes it to be deferred. The sign is the 'story' of this resistance."

I would now like to take these ideas of separation and resistance to assimilation and look at them through the lens of images and ideas from the realm of thermodynamics and consider them in the context of the inexorable rise of entropy, which marks the passage of time. The origin of language is, at the same time, the origin of differentiation. As Gans has shown, it is not accurate to speak of what we could call "representational spaces." Symbolic representation is not merely spatial, but is scenic, which is another way of saying that it creates a differentiated space, the space that is not homogeneous, neither smooth, nor equally structured, stretched, and distributed in all directions. It is differentiated in the sense that it consists of two parts that have different attributes, the center and the periphery, with the center having a privileged position over the periphery and acting as a point of attraction. Differentiated space is intimately connected to the energetic model of narrative. The differentiation between a point-like central space and a large periphery creates force and acceleration. The privileged central space exerts a gravitational pull on the peripheral players through the gradient of desire. Mimetic desire acts as a glue that orients peripheral players towards the shared object of attention in a triangular configuration. Cognitive scientists and linguists would call it joint attention, but the concept of joint attention, while compatible with the GA understanding of language, is too static and grows out of the model of language as communication, which is oblivious to its anthropological underpinnings. The triangular configuration in GA is neither static, nor does it exist in the state of equilibrium. The force of mimetic desire is momentum-building: it quickens the movement of desire along its narrowing path towards the bottlenecking apex. This is where, I believe, the force of linguistic performativity is born.

Another analogy I would like to offer is from the field of statistical mechanics, where an alternative explanation of the growth of entropy is articulated. While in thermodynamics, the rise in entropy is a purely empirical law that does not have any deeper explanation, in statistical mechanics, it receives a simple statistical interpretation: entropy is the measure of unpredictability or missing information. As the system evolves, it develops in more stable and predictable ways towards configurations that are more likely. What this usually means is that these are macrostates (like temperature) which consist of a large number of microstates (such as descriptions of individual molecules). The reason these configurations are more likely is that each microstate might not be of interest to us, but the larger the number of microstates that make up the macrostate, the greater the likelihood that this macrostate will occur, and the less information the fact of its occurrence will carry. It might help to imagine a marching band that performs in a certain formation. When all the members keep their correct spots in this formation, the audience experiences this arrangement as order. But let us imagine that a band comes to a stop. After a while, individual members become tired of standing in the same place and start dispersing gradually. The arrangement now looks disordered. If we knew all the individual band members, each arrangement that declined from the prescribed one would still be unique: "now John is standing here, and Pete there, and now John is over there, and Pete is over here." But in a general case, the audience does not know the participants and does not care who is standing where. Because there are infinitely many more disorderly ways in which band members may be standing, compared to the only one that interests us, when the musicians are all lined up in neat rows, we lump them together as indifferent states of undifferentiated hordes. The system thus evolves from individuation to non-individuation, from focusing to defocusing.
There is an interesting corollary to this. The Second Law of Thermodynamics (which describes a dissipation of energy) is only operational in situations when we are interested or not interested in specific configurations, that is to say in situations when the question of particles being differentiated vs. non-differentiated, distinguishable vs. indistinguishable, or interchangeable vs. non-interchangeable becomes an issue. The problem of particles having distinct identities is intimately related to the probabilistic model of reality—the view that incorporates uncertainty and randomness. And this makes sense. Objects can only be seen as individuals when they can be lost and found, expected or unexpected, in other words, when they cannot always be traced and followed but can disappear into the background. The paths of the objects of deterministic classical mechanics are always known; therefore the dichotomy between distinguishability and non-distinguishability is not applicable to the Newtonian universe.

I will now come to the most speculative part of my paper and suggest that mimetic desire is a glue that creates similar dynamics to the one that exists in a probabilistically described dissipative system. The focusing of attention on one central object is what makes it individual and individuated. A moment ago I had no interest in this object, but all of a sudden, I notice that someone else is paying attention to it. It is discerned from all other objects in the moment mimetic desires have converged on it. Focusing attention on an object in an attempt to consume it, mimetic desire differentiates it from other objects by giving it individuality. The object resists assimilation and pushes back, and in doing so, makes the appropriating gesture meaningful. This is how Gans's idea that "what is meaningful is what resists assimilation" can be additionally interpreted. The detail that I want to add to the GA insight about deferral through resistance is that the narrative unfolding of the sign follows a "thermodynamic" logic: namely it pushes forward, toward the future as energy and turns back in time as information.

My final speculation attempts to respond in a very schematic way to the questions of what is the meaning of the loss of entropy in the forward movement of narrative (what exactly is lost and why?) and why is it necessary to conceive of the retrospective narrative interest as an actual time reversal rather than in the more intuitive terms of a backward glance? I would like to suggest that what is lost is other undifferentiated possibilities resulting in choices not made, options not taken, rival scenarios ruled out, and alternative universes cut off. Instead, a particular future, locked into place by this particular scenario, is launched into existence by determining the preceding events teleologically and unleashing a chain of causes and effects back into the past. This supports the narratological intuition, expressed in different ways by different narratologists, that narratives are governed by the circular structure of predestination (i.e., the already mentioned "John and Mary got married in order to get a divorce"). I would like to call this narrative logic of unfolding "the providential structure." The sentiment to which this logic gives rise becomes especially acute and resonant in narratives of vocation and confessional narratives. Every choice becomes providential insofar as it activates the workings of destiny: "I made a choice to become an artist because it was meant to be: I was born to become an artist." Did my destiny rule my choice, or did my choice rule my destiny?

I will finish by mentioning some recent quantum experiments that are referred to as quantum eraser experiments. They seem to suggest that retrocausality and reverse time travel are not just ideas that belong in science fiction. What was postulated in the twentieth century as a thought experiment about entangled particles (entanglement in itself is an interesting idea that deserves some thought in the context of GA because when I desire something mimetically, I become entangled with my model) has been experimentally confirmed by, for example, an experiment at the University of Vienna in 2011, the results of which were published in 2012 ("A Non-Causal Quantum Eraser"). The conjecture that the experiment was set up to test was that entanglement can be produced a posteriori. To do so, one experimenter makes a decision as to whether to create an entanglement between two pairs of photons, and another pair of experimenters measure the particles to see whether they're entangled or not (whether they behave as particles or as waves). The surprising thing is that the measurement is made before the decision is made—and it is always accurate! The result seems to suggest that particles "know" before the experimenter what he or she is going to decide. This experiment might be uncovering something interesting about the nature of consciousness—something about its agglutinant quality that can produce entanglement and, thus, triadic structures of thought, which, in turn, make possible the origin and evolution of symbolic thinking.

References


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The Demand for Purity: The Nature of Islamist Symbolism, Protest, and Violence

Dawn Perlmutter

The apparent universality of the cultural concept(1) would tend to suggest that purity is an inherent quality of the sacred. From Rene Girard's anthropological perspective, the desire for purity and the fear of impurity have roots in the violent rituals of the scapegoat mechanism, and are at bottom motivated by a deeply learned fear of the contagion of imitative violence.(2) In Generative Anthropology, purity is surely a quality of the inviolable center established by the sign, and impurity thus an attribute of any human being who dared arrogate that center to him or herself. As this could in principle be any desiring human being whose attention was attracted by that center, one might imagine impurity becoming established as the prevailing attribute of the "profane" periphery, and purity a quality aspired to by all those—again, in principle everyone—who sought to partake of the peace and other rewards apparently proffered by the center. Western psychology, meanwhile, might strip such concerns of their religious and socially functional aspects and diagnose the demand for purity as a form of obsessive-compulsive disorder (OCD). In any case, purification rituals are found in all known cultures and religions, are expressed in a wide variety of forms, and function to remove specifically defined uncleanness especially prior to the worship of a deity. This essay will survey the concepts and practices related to purity in Islam, arguing that this universal religious impulse, particularly strong in Islam, has been skillfully exploited by Islamists. In brief, Islamists make use of a visceral shaming code to try to prevent any form of religious moderation or cultural assimilation, to evoke primal fear and dread of deviating from Islamic law and to prompt violence when the sacred is being threatened. Islamists seek to achieve this by continually designating others as filthy unbelievers who contaminate the purity of Islamic true believers, their sacred objects, holy personages and hallowed spaces.

Purity in Islam

As in other cultures, including those of the West in various historical eras, purity in Islam is both a psychological and physical state of being that functions to instill and enforce the traditions and taboos of its culture. Purity is equated to honor, is considered a moral virtue and more than any other attribute regulates every aspect of individual and group conduct. It is achieved by following strict rituals such as ablutions/ritual washing, prayer and observing dietary rules, sexual conventions and social customs. Purity is intrinsically related to and defined by impurity. Often referred to as ritual uncleanness, impurity is an inherent quality of taboo things and manifested in defilement of a person and desecration of the sacred. Impurity is typically associated with enemies, corpses, bodily functions, corruption, social upheaval, violence, illness, strange, anomalous or inexplicable phenomena and contact with "others." Impurity is experienced as a form of contagion because it is believed that it may spread from one individual or object to other members of society. Impurity is also experienced as dishonor particularly when manifested in sexual violations, enemy occupation and acts of desecration. Taboos surrounding hygiene, food, sexual and other customs are intrinsically associated with impurity. Significantly, impurity is what gives taboos their efficacy; violation of taboos, customs and tradition results in ritual uncleanness that requires purification rites. Like purity, impurity is both a psychological and physical state of being. True believers experience ritual uncleanness as an impurity of the soul as much as of the body, and for this reason it cannot be washed away with water and soap. The ritually unclean person must be cleansed through strong rites. Additionally, places and objects can be designated as unclean or desecrated requiring purification rites.

The essence of the Islamic symbolic code is found in Islamic rites of purity that function as ritualization, a form of repetitive symbolic conditioning. Ritualization through strict rules on diet, hygiene, sex and daily ablutions (ritual washing) reinforces distinctions between believers and unbelievers, deeply embeds visceral responses that can make it difficult or even unbearable to assimilate to other traditions, and strengthens allegiance to Islam. In psychological terms rites of purity serve to instill feelings of fear and shame when a devout believer deviates from sharia law. Symbolically, purification rituals are magical rites that remove uncleanness, purge taints, nullify pollution, prevent contagion and restore purity. Socially, rites of purity are a method of preventing Muslims from conforming to the customs of other cultures, including those of the West. This is reinforced by strict religious obligations and images, language, and rituals that implicitly demarcate specific things as unclean, particularly unbelievers.

Islamic Purification Rites: Ritualizing Bodily Functions

Taharah, translated as purity, is an intrinsic element of Islam and has both physical and spiritual aspects. Physical purity requires Muslims to observe cleanliness of their body, clothes and surroundings by avoiding contact with designated impure things, necessitating the process of ritual purification. Spiritual purity, referred to as Tazkiyatun nafs, purification of the soul, is observed through righteous living, is obligatory for closeness to God and a prerequisite for entering Paradise. The spiritual
struggle for self-purification is described as the greater jihad, an internal effort to lead a pure good life. Self-purification as the sole definition of jihad is the meaning that Islamist apologists choose to focus on, as opposed to holy war, the physical outer struggle of jihad, a purification of Islam through violence. The two aspects of jihad are intrinsically intertwined, however, because the Islamic demand for purity encompasses both the personal and the political. Personal jihad purifies through water. Political jihad purifies through blood.

Rites of purity are derived from Islamic theology mandated in the Quran that prescribe a large number of purity related rules inclusive of physical hygiene, ritual ablutions, dietary laws and customs such as removing shoes when entering homes or mosques. Spiritual and physical purity are interrelated and not viewed as two different and opposing things, hence, all purification rites, even ritual washing, are considered acts of worship. Physical and spiritual purity is maintained through strict adherence to sharia law. Islamic purification rituals are primarily centered on the preparation for ritual prayer and take the form of ablution (ritual cleansing), in a lesser form, and greater form, depending on the circumstance. Ablution is required because when you are ritually unclean, you are impure to God and prohibited from performing acts of worship such as prayer. Ablution is also required for handling or reading of the Quran. Since one of the five Pillars of Islam, Salat, requires prayer five times a day, purification rituals occur at least five times a day and sometimes more often if the ablution has been nullified or additional rituals are required. There are two primary forms of ablution: the partial ablation referred to as wudu and the complete ablation referred to as ghusl. In addition, there is a symbolic or dry ablution referred to as tayammum that is used when no water is available or a person cannot use water because of reasons of health. Every ritual act including ablution requires intention in one's heart to perform the ritual for the sake of Allah. Before every ritual act, one must declare that one's intention, referred to as Niyah, is worship and purity. Without sincerity of heart, ablutions are devoid of faith and do not differ from ordinary washing. Wudu which is performed at least five times each day before prayer involves very detailed ritualized activities inclusive of washing the hands, face, arms, ears, neck, feet, rinsing out the mouth and cleansing the nostrils. These acts are done in very specific order, and many of the specific acts have to be repeated three times. Ghusl, the full ablution is a complete ritual bath that in addition to performing all of the acts required in wudu also includes ritual washing private parts and hair also in specific order and for a prescribed number of times for each action.

Repetitive rituals function to inculcate a symbolic code, but it is the actions that invalidate the purified state that provide particularly unique insights into the nature of true believers. Commonly referred to as “breaking wudu”, actions that invalidate the purified state include defecation, urination, passing gas, emission of semen, sleep, passing blood, vomiting, loss of senses, intoxication and other specified conditions. The following circumstances also nullify wudu and require the full ablution: sexual intercourse, wet dreams, the expiration of a women's menstrual period and childbirth. Essentially, all natural bodily functions are designated as impure and require further ablutions in addition to the five ritual washings before prayer each day. Anthropologist Fuad I. Khuri confirms that

According to Islamic shari'a, washing for purification should be carried out after reaching orgasm through intercourse, masturbation or wet dreams; after menstruation and parturition; after death or touching the dead. In other situations such as touching dogs or pigs, or any other polluted objects, washing is commended, but not compulsory... In general, Islam requires the faithful to pray five times a day, and every prayer is preceded by ablution which entails washing the face, the hands and the feet. The body should also be purified whenever it comes in contact with polluting objects either through secretions—urine, semen, solid waste, menstrual blood, and the like; or by contagion, such as touching the dead, dogs or pigs. Obviously, the intensity of prayer and the purification rituals that follow continuously urge the faithful to seek personal spiritual fulfillment. This ritualistic approach to spirituality is reinforced by the popular usage of interjections that invoke God's name and which punctuate all sorts of actions and exchanges.... In brief, the faithful are in constant search for spirituality through rituals of physical purification and/or continuous invocation of God's name.

Sharia purification laws also include specific rules for hygiene and behavior that concern the body. These include covering the body, using the right and left hands for specific actions and everything from instructions on maintaining pubic hair to beards. Purification rules are a form of moral hygiene that far exceeds health issues: every gesture, action and decision concerning the body is a spiritual act. There are lengthy treaties on what is designated as impure, types of purifying agents and detailed rituals on how to remove the impurity.

Questions of purity also involve topics that would not have been considered in Muhammad's time. For example, it is disputed whether nail polish, hair dye, and hair extensions hinder ablation. Since nail polish is a material that forms a layer over nails and prevents water from soaking through, some Islamic scholars advise women to remove their nail polish before each ablation. This is just one of many mundane concerns on how to maintain purity without violating sharia law. There are so many questions that purification rules are the subject of numerous websites that provide advice on Islamic living. One popular site, translated into twelve languages, is called "Islam QA Question and Answer," and is hosted by Shaykh Muhammad's al-Munajjid. It posts hundreds of questions regarding purity rules. Questions reflect specific concerns such as the proper way to wipe oneself, rules for washing and plucking body hair, conditions for wiping over socks, and dozens of questions regarding menstrual and other vaginal discharges. The large number of detailed personal inquiries demonstrates how serious purification is in the lives of the Muslim faithful.

The result of Islamic purification rites is that both the body and natural bodily functions are experienced as a source of shame. Khuri continues:

The body as a source of shame applies to both men and women alike. Though in varying degrees, both are urged to be modest, keep clean and protect their chastity... Intercourse or even touching women, like sickness and travel,
generates a polluted state to be purified before prayer. The discrepancy between men's and women's bodies becomes more apparent in the conditions Islam stipulates for prayer, which include, among other things, a state of purity, clarity of intent, facing Mecca, and covering the body. These conditions are equally required from men and women; the difference lies in what constitutes shamefulness for men as opposed to women. While men's source of shamefulness refers to that part of the body that lies between the navel and the knee, women's shamefulness refers to the whole body. The body is a source of shame and its secretions —urine, blood, semen, infected blood, and vomit, are all pollutants that need to be purified before prayer. 

The negative effects of shame have been well documented in Western behavioral science. Numerous studies have shown that deep-seated shame results in feelings of inferiority, worthlessness, inadequacy, self-disgust and alienation that give rise to a strong desire to alleviate those harmful emotions. Islamic purification rituals function precisely to instill shame as a means to urge believers to follow sharia law. When a believer adheres to sharia law, feelings of shame are replaced with feelings of honor and self-respect. Follow the rules and you feel good, deviate from tradition and you feel worthless. Islamic purification rites condition the faithful through a process of ritualization, a form of repetitive symbolic conditioning, whose result is to instill a shaming code that evokes fear and dread of violating sharia law. Designating natural bodily functions as producing impurity that requires repetitive ritual washing is how the symbolic code becomes visceral. "How the human body is viewed ideologically has a considerable impact upon behavior and interaction. If the body is a source of shame and impurities, it should then be covered, concealed and continuously purified" Khuri adds. The compulsory ritual washings involved in Islamic ablutions are one of the most effective methods of symbolic conditioning, continual reminders that the body and its natural functions are dirty and purity and cleanliness are only achieved by observing sharia law.

The focus on the body in Islam cannot be underestimated. Khuri reminds us:

Body symbolism in Arab-Islamic culture permeates every area of social intercourse, including faith and religion, social and cultural norms, patterns of behavior and various modes of communication. The condition of the body reflects the depth of a person's religious faith, his status, manners, morality, up-bringing and reputation in society. ...to seek purity through ablution, which involves washing different parts of the body, is not simply an act of cleanliness, it is divine cleanliness imposed by religious law, nor is pollution simply a form of defilement; the avoidance of polluted objects is religiously sanctioned. Purity and pollution represent two ends of a continuum derived from religious texts...Cleanliness and decorum express purity, and purity is an act of faith. In brief, the purity of the soul is derived from physical purity which, if defiled, must be purified by "absolute water".

Connecting impurity to bodily functions makes perfection unattainable in this life, which is why believers are taught that purity is one of the many rewards of paradise. Islamic writings describe how paradise is free from all the impurities of this world including the need for excretion, menstruation and childbirth. Alcohol, however, one of the essential earthly impurities, is permitted in Paradise. In a popular treatise titled The Pleasures of Paradise, in the section called "Free From All Impurities," M. Abdulsalam writes,

Paradise is free from all the impurities of this world. Eating and drinking in this life results in the need for excretion and its associated unpleasant odors. If a person drinks wine in this world, he loses his mind. Women in this world menstruate and give birth, which are sources of pain and hurt. Paradise is free from all of these discomforts: its people will not urinate, defecate, spit or suffer from catarrh. The wine of Paradise, as described by its Creator, is: "Crystal-white, delicious to those who drink (the)reof, free from intoxication, nor will they suffer intoxication therefrom" (Quran 37:46-47). The women of Paradise are pure and free from menstruation, postnatal bleeding and all the other impurities suffered by women in this world, and all are free from stool and feces. God says: "...and they shall have therein purified mates..." (Quran 2:25) The prophet answered a person when they asked how the people of Paradise will relieve themselves: "They relieve themselves by perspiring through their skins, and its fragrance will be that of musk, and all stomachs will have become lean" (Ibn Hibbaan).

In Paradise the Muslim faithful are not just free from all impurities but are also released from all ritual obligations including performing ritual washing and prayer five times a day. Shaykh Muhammad's al-Munajjid responds to a question regarding prayer in Paradise, "There is no difference of opinion among the scholars that Paradise is not a place of obligations, rather it is the place of reward, so there will be no obligation to pray there at all... acts of worship will be waived in Paradise and there will be nothing left but worship by saying tasbeeh and dhikr (remembering Allah)." The psychological reward of paradise is that a lifetime of mandatory compulsive washing, praying, abstaining from alcohol and designated foods is finally over. More significantly, feelings of self-disgust every time you defecate, urinate, vomit, spit, pass gas, ejaculate or menstruate are replaced by a pure body devoid of all excretions and shame free drinking and sex.

The concept of ritual impurity also provides insights into other Islamic beliefs. For example, one of the miracles of the martyrs is the belief that martyrs' bodies upon death remain intact and blood is instantly transformed into a perfumed fragrance. Since martyrs go directly to paradise their bodies upon death are immediately removed of all impurities. Hence, instead of the smell of decomposition the body exudes the scent of musk. This unusual phenomenon has been reported by clerics and allegedly witnessed in 2011 and 2013 amongst mujahiedeen fighters in Syria and the Afghan Taliban. The concept of purity in Islam also explains the extraordinary attributes of the 72 beautiful women that holy martyrs receive in paradise. The women of Paradise are described as pure which is often misinterpreted in the West to mean that the women are virgins. However, what is lost in translation is that pure is not simply defined as virginal; pure refers to the fact that these perfect women do not defecate, urinate or menstruate and hence martyrs are rewarded with shame free sex without fear of being polluted and women are no longer ashamed of their bodies. Once in paradise true believers are finally free from the impurities of the body...
and the corresponding revulsion and shame.

Body Shame in the West

Of course, body shame is also an issue in the West but for entirely different reasons. While Islam and other religions induce body shame as a method to regulate morality, Western secularists have aspired to have no shame associated with the body. It is flagrantly evident in Western clothing, advertisements, media and attitudes that there is no shame in exposing the body or publically speaking of and often making fun of bodily functions. Islamic purity is the reason the West’s permissiveness is so highly offensive to Islamist true believers who are systematically conditioned to be disgusted by unbelievers. Interestingly, the very freedoms that were intended to eliminate the shame of nakedness, bodily functions and human sexuality in Western culture have had unintended consequences. Although positively resulting in women’s liberation and sexual freedoms, body shame is more prevalent than ever in the West, eliciting feelings of self-disgust very similar to those found in Islamic culture. Shame is now associated with issues of negative body image, particularly complexes about weight, the result of cultural conditioning through mass media. People are bombarded with advertisements of unnaturally thin women and altered images of the ideal perfect body that is unattainable in reality. Instead of religious conditioning, secular Americans are programed by Hollywood and Madison Avenue.

Western psychology has come to believe that it is not healthy to have shame linked to natural bodily functions. This has resulted in theories of toilet training and sexual education in which the objective is to detach feelings of shame from the body. This is sharply at odds with the tendency of Islamic purity rites, which continue to inculcate the view that the body is a source of shame. The Western disassociation of shame from the natural body has of course also been accompanied by a shift in moral values regarding sex, nudity and other previously restricted behaviors. Customs, etiquette, manners and even toilet training all reflect a culture’s morality. Twenty-first century Western freedoms are manifested in a shamelessness that is experienced as a constant insult to the Islamic way of life. Each image of women displaying their hair and bodies, films and television depicting graphic sex and basically the entire Western way of life is perceived as impure and contagious. The Western lack of shame is a primary reason that among the essential impurities in Islam are unbelievers, commonly referred to as infidels. Purification rites function to instill shame so that when an Islamic believer comes in contact with things and people that are felt to be impure, a visceral response may signal the danger of the “other,” whose impurity signifies a highly contagious threat.

Contagion: The Nature of Impurity

Impurity is symbolically contagious in many cultural contexts, including that of Islam. Impurity signifies the “other” and is experienced both physically and spiritually as a mysterious and harmful substance of the outside world that keeps attacking, contaminating, defiling and desacralizing the sacred world of true believers. True believers have to protect themselves and their communities against this threat of defilement and to get rid of it once the contamination has taken place. Individuals have to cleanse themselves by means of various purification rites and cathartic practices, while communities cleanse themselves by excluding, expelling, or proscribing the things and people whose presence defiles the community. Impure things are the designated taboos of a community, those things that are prohibited in society: violations of social customs and transgressions of the sacred. Taboos are expressed in dietary restrictions, sexual conventions, customs, laws, etiquette and religious laws. The concept of taboo is intrinsically intertwined with the idea of impurity, particularly the notion that breaking a taboo results in corruption, evil or illness. Many rituals, customs, social conventions and even superstitions evolved specifically to mitigate taboos. Anthropologist Mary Douglas described the function of taboo in her classic text Purity and Danger: “Taboo is a spontaneous coding practice which sets up a vocabulary of spatial limits and physical and verbal signals to hedge around vulnerable relations. It threatens specific dangers if the code is not respected." Islamic purification rules function to protect true believers from both physical and spiritual contamination by designating specific things as taboo and impure. These impure taboo things are referred to as najis. There are two kinds of najis: inherent, which cannot be cleansed, and acquired, which become unaclen through contact with an inherently impure thing. When a true believer comes in contact with something najis he enters into a state of ritual impurity (najasat), which requires undergoing ablutions, Islamic cleansing rituals. Things that are inherently najis and cannot be purified include: alcohol, dogs, swine, dead animals that were not ritually slaughtered, blood, urine, semen, feces, milk of animals whose meat is forbidden, dead bodies and unbelievers. The contagious nature of impurity is evident in detailed descriptions found in the Qur'an and hadith and numerous present-day interpretations by Islamic scholars of how a Pak (pure) thing becomes impure. For example the Grand Ayatollah Al-Uzma Seyyid Ali al-Sistani, the senior Iraqi Shia cleric and the prime marja, or spiritual reference, for Shia Muslims has written extensively on Islamic laws regarding purity. On his website Ayatollah Sistani describes the rules for everything from use of the lavatory to use of utensils. He also describes precisely how a Pak (pure) thing becomes Najis (impure):

If a Pak thing touches a najis thing and if either or both of them are so wet that the wetness of one reaches the other, the Pak thing will become najis. Similarly, if the wetness of the thing which has become najis, touches a third thing, that third thing will also become najis. It is commonly held by the scholars, that a thing which has become najis transmits its najasat, but indefinite number of transmissions is improbable. In fact, after certain stage it is Pak. For example, if the right hand of a person becomes najis with urine, and then, while still wet, it touches his left hand, the left hand will also become najis. Now, if the left hand after having dried up, touches a wet cloth, that cloth will also become najis, but, if that cloth touches another wet thing, it cannot be said to be najis... If a Pak thing touches a najis thing and one doubts whether either or both of them were wet or not, the Pak thing does not become najis.... If a fly or an insect sits on wet, najis thing, and later sits on wet, Pak thing, the Pak thing will become najis, if one is sure that the insect was carrying najasat with it, and if one is not sure, then it remains Pak.
The hundreds of detailed rules for mitigating impurity are mindboggling. The details and concern of how pollution is transferred from one thing to another reveals how fear of contagion is intrinsic to the nature of impurity.

In both sacred and mundane activities true believers in religions with highly codified notions of purity, including Islam, must work continually to avoid dangerous contagion. A classic example of the significance of contagion beliefs and the deeply engrained aversion to impurities is the complex of Islamic rules and customs pertaining to shoes. Shoes are not inherently najis unless they are made from leather products that are from impure animals or from the hide of an animal not slaughtered according to Islamic laws. However, shoes are the definitive symbol of impurity because they continually come in direct contact with inherently unclean things such as urine, feces and other designated najis. For this reason, shoes are not worn in mosques, shrines, temples, or peoples' homes and are frequently used in demonstrations and thrown in protests as a highly symbolic insult. The fact that each and every individual eats, wears, touches and excretes is subjected to purity rules creates a situation in which life is a constant negotiation of avoiding contagion.

Purity rituals tend to program moral values into believers, acting to preserve tradition and fend off assimilation by other cultures. Therefore it is not surprising that one of the intrinsically impure things in Islam are Kafirs, a term that is used to describe non-Muslims, and apostates from Islam; it is translated into English as infidel or unbeliever. As unbelievers are ritually impure, there are specific rules regarding physical contact with them and things or places that they have touched. "The entire body of a kafir, including his hair and nails, and all liquid substances of his body, are najis." (20) Unbelievers are not just viewed as the "other" but are experienced as untouchable and contagious, and threaten both a spiritual and physical infection. Khuri notes, "The conclusion that impurity, defilement, uncleanness, or pollution is a quality of those who lie outside the mother group to which they should belong, 'the imperfect members of their class', is well documented in the Qur'an." (21) Islamic purity reinforces the tribal aspect of Islamic culture, providing specific criteria for us-versus-them. If a person does not engage in Islamic purification rites he is easily recognized as the polluted other, an impure unbeliever. Islam's designated unclean things function to divide the world into believers and unbelievers, the sacred and profane, the pure and impure, the good and the evil. This is consistent with psychiatrist Robert J. Lifton's concept of the "demand for purity," developed in his classic 1961 book Thought Reform and the Psychology of Totalism:

In the thought reform milieu, as in all situations of ideological totalism, the experiential world is sharply divided into the pure and the impure, into the absolutely good and the absolutely evil. The good and the pure are of course those ideas, feelings, and actions which are consistent with the totalist ideology and policy; anything else is apt to be relegated to the bad and the impure. Nothing human is immune from the flood of stern moral judgments. All "taints" and "poisons" which contribute to the existing state of impurity must be searched out and eliminated.... The individual thus comes to apply the same totalist polarization of good and evil to his judgments of his own character: he tends to imbue certain aspects of himself with excessive virtue, and condemn even more excessively other personal qualities—all according to their ideological standing. He must also look upon his impurities as originating from outside influences—that is, from the ever-threatening world beyond the closed, totalist ken. Therefore, one of his best ways to relieve himself of some of his burden of guilt is to denounce, continuously and hostilely, these same outside influences. The more guilty he feels, the greater his hatred, and the more threatening they seem. In this manner, the universal psychological tendency toward "projection" is nourished and institutionalized, leading to mass hatreds, purges of heretics, and to political and religious holy wars. (22)

The Islamic demand for purity inculcates shame-based purification rules that can foster Islamist mass hatreds of others and recruit true believers to fight in the global jihad, holy war. The "other" is not simply impure; he symbolizes contagious evil.

Desecration: The Phenomenology of Defilement

The sacred is manifested in symbols, objects, times, places, people and ideas to which a community of believers have assigned special meaning or relevance. Due to Muslim iconoclasm, an aniconic tradition that prohibits depictions of Allah, Muhammad, and the portrayal of living creatures, especially human beings, there are few representations of the sacred in Islam. For this reason, their defilement and insult is experienced as a serious violation. The sacred in Islam is symbolized in holy texts such as the Quran, the sacred personages of Allah and Muhammad, sacred places such as mosques and shrines and holy cities such as Mecca, Medina and Jerusalem, whose mosques have special status.

Violation of the sacred is the ultimate taboo. In Islam desecration of sacred artifacts and irreverent behavior toward holy personages, customs or beliefs is designated as blasphemy. The concept of blasphemy refers to speaking evil of sacred matters and exists in every culture. It is a profanation of the sacred, an affront to the deep-seated beliefs of worshippers and the basic values that a community shares. Blasphemy pollutes the purity of the community and requires punishment to set an example to others. Punishment propitiates the offended deity by avenging his honor, thereby averting divine wrath. Violation of the sacred in Islam is not just a personal affront; it is also experienced as an insult to the honor of the Prophet Muhammad. Hence, the impurity of an act of blasphemy or desecration elicits a natural urge to vengeance to restore the Prophet's honor and the dignity of true believers. Desecration of the sacred, particularly by unbelievers, is symbolic of unclean contact, a tarnishing of Islamic purity and the source of every Muslim controversy from Quran burning to Anti-Islam films. When the sacred is polluted by the impurity of unbelievers, it is experienced as defilement, dishonor and disrespect. Since Islamic purification rites inculcate a hypersensitivity to any disrespect of Islam, the faithful experience blasphemy as debilitating shame.
This hypersensitivity is the reason there are such disproportionately violent reactions to ostensibly nonthreatening things such as cartoons and films of Muhammad and Quran burning. The Quran, one of thefew sacred objects permitted, has been the subject of several desecration controversies that have resulted in worldwide violent protests and deaths. The first highly publicized Quran incident occurred in 2005 when Newsweek published a report alleging that American military personnel at Guantanamo Bay detention camp deliberately desecrated the Quran by placing it in the toilet. The Quran cannot be touched without performing ritual ablutions, and urine is one of the inherently impure substances; therefore, from the Muslim perspective the Quran, which is both a holy object and a symbol of Islam, was both physically and symbolically defiled. Reports of the Muslim holy book being placed in a toilet triggered feelings of revulsion and violation. The physical and spiritual uncleanness of the act elicited righteous outrage resulting in worldwide protests and riots.

Subsequent incidents involving burning the Quran, which is also considered an intentional act of desecration and regarded as blasphemy. Christian pastor Terry Jones of the Dove World Outreach Center, a church in Gainesville, Florida, publicized his plans to burn a Quran in 2010 on the ninth anniversary of the September 11, attacks which he named "International Burn a Quran Day." Just announcing his intention to desecrate the Quran triggered protests in the Middle East and Asia in which 20 people were killed. After international criticism Jones cancelled the event. However, on March 20, 2011, he proceeded with burning the Muslim holy book. This intentional desecration caused the deaths of over 30 people in Afghanistan, including seven United Nations workers, two of whom were beheaded. Less than one year later in February 2012 another Quran burning incident triggered five days of protests throughout Afghanistan and even more deaths, another 30 people including six US soldiers. In this incident U.S. soldiers at Bagram Air base in Afghanistan improperly disposed of Quans that had been used by Taliban prisoners to write messages to each other. In September 29, 2012, just the posting of a picture depicting the desecration of a Quran on a Buddhist man's Facebook profile caused Islamist mobs to destroy and burn Buddhist temples, shrines, and houses in Bangladesh. Depictions of Muhammad in cartoons and film also provoked international demonstrations, protests, riots and violence. On September 30, 2005, a Danish newspaper published a set of editorial cartoons, many of which depicted Muhammad, that led to over 200 deaths, attacks on diplomatic missions, churches, Christians and an international boycott of Denmark. In September 2013 a 14-minute video clip on YouTube titled "Innocence of Muslims" led to attacks on American and other embassies, worldwide violent protests and the deaths of over 75 people.

Islamic rites of purity establish special physical and spatial limits surrounding the sacred. Violation of sacred boundaries threatens specific dangers to the community of true believers. In Purity and Danger Mary Douglas warned, "some of the dangers which follow on taboo-breaking spread harm indiscriminately on contact. Feared contagion extends the danger of a broken taboo to the whole community." The phenomenon of the fear of contagious impurity provides an explanation for desecration controversies. Taboos surrounding the sacred were broken, and the Muslim faithful were disrespected, evoking a deep seated fear of contagious impurity provoking an eruption of violence. The Muhammad cartoons and the anti-Islam video trailer represent an epidemic of impurity similar to an infectious disease because each and every time they were viewed on YouTube or republished, their uncleanness became more contagious, touching more people, multiplying the insult, increasing the revulsion, escalating the affront and spreading the dishonor. This can be likened to Ayatollah Sistani’s descriptions of how impurity is transmitted from one thing to another In his classic text Violence and the Sacred, Rene Girard described the contagious nature of ritual impurity: "In many religious communities—among the ancient Greeks, for instance—when a man has hanged himself, his body becomes impure. So too does the rope from which he dangles, the tree to which the rope is attached, and the field where the tree stands. The taint of impurity diminishes, however, as one draws away from the body. It is as if the scene of a violent act, and the objects with which the violence has been committed, send out emanations that penetrate everything in the immediate area, growing gradually weaker through time and space." Girard could not have foreseen the ease of uploading, publishing, copying and downloading blasphemous and violent images on the internet where the image never gets diluted and remains highly contagious and impure. Blasphemous videos viewed on the internet in the personal space of your home can be likened to another description of contagion by Girard: "When a town has undergone a terrible bloodletting, and emissaries from that town are sent to another community, they are considered impure. Every effort is made to avoid touching them, talking to them, remaining in their presence any longer than necessary. After their departure rites of purification are undertaken: sacrifices offered, lustral water sprinkled about." The internet is the modern-day emissary spreading impurity from one community to another, emanating dishonor and significantly never diminishing nor growing weaker, immune to purification rites.

Mocking the sacred is not just an insult to Islam per se; it is experienced as an existential threat to the entire belief system. As philosopher Paul Ricoeur suggests,

Dread of the impure and rites of purification are in the background of all our feelings and all our behavior relating to fault. ...We define defilement as “an act that evolves an evil, an impurity, a fluid, a mysterious and harmful something that acts dynamically—that is to say, magically." What resists reflection is the idea of a quasi-material something that infects as a sort of filth, that harms by invisible properties, and that nevertheless works in the manner of a force in the field of our undividedly psychic and corporeal existence... With defilement we enter into the reign of Terror.

One cannot underestimate the power of impurity; it equates to the impact of evil. Unbelievers are not only impure but more significantly, they symbolize evil in the form of contagious pollution. Rites of purity are intertwined in fears of eternal punishment and connect taboo to terror. Defiling sacred objects is a violation of purity that unleashes spiritual pollution that disrupts the sacred order. Mary Douglas explains that "these are pollution powers which inhere in the structure of ideas itself and which punish a symbolic breaking of that which should be joined or joining of that which should be separate. It follows from this that pollution is a type of danger which is not likely to occur except where the lines of structure, cosmic or social, are
clearly defined. A polluting person is always in the wrong. He has developed some wrong condition or simply crossed some line which should not have been crossed and this displacement unleashes danger for someone."[27]. The cartoonists, film makers and other producers of blasphemous media have crossed the Islamic structural lines, transgressing purity, violating sharia law and breaking taboos that unleash spiritual pollution that poses a danger to all Muslims believers.

The disproportionately violent response to seemingly innocuous acts such as cartoons and films needs to be understood in terms of magical thinking. As with the burning of effigies, there is a belief that harming the symbol will bring actual harms. Riceour continues, "Defilement infects symbolically... Dread of the impure is, in fact, no more a physical fear than defilement is a stain or spot. Dread of the impure is like fear, but already it faces a threat which, beyond the threat of suffering and death, aims at a diminution of existence, a loss of the personal core of one's being."[28]. Defilement of the sacred represents an apparently existential threat to the Muslim faithful. True believers sense that impurity is highly contagious and symbolic of unbridled evil. For this reason they experience desecration of sacred symbols not just as offense but as a source of dread.

The Islamist Deployment

We move now from a consideration of Islamic rites of purity more generally to their exploitation by Islamists. "Islamist" has replaced the more controversial terms "Islamic extremist" and "Islamic fundamentalist" and is often used to differentiate radical from moderate Westernized Muslims. Islamist ideology, described as "Islamism," is sometimes referred to as political Islam, an ideology that has a pan-Islamic political agenda that advocates the unity of Muslims from different cultures, nations, and ethnicities under one Islamic government/state, the Caliphate. Islamism emphasizes the enforcement of Sharia (Islamic law) that advocates the elimination of non-Muslim, particularly Western, military, economic, political, social, and cultural influences in the Muslim world. Militant Islamism, often referred to as "jihadism," promotes a global agenda to expand the territories ruled by Muslims with the eventual goal of achieving Muslim dominion over all countries through both overt and covert Jihad, or holy war. Islamists include individuals who are both affiliated and unaffiliated with terrorist groups.

Islamists have exploited Islamic purification rites as a method to instill shame, induce primal fear of "others" and to justify violence as ridding Islam of Western impurities. Many of the features discussed above are conducive to exploitation by Islamists. From a secular perspective, as noted above, ritual ablutions are often interpreted by Western behavioral scientists as a form of institutionalized OCD. Regardless of their function as secular rituals or religious rites, obsessive, chronic behaviors performed to ward off feelings of uncleanness, degradation and/or shame are fertile ground for the fomenting of violence, intolerance and fear. Systematic repetitive rituals and a demand for purity are also standard indoctrination techniques often used by cult and totalitarian groups. Psychiatrist Lifton identifies the demand for purity as one of eight criteria for thought reform in Thought Reform and the Psychology of Totalism, where he characterizes the demand for purity as a method to motivate members to conform to the ideology of the group, to strive for unattainable perfection and to induce guilt and/or shame as a method of control. Lifton writes,

The philosophical assumption underlying this demand is that absolute purity is attainable, and that anything done to anyone in the name of this purity is ultimately moral. In actual practice, however, no one is really expected to achieve such perfection. Nor can this paradox be dismissed as merely a means of establishing a high standard to which all can aspire. Thought reform bears witness to its more malignant consequences: for by defining and manipulating the criteria of purity, and then by conducting an all-out war upon impurity, the ideological totalists create a narrow world of guilt and shame. This is perpetuated by an ethos of continuous reform, a demand that one strive permanently and painfully for something which not only does not exist but is in fact alien to the human condition. At the level of the relationship between individual and environment, the demand for purity creates what we may term a guilty milieu and a shaming milieu. Since each man's impurities are deemed sinful and potentially harmful to himself and to others, he is, so to speak, expected to expect punishment which results in a relationship of guilt and his environment. Similarly, when he fails to meet the prevailing standards in casting out such impurities, he is expected to expect humiliation and ostracism - thus establishing a relationship of shame with his milieu.

Islamists are brilliant at exploiting shame based purity customs and taboos for propaganda and recruitment. Islamists understand that defilement of sacred objects incites strong emotions of uncleanness, hatred, humiliation and vengeance that resonate with both moderate Muslims and Islamists. This strategy of evocation and incitement succeeds because purity rites are inculcated in childhood and aroused by the impurity of the act of blasphemy and desecration which elicits a natural urge to vengeance, to restore the Prophet's honor and the dignity of true believers. Islamists exploit controversies that involve insults to Muhammad and Quran desecration to recruit sympathizers, instigate protests, recruit moderate Muslims into radical Islamists and incite Jihadists to action.

Symbolic Warfare: The Propaganda of Purity

Islamists understand the fear of impurity. For this reason symbols of Islamic impurity and the symbolism of contagion are found throughout Islamist propaganda in both overt and subliminal images and language. The concept of unbelievers as impure hence contagious is evident in videos, sermons, posters, protest signs, music and other media specifically designed to evoke visceral emotions of disgust, revulsion and hatred. Images of blood, pigs and dogs, all inherently impure things, are often used by Islamists and frequently misinterpreted by Western journalists. The symbolism of blood in Islamist media often appears in political cartoons, posters and in television programs as part of the classic blood libel myth that alleges that Jews murder and drink the blood of children for ritual purposes. Since human blood is intrinsically najis, blood libel represents the epitome of...
impurity. Overt images of blood drinking reinforce myths, allegations and conspiracy theories while subliminal images of blood evoke fear of uncleanliness and dread of contamination. Depictions of blood libels are no longer specific to Jews but also include many political figures in the West. Dozens of cartoons portray politicians drinking blood, cannibalizing flesh and killing children. In addition to cartoons there have been placards, posters and billboards depicting President Obama, Pope Benedict XVI, President Bush, Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice and other political leaders with fangs and blood on their mouths. Western media misinterprets these images to represent a vampire creature of western mythology, when in fact the imagery primarily denotes impurity, blood libel and is suggestive of demons in the Muslim occult tradition of Jinn. A similar misreading of Islamist symbology occurred in 2012 when Afghan protesters burned an effigy of President Obama that had a sign attached to it that read "Black Dog Obama." This was misconstrued in the West as being symbolic of American racism because it was interpreted in the historical and cultural context of U.S. history. Although it was an insult to the American President, in Islamic symbolism it was a reference to dogs as one of the essential najis (impurities). In addition to being ritually unclean animals, black dogs are considered to be demonic and often are viewed as possessed by evil Jinn spirits. (29) Islamists often ascribe and/or depict attributes of impure animals to political leaders in cartoons, caricatures, commentaries and sermons. Dogs, pigs and apes are common symbols of Muslim insults and are often used in Islamist language and images.

Dogs, pigs and blood are overt symbols of the "impure other." A more insidious form of propagand is to stigmatize the "other" as infectious disease as a calculated tactic to evoke fears of contagion, death and annihilation. Islamists adopted many Nazi themes and symbols in their propaganda including the strategy of depicting Jews as agents of disease and corruption. In his book The Broken Connection: On Death and the Continuity of Life, Robert Jay Lifton describes one of Hitler's greatest rhetorical talents as portraying the Jew as an impure, life-threatening force to the German people: "The Jew was the embodiment of moral decay—of physical and sexual perversion, spiritual petrifaction, and cultural degeneracy. The images are closely linked to death and deterioration—the Jews as carriers of filth and disease, of plague and syphilis and 'racial tuberculosis,' as spreaders of every kind of 'poison,' and as parasites, vampires, bloodsuckers, and racial contaminants." (30) Nazi ideology was also based on a doctrine of purity; however, stigmatizing Jews as disease has been even more effective with Islamists because Islamic purity rules inculcate a particularly potent version of the near-universal moral revulsion against the impure other. Islamist propaganda characterizes the other as both physically and spiritually impure. Contemporary infection libels are found in Palestinian television, cartoons and news reports that characterize Jews and Israel as a disease and a cancer. In 2009, the symbolic warfare campaign to stigmatize Jews as infectious disease intensified when Muslim and Arab media exploited the swine flu epidemic. Symbolically the swine flu was the perfect disease, a combination of an inherently impure animal and an infectious illness. Anti-Israel swine flu cartoons appeared in Arab and Muslim newspapers in Qatar, the United Arab Emirates and the United Kingdom. A prominent theme of the cartoons was depicting Israeli leaders with faces of pigs. The incident was characterized by the media as classic anti-Semitic insults but the subliminal message evokes fear of impurity from diseased others. The fear of infectious impurity corresponds with several full-blown Muslim conspiracy theories claiming that the West infected Muslims with diseases. Allegations include Jews deliberately infecting Palestinians with AIDS and drug addictions, Americans lacing polio vaccines with anti-fertility agents to sterilize Muslims, that Egypt's peace treaty with Israel resulted in increased instances of hepatitis, cancer and kidney infections and that America infected Africans with AIDS through Christian missionary groups by putting the virus in medicine used to inoculate people. The conspiracy theory that Americans were lacing polio vaccines to stabilize Muslims resulted in an epidemic of polio in sixteen Muslim countries in Africa and Asia where polio had been eradicated. Daniel Pipes writes:

Local imams repeated and spread the sterilization theory, which won wide acceptance despite vocal assurances to the contrary from the WHO, the Nigerian government, and many Nigerian doctors and scientists.

Ibrahim Shekarau, governor of Kano, one of the three Nigerian states that refused the polio vaccine, justified the decision not to vaccinate on the grounds that "it is a lesser of two evils to sacrifice two, three, four, five, even ten children than allow hundreds of thousands or possibly millions of girl-children likely to be rendered infertile." (31) Villagers saw the vaccination program as a threat and on occasion "chased, threatened and assaulted vaccinators. Frustrated, some vaccination teams dumped thousands of doses of the vaccine rather than face angry villagers." With rumors unchecked, "By mid-2004 the conspiracy theory had jumped to India, where a health worker noted that in one slum, 'many poor and ignorant women regard the anti-polio drops as a deceptive strategy to control the birth rate.'" As Pipes notes, "scientists hypothesize, the polio infection traveled from Nigeria in a uniquely Muslim way—via the hajj, or pilgrimage to Mecca, which took place in January 2005. Testing confirms that all three Asian strains of the disease originated in northern Nigeria." (32) Propaganda has real consequences, particularly when the message is directed at people who have been deeply inculcated with fears of impurity and contagion. The symbolic meaning is clear: the impurity of unbelievers is a life-threatening danger to all Muslims. Islamists exploit the fears that they inculcated. Allegations of being infected with disease as well as images of blood, dogs and pigs are all acts of "symbolic warfare" intended to evoke terror, dread and hatred of the "other."

The Dirty Language of Jihad

"Loaded language," also known as "emotive language," "high-inference language" or "language persuasive techniques," is utilized to elicit an emotional response, either positive or negative, beyond the literal meaning of the word or phrase. (33) Loaded words are often employed by politicians, newscasters and advertisers with the goal of persuading particular audiences to adopt a specific point of view. Islamists, like all propagandists, are experts at loading the language; they know how to use words and images that elicit sympathy, empathy, instigate protests and incite violence. Influence is most successful when evoking deep-seated feelings of humiliation and arousing fears of contagious impurity. This is accomplished by loading the
language with references to what is held sacred and taboo, depicting overt and subliminal images of impurity, persistently
leveling accusations of insult and blasphemy and exploiting desecration incidents. Islamists encode loaded words, symbols and
images in order to prompt emotional responses that are triggered by the media. Lifton describes loading the language as one of
the eight psychological themes which are predominant within the social field of the thought reform milieu: “The language of the
totalist environment is characterized by the thought-terminating cliché. The most far-reaching and complex of human problems
are compressed into brief, highly reductive, definitive-sounding phrases, easily memorized and easily expressed … In addition
to their function as interpretive shortcuts, these clichés become what Richard Weaver has called ‘ultimate terms’: either ‘god
terms,’ representative of ultimate good; or ‘devil terms,’ representative of ultimate evil.”[34] Islamist positive / god terms
connot purity and negative /devil terms signify impurity. Particular words and phrases are calculated to trigger specific responses.
Negative words evoked uncleanness and often include adjectives such as “dirty” and “filthy” or evoke fear of
tagion by using words such as “disease” and “infection.” Negative terms used to incite protests and violence include words
indicative of sacred violation such as “desecration,” “defilement” and “occupation.” For example, in many of bin Laden’s
channels he referred to the Crusaders and Zionists (Jews) occupying the holy lands of Islam. Bin Laden’s 1996 fatwa is
titled “Declaration of War against the Americans Occupying the Land of the Two Holy Places.” The land of the two holy places is
a reference to Islam’s most holy sites, Mecca and Medina. On October 7, 2001, Osama bin Laden justified the 9/11 attacks as a
response to humiliation and defilement of sacred places: “Our umma (nation) has been tasting this humiliation and contempt
for over 80 years. Its sons have been slain, its blood has been shed and its sacred places have been defiled … Thus did Allah
Most High bestow success upon what a convoy of Muslims—the vanguard of Islam—allowing them to devastate America utterly.”[35]
In May 2012, Al Qaeda leader Ayman al-Zawahiri urged Muslims to avenge the burning of copies of the Quran on a U.S. base in
Afghanistan referring to violation of holy text and personal honor, “Once again, the crusaders burned the holy Quran, in Kabul …
Kill those aggressors who occupied your country, stole your wealth, violated your honour and attacked your Quran and your Prophet”[36] Positive purity terms use cathartic words such as cleansed, washed and purged. In a 2007 video Al-Zawahiri
advocates violence as an act of purification: “Let the Pakistani army know that the killing of Abdul Rashid Ghazi and his male
and female students … has soaked the history of the Pakistan army in shame and despicableness which can only be washed
away by retaliation.”[37] Osama bin Laden frequently used purification language. In a December 16, 2004, audio tape he said,
“Do not relent in purifying and cleansing the Arabian Peninsula of polytheists, heretics, and apostates.”[38] In a 1998 interview
bin Laden said, “Allah ordered us in this religion to purify Muslim land of all non-believers, and especially the Arabian Peninsula
where the Ke’ba is.”[39] These symbolic words used individually and in conjunction with common phrases are consistent with
the Islamist demand for purity and incitement of a tribal imperative of us-versus-them.

One of the more prevalent Islamist expressions is "dirty infidel." An Arabic language Google search of the phrase produces over
four hundred results often in combination with other popular slurs such as “filthy” and “dog”. [40] The phrase “Dirty Jew”
produced over ten thousand results in Arabic and over fifty-nine thousand results in English.[41] The large number of search
results in English is due to the fact that “dirty infidel” is specific to Islamists while the phrase “dirty jew” encompasses all anti-
Semitic groups throughout history and across cultures. In both cases the adjective “dirty” is more than just an insult; it signifies
disease, corruption and a moral taint. These and other symbolic words and phrases are thought terminating clichés that
Islamists seek to encode in the minds of believers to overwhelm rational thinking with primal fears of impurity and contagion.

Words and phrases that signify impurity, contagion and desecration comprise what I will call the "Dirty language of jihad." 
“Dirty” words are found in almost every reference to unbelievers and are used in media, music, sermons, political speeches and
more. A classic example is the 2004 rap music video titled “Dirty Kuffar.” Kuffar, as we noted above, means unbeliever, one of
Islam’s intrinsically impure things. This jihad rap song is not titled “brutal, sadistic, vicious unbeliever” but specifically “dirty
unbeliever” to signify the Islamist demand for purity. Islamist children’s television shows repeatedly emphasize the ideas of
others as impure. Quotes from various characters in the popular Hamas program, The Pioneers of Tomorrow, reinforce the
idea that the enemy is impure and that they have polluted sacred land and the holy Al-Aqsa mosque. For example, Farfour, the
Hamas version of Mickey Mouse declares: “I don’t know how to liberate this land from the filth of the criminal, plundering
Jews…”[42] while Nahoul the Bee promises, “We will take revenge upon the enemies of Allah …until we liberate the Al-Aqsa
Mosque from their impurity.”[43] Nor are Jews the only type of dirt. In a March 2008 episode of the “Exceptionals,” a puppet
stabs George Bush to death with a sword while proclaiming “you are impure, Bush, so you are not allowed inside the White
House… because it has been turned into a great mosque for the nation of Islam.”[44] The words “filth,” “impure” and “impurity” are continually repeated in such shows to equate the hated “others” with the concept of impurity.

Adult television programming continues the symbolization process except cartoon characters are replaced with loaded language
in news reports and sermons that perpetuate dirty words and symbols. In November 2011 a program on Palestinian Authority
Televising, “Sights of Jerusalem,” reported that the weekend in Jerusalem, and in particular on the Temple Mount,
“cleans[ed] the steps of the foreigners [Jews] so that the feet [of Muslims] in prayer will not step on impurity […] in August the
same program referred to Jews praying at the Western Wall as ‘sin and filth’ contaminating what should be a wholly Islamic
city.”[45] Hamas’ Al-Aqsa TV often airs sermons that employ the dirty language of jihad. On July 26, 2010, a Friday sermon in
Gaza was filled with loaded words:

‘Dearly beloved, the Al-Aqsa Mosque is subjected to a vicious campaign of Judaization and defilement, at the hands
of the filthiest creatures made by Allah – the Jews. […]

“Today, we see the brothers of apes and pigs destroying homes with their occupants still in them, uprooting trees
from their land, and killing women, children, and the elderly. […]

“A levy of blood will be paid for the Al-Aqsa Mosque. Our people will never relinquish the Al-Aqsa Mosque or
Palestine. We will redeem it with our souls, with our blood, with our sons, with what is most dear to us—regardless
of the sacrifices we will have to make—until it is liberated, with the grace of Allah, and until this holy land is purified from the filth of the Jews. […]

‘Brothers in faith, the Al-Aqsa Mosque remains under oppressive occupation. The Jews continue to defile it with their filth. The only way to liberate it is through Jihad for the sake of Allah.’ [all ellipses in the original “Special Dispatch”](46)

This sermon is a classic example of the use of symbolic language filled with the negative words—filth, defilement, apes, pigs, creatures, occupation—and positive words—holy land, liberated, grace, and purified.

The dirty language of jihad is not just perpetuated on television, but is also used by Islamist professors, political leaders and clerics. Iran’s late Supreme Leader Ayatollah Khomeini proclaimed that “every aspect of a non-Muslim is unclean.” He [Ayatollah Khomeini] explained that non-Muslims rank between ‘fèces’ and ‘the sweat of a camel that has consumed impure food.’ Other prominent ayatollahs, including Ahmad Jannati, the current chairman of the Guardian Council, have made similar utterances. (47) Another example of Muslim clerics employing the language and symbols of impurity is Sheikh Abdul Rahman al-Sudais, the imam of the Grand Mosque in Mecca and Islamic Personality of the Year in 2005. al-Sudais described Jews as “the scum of humanity, the rats of the world, prophet killers and pigs and monkeys”. (48) He also referred to Christians as “cross-worshippers” and Hindus as “idol worshippers”. (49) Although the controversial cleric was banned from conferences in the U.S. and Canada in 2009, he toured the United Kingdom and delivered a sermon at the East London Mosque. In August 2006, President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad’s senior advisor Mohammad Ali Ramin told students during a visit at the town of Rasht that “Jews are filthy people, and that is why they have been accused throughout history of spreading deadly disease and plagues.” Ramin, a historian, continued, “historically, there are many accusations against the Jews. For example it was said that they were the source for such deadly disease as the plague and typhus. This is because the Jews are very filthy people.” (50)

The use of the incendiary dirty language of jihad is not specific to Muslim countries; there are numerous examples in the United States, Britain and Australia of Muslim preachers and professors perpetuating Islamist propaganda. Siraj Wahhaj, a powerful African-American imam of the Al-Taqwa mosque in Brooklyn, New York, told his congregation, “You know what this country is? It’s a garbage can. It’s filthy, filthy, and sick.” (51) Referring to America as filthy is a reference to unbelievers. It is not surprising that Wahhaj, an unindicted co-conspirator in the 1993 World Trade Center bombing known for preaching violence and insurrection against the U.S., wants to replace the Constitution with sharia law, and has said he hopes all Americans eventually become Muslim. (52) There have been several incidents in Britain where university students complained about invited speakers and professors characterizing non-Muslims and gays as filth, dogs and pigs. In April 2006 at the Hawza Ilmiyya of London, a religious college that offers a BA in Islamic Studies, Muslim students studying to become imams “complained that they are being taught fundamentalist doctrines which describe non-Muslims as “filth”. (53) The University of Reading in Reading, Berkshire UK, had to withdraw their invitation to Islamic preacher Abu Usamah at-Thahabi scheduled to speak on February 28, 2013 at its Discover Islam Week due to protests from a student’s rights group who claimed that Abu Usamah is anti-gay. The students’ claims were based on a video of Thahabi addressing worshippers at the Green Lane Mosque in Birmingham in which he characterized homosexuals as “perverted, dirty, filthy dogs who should be murdered”. (54) In Australia in 2011, Sheikh Haron, a Shia cleric originally from Iran, sent letters to politicians and members of the Jewish community in which he describes a Jewish soldier as a dirty animal who is a thousand times worse than a pig. Haron wrote, “A Jewish man who kills innocent Muslims, civilians is not a pig. He’s a thousand times worse. Some people don’t eat the meat of pig but they are dirtier than pig. What’s the point when some people don’t eat pork while their behavior is worse than dirty animals”? (55) These are just a few examples of the propaganda of impurity that are taught to students and perpetuated by Islamist clerics around the world. This language is often literally lost in translation when loaded words are replaced with less highly charged synonyms.

Dirty words and symbols are also frequently employed in protest signs and effigies. Examples include an effigy of President Obama labeled “black dog,” his portrait attached to a stuffed monkey, placards of Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu as a pig and protest signs depicting Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice drinking the blood of infants. Shoes, the quintessential symbol of impurity, are often used in Islamist protests; held in the air, attached to, thrown at and standing on images of politicians. Placing your shoes on the face of a politician is a common gesture in many such protests. The language of impurity is used to incite protests. On June 3, 2010 the Islamist organization Hizb ut-Tahrir in Bangladesh issued a press release on their website in English and Bengali, organizing a demonstration to protest against Israel’s Gaza flotilla military operation that read, “O Muslim Armies! Teach the Jews a lesson after which they will need no further lessons. March forth to fight them, eradicate their entity and purify the earth of their filth.” (56) The September 2012 protests against the anti-Islam video that prompted a wave of demonstrations throughout the world also included words and symbols of impurity. In one protest several Muslim women were holding up a sign with the photo of a monkey sticking its tongue out pasted over the American flag. One sign had the name Obama written on the tongue of the monkey. (57) Monkeys, dogs and shoes are all frequently used symbols of impurity. In North Africa the Islamist group Al-Qaeda in the Land of the Islamic Maghreb “urged Muslims to pull down and burn American flags at embassies, and kill or expel American diplomats to ‘purge our land of their filth in revenge for the honor of the Prophet.’” (58) The message that the impurity of the filthy “other” must be removed from sacred land is a common theme in Islamist rhetoric.

For Islamists dirty words are often meant as curse words in the traditional meaning of the term, specifically the belief that cursing someone will bring actual harms. Curse words are a classic form of magical thinking; taboo speech that is a form of magical thinking might be termed “word magic,” the concept that the very act of uttering a word directly affects the person or thing that the word refers to. (59) Word magic is most commonly found in religious practices such as intercessory prayer, blessings, oaths, incantations, ritual formulae used in liturgies and curses. (60) Sociologist Jack Katz describes the significance of cursing for offenders in his book Seductions of Crime, saying that attackers
Perlmutter - Demand for Purity

including al Qaeda, "emphasized the need to cleanse Islam from impurities resulting from its exposure to Western and capitalist influences. Sayyid Qutb, one of the most influential contemporary Islamists whose ideals inspired many terrorists groups

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Purity and Violence: The Nature of Islamist Terrorism

The act of cursing has magical qualities, which is why it is forbidden to curse fellow Muslims. However, cursing non-believers is perfectly acceptable. Fatwa 36674 states that “Cursing the kuffaar and sin in general terms, such as saying 'May Allah curse the Jews and Christians,' or 'May Allah curse the kaafirs, evildoers and wrongdoers,' or 'May Allah curse the wine-drinker and thief.' This kind of curse is permissible and there is nothing wrong with it. 'It is permissible to curse the thief.' This kind of curse is permissible and there is nothing wrong with it. ‘It is permissible to curse the Jews and Christians,' etc.... Allah's Messenger ... said, 'Do not curse one another, invoking curse of Allah or Wrath of Allah or the fire of Hell.’... To curse a Muslim is akin to killing him. Allah's Messenger ... said, 'Cursing a believer is like murdering him.'... The act of cursing is such that one who does it can himself become a recipient of it.... Allah's Messenger ... said, 'When a person curses (La'nah; to ask that something be deprived of Allah's Mercy) somebody or something, the curse goes up to the heaven and the gates of the heaven are closed. Then it comes down to the earth and its gates are closed. Then it turns right and left, and if it does not find an entrance to go anywhere, it returns to the person or thing that was cursed, if he or it deserves to be cursed; otherwise, it returns to the person, who uttered it.’(62)

The dirty language of Islamist jihad functions as "cursing," marking unbelievers as impure pollution that must be purified through violence. It is the authentic meaning of the term "ethnic cleansing." Cleansing Islam of its impurities and expelling unbelievers from Muslim holy lands is the ideological goal of Islamism.

In Belgium in November 2011, five Muslim Moroccan girls assaulted Oceane Sluijzer, a 13-year-old classmate. While grabbing her hair and slamming her head against their entrance to go anywhere, it returns to the person or thing that was cursed; otherwise, it returns to the person, who uttered it.”(62)

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Purity and Violence: The Nature of Islamist Terrorism

In Islam, the concept of cursing is referred to by the Arabic word La'nat which means deprivation, signifying being deprived of God's blessing. In Islam it is permissible to pray to Allah to curse unbelievers but cursing fellow Muslims is discouraged. Islamic texts regarding cursing clearly describe it as a form of word magic:

Muslims should neither curse nor imprecate each other with words such as, "May the Curse of Allah be upon you," or "I wish you to burn in Hell-fire," etc.... Allah's Messenger ... said, "Do not curse one another, invoking curse of Allah or Wrath of Allah or the fire of Hell."... To curse a Muslim is akin to killing him. Allah's Messenger ... said, "Cursing a believer is like murdering him."... The act of cursing is such that one who does it can himself become a recipient of it.... Allah's Messenger ... said, "When a person curses (La'nah; to ask that something be deprived of Allah's Mercy) somebody or something, the curse goes up to the heaven and the gates of the heaven are closed. Then it comes down to the earth and its gates are closed. Then it turns right and left, and if it does not find an entrance to go anywhere, it returns to the person or thing that was cursed, if he or it deserves to be cursed; otherwise, it returns to the person, who uttered it.”(62)

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Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini, the Iranian Shiite cleric and founder of Iran's Islamic Republic, was determined to rid Iran of what he saw as Western corruption and to restore the purity of Islam. Al Qaeda's ideological program is the
purification of Islam through violent struggle. Osmani and Ayman al-Zawahiri have continually called on supporters to purify Muslim holy lands of infidels, un-Islamic beliefs and practices.

For Islamists, cleansing Islam is a function of jihad, holy war, and a justification for violence and terrorism. Islamists lead by emphasizing how purifying Islam of Western influences will restore respect, honor and dignity to true believers who have been humiliated by the occupation of their lands and defilement of their holy places. Many politicians and terrorism scholars attribute the root causes of terrorism to societal issues such as poverty, oppression, alienation and unresolved grievances. In her book *Terror in The Name of God, Why Religious Militants Kill*, terrorism expert Jessica Stern writes.

"Over the last quarter century, standards of living have either fallen or remained steady for most Muslim-majority states. In some, extremist groups step in to offer the social services the state is failing to provide. Poor governance and inadequate protection of civil liberties have allowed extremist groups to thrive and to spread the message that the West is responsible for their plight. Weak or authoritarian governments, extremist religious groups, poverty, rage, and alienation work in concert to create a population that is furious with America, which is viewed—often rightly—as a supporter of the status quo in the Arab and Islamic world." (69)

In the introduction to his book *What Makes A Terrorist*, Alan B. Krueger cited some of the arguments for economics and lack of education as the root causes of terrorism:

In short, what makes a terrorist? Although the answer to this question is complex and surely varies from case to case, many turned to a simple explanation: economic deprivation and a lack of education cause people to adopt extreme views and turn to terrorism. This explanation appealed to a wide range of people, from President George W. Bush and Prime Minister Tony Blair to religious figures of all faiths to public intellectuals. The alleged connection between poverty, lack of education, political extremism, and terrorism continues to resonate with government officials, even those who leave office and are no longer obliged to toe the party line. For example, Richard Armitage, the deputy secretary of state from 2001 to 2005, published an op-ed piece in the New York Times on Pakistan's problems with terrorism that claimed, "General Musharraf has shown that he understands the seriousness of dealing with the root causes of extremism, making real efforts to improve economic and educational opportunities" (Armitage and Bue, 2006, p. 11). Within the Muslim community, a distinguished group of thirty-nine imams and ulama (religious leaders and scholars) signed a statement that claimed, "The tragedy of 7th July 2005 demands that all of us, both in public life and in civil and religious society, confront together the problems of Islamophobia, racism, unemployment, economic deprivation and social exclusion-factors that may be alienating some of our children and driving them towards the path of anger and desperation" (Muslim Council of Britain, 2005, p. 2). Rowan Williams, the archbishop of Canterbury, chalked up terrorism to "economic powerlessness" (Williams, 2006). And in his acceptance speech upon being awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 2006 for his work on micro loans, the economist Muhammad Yunus of Bangladesh said that it was essential to put "resources into improving the lives of the poor people" to end the root cause of terrorism (Yunus, 2006). (70)

Krueger argues against these positions in his book suggesting that terrorism is motivated by political goals not poverty. The Obama administration also views the cause of terrorism as an economic and social issue. In a September 19, 2001 statement on the attacks of 9/11 Barack Obama, then an Illinois state senator, issued a statement to his local newspaper the *Hyde Park Herald*: "I think terrorism may find expression in a particular brand of violence, and may be channeled by particular demagogues or fanatics. Most often, though, it grows out of a climate of poverty and ignorance, helplessness and despair." (71) President Obama's position that poverty is a root cause of terrorism has been consistent throughout his administration and held by both Secretaries of State Hillary Clinton and John Kerry. A 2011 article in *Foreign Affairs* reported that "In 2010, U.S. President Barack Obama argued in favor of sending more development aid to poor countries, because 'extremely poor societies' are 'optimal breeding grounds for disease, terrorism, and conflict.' The same year, Secretary of State Hillary Clinton concurred, declaring economic development an 'integral part of America's national security policy.'" (72) When Secretary of State John Kerry met with his counterpart Pietro Parolin at the Vatican in Rome on January 13, 2014 he linked poverty to terrorism in remarks following the meeting: "And so we have a huge common interest in dealing with this issue of poverty, which in many cases is the root cause of terrorism or even the root cause of the disenfranchisement of millions of people on this planet." (73)

These theories habitually underestimate the ideological influence of purity rites, and the resulting hypersensitivity to humiliation and thus vulnerability to Islamist messaging. Such politicians and scholars apparently fail to recognize that shame is embodied in Islam and frustrations may be the result of an unattainable demand for purity. It is the dread of impurity, not poverty, that is the direct cause of Islamist terrorism. While it is impossible to predict the cultural effects of long-term economic development, for the moment this is an important reality. Islamist propaganda that is calculated to incite violence focuses on religion and holy war almost entirely ignoring economic conditions. For this reason Islamist messaging continually emphasizes occupation of holy land, defilement of the sacred and offences to Islam, rather than economic disadvantages and material privations.

The call to jihad is presented by Islamists as an opportunity to restore dignity, honor and respect and alleviate feelings of humiliation and shame. This is to be accomplished by sanctioning violence in the cause of holy war, which transforms violence into an act of purification. Terrorism justified as sacred violence is a cleansing ritual that functions as expiation of individual shame and as a method to cleanse Islam of the impurity of the West. Islamist messaging that continually tells the Muslim community that they are being humiliated by Western infidels is a proven strategy for inciting violence. Killing in the cause of Islam, Islamist propaganda promises, restores respect and feels moral and good. This is a psychologically plausible strategy. In his book *Preventing Violence*, prison psychiatrist Dr. James Gilligan posits,
the basic psychological motive, or cause, of violent behavior is the wish to ward off or eliminate the feeling of shame and humiliation—a feeling that is painful, and can even be intolerable and overwhelming—and replace it with its opposite, the feeling of pride.... The degree to which a person experiences feelings of shame depends on two variables: the way other people are treating him (with admiration and respect or with contempt and disdain) and the degree to which he himself already feels proud or ashamed. The more a person is shamed by others, from childhood by parents or peers who ridicule or reject him, the more he is likely to feel chronically shamed, and hypersensitive to feelings and experiences of being shamed, sometimes to the point of feeling that others are treating him with contempt or disdain even when they are not. For such people, and they are the rule among the violent, even a minor sign of real or imagined disrespect can trigger a homicidal reaction. The purpose of violence is to force respect from other people.(74)

The Islamist demand for purity chronically shames true believers through purification rites that make them hypersensitive to humiliation, increasing their potential for violence.

As I have said elsewhere,

Islamist propaganda is designed to convince believers that their honor has been disrespected, their prophet has been insulted, their territory has been occupied, their holy book has been defiled and they have lost face. Symbols and loaded language are all calculated to trigger feelings of humiliation that can only be assuaged through violence. Exploitation of perceived desecration incidents is emphasized so that violence can be morally sanctioned as a defense of Islamic purity, which has been defiled, transforming murder it into a sacred act. Purification through violence is a sacrificial ritual. Shedding blood, including one’s own, restores honor and washes away shame. (75)

Suicide attacks, referred to by Islamists as “martyrdom operations,” are purification rituals, sacrificial acts that cleanse the land of impurities and the individual of sin. In his article “Why Does Religion Turn Violent? A Psychoanalytic Exploration of Religious Terrorism,” James W. Jones writes, “In many religions the theme of purification is linked with the theme of sacrifice. The Latin root ‘sacri-ficium’ means to ‘make holy.’ Sacrifice is a way of making something holy, of purifying it. Sacrifices are offerings to the divine and to the community. But they are a special kind of offering in that what is given is destroyed. But something is not only destroyed, it (or something related to it, like the religious community) is also transformed. Something is offered; something is made holy.”(76) Killing and dying for Islam are considered sacred, and sacred violence is always justified. However, the violence must be ritualized into a sacred rite to distinguish it from profane barbarism. This is what Girard refers to as the difference between sacrificial violence and nonsacrificial violence, between blood spilt for ritual or criminal purposes: “Beneficial violence must be carefully distinguished from harmful violence and the former continually promoted at the expense of the latter. Ritual is nothing more than the regular exercise of ‘good’ violence.... Sacrificial violence can, in the proper circumstances, serve as an agent of purification.”(77) For this reason, jihadists in Syria, Nigeria, Somalia, Afghanistan, Iraq and other countries take the time to slit the throats of many of and behead their enemies instead of just shooting them. Enemies are ritually slaughtered in the same manner and for the same reasons as unclean animals: to maintain ritual purity in Islam. According to the rules of Dhabihah, the prescribed method of ritual animal slaughter in Islamic law consists of cutting a fully conscious animal’s throat while praising Allah and then letting it bleed to death.(78) Specifically, the prescribed method entails a swift deep incision made with a sharp knife on the throat, cutting the carotid arteries in the neck along with the esophagus and vertebrate trachea with one swipe of a non-serrated blade. Exsanguination should take place before the animal dies because the animal should not be handled while the blood is draining. It is mandatory to invoke the name of Allah during the time of slaughter or the sacrifice is rendered void. Jihadists yell “Allahu Akbar!” during beheadings as part of their ritual human slaughter. After beheading British soldier Lee Rigby on a London street on May 22, 2013, Michael Adebolajo told police that he and Michael Adebowale cut his throat with a knife because “this is how we kill our animals in Islam.”(79) Adebolajo claimed that “The most humane way to kill any creature is to cut the jugular. This is what I believe... He may be my enemy but he is a man...so I struck at the neck and attempted to remove his head.”(80) Dozens of honor killings also entailed cutting the victims throats and are often described as an act of purification by the offenders. Just a few examples of honor murders in Jordan exemplify how honor killing is similar to animal ritual slaughter. On April 29, 2013 a Jordanian man slit his sister’s throat and stabbed her 20 times in the face and chest “to cleanse the family honor.”(81) In November 2011, when an 18 year old man from the southern city of Taftah, killed his sister in public by slitting her throat, he told police he killed her “to cleanse the family honour.”(82) In July 2011 a Jordanian man confessed to stabbing his twenty two year old wife to death claiming that “ he wanted to cleanse his honor after he suspected his wife of bad behavior.”(83) On April 14, 2013 the burned body of a pregnant woman in her twenties was found in a dumpster in Ruseifeh (east of Amman). Her throat was slit and her womb was cut open displaying her murdered four-month-old fetus. The two men seen dumping her body in the garbage container and setting it ablaze were taking out what they considered trash.(84) The symbolism of impurity evident in the chosen dump site and the act of setting her on fire, a common method of purification, demonstrates the strong visceral nature of feelings of uncleanness. The demand for purity and its manifestation in emotions of shame and honor are particularly evident in honor killings.

Girard explains the necessity of sacrificial violence for mitigating impurity: “The taint of impurity cannot always be avoided; even the most careful precautions are no security against it. And the least contact with the infection can contaminate the entire community. How can one cleanse the infected members of all trace of pollution? Does there exist some miraculous substance potent enough not only to resist infection but also to purify, if need be, the contaminated blood? Only blood itself, blood whose purity has been guaranteed by the performance of appropriate rites—the blood, in short, of sacrificial victims—can accomplish this feat.”(85) Fathers, brothers, mothers kill their beloved daughters and sisters to purify their alleged contaminated blood in defense of the purity and honor of the family. Jihadists cut the throats of their enemies as righteous slaughter in defense of the purity and honor of Islam. Enemies and tainted daughters become unclean animals. Murder is a purification ritual that restores honor to the community and cleanses personal shame. Rites of purity are the secret weapon in propaganda, recruitment and
indoctrination, a brilliant method to prevent Islamists from being assimilated to other cultures, to demonize the enemy, to guard the family bloodline, to demarcate territory as sacred land and to incite violence against the impure other. Purification rites constitute a form of symbolic warfare that is so successful that an army of true believers has arisen willing to kill and die to protect the purity of Islam.

Notes

1. "Every culture entails an idea, in one form or another, that the inner essence of man can be either pure or defiled." "Purification Rite," Encyclopedia Britannica, http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/483975/purification-rite/66392/The-introduction-of-purity. (back)


8. Khuri, cited above, 36, 41. (back)


10. Khuri, cited above, 49. (back)

11. Khuri, cited above, 16, 27, 30. (back)


16. Elemer Hankiss, Fears and Symbols (Budapest: Central European University Press, 2001), 139. (back)


In general, evil Jinn are characteristically similar to the Western concept of demons and ghosts, while good Jinn have attributes similar to the Western concept of guardian angels. Many Muslims believe that evil Jinn are spiritual entities that can enter and possess people and exercise supernatural influence over them. Evil Jinn are also often believed to haunt people and places while good Jinn can protect, empower and assist humans in many ways. For millions of Muslims around the world, both illiterate and educated, jinn exist and are experienced as real. The Quranic message itself is addressed to both humans and jinn. Although there is a recurrent presence of Jinn in legends, myths, poetry and literature, for Muslims jinn are not solely relegated to myths or superstitious beliefs, they are described in the Quran and are an integral part of Islamic theology.

According to the Quran, God created humans from clay, angels from light and Jinn from smokeless fire. The Quran describes Jinn as actual, intelligent life forms, beings that, though different from humans, share some attributes with them. Jinn are complex, multifarious intermediary beings that, similar to humans, have free will and can embrace goodness or evil. There are different tribes, clans and classes of jinn each with their own attributes and powers. Jinn often appear humanoid or even human but possess amazing powers that humans lack. They can change their shapes, fly through the air and can even render themselves invisible. They can take any form they want human, beast or animal, often as dogs, snakes and scorpions. Interestingly, many of the fears associated with Islamic purification rites are expressed in the symbolic attributes of the jinn. For example, in Islam dogs, urine, feces, and blood are intrinsically impure and Jinn are known to shape shift to dogs, accept impure animal sacrifice and dwell in bathrooms, garbage dumps, sewers, graveyards and other unclean places. This reinforces the deeply embedded concept of evil as contagious pollution in Islamic rites of purity and intensifies the inherent primal fear of jinn. Women are considered to be more vulnerable to jinn because they are thought to be weaker in their faith and impure several days of the month which coincides with the idea that impurity wields a strong magnetic influence on jinn. Belief in Jinn directly corresponds to Islamic rites of purity, the origin of local customs, ritual practices and superstitions.
Laden directs his criticism against Arab rulers in general and against the Saudi royal family in particular..." (back)


40. Google search in Arabic of the phrase "dirty infidel" on May 25, 2014. (back)

41. Google search of the phrase "dirty Jew" in English and Arabic on May 25, 2014. (back)


45. "Iran leader's aide: Jews are filthy," ynetnews.com (August 6, 2006), http://www.ynetnews.com/articles/0,7340,L-3260391,00.html. (back)

46. "Iran leader's aide: Jews are filthy," ynetnews.com (August 6, 2006), http://www.ynetnews.com/articles/0,7340,L-3260391,00.html. (back)


50. "'Iran leader's aide: Jews are filthy," ynetnews.com (August 6, 2006), http://www.ynetnews.com/articles/0,7340,L-3260391,00.html. (back)


53. Sean O'Neill, "Muslim students 'being taught to despise unbelievers as filthy',' thetimes.co.uk (April 20 2006), http://www.thetimes.co.uk/tto/news/uk/article1947337.ece. (back)

54. Barry Duke, "Mad Muslim hate preacher barred from addressing Reading University students," Freethinker.co.uk (February 28, 2013), http://freethinker.co.uk/2013/02/28/mad-muslim-hate-preacher-barred-from-addressing-reading-university-students/. (back)


60. Zusne and J, cited above, 196. (back)


66. Gantz, cited above. (back)


69. Stern, cited above, 287. (back)


71. Toby Harnden, "Barack Obama and John McCain on 9/11: Statements then and now," Telegraph.co.uk (September 12, 2008), http://blogs.telegraph.co.uk/news/tobyharnden/5213537/Barack_Obama_and_John_McCain_on_911_Statements_then_and_now/. (back)


74. James Gilligan, Preventing Violence (New York: Thames & Hudson, 2001), 29, 35. (back)

75. Dawn Perlmutter, “Prelude to the Boston Bombings,” Middle East Quarterly 20.4 (Fall 2013), 77. (back)


77. Girard, cited above, 37, 40. (back)

78. Dhabihah is the Islamic law regarding animal slaughter. Some of the conditions for slaughtering an animal in Islam include: (i) A person, a man or a woman, who slaughters an animal must be a Muslim. (ii) The animal should be slaughtered with a weapon made of iron. (iii) When an animal is slaughtered, it should be facing Qibla. (iv) When a person wants to slaughter an animal, just as he makes the Niyyat to slaughter, he should utter the name of Allah, (v) The animal should show some movement after being slaughtered. This law applies only when it is doubtful whether or not the animal was alive at the time of being slaughtered, otherwise it is not essential.(vi) It is necessary that the blood should flow in normal quantity from the slaughtered animal. (vii) The animal should be slaughtered from its proper place of slaughtering; on the basis of recommended precaution, the neck should be cut from its front, and the knife should be used from the back of the neck... As a precaution, it is not permissible to sever the head of the animal from its body before it has died."


79. Arthur Martin, "British soldier's alleged killer 'told police he went for jugular as he was hacked to death in London street because that is how animals are killed in Islam'," Dailymail.co.uk (December 5, 2013), http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-2518738/Lee-Rigbys-killer-told-police-went-Fusiliers-jugular-animals-killed-Islam.html.

80. Martin, cited above.


84. Martin Jay, "Pregnant woman in Jordan had stomach slit in 'honour' killing before her body was thrown in dumpster," Daily mail.co.uk (April 16, 2013), http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-2309844/Pregnant-woman-Jordan-stomach-slit-honour-killing-body-thrown-dumpster.html.

85. René Girard, cited above, 36.
The purpose of this article is to reveal the extent to which knowledge claims in communication that purport to be true should always be supported by the human virtue of faith. When not so supported, it is argued that they are dependent on a blind, even unconscious, trust. Truth or objectivity or certainty and the like are not to be thought of as the principal ethical criteria of speech, but, rather one should accept a single principal one—human faith.

It will be seen later in what way this faith is not to be identified as divine in the normal acceptation of that word. In view of faith thus being a vital element in dialogues involving truth and knowledge, in all instances of their occurrence, this interlocks epistemology with ethics, with consequent implications for both, particularly as regards the inescapability of sacrifice in human dealings. As the source of dialogue, language is argued to be the ground of what had been regarded as ‘divinity’ as such, and, when properly theorized, that ‘divinity’ loses nothing of its ethical power but gains by the loss of the superstition that enfeebles it. As the final step, I shall indicate why these ethical implications have tended to keep the key proposal out of philosophical attention.

(Step 1) Sensory and Perceptual Relativity

The initial premise is the fact of the differences at the sensory and perceptual level between one agent and another, any of which differences, depending on the circumstances of mutually projected understanding, may become relevant to action. All our statements to each other are characterized by both sensory and perceptual relativity. For a survey of the extent of the sensory relativity of vision, see Larry Hardin’s book *Color for Philosophers* (1986). Similar cases can be made for the other senses. As regards perceptual judgements, the psycholinguist Ragnar Rommetveit has shown that human subjects use markedly different criteria in identifying what they call ‘the same entity’ (Rommetveit 1974: Ch. 4; see also Watzlawick 1977, chs. 5 to 7). Kant acknowledged this: ‘To one man . . . a certain word suggests one thing, to another some other thing; the unity of consciousness in what is empirical is not, as regards what is given, necessarily and universally valid’ (*CPR* B140). The history of our personal learning of what selections from the real to fit to words plays its part here. Notice that, though this appears to be an uncontentious claim, its implications have gone unexamined, and this disinclination deserves analysis.

Wilhelm von Humboldt, the eminent German anthropologist and linguist, was thus not uttering nonsense when he asserted that ‘All understanding is at the same time a misunderstanding; agreement in thought and feeling is also a parting of the ways’ (Humboldt 1971: p. 43). He put it this way because he wanted to foreground the fact that the genesis of speech can be traced to a felt need to update another person, to improve some selection they are making from their field of experience, and the presupposition behind that assertion is that there would be no impulse to speak unless speaker and hearer did have *different* understandings of some portion or portions of the world (although the core argument here is confined to the Statement, it has been extended to the Question and the Command; see Wright 2005, 142-7).

(Step 2) The Idealization of Reciprocity as a Mode of Coping with that Relativity

Wilhelm von Humboldt, the linguist Fritz Mauthner (1923: II, 117), and the sociologist Alfred Schutz (1962:
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(Step 3) The Idealization of Reciprocity in Language

In jokes, stories and games, including the language-game, the trick — and I do mean ‘trick’ — is to challenge that ‘reciprocity’, to induce in the hearer, reader, audience to accept another interpretation of the same sensory evidence.

An example (those familiar with the present argument will forgive my using an example I used before [Wright 2008, 3]): As regards language, consider this interchange between two bird-watchers engaged in a bird-count:

A: That bird in that tree you just counted.

B: Well, what about it?

A: It was two-and-a-bit leaves.
It seems that B should not really have been so confident in his use of the singular pronoun ‘it’. What is noteworthy here is that A did use the singular form ‘that bird’—to get B’s attention fixed on the fuzzy region about which she wishes to update B. At the beginning of a statement these two engaged in dialogue have assumed that they have selected the same singular entity from the real continuum. But this mutual assumption was really only something in the nature of a catalyst in the process of transmitting information, for at the end of the statement the ‘entity’ was not the same for B as it had been before.

One may call the bird phrase the ‘pragmatic subject’, and A’s last sentence the ‘pragmatic predicate’ (there is no necessary tie between these and the grammatical subject and predicate, since what updates the Hearer can be in any part of a sentence—see ‘The cat is on the mat’ as an answer to the question ‘What is on the mat?’. This distinction was first pointed out by the logician John Cook Wilson (1926: 123-6).

In the example above, the ‘entity’ had not even preserved its singularity, ‘one’ bird becoming ‘two-and-a-bit leaves’, but B had nevertheless been updated by A about his perception of the world. The ‘reciprocity of perspectives’ was transformed. As Dinnaga, a 6th-century Indian Buddhist sage, put it, ‘Even "this" can be a case of mistaken identity’ (Matilal, 1986: 365-7), a fact not realized by Bertrand Russell. In Russell’s philosophy of language, ‘this’ as an unshakable singularity and should be viewed as such when it appears as a basic ‘referent’ in a statement (Russell 1923, 120-3), which can now be seen as actually believing that the ‘reciprocity’ is complete.

A defensible interpretation can be put on this claim, one which Russell did not foresee. The core of any informative statement is that the two participants begin by mutually assuming that they have ‘the same entity’ in view—yet this assumption is no more than that, an assumption, a taking-for-granted, which is useful nevertheless in bringing two differing perceptions into enough of an overlap of understanding to allow the updating to go through (that there is no necessary actual overlap in perception can be readily seen in our example). But this is no surprise, for the phrasal verb ‘to take for granted’ contains the same indication of suggesting a tentative hypothesis. ‘To take for’ means to accept one thing as if it were another, that is, it is used in situations both parties recognize as having an element of ambiguity or illusion (compare—’It was so foggy I took him for his brother’). Examine the parts of this phrasal verb ‘to take for’: ‘to take’ here means to accept a percept as reliable, as no illusion, no mis-take; and ‘for’ implies that the percept was wrongly interpreted. ‘Granted’ means allowed, permitted, exposed to no expectation of opposition of will and desire from the other. So ‘to take for granted’ means to accept an illusion of real agreement as a perfect agreement, an apparent blending of motivation with another as a perfect fusing, as if there no violent disagreement was possible in the future. And what is this illusory agreement the illusion of which is be temporarily ignored? —that a single object is before the agents concerned—and they are concerned agents. Not the important feature of this fusing of hypotheses, that both agents are undoubtedly attempting to handle the real with something that is imagined — separately by each of them.

In order to obtain a rough-and-ready mutual fix on a portion of the real, a partial overlapping of their differing selections, they have to behave as if they have a perfect one. My own way of describing this trick by which we get a rough mutual grasp on the Real has been to say ‘It is by a PRETENCE of complete success that we partially capture THE REAL’. This could be said to explain Saussure’s hybrid view of language as a fixed system, the ‘synchronic’, and as a developing one, the ‘diachronic’ (Saussure 1977, 81). He used these terms because the idealization is timeless (syn-chronic) as something imagined, whereas the updating clue, as the adjective implies, moves through time (dia-chronic) to a new idealized state. One might almost say that there was the logical on the one hand and the figurative on the other. Saussure himself had no explanation for the relation of the two. So language is ‘hybrid’, but certainly not in the way he imagined.

Objectors may protest that such an extension of their position is a fanciful exaggeration, but to believe in the perfection of the singularity of objective reference implies precisely that. A divine uniqueness invade the claim of mundane objectivity, but the ‘commonsense’ defenders of it cannot see it. When they typically protest “You are not telling me that that is not a book here in front of us both!”, you can counter with drawing attention to their use of the word ‘telling’: what this implies is that (i) language is all to do with narrative telling; (ii) their prohibition of one’s telling is a sign of their believing in the imaginary perfection of the ‘commonsense’ reference they are making—while ignoring how the commonality of mutual sense is achieved by the Idealization of Reciprocity, and thus, implicitly, forbidding me to speak; (iii) that it is
grossly unethical to project one’s own private reference as the touchstone for all; and that (iv) men and women, ‘anthro-’, achieve their human nature in talk through ‘-poetics’, not through literal belief. By the way, it is not without significance that we often use the word ‘telling’ as an adjective to mean of newly persuasive and lasting importance.

Finally—an apparently disturbing philosophical conclusion — since the notion of singularity is no more than a catalyst, we do not need to believe in ‘the singular entity’ for it is quite otiose in our ontology, however valuable it is in communication. We need to acknowledge this at the very same time as we, with the utmost seriousness,—as in a game or play —treat the singularity as real. Strictly speaking, there is no perceptible difference on behaviour at that moment between those who actually believe in the singularity and those that are co-operatively imagining it; it is just that the believers are using an hypothesis as if it were purely real, while the others are using the hypothesis knowingly (for this linguistic use of ‘as if’ see Hans Vaihinger 1924, 91-95). Compare the extra success of jokers who manage keep a straight face.

The claim here is that the Word, the Trope, and the Statement themselves, the building-blocks of all communication, are of this form, a view that bears out the opinion of Calvin Schrag, the American philosopher of rhetoric, that ‘Narrative is the linchpin of discourse’ (Schrag 1997: 41). In narratives an expectation is presented as established in order that, by the provision of a clue to a new context, the hearer’s interpretation can be shifted about upon the real, thus changing the ‘world’ (which we can take as the collaborative interpretation of the real). We thus change the ‘objective’ nature of some part of it, that is, its definition within the current interpersonal acceptance.

What now emerges is that, in order for the speaker, who is armed with the new interpretation, to effect in the hearer a change in percept at this first stage of communication, they must, to begin with, both behave as if they are picking out exactly the same thing from their separate fields of experience. Just as in the Joke and the Story, a speaker, once this needful situation has been set up, produces a clue to a new intentional context, and this affects the context of what was initially agreed, shifting it upon their sensory fields and their memory of them. This, of course, is the aim of the utterance, but, as we know well, it may not succeed. The partners in the dialogue must, as Wilhelm von Humboldt insisted (1971, 36), make their own checks upon their own sensory experience in order to test out that shift, checks which have to be made for the transformation to be appreciated.

This situation is thus an unusual one: though both think that they have focused on ‘the same entity’, all they are actually doing is bringing two differing selections from the brute real into a rough co-ordination, one sufficient to guide their co-operative actions in the current circumstance, but the key additional point is that this mistaken thought is what enables them to produce that rough co-ordination in the first place. It matches exactly the first move in the joke where it appears for the moment that both the joker and his hearer share the same understanding of a part of the world. It is also, unsurprisingly, what keeps them both from realizing what they are actually doing!—and what has kept most linguists from realizing what was being done!

It seems likely that what the blind and deaf Helen Keller unconsciously realized, as she ran her hands under the water from a tap and was treated to tactile signing of /water/ from her teacher, was not so much that she had come to understand what a name was (Aitchison, 1996, 96) but that language began with the understanding that the other’s attention, through the hand sign /water/, was on the ‘same’ portion of the Real, even though she and her teacher had markedly different perceptions of it, her teacher having normal sensory access to the world.

Note, therefore, the paradox that arises from this dramatic performance of the coincidence of each person’s object with that of another’s. Every informative statement is of this form: the two in dialogue begin by getting a rough and partial superimposition of their percepts by acting as if they already had a perfect one, as if there were a single entity that provided an unquestionable referent for both of them. They have to act out Samuel Butler’s notion that ‘everything is what it is and not another thing’ (Butler, 1970 [1726]), as implied by the so-called ‘Laws of Thought’ (which are obviously dependent on the Idealization of Reciprocity). No surprise that that they are called ‘laws’ as they are presumed to apply to any speaker. The next step is to deny that very presupposition, because the speaker provides a clue to another intentional perspective that alters the ‘entity’, which amounts to a common admission that they did not in fact have a
perfect superimposition of their selections. They performed what is thus an imagined act, one which cannot be but an act of faith. It is clearly necessary as a part of our method of achieving an overlap of our separate selections from the real that we behave as if it were not a mere overlap but a pure coinciding.

In actual dialogue the mismatching between the speaker's and the hearer's 'referent' can vary considerably: (i) they can overlap by a large margin such that the mismatch can be very minor and cause no notable mix-ups for a considerable time; (ii) the overlap can be very small in that a misunderstanding rapidly emerges; (iii) there may be no overlap at all in which misunderstanding leads to gross dissimilarity in action. There is a fourth type of mismatch: it may be that the intended hearer has not sorted any entity at all from the real in that region of it, it being outside the present scope of his or her attention. The fact that the real sensory field may exist unperceived has been contested by some objectors to this theory: the psychologist James J. Gibson for one believes that the real consists of a mass of already distinct 'invariants', so in his view one cannot not perceive, that is, that every portion of your sensory fields is already mapped out into separable units (Gibson, 1977, 67). The response is to say that this is our hope, and, too, the basis of our method of guiding us through the real, but not by any means a given (for empirical evidence that disproves Gibson's claim see Wright 2005, 91-3). One can add that Gibson's use of the word 'invariant' is no more than an expression of the Idealization of Reciprocity without the acknowledgement of the inescapable risk that attends it; for two persons in communication, each has arrived at his or her hopeful 'invariant' but they are not the same, so for each there are regions they are sensing but not perceiving. It needs to be pointed out that a mismatch in understanding can lead to positive as well as negative outcomes, for the hearer may already have assumed something in the 'taking-for-granted' which is of immense mutual value and which, initially, had not been at all recognized by the speaker. Teachers are always open to being taught by pupils.

(Step 4) The Difficulty of Performing the Idealization

We come now to what Schutz omitted. It probably will already have been realized that, in any case, such ideal coinciding was impossible from the start: the sensory and perceptual differences prevent it taking place. An idealization of reciprocity is impossible to effect, for what does such reciprocity imply but a perfect fusing at some eternal point of all the wishes and desires of both parties? One cannot artificially limit the desires of the partners in dialogue to something immediately relevant as each identically perceives it. It is plain that one's trust has to move out of the range of current expectations into a consciously imagined fusing, and this is one which is prepared to take unexpected motivational differences into consideration.

A philosopher, Joel Feinberg, has dubbed this extending of intention into the future the 'Accordion Effect':

This well-known feature of our language, whereby a man's actions can be described as narrowly or as broadly as we please, I propose to call the 'Accordion Effect', because an act, like the folding musical instrument, can be squeezed down to a minimum or else stretched out.

(Feinberg 1965: 146)

(He gives part of the answer to the questions surrounding this odd feature of language in that almost unnoticed little interjection 'as we please'; in the phrase 'as we please' the word 'we' has only an individual sense.). The accordion is stretched out by our providing wider and wider explanations of the intentional context. But there is a question that Feinberg did not ask: Is there the assumption that there is some one fixed fully open position, which, although a few of the bellow pleats are tattered, still represents a 'totality' of understanding which touches the world securely at its fully extended edges? This is extraordinary in that it appears to envisage an ideal goal of all our actions, some *summum bonum* for both speaker and hearer beyond the horizon which, of course, can never be achieved.

One is tempted to say that talkers have to content themselves with taking Feinberg's accordion as open enough to justify current suppositions about the relevance of what is said, the context thus having distinctly fuzzy edges. But that temptation is to be resisted if we are to analyse the circumstance satisfactorily—for whose are 'the current suppositions'?

Another linguist, Sir Alan Gardiner, criticized Saussure thus for neglecting the fact that each person has a
different understanding of a word (Gardiner 1951, 52-61). We can quote Immanuel Kant here:

To one man, for instance, a certain word suggests one thing, to another some other thing; the unity of consciousness in that which is empirical is not, as regards what is given, necessarily and universally valid. (Critique of Pure Reason: B140)

Kant’s uncontentious statement, that it is not possible for two persons’ understandings to match exactly, has not been given by philosophers the attention it deserves. And why? Why do we take the equivalence as confirming a rational view of the world, that rationality depends on the common singularity of the entities we refer to? Fortunately, Ragnar Rommetveit has concerned himself with this very matter; he has empirically established the fact that it is possible for two persons to arrive at practical co-ordination in speech and action without either being aware that they each have marked differences of sensation and perception (Rommetveit, 1974). These differences would, indeed, only become salient to one or both in some entirely new context unforeseen by either, in which some hidden criterion on which one had been unconsciously relying became relevant to his or her current purposes.

A logician, Harry S. Leonard, has commented on this universal feature of communication, an ever-present but concealed ‘misapprehension’: notice the radical implication here which goes beyond this remark and that of Kant: the two might not even be using criteria that pick out strictly the same extension, the same ‘thing’.

Two people engaged in this same process of trying to reach a common understanding may well find two sets of criteria which remarkably well isolate the same extension. But do they understand the word in the same way? (Leonard, 1967: p. 266)

For one of them, his ‘entity’ might not be considered to last as long as the other’s ‘entity’, or cease to be ‘the same thing’ when it changes in some quality (say, in colour, weight or taste). As Aristotle commented, what are six apples for the seller do not necessarily count as six apples for the buyer. So the actual imputation of entityhood is just that, an imputation, performed mutually. To use phrases from Habermas, one has ‘to play along’ (2008, p. 32), acknowledge that there is only an ‘overlap’ of reference (ibid., p. 40), thus achieving only an ‘interlacing’ of differing ‘perspectives’ (1970, p. 141). This is what objectivists like James J. Gibson are unable to recognize.

There is thus a detectable taint of inconsistency here in the first quotation from Habermas, for, if there is something ‘unshareable and individual’ in an agent’s perceptions, how can the ‘symbols’ be ‘intersubjectively valid’? This is Saussure’s problem the other way round, for we can ask how can word and meaning perfectly match when meanings change across time?

Leonard’s remark can take us further: it does not matter (in the sense of how the participants in language judge their intentions and how they direct their separate attentions) whether their attempts at co-ordination do coincide fully, that is, each might have their own ‘entity’, their own selection from the individual experiences they are having, as long as the ‘failure’ of overlap between these selections does not immediately interfere with their immediate pragmatic judgements of success in the action concerned. Another way of putting it is to say that where each puts his or her boundaries upon the real can differ even when both would say that they were satisfied with their mutual agreement at that moment in time.

The implication is a startling one: there is actually no single entity in front of them at all—its ‘singularity’ is something supposed for the convenience of communication. That convenience is established by each behaving as if their two selections from experience actually did coincide. Obviously, if they did not make this necessary but strictly false assumption that there was only ‘one’ entity in front of them, they could never bring their separate judgements into any sort of harness.

This vital demand is what requires that the collaboration be ethically based on faith and not blind trust. To accept that all percepts are viable (Ernst von Glasersfeld’s favoured word here; Glasersfeld, 1984, 25) and that the language group is maintaining the co-reference of them by this species of faith is not easy to recognize or accept. Glasersfeld himself, like Schutz, does not carry his analysis further and pick up the ethical necessity of faith in this mutual situation.
Fearing for the security of our concepts, in particular our self-concept and the group concept bound up with it, leads, as we have seen, to rigidifying the blind faith into an unshakeable conviction of a final truth of our own identifications, which prevents, as we shall see, the challenge of faith from being recognized.

There is an unusual question here. If language has evolved in this way, few can have been consciously aware of this mutual assumption. Strictly speaking, it is not an assumption, but a natural performance. Analysis of the situation shows the two agents in dialogue behaving ‘as if they had exchanged bodies’ with the result that a ‘referent’ appears ‘exactly the same for both of them’. The subjects themselves are not in possession of the theory we are now entertaining. Since they are behaving as if ‘a single object’ were in front of them without knowing that they are so behaving, they immediately and certainly believe that ‘it’ is the ‘same object’ for their interlocutor. For them there is no ‘as if’. Hence, they are continually faced with shocks, pleasant and unpleasant, either when a correction works upon them or when brute contingency breaks in upon their assurance. It is not a great deal of consolation to realize that the intrusion of contingency thus is a proof of there being an external real independent of our language; and, furthermore, because of this real residue, solipsism is impossible since one’s notion of oneself is thus inextricably dependent on the judgement of others. The brute contingency of the real as such is as present in the so-called ‘self’ as anywhere else in the real, and much therefore always lies outside our knowing. Habitually, however, the overall false conviction of a objective world is not disturbed, the reason being precisely that the mutual performance of perfect objectivity has to be resumed with every utterance; otherwise we could not talk at all, for we would fail to get our separate perspectives in any kind of rough co-ordination. What cannot be disturbed is our inescapable immersion in the real, which continues in our sensings while our perceptions range dubiously and dangerously over it.

At this point it is needful to note that a naïve objection to this can be disposed of. The objection goes thus:

The sensory and perceptual relativity premiss has no force here because it is plain that the objectivity of the entity at the core of the attempts to refer is already an existent fact. There is no harm in pointing out that they may be varying perspectives upon the person or thing or property in question, but it cannot be denied that the focus of these ‘overlapping’ exists apart from them, and that it remains as what the attempts are trying to close in on. However ‘vague’ may be the criteria of recognition, the vagueness is the same for everyone (Wiggins, 1986, 95): it is plain that there is a core common across all perspectives. To use a favourite phrase of John McDowell, it is ‘thus and so’ (McDowell 1994, 9; see also Tye 2000, 46-7). Bertrand Russell dismissed vagueness altogether: ‘There can be no such thing as vagueness or imprecision; things are what they are and there’s an end of it’ (Russell 1923, 85).

But the ‘singular entity’ is not an ‘existent fact’: the taking of the focus as a singular, pre-existing ‘entity’ is only the means by which differing selections are held in hopeful focus. What undeniably exists is the ground of the real, the ever-changing flux, which has been carved out by each observer applying different criteria of recognition. Indeed, when a correction goes through and is apparently confirmed by one’s sensory inspection, one has been presented with a proof of the existence of the real, but one has not been presented with a proof of a perfect ‘objectivity’ characterizing one’s own selection, which remains irremediably different from that of others (Kuhn 1970, 198-204). Naturally we are disinclined to suspect our own and others’ success in the game of projecting identities: it has taken such trouble to hone them.

One has to say that each person’s selection outlines and embraces a portion of the real, but, because that portion cannot match that of anyone else, there is no final objectivity in that selection. You may be taking for granted as definitive of that ‘objectivity’ something you perceive that no one else does, and no one, including you, as yet knows of that difference between you! The word ‘objectivity’ becomes a useful piece in the language-game but it has no ontological reality except as such a piece; it can only slide about on the real as we adjust it in mutual hope. One curious consequence is that the updating the Speaker hopefully supplies may be unsatisfactory in the long run, but the transformation still proves the existence of the real, for it shows that the two observers have sensory access to it as the ground over which their selections play. There is therefore no pretence in the joys and sufferings that result from our engagements with the real for the whole play has a purpose, namely, to guide its collaborative drama through time for the impossible realization of all our hopes. It does not proceed for the satisfaction of any one of us because that very ‘oneness’ we owe to the great game itself. Pretence at the mundane level is thought of immediately as a
form of deception, but the great play is not a deception but the grandest of hypotheses, one we are within and cannot exist without (‘without’ here can be taken as an Elizabethan pun).

The continuing agreement in co-operative action with that part of the real leads us to equate its historical, temporary, only viable objectivity with the real, but this is to try vainly to turn hope that what we have picked out as the same for all of us, into logical certitude (Glasersfeld 1934, 33). Worthwhile dwelling on this fact: we can point at ‘the’ object and say to ourselves “That’s real!” or, with Ted Honderich, “That’s actual!” (Honderich, 2014), but one is still in the position of one ignoring the access of others: Birdwatcher B could have confidently pointed to the two-and-a-bit leaves he took for a bird and said ‘That’s real!’

Objectivity is thus not a feature of the real: it is only a rough compromise of differing perspectives upon existence that should guide human beings in their would-be collaborative actions within it. We find it profoundly unsettling to think of objective ‘reality’ as shot through with doubt: better, it seems, to hold to a ‘security’ that our partner in dialogue also appears to want to uphold, especially when our own identity would be rendered precarious. What is comfortingly forgotten in such attitude is that the real is full of surprises, and some of those surprises can arise unbidden from within us. How valuable it is, then, that we are unconsciously drawn to stories, which are all about those surprises. Inevitably, one element of the resistance to this theory lies in the fact that it is profoundly disturbing, as well as counter-intuitive, to accept the idea that all our identifications are irremediably uncertain, only maintained by human faith, faith which accepts the attendant risk.

Borrowing from the theory of the theatre, one can say that we should view all our mundane identifications as betraying a Brechtian Verfremdungs Effekt, that is, with the fictive illusion showing through. Brecht counsels his actors to disturb the audience’s cosy acceptance of the theatrical illusion so that they were unable to escape the play’s relevance to their lives:

The audience were to be nudged into a critical and inquiring attitude by a continual emphasis on the fictional status of the theatrical enterprise. (Elizabeth Wright 1989, 27).

For Brecht the aim was political, namely, to disturb the numbing effects of bourgeois ideology; but in the present context we can apply it to our habitual absorption in the mundane world, in which we turn a merely viable perception—of our ‘theatrical enterprise’—into a complacent self-deception. Although Brecht himself would characterize this theatrical method as arising from political insight, we can rather say that fundamentally it is a philosophical one.

An unforeseen consequence of blind faith is that it transforms the play-assumption of the Idealization of Reciprocity into a real belief in a final coincidence of Speaker’s and Hearer’s desires. Therefore one has right to say that blind trust implicitly projects a sumnum bonum, a heaven, a utopia, a promised land, a ‘Jerusalem’, where all desires are magically harmonized, when in fact they are no more than poetic expressions of our unrealizable mutual hope (Wright 2012). As Feinberg’s analysis shows, the ‘intentional perspective’ one adopts has no horizon. All our motivation has no idea of where it wants to end up—except as part of the needfully imagined common sumnum bonum.

Objectors may protest that such an extension of their position is a fanciful exaggeration, but to believe in the perfection of the singularity of objective reference implies precisely that. A timelessly divine uniqueness invades the claim of mundane objectivity, but the ‘commonsense’ defenders of it cannot see it. When they typically protest "You are not telling me that that is not a book here in front of us both!", you can counter with drawing attention to their use of the word ‘telling’: what this implies is that (i) language is all to do with narrative telling; (ii) their prohibition of one’s telling is a sign of their believing in the imaginary perfection of the ‘commonsense’ reference they are making—while ignoring how the commonality of mutual sense is achieved by the Idealization of Reciprocity, and thus, implicitly, as a German friend, Ulrike Hanraths, has pointed out to me, forbidding me to speak; (iii) that it is grossly unethical to project one’s own private reference as the touchstone for all; and that (iv) men and women —‘anthro-’— achieve their human nature in talk through ‘-poetics’, not through literal belief. By the way, it is not without significance that we often use the word ‘telling’ as an adjective to mean of newly persuasive and lasting importance.
Honderich, Wiggins, McDowell, and their like—all the way back to Russell—are typical of philosophers who dismiss anti-objectivist arguments thus. What motivates their false sense of certainty is their inability to see that any mutual identification has to take account of the stubbornly residual differences in our access to the real, and, in particular, to understand that a feature of such taking account must involve co-operating observers engaging in a form of play. If they advance to detecting a trace of the ambiguity of play, they can only construe the dual nature of the method as deception or disguise or an attempt at subversion. After all, as they would put it, what could be more destructive of truth than ambiguity?—Could not that ambiguity be deception? This is why they characterize anti-objectivism as relativist, as a view that refuses to accept that the basis of truth can ever be arrived at. So in opposing the relativist they adopt the authoritarian stance of someone engaged in morally correcting another, and thus feel justified in their certainty. To quote Russell again, ‘Things are what they are and there’s an end of it.’ There’s an end of it, because ‘it’ is the taken-for-granted agreement across speakers of language that observers are focussed upon one entity, but to accept that it is only taken for such is regarded as blasphemy.

However, play proper, whether of a game, a joke, or an aesthetic creation (poem, novel, drama, painting, statue, mime, ballet, etc., etc.), demands the mutual taking of one perception for another together with the serious recognition that all concerned are not ‘concerned’. We have to play ‘with straight faces’, knowing full well that all of us are all doing so. This implies that all speakers should be apprised beforehand that only faith can bridge the disturbing gap between the truth we are projecting together and the response of the real to our hope.

The objectivist winces away from the fictive character of this unnoticed collaboration: he sees it as delusory, pretended, even mythical, and derides what he regards as relativism with these accusations. But its irremovably dual nature arises from the two hypotheses that the persons in dialogue are trying to match. The objectivist cannot see the duality with a straight face, that is, inwardly acknowledging its presence but outwardly behaving as if it did not exist, all the while knowing that his partner in dialogue is doing exactly the same thing! Ironically, he is the one who is superstitious in taking the timeless singularity of ‘the’ entity for real.

When a philosophy professor of the analytic persuasion, Robert Kirk, said to me, "You’re not going to tell me that that is not the sun up there!", I replied "All you are doing is exhorting me to share the basic, poetic trust of language with you, and I will, for unless we treated our co-reference as a perfectly singular reference, I could never update you about the Real, such as now by saying that, strictly speaking, that bright disc of light is not the sun, for the actual sun is invisible some degrees further down the sky!"

The actual state of the case is that all ‘entities’, including that of the self, are maintained as co-operative choices from the real by this hidden faith — to quote the poet Edwin Muir, ‘Faith made the whole’ (Muir, 1960, 238-9). Incidentally, this is what had led the religions of the past to attribute the creation of the world to God, which can now be seen as only a poetic acknowledgement of the countless acts of mutual faith between human beings who, in talking to each other, have projected their hopeful sortings upon the real. The popular origin of this faith process as a god or gods is a sidelong admission that faith is at the core. The claim in the catechism that ‘God made everything’ can now be seen as an unknowing disclosure of the actual human construction-in-faith sustaining the whole language system.

(Step 5) Faith—The type of trust that is ethically requisite

This hidden mutual faith, then, needs a closer look. If this theory is correct, what Rommetveit has called the ‘naïve and unreflecting faith’ that we have mutually focussed on a perfectly singular entity (Rommetveit, 1978: 31) is essential to all language, and therefore all that is human. Communication apparently displays a need to trust other members of the group, but it is questionable whether at this level it is describable as ‘altruistic’, for how could something evolved be normative? The performance requires this initial trust that enables perceptual correction to go through, but it is trust so second-nature it is entered into without thought. At the animal level, two predators may successfully capture their prey, and we onlookers may be satisfied with identifying the ‘singularity’ of their prey, but differences in their sensings and perceptions may still be evolutionarily significant in the future; the animals themselves, of course, have no such awareness of their differences from the perceptions of others even though those differences may lead to evolutionary
survival.

It is thus profoundly disturbing to this tempting narcissistic view of the world as securely objective by our own standards to suspect that what ‘counts’ for us may not count in the same way after a new interpretation is proffered to us by our interlocutor. This is why the word ‘count’ has the two meanings that it does: ‘count’ as to enumerate singularities, and ‘count’ as to matter, the link being that the ‘singularities’ we have selected were selected at the behest of motivation. This ambiguity is itself low-level evidence in support of the present theory. An ‘it’ certainly exists as my choice from the Real, but the choice that produces the ‘it’ for the Other is not the same as mine. In other words, we each separately see the Real as some-thing in our own way, but we have to behave as if that we just see that there is one identical thing before everyone. The ‘seeing-as’s’ are actual in each observer: the ‘seeing-that’s’ as one and the same for each is a mutual fictive construction. Michael Dummett was indirectly alluding to this when he wrote ‘Knowledge of truth-conditions cannot be reduced merely to verbalizable knowledge’ (Dummett, 1973, 461), an echo of Locke, who, in referring to men’s ‘different ideas’, said that they ‘make the signification of [a] common name very various and uncertain’ (Essay, III ix 13).

It can now be seen why we should withhold the honorific term ‘faith’ for the basic Idealization of Reciprocity, for there is a subtle temptation to move from the tacit performance of an agreement with the Other to the conviction of there being a perfectly shared, timeless singularity as a ‘common’ referent. How easy to build on that needfully imagined projection of that singularity without which a statement cannot be made, to a superstitious belief in it, especially when one is not consciously aware of the Idealization in the first place. The Idealization per se may have the form of trust, but, unless it is informed with a notion of risk covertly arising from our differences from the Other, it is only a pseudo-trust. The ever-present possibility of sacrifice is ignored, especially when the entity in question is one’s self. This may be an underlying fear for the naive objectivist in many cases where an objective truth is being claimed.

A curious surfacing of this conviction, one that hides its origin, is to be found in the work of an American philosopher, Lynne Rudder Baker. In one of her books (2000) she explores the intricacies of the constructed interrelationships of our mundane worlds of ordinary objects and scientific ones. Persons, selves and things are all characterized in their entityhood as ontologically singular atoms. For example, she regards a person and her body together as an ontologically singular unit: ‘it is not as if there were two separate things — my body and myself. There is a single constituted thing—me’ (p. 114). Just as Democritus used the word ‘atom’ (literally not split) in search of the certainty of a basic identity in the constituents of matter (and we can extend this to the modern quarks and bosons), she discerns the same fundamental singularity in an ordinary table. The present argument can explain why. The reason is that the collaboration in trust, or, preferably, faith of Speaker and Hearer in an uttered statement with ‘table’ as its singular referent relies on their mutual imaginative performance of convergence on a singular ‘atom’ of ‘knowledge’, faith, of course, because there is no singular referent in the real. What does exist there is the convergence (or not, as the case may be) of two complex perspectives compounded of two sensory, perceptual, and conceptual selections from the real. So Baker has made the common error of turning a feature of the dialogic compact into an ontological given; she is virtually recommending the Idealization of Reciprocity without knowing that she is.

This is why I have frequently said that every ‘identification’ that we make should ultimately be seen to depend upon that faith. The very word ‘identification’ betrays the actual nature of the mutual construction that is taking place, for its etymological source is ‘a making of the same’. What we forget is that we are doing the making together, a making of a guide for mutual perception, not, obviously, a making of the material from which we select — the real.

A proper faith is certainly not blind. It does not superstitiously depend on certainties believed to be absolute. Have not theologians over the centuries protested that faith is precisely not certainty — ‘Oh, Lord, I believe: help Thou mine unbelief’ (Mark 9:24). If the Real can subvert the Thing and the Self, escape the word, rule and custom that attempts to keep it roughly within bounds, then there is risk in every act of trust. To trust someone is not to be sure that they will do exactly as you personally expect. To believe that they will is to put yourself in a narrative over which you have little control, as well as committing the narcissistic sin of believing that your desire is their desire, your objective world is theirs, absolutely without any awkward residue. There is always a residue, as Humboldt insisted, sometimes favourable to both,
sometimes harmful to one or both, sometimes for the moment neutral in its implications. A proper faith acknowledges that the Other, a part of the Real, can never be encompassed within the play of language, no more than one's own self can. It is now plain that one's self-concept depends upon dialogue with others; one would not even be ‘a self’ without them. We both need our partner in language to talk at all, but, if we are to talk in a genuine fashion, then our faith must be of this second kind, not the pseudo-trust, every time we speak.

This is what all jokes and stories are about. Are jokes and stories not repeated demonstrations of what happens when someone superstitiously favours their own choice from the Real while disregarding all clues to the contrary, indicative of what others may be seeing? And this is so consoling for readers of stories, safely insulated by foreknowledge of those clues which save them from the misunderstandings of the characters in the text. This is where the pleasure of the text lies. Look at Oedipus, or the rioters in The Pardoner’s Tale, or Marlowe in She Stoops to Conquer, or Emma in Emma, or Pip in the appropriately named Great Expectations. A story follows exactly the same pattern of the informative Statement: having established one projection of the ‘truth’, the author-speaker introduces a second clue to a new intentional perspective which disturbs the Idealization of Reciprocity. The Statement is thus a story, and the Story is a statement. A story proceeds by first establishing a strong wrong first clue for the protagonist, and then proceeds to subvert the first interpretation by providing a faint right second clue to a new interpretation (sometimes often and faintly throughout, sometimes in a final surprising peripeteia, sometimes both, and sometimes protagonists are left in their sad misapprehension (Wright 2005, 59-64; Jane Austen is expert at this teasing).

Speaker and Hearer are engaged in a hopeful adjustment of the play of language, and their trust in it therefore involves the expectation that the new meaning will contribute to the advance ultimately towards some future felicity for both. Nevertheless, however sincere both parties may be, each may understand the words differently and not know of that difference until later. So in opposition to Robert Brandom’s claim that all should be made publicly ‘explicit’ which is a literalizing of the impossible hope (Brandom 1994), the claim here is that what is implicit for each cannot all be explicit for both (although we all, keeping straight faces, have to behave in the performance of a Statement as if it is!).

A more self-concealing version of the same error can be found in a definition of ambiguity by Dan Sperber and Deirdre Wilson:

> Everything is ambiguous, as long as it is taken by itself, while nothing is strictly ambiguous if we look at it top-down, placing it in its proper, cognitive environment. (Sperber and Wilson, 1995, 205)

Notice the belief—not provisional assumption —that a ‘proper’ placing of a word in ‘its cognitive environment’ when one ‘looks at it top-down’ ensures a fixed, utterly single meaning for each word. This plainly reveals the status of the word as an Idealization of Reciprocity. Neither Sperber nor Wilson, as with Baker, are aware that what is really being recommended nor of the possibility of the updating that is at the core of an informative statement.

The first thing one can say here is that the use of the words ‘proper’ and ‘top-down’ betrays the frankly authoritarian conviction that a single agent cannot change the public meaning of a word. This is often backed up with an amused allusion to Lewis Carroll’s Humpty Dumpty who claimed that he could make a word mean just what he chose it to mean, which suggests that any adjustment to the meaning of word can only be nonsense, or, at the most, a trope. Anyone who uses this dismissal has no right to be amused as the definition rules out jokes, especially ones with a serious purpose. Sperber and Wilson forget that ‘cognition’ is negotiable. The second thing to say is that their definition is unable to see itself as the necessary dramatic performance of a perfect mutual co-reference that allows a shift of reference to take place —one might say, as the mutual imagining of Saussure’s ‘synchronic’ fixedness that enables the mutual ‘diachronic’ adjustment to go through. Unless some rough overlap of referential perspective between participants in a dialogue can be mutually established, no updating can be achieved.

This acknowledgement of our irremediable difference in sensory and perceptual perspectives must carry with it the admission that both comic and tragic outcomes cannot be scientifically ruled out. The supposedly
agreed ‘truth’ thus is secondary to the original ‘troth’. To repeat an earlier dictum of mine: ‘Troth comes before truth, and love before troth’ (worth noting that the word ‘truth’ derives etymologically from the word ‘troth’; Wright 2005, 228-9). In the comic or tragic situations, the troth is ethically secondary to the quality of the love that the two parties have for each other, for the resulting emergence of the mismatch may only be resolvable by sacrifice on the part of one or other or both. So love is extremely difficult on those occasions in which the conflict is not resolvable—Read Great Expectations if you are in doubt.

That this is an alarming possibility leads many into being blind to the very act of trust involved in speaking, to the point where they project their own understanding as a fact and not a mutual, provisional assumption. A philosophical implication is that anyone who is tempted to take the singularity of entities, either of their own selfhood, other selves, or any external entity as a given, objective, impersonal fact — and not, as it is, a tentative experiment in the co-ordination of two differing selections out of the undoubted real — is being superstitious, and superstition rests on a blind ignoring of the existential risk. What is faith if it is not prepared for the risk of finding that the person one loves is an ‘enemy’?

That this accusation includes both idealists and hard-headed positivists may come as something of a salutary surprise to both of them. The actual state of the case is that, all ‘entities’, including that of the self, are maintained as would-be co-operative choices from the real by this hidden faith. This mundane ‘world’ of ours that we call ‘reality’ is hopefully kept in place on the recalcitrant real by our co-operating in faith. The word ‘entity’ itself is a trap bestowing as it does a fixed singular existence in the real upon what is no more than the concatenation of all our separate hypotheses fuzzily overlapping on the real. This is not to deny that this language trick has helped us in varying degrees to track the changes in the real; hence the Glasersfeldian ‘viability’. In case one were tempted to extend this viability to the whole of the cosmos, one must recall how parochial our view of it is.

We can thus correctly accuse Plato of carrying the Idealization of Reciprocity to the point of reifying the imagined coincidence of our selections as his ‘Forms’, and, inevitably, mistakenly bestowing upon them the sacredness of divine ‘truth’, when their ‘sacredness’ arises from our having to have faith, a human faith that is prepared to accept that conflict can emerge in the most loving relationships and the love must learn some way of enduring it. In his elaborate Cave Analogy he forgot the others who were examining the Wall of the challenging real with him; he never considered what the Wall represented in his scheme (Wright 1979).

Since every ‘entity’ (and ‘property’ – for the argument applies just as much to ‘singular’ properties) they pick out is sustained at the best by this ‘holy’ human faith, it is no wonder that it is easy to believe that ‘God’ has ‘created’ ‘them’ all. The real motivation behind the creationists’ wanting to have a god creating them all, as I noted above, no more than a skewed acknowledgement that human faith is the ground of all our recognitions, but it undoes its own desire in not accepting the difficulty of real faith.

One can use a justifiable argumentum ad hominem here specifically addressed to those objectivist philosophers. To believe that objectivity is as one sees it, plus the conviction that everyone accepts it as one does oneself, is an act of narcissism. One’s own interpretation of that portion of the real, one’s own guide to action in that circumstance—for to accept that portion as ‘objective’ is to be convinced that one’s desires and fears are wholly taken account of in that act of perceiving—is to proclaim an absolute certainty and the right to guarantee it. There is both vanity and complacency in such a stance, as well as lack of courage in not facing the challenge of the real that is acknowledged by faith.

(Step 6) The Ethical Implications

Faith is thus very difficult. We would not be able to utter an informative statement unless we entered into the play that takes the real as consisting of re-cognizable ‘entities’ (and ‘properties’) visible to us all in the same way; because of this, it is dangerously easy to move from this to believing what we are unconsciously entering into—that is, to taking the play for real. Let us go over the traps here.

1. To remember that the word of one’s language partner cannot in the final analysis be his or her bond. The motto of the British Stock Exchange is ‘My word, my bond’. Don’t we say ‘I give you my word.’ But it can’t be just your word—it is your Hearer’s, and your hearers’-plural. One
salutary way of remembering this is to realize that one's every use of ‘I’, ‘we’, and ‘you’ is attended by an aura of risk and doubt, and should therefore be imbued with the responsibilities of faith.

2. To forget that any ‘taking for granted’ is what it says, an acceptance of a partial agreement as a perfect one. To quote Rommetveit, ‘We TAKE a perfect intersubjectivity FOR granted in order to achieve a partial one’ (Rommetveit 1978, 31). After all, that is what ‘to take for’ means.

3. A hearer's unexpected interpretation of one's word may be comic, in that you can ease some of the motivational pain in laughter, laughter in which the body's pain is assuaged by a concession to the Other, or their concession to you, or a concession by each of you.

4. On the other hand, the unexpected interpretation may involve a tragic transformation, as it did for Pip. Then a sacrifice may be called for by Speaker, by Hearer, or by both, which was not foreseen at the moment of the original agreement, and this involves challenging negotiation, if that is at all possible. Sometimes in the most tragic cases, as we have seen, it is not possible: the bases of our motivations sometimes go down so deep it would be to brainwash us to proceed further. This dark conclusion is one which those who are suspicious of this approach to the human indistinctly discern, thus adding to the dangerous aversion to engaging with the argument. Nor will this pain necessarily be assuaged – certainly not by some compensation in a non-existent afterlife, as many would-be martyrs expect. The only compensation is perhaps that one's story becomes exemplary for those who follow after, though they may not know that you were the agent. Tennyson has the line ‘Our echoes roll from soul to soul’, and your echo may have an effect on posterity without posterity knowing that it originated with you. It may not glorify you, for you may be nameless, like those who freely took the place of others in the ovens of Auschwitz. Their example still inspires, anonymity or no. One doesn't do good in order to be personally rewarded, even in posthumous reputation. One equally certainly doesn't do good in order to avoid eternal punishment! Surely moral worth evaporates if either of these is the reason for action. These ‘echoes’ are what immortality really is. We have contributed—well or badly —to the great drama that passes on through time like a ‘Mexican wave’ round a stadium through sports spectators, those sitting ahead of it being the unborn, those after, the dead.

5. Look now at a more insidious temptation. The shift now revealed implicit in the other's interpretation can look at once like treachery or heresy, this when the mismatch with your own was not at all salient to either of you when the original agreement was made. You may have sacralized your private version in the anarchist manner, or it has been a tradition handed on to you by the ‘authorities’ as sacralized: that the prohibition of action or the instigation to it was presented as divinely sanctified and therefore unchangeable by definition. The residual blind trust is thus defensively rigidified, (a) because the demand of unquestioning acceptance is also a demand for a promise of your utterly unwavering loyalty to the family, the group, or the nation — of course, according to the would-be authority’s interpretation of it, a realization which undermines the would-be moral argument of those who defend ‘Big Brother’ invasions of privacy; (b) all the myths supportive of that solidarity become literal, instead of being aesthetic, indeed playful, encouragements of the Idealization of Reciprocity—which are valuable if supportive of faith and unreliable if supportive of blind trust. What should be consciously dramatic becomes unconsciously self-deceptive: one ends up believing the myths instead of performing them—and this from persons who make a great pother about the treachery hidden in all things ambiguous, equivocal, fictive, illogical.

6. When the communication does go through and both partners are satisfied, note the additional temptation: the original ideal agreement spreads this feeling of success to the whole of one’s language. One may become an objectivist, with no motive to think that one's own idiolect does not match the language as a whole. The mundane world seems all the more secure, fears of risk having been tranquillized away. The mundane becomes the real, and one's sense of its unpredictability fades. One becomes more reassured with talk of objectivity, loyalty, sincerity, reality, and anyone who suggests a flaw in these eternal verities is automatically suspect. Don't we all know that fiction is akin to lying, that jokers are not serious? That is why Humboldt's, James's, Schutz's, Wood Sellars', etc. insight was neglected and still is. The unspoken fear is that it leads to relativism—Did not the last pope in his first week as pontiff make it the key enemy to be watched for at all costs? For me there is a keen irony in a leader of what is called ‘a faith’ taking up such a position. A pure authority is as impossible as a pure freedom.
Playing is something sensible children do without difficulty. Some children, however, find the challenge to their sense of identity too frightening—like the child in an Orcs-and-Hobbits game who bursts into tears when he is ‘taken prisoner’. Read the last two lines of Thomas Hardy’s poem ‘The Darkling Thrush’ where the myth of a final heaven, a _sumnum bonum_, as inspiring the song of the winter thrush, is accepted for what it is, a valuable myth:

Some blessed Hope whereof he knew
And I was unaware. (Hardy 1952, 137)

A look at the myths that have produced a recognition of the dark conclusion is worthy of note here. If one examines the ‘Trickster’ figures that characterize a number of unrelated cultures (for example, Eshu Elegba in Yoruba culture, Kokopelli in North American tribes, Hermes in Ancient Greece), one finds

1. that they are associated with practical jokes of many kinds, most often blatantly challenging the sexual mores of the tribe in question, thus metaphorically putting desire at odds with traditional codes;
2. their jokes of themselves take advantage of ambiguity at the frontiers of existing law and morality, exactly where linguistic adjustments to accepted patterns of behaviour take place, where talk is going on, so they are gatekeepers and messengers;
3. (of special relevance here) they are paradoxically both bringers of things of value to the community (such as medicines and fire; Anansi of Ashanti myth made the matter out of which the world is made, as well as providing grain and the tools for farming) and the creators of violence and pain (Carr and Greeves, 2007, Ch. 3). The ambivalence shows itself currently (2014) in the film _Thor: the Dark World_, in which Loki, the Norse Trickster, is induced to aid Thor in saving the world. One can view this as a poetic acknowledgement both of the creative imagination that has contributed to our material progress, and of the inevitable suffering that attends the use of that ambivalent instrument, language, _that the tragic always remains a possibility_. Language has thus always been ‘divine’; ‘In the beginning was the Word’. The Idealization of Reciprocity at the heart of language foresees in imagination a final heaven and an omniscient god that it must, _in play_, accept as real, knowing full well that it is unreal. This core of ancient wisdom is sadly missing from those optimistic religions that turn the myth of a final heaven into a literal end of life’s journey.

(Step 7) Why Humboldt’s insight has been ignored

Let us summarize these temptations to ignore Humboldt’s insight that language partners must behave as if the speech-habits of the other ‘were similar to his own’, the thought expanded by Schutz into the Idealization of Reciprocity:

1. The disinclination to distrust one’s partner in language, for this seems implicated in the idea that the reciprocity is to be idealized, that it actually does not exist in the ideal form assumed.
2. The narcissistic tendency, as part of the superstitious ‘blind trust’, to equate one’s idiolect with the language as commonly spoken (Saussure’s synchronic aspect of language). It amounts to a prejudice in favour of one’s own interpretation, _the anarchist error_.
3. The disinclination to disturb existing structures of trust, loyalty, obedience in whatever group one is, whether political, religious, or of the dominant scientific ‘tradition’ of one’s day.
4. From ‘authority’s’ point of view the tendency to see mismatches to the public interpretation always as disloyalty, treason, etc., _the authoritarian error_.
5. The tendency to consider all adjustments only permissible from established figures, whether those of the authority recognizes or those the anarchic periphery does.
6. To be in favour of strict logic, agreed objectivity, familiar categorizations, tested criteria, etc.—to the exclusion of all unexpected adjustments.
7. The failure of love in not being prepared for possible deep-seated disagreement, in not realizing that conflict is an inescapable risk in the language-game—furthermore, especially when a disagreement has not been _consciously planned by one’s interlocutor_.

Now these are suggested reasons why the insight has been ignored, but there may be more.

The prejudice against it revealed itself in unconscious resistance in the academic world. Take Fritz Mauthner's case; he found that he was unable to progress in promotion because of his views. Or that of Roy Wood Sellars, who, late in life, spoke of his disappointment that his 'Critical Realism' awoke no response in the philosophical community at large; he confessed that he ‘did not know why’ (Wood Sellars 1970, 141). F. C. S. Schiller, finding himself sidelined by the fashionable philosophers of his time (the 1920's and 30's), retired from Oxford to the United States where he hoped his championship of William James and his consequent critique of linguistic philosophy would be more warmly received. The linguist Sir Alan Gardiner, having stated what was in effect a Schutzian analysis of the speech situation, confessed himself wary of current philosophical criticism and held back from pursuing his insight further (Gardiner 1932, 81). George Steiner's remarkable book After Babel (1998), in which he examined the notion of the Idiolect, has not received from mainline philosophers the attention it deserves.

The false hint of relativism and solipsism keeps possible opponents away—though one can hardly call them 'opponents' as they never seriously do any opposing. The slightest of inquiries, though, would have unearthed the plain fact that, since, within the theory, 'selves' are just as much continually corrigible as any other 'entity', they fall within the risk that human faith brings with it. Accusations of relativism and solipsism, therefore, pass this theory by, as does that of 'postmodernism', which is believed to wrap up these vices in impenetrable jargon—this charge can hardly be levelled at Wilhelm von Humboldt or William James.

What is extraordinary is the fact that no arguments have been produced to subject the Idealization of Reciprocity claim to careful refutation. The ignoring is so powerful it ignores its own operation. A critic would also have had to cross disciplinary boundaries to create a satisfactory opposing case, and, in academia, there are career obstacles to doing that, especially between philosophy and anthropology.

(Step 8) The Scope and Simplicity of the Theory

The fact that the discussion must cross-disciplinary boundaries is a positive feature of the theory, for it testifies to its scope, and scope is one of the common characteristics of a good theory, as is simplicity.

(8a) Scope

Let us first indicate the scope and fertility of the theory. This is no place to display all of the riddles would solve outright; a quick list must suffice. The light it sheds on language is one of these: it is a proposal which leads to a defensible account of the origin of language (with help from the anthropologist Gregory Bateson [Bateson, 1980, Wright 2008]. The fact that a wish to inquire into the origin of language used to be regarded in linguistics as naïve, even cranky, is further evidence of the prejudicial fear). At the same time it offers a novel view of logic, rhetoric and grammar, offering an explanation of the Synchronic/Diachronic distinction, of predication, of the nature of the Joke, the Story and the Trope, and such conundrums as the Ship of Theseus and the Cretan Liar (Bateson, 1978: 79-81; Wright 1976, 2005, 2011).

Outside language there is the placing of human faith as the basis of religion and patriotism, and, highly politically relevant at this juncture in history, as it accounts for the source of fundamentalisms of all kinds (which are not ‘faiths’ at all but superstitions); it also demonstrates that the so-called ‘secular’ can have faith at its heart. All tyrants, all totalitarian oppressors, all dictators, religious or political, are thus superstitious: a proper faith is open to adjustment. It should be deserving of some astonishment that the source of so much oppression, from bullying at school to genocide between social groups, can be traced to a misconstrual of a linguistic requirement in communication.

As a single indication of the scope, take its account of the continuance of human society over time as new members are born and the old die (see the Mexican Wave Analogy above, and the remark about immortality in Section 5). The account is a scientific one. Its subject of investigation is the interplay between members, for that is what it is, the equivalent of a play. Ask what a scientific account of a stage
play could be—and, further, why no scientist has yet inquired into its nature.

A scientific account of a stage play would have to explain the operation of mutual imagination among actors and audience and how that proceeded. It would have to explain the differences in understanding and yet the measure of co-ordination that was achieved—as has been done in the Schutzian explanation of the operation of language. All the brains, all the bodies of those present contribute to that continuing social act, yet all are projecting in imagination a dramatic ‘reality’ supposedly common to them all. That fictive projection is actually going on in those minds, so it behoves science to explain the material basis of that collaborative fictive projection—indeed, of what such mutual imagination consists. Similarly with the progress of our social history: we are all projecting it, including our notion of the ‘selves’ who are doing the projecting, and the social groupings supporting selves and which selves maintain. However, we do not ourselves have scientific access to the neurophysiological systems that uphold that projection. As a result, for us the ‘selves’ float in the social play seemingly without a material base, and their notions of themselves are always in flux, defined by the state of the game of ‘self-definitions’. Hence, the fear of acknowledging the risk to ‘identity’.

We can also here perceive the reason why science has been loth to ask scientific questions of drama: it would bring to the surface the fact that the whole would-be logical edifice that we have taken it to be would be revealed for what it is, a mutually maintained, dramatic act of hope—and, ironically, one acknowledging that no total explanation, no ‘theory of everything’, can be forthcoming.

The outstanding difference from a stage play lies in the obvious fact that the words and actions performed have no immediate motivational consequences: in a stage play no one suffers or dies or enjoys sensory delight (this is why one could hardly be attending to the film if one is wondering whether Andie McDowell and Hugh Grant in the Four Weddings and a Funeral film were enjoying their kisses, or whether the guests at the banquet in Macbeth like their food and drink; the theory also suggests why the superstition of physical danger in acting Macbeth exerts a strange fascination).

This theory renders harmless Gilbert Ryle's jibe about there being a ‘ghost in the machine’ (Ryle 1949, 17ff), as we are metaphorically ‘machines’ that are making real ‘ghosts’, that is, the dramatic projections of everyone including our ‘selves’. This is why there has been talk of the ‘spiritual’ nature of the ‘soul’. Many a theorist has regarded the ‘soul’ as invisible, outside measurement, impervious to experiment, and non-scientific, and thus ‘unreal’. You could say the same of the characters in a play being performed, but ‘they’ as part of our ongoing imaginings are undeniably a part of the real, and, as certainly therefore, a justifiable subject of scientific study.

When we die, our influence, ‘good’ or ‘bad’ as judged in the ongoing game, continues: this is what ‘immortality’ really consists of. It is not centrally in the active memories of those who knew you personally. Thomas Hardy has a pathetic poem—‘Her Immortality’—in which a fading ghost visits a living person with the complaint that, when the latter ceases to remember her, her ‘immortality’ will be over (Hardy 1952, 48). This is a mistaken way of satisfactorily accounting for intimations of immortality. Immortality is not an occult illusion as the aggressive atheists have it, but the Tennysonian ‘echoes’ that really occur in the minds of the surviving members, that is, the multifarious influences that we have had upon each other’s actions. Clearly there is no personal immortality, nor is there a fortiori any bodily immortality, although bodily immortality has been often used as a metaphor for what actually happens. The fact that evil ‘souls’ as well as good ones go on existing in the superstitious account is an attempt to make sense of the persistence in the living drama of their influence on others; in the Christian version, evil people and the devils who tempted them are as ‘immortal’ as the good. Within the great dramatic social game lies all the ‘spiritual’ continuation that old religion was trying to conceptualize. After our death, our human value lies in this legacy and constitutes all the immortality there is. One can add that this perspective upon human life should make this non-occult immortality one of our personal aims. Take Shakespeare’s sonnet ‘Since brass, nor stone, nor earth, nor boundless sea’ which concludes with the question how beauty can be saved from the time’s destruction, and answers,

O! none, unless this miracle have might
That in black ink my love may still shine bright.
Here is a case where the word ‘miracle’ has something in addition to its a metaphorical and hyperbolical meaning, namely because something of Shakespeare’s influence still survives today in the great drama of our human life on this planet and not in any occult sense. It is a ‘miracle’ that in principle science could explain, thus supporting this view of what faith requires. This particular utterance can obviously taken as exemplary of all utterances.

Aggressive atheists are thus mistaken in dismissing the notion as a mythical invention when it can be given a scientific place in our assessment of the human as a mutual act of open-eyed imagination which continues in the living, and, because it should be played, it has no objectivity at the mundane level. Faith for Dawkins is no virtue at all—it is even ‘pernicious’ to teach it as one (Dawkins, 2006, 247); Hitchens equates it with blind belief (Hitchens 2007, 254-9); similarly for Dennett, faith is a ‘meme’ that encourages you with Mark Twain ‘to believe what you know ain’t so’; for Onfray, all entertaining of myth, such as a vision of an after-life, is ‘a really deadly sin’ (Onfray 2007, 217). These Enlightenment-inspired thinkers are so set against the ‘irrationalism’ of religion that they have ignored the notion of human faith altogether.

Russell’s stress on the key notion of unique reference enshrined in the word ‘this’ can now be seen as an unconscious acknowledgement of the mutually imagined singularity that has to be upheld by faith. Read Chapter II of his The Problems of Philosophy and you will witness the strange spectacle of a discerning mind unable to subject itself to its own analysis. We can also now understand that this too is the source of the aggression of those misguided atheists: the fact that they have been compared to the fundamentalists they berate is thus not without significance. Like them, they cannot play seriously. A serious atheism has to make space for play in its theories.

The criminal’s response that such a slack morality, one that asserts that there is no divine denunciation or ‘punishment’ of ‘evil acts’ to back up the legal and social order, contains its own refutation. Such a response ignores what the theory has to say about the ‘individual’, namely, that there is no single self to be found that is aware of its own paths to happiness. The criminal certainly cannot define ‘his or her own’ path. Criminals always place a huge value upon gang loyalty for they have foregone loyalty at the public level. There can, for example, be no financial aggrandisement that can ensure human satisfaction outside the great game, no way criminals can ensure that a satisfying end to his endless scheming can be achieved. But believing that life can be securely defined outside the great language-game-with-others is a recipe for personal disaster. Of course, there are instances where the ‘criminals’ have a right to contest a law which constrains them, as in Bangkok today (May 28th, 2014) where a minister in a former government is being imprisoned by the leaders of the military coup for ‘a crime against the state’.

The way to sustain human faith is to be well aware with Mark Twain that the myths are what ‘ain’t so’ and yet perform them dramatically as if it were so until a mismatch of understandings brings about a negotiation that reaches a satisfactory outcome—if such a one is possible, because what constitutes undue sacrifice is not a given, not metaphysically engraved in the blankness of the real. There is only one reassurance to be had: that for two hostile people, this theory would help them to know beforehand that enmity was always possible and, paradoxically, love is the only possible solution. In performing it dramatically you know perfectly well that it ‘ain’t so’ (and we have seen that many a child at play or an actor could tell you as much), but you do it just the same, if you judge that the myth has a worthwhile symbolic meaning. We do it happily with Santa Claus, and consequently enjoy the myth of worldwide, generous, familial love. Those parents who initially try to make their children believe in a ‘real’ Santa Claus cannot play, and, worse, do not understand that their children can! The so-called ‘children’s fantasy film’ Tooth Fairy is based on the false assumption that children prefer being thus led by the nose; the whole film sentimentalizes children as sweet little innocents who must be quarantined from the adult world as long as possible, a world that is dourly objective, devoid of imagination.

Pace Onfray, what is ‘a deadly sin’ is to believe superstitiously that personal survival is what real immortality consists in, when there is a justifiable alternative way to give a scientific place to the notion. That the universe may destroy the great drama on our planet at any time is irrelevant to the value it should have for us, at the same moment we accept that there is no future ‘reward’. This is what a good ‘faitheist’, as I have called him —i.e. an atheist who sees the centrality of human faith—should do (Wright 2012, 53ff).
Even if you take the non-philosophical aspects of the theory alone, its claim to be a fruitful one is worth considering. It is unique as well as radical in its bringing the ethical power of faith to bear upon knowledge. Even though it prove mistaken, the scope of the theory is undeniable.

(8b) Simplicity

As regards that other criterion of good theories, its simplicity, consider this anecdote from my past.

A distinguished philosopher from the University of Buffalo, the late Peter Hare, heard me explain this view of the human, and his response was immediate: he said, "It can't be that simple!" I here submit that this is one reason, perhaps the most important one, why the philosophical riddle of the Idealization of Reciprocity has been neglected for it is strange as well as difficult to see that solidarity, friendship, affection, and love are involved in all our ‘identifications’, scientific as well as mundane.

Finally, one may quote, appropriately, from a story, Tolkein's Lord of the Rings. As the laughing Gandalf said of the riddle 'Speak Friend and enter' (sic, i.e. without commas round 'Friend') that was on the door into the mines of Moria, a statement that the humble hobbit Merry had queried—and which we can now take as the password to the entrance to language:

I have it! Of course, of course! Absurdly simple, like most riddles when you see the answer... I was wrong after all, and Gimli too. Merry, of all people, was on the right track. The opening word was inscribed on the archway all the time! The translation should have been Say ‘Friend’ and enter. I had only to speak the Elvish word for friend and the doors opened. Too simple for a learned loremaster in these suspicious days!" (Tolkien 1993, 325).

‘Friend’, the password to the entrance to language—and to the human.

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The authors included in this issue all participated in the 2013 GASC at UCLA, although not all their texts are taken from their conference presentations. All are seasoned contributors to Anthropeotics, to which they have now contributed a total of 29 articles. Their contributions range from the political (Chris Fleming-John O'Carroll’s essay on “Revolution”) to the religio-political (Dawn Perlmutter’s article on Islamist symbolism) and the literary (Marina Ludwigs’ analysis of the “Janus” function in narrative) to the philosophical (Raphael Foshay’s study of GA’s and Heidegger’s readings of classical philosophy, and Edmond Wright’s rich essay on the epistemology of faith, which offers many parallels with GA’s analyses).

Let me take this final opportunity to thank Stacey Meeker and Ian Dennis for their painstaking editorial work, which covered both this and the previous issue (19, 1). I think all the authors in this volume appreciated their skill and conscientiousness.

About Our Contributors

Chris Fleming is Senior Lecturer in the School of Humanities and Communication Arts at the University of Western Sydney, Australia. He is the author of Rene Girard: Violence and Mimesis and one of the editors of the Bloomsbury series, Violence, Desire and the Sacred. His book, Modern Conspiracy: The Importance of Being Paranoid—co-written with Emma A. Jane—is forthcoming with Bloomsbury Press.

John O’Carroll is Senior Lecturer in the School of Social Science and Liberal Studies, Charles Sturt University, Bathurst NSW, Australia. His research interests lie in the area of the philosophy of communication, postcolonial theory, and Western epistemologies of landscapes (especially in Australia and the South Pacific). He has also taught at the University of the South Pacific (Fiji Laucala campus).

Raphael Foshay teaches in the MA Program in Integrated Studies at Athabasca University. He works on the relations between philosophy and literary theory and is currently writing on mimesis and dialectic. He also works in the area of comparative east/west philosophy, with a particular interest in Buddhism.

Marina Ludwigs teaches English Literature at Stockholm University. She has a PhD in Comparative Literature from UC Irvine and has worked with, and presented papers on, both Girardian theory and Generative Anthropology. Her current interest is bringing into dialogue narratology and Generative Anthropology.

Dawn Perlmutter, Director of the Symbol Intelligence Group, is considered one of the leading subject matter experts (SME) in the areas of symbols, unfamiliar customs, ritualistic crimes and religious violence. In her SME capacity, she routinely provides law enforcement and intelligence agencies with specialized information to assist in investigation and analysis. She has advised police departments and prosecutors' offices on numerous cases of ritual homicide and presented expert witness testimony on ritualistic crimes. As an expert on ritual murder she has been interviewed and appeared on many documentaries and newscasts. She is an adjunct Professor in the Forensic Medicine Program at Philadelphia College of Osteopathic Medicine, and the author of two books and numerous publications on ritual violence. She holds a Doctor of Philosophy from New York University and a Masters Degree from The American University, Washington, D.C. She is an active member of the distinguished Vidocq Society, an exclusive crime-solving organization that solves cold case homicides.

Edmond Wright holds degrees in English and philosophy and a doctorate in philosophy. He is a member of the Board of Social Theory of the International Sociological Association, and was sometime a Fellow at the Swedish Collegium for the Advanced Study of the Social Sciences, Uppsala. He has edited The Ironic Discourse (Poetics Today, 4, 1983), New Representationalisms: Essays in the Philosophy of Perception (Avebury, 1993), Faith and the Real (Paragraph, 24, 2001), and The Case for Qualia (MIT Press, forthcoming, May 2008), and has co-edited with his wife Elizabeth The Zizek Reader, (Blackwell, 1999) and is author of Narrative, Perception, Language, and Faith (Macmillan, 2005). Over sixty articles of his have appeared in the philosophical journals. He has also published two volumes of